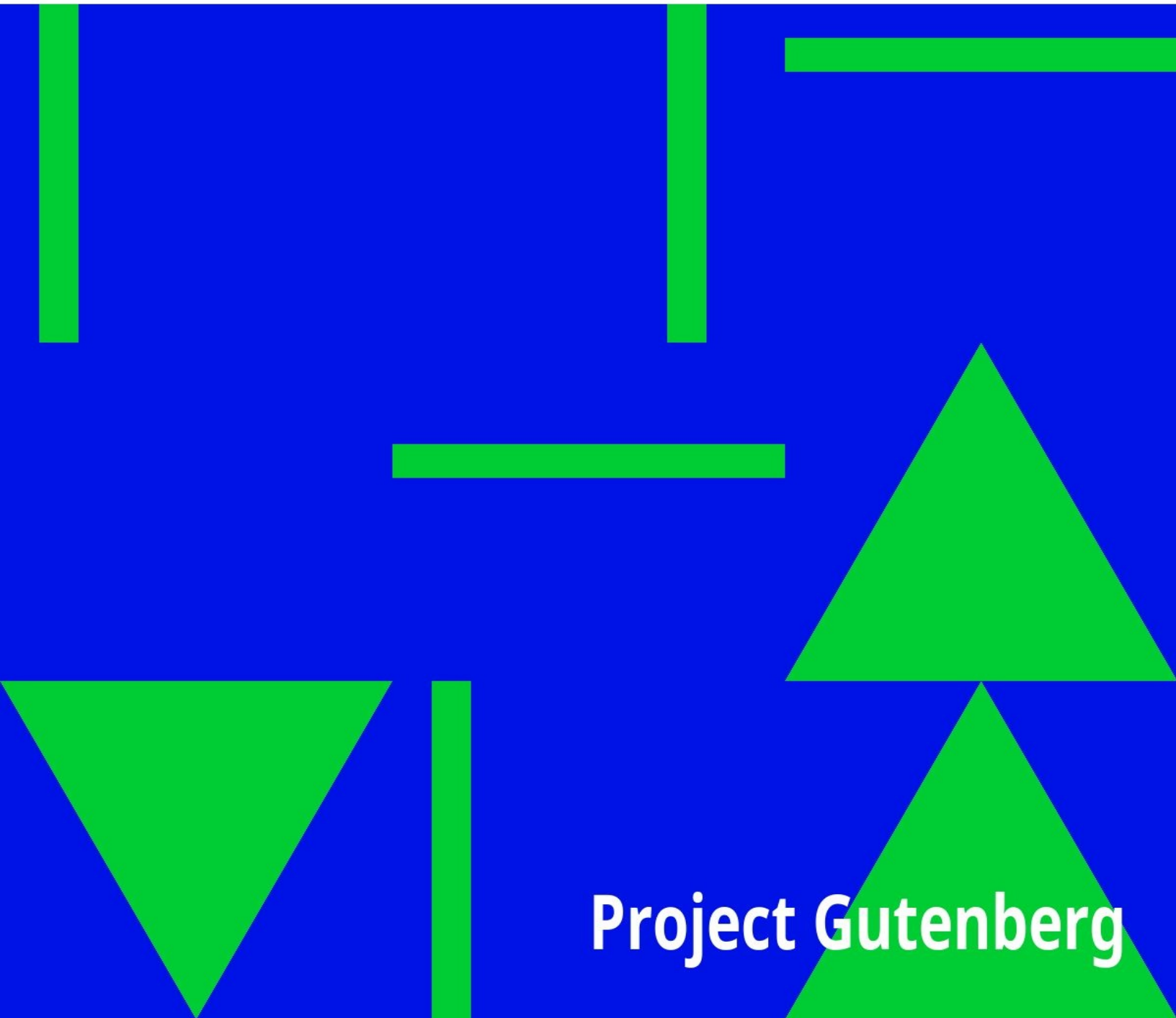
The Castaways

Harry Collingwood



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Chapter One.

Miss Onslow.

It was on a wet, dreary, dismal afternoon, toward the end of October 18—, that I found myself *en route* for Gravesend, to join the clipper ship *City of Cawnpore*, in the capacity of cuddy passenger, bound for Calcutta.

The wind was blowing strong from the south-east, and came sweeping along, charged with frequent heavy rain squalls that dashed fiercely against the carriage windows, while the atmosphere was a mere dingy, brownish grey expanse of shapeless vapour, so all-pervading that it shut out not only the entire firmament but also a very considerable portion of the landscape.

There had been a time, not so very long ago—while I was hunting slavers on the West Coast, grilling under a scorching African sun day after day and month after month, with pitiless monotony—when the mere recollection of such weather as this had made me long for a taste of it as a priceless luxury; but now, after some five months' experience of the execrable British climate, I folded my cloak more closely about me, as I gazed through the carriage windows at the rain-blurred landscape, and blessed the physician who was sending me southward in search of warmth and sunshine and the strong salt breeze once more.

For it was in pursuit of renewed health and strength that I was about to undertake the voyage; a spell of over two years of hard, uninterrupted service upon the Coast—during which a more than average allowance of wounds and fever had fallen to my share—had compelled me to invalid home; and now, with my wounds healed, the fever banished from my system, and in possession of a snug little, recently-acquired competence that rendered it unnecessary for me to follow the sea as a profession, I—Charles Conyers, R.N., aged twenty-seven—was, by the fiat of my medical adviser, about to seek, on the broad ocean, that life-giving tonic

which is unobtainable elsewhere, and which was all that I now needed to entirely reinvigorate my constitution and complete my restoration to perfect health.

Upon my arrival at Gravesend I was glad to find that the rain had ceased, for the moment, although the sky still looked full of it. I therefore lost no time in making my way down to the river, where I forthwith engaged a waterman to convey me, and the few light articles I had brought with me, off to the ship.

The *City of Cawnpore* was a brand-new iron ship, of some twelve hundred tons register, modelled like a frigate, full-rigged, and as handsome a craft in every respect as I had ever seen. I had seen her before, of course, in the Docks, when I had gone down to inspect her and choose my cabin; but she was then less than half loaded; her decks were dirty and lumbered up with bales and cases of cargo; her jib-booms were rigged in, and her topgallant-masts down on deck; and altogether she was looking her worst; while now, lying well out toward the middle of the stream as she was, she looked a perfect picture, as she lay with her bows pointing down-stream, straining lightly at her cable upon the last of the flood-tide, loaded down just sufficiently, as it seemed, to put her into perfect sailing trim, her black hull with its painted ports showing up in strong contrast to the peasoup-coloured flood upon which she rode, her lofty masts stayed to a hair, and all accurately parallel, gleaming like ruddy gold against the dingy murk of the wild-looking sky. Her yards were all squared with the nicest precision, and the new cream-white canvas snugly furled upon them and the booms; the red ensign streamed from the gaff-end; and the burgee, or house flag—a red star in a white diamond upon a blue field—cut with a swallow tail in the present instance to indicate that her skipper was the commodore of the fleet—fluttered at the main-royal-masthead.

“She’s a pretty ship, sir; a very pretty ship; as handsome a vessel as I’ve ever see’d a lyin’ off this here town,” remarked the waterman who was pulling me off to her, noting perhaps the admiration in my gaze. “And she’s a good staunch ship, too; well built, well found, and well manned—the owners of them ‘red star’ liners won’t have nothin’ less than the very best of everything in their ships and aboard of ’em—and I hopes your honour’ll have a very pleasant voyage, I’m sure. You ought to, for there’s

some uncommon nice people goin' out in her; I took three of 'em off myself in this here very same boat 'bout a hour ago. And one of 'em—ah, she *is* a beauty, she is, and no mistake! handsome as a hangel; and such eyes—why, sir, they're that bright and they sparkles to that extent that you won't want no stars not so long as she's on deck."

"Indeed," answered I, with languid interest, yet glad nevertheless to learn that there was to be at least one individual of agreeable personality on board. Then, as we drew up toward the accommodation ladder, I continued: "Back your starboard oar; pull port; way enough! Lay in your oars and look out for the line that they are about to heave to you!"

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the fellow, as he proceeded with slow deliberation but a great show of alacrity to obey my injunctions. "Dash my buttons," he continued, "if I didn't think as you'd seen a ship afore to-day, and knowed the stem from the starn of her. Says I to myself, when I seen the way that you took hold of them yoke-lines, and the knowin' cock of your heye as you runned it over this here vessel's hull and spars and her riggin'—'this here gent as I've a got hold of is a sailor, he is, and as sich he'll know what a hard life of it we pore watermen has; and I shouldn't wonder but what—knowin' the hardness of the life—he'll'—thank'ee, sir; I wishes you a wery pleasant voyage, with all my 'eart, sir. Take hold, steward; these is all the things the gent has brought along of 'im."

I was received at the gangway by a fine sailorly-looking man, some thirty-five years of age, and of about middle height, sturdily built, and with a frank, alert, pleasant expression of face, who introduced himself to me as the chief mate—Murgatroyd by name—following up his self-introduction with the information that Captain Dacre had not yet come down from town, but might be expected on board in time for dinner.

It was just beginning to rain rather sharply again, or I should have been disposed to remain on deck for a while and improve my acquaintance with this genial-looking sailor; as it was, I merely paused beside him long enough to note that the deck between the foremast and the mainmast seemed to be crowded with rough, round-backed, awkward-looking men, having the appearance of navvies or something of that kind; also that the main hatch was partially closed by a grating through an aperture in which, at the after port angle of the hatchway, other men of a like sort

were passing up and down by means of a ladder. The mate caught my inquiring glance as it wandered over the rough-looking crowd, and replied to it by remarking:

“Miners, and such-like—a hundred and twenty of ’em—going out to develop a new mine somewhere up among the Himalayas, so I’m told. Rather a tough lot, by the look of ’em, Mr Conyers; but I’ll take care that they don’t annoy the cuddy passengers; and they’ll soon shake down when once we’re at sea.”

“No doubt,” I replied. “Poor fellows! they appear to be indifferent enough to the idea of leaving their native land; but how many of them, I wonder, will live to return to it. Steward,” I continued, as I turned away to follow the man who was carrying my hand baggage below for me, “is there anyone in the same cabin with me?”

“No, sir; you’ve got it all to yourself, sir,” was the reply. “There was a young gent,” he continued—“one of a family of six as was goin’ out with us—who was to have been put in along with you, sir; but the father have been took suddenly ill, so they’re none of ’em going. Consequence is that we’ve only got thirty cuddy passengers aboard, instead of thirty-six, which is our full complement. Your trunks is under the bottom berth, sir, and I’ve unstrapped ’em. Anything more I can do for you, sir?”

I replied in the negative, thanking the man for his attention; and then, as he closed the cabin-door behind him, I seated myself upon a sofa and looked round at the snug and roomy apartment which, if all went well, I was to occupy during the voyage of the ship to India and back.

The room was some ten feet long, by eight feet wide, and seven feet high to the underside of the beams. It was set athwartships, instead of fore and aft as was at that period more frequently the fashion; and it was furnished with two bunks, or beds, one over the other, built against the bulkhead that divided the cabin from that next it. The lower bunk was “made up” with bed, bedding, and pillows complete, ready for occupation; but the upper bunk, not being required, had been denuded of its bedding, leaving only the open framework of the bottom, which was folded back and secured against the bulkhead, out of the way, thus leaving plenty of air space above me when I should be turned in. At the foot of the bunks

there was a nice deep, double chest of drawers, surmounted by an ornamental rack-work arrangement containing a brace of water-bottles, with tumblers to match, together with vacant spaces for the reception of such matters as brushes and combs, razor-cases, and other odds and ends. Then there was a wash-stand, with a toilet-glass above it, and a cupboard beneath the basin containing two large metal ewers of fresh water; and alongside the wash-stand hung a couple of large, soft towels. There was a fine big bull's eye in the deck overhead, and a circular port in the ship's side, big enough for me to have crept through with some effort, had I so wished, the copper frame of which was glazed with plate glass a full inch thick. Beneath this port was the short sofa, upholstered in black horsehair, upon which I sat; and, screwed to the ship's side in such a position as to be well out of the way, yet capable of pretty completely illuminating the cabin, was a handsome little silver-plated lamp, already lighted, hung in gimbals and surmounted by a frosted glass globe very prettily chased with a pattern of flowers and leaves and birds. The bulkheads were painted a dainty cream colour, with gilt mouldings; a heavy curtain of rich material screened the door; and the deck of the cabin was covered with a thick, handsome carpet. "What a contrast," thought I, "to my miserable, stuffy little dog-hole of a cabin aboard the old *Hebe*!" And I sat there so long, meditating upon the times that were gone, and the scenes of the past, that I lost all consciousness of my surroundings, and was only awakened from my brown study—or was it a quiet little nap?—by the loud clanging of the first dinner bell. Thus admonished, I went to work with a will to get into my dress clothes—for those were the days when such garments were *de rigueur* aboard all liners of any pretensions—and was quite ready to make my way to the saloon when the second and final summons to dinner pealed forth.

The cuddy, or main saloon of the ship, was on deck, under the full poop, while the sleeping accommodation was below; consequently by the time that I had reached the vestibule upon which the cuddy doors opened, I found myself in the midst of quite a little crowd of more or less well-dressed people who were jostling each other in a gentle, well-bred sort of way in their eagerness to get into the saloon. They were mostly silent, as is the way of the English among strangers, but a few, here and there, who seemed to have already made each other's acquaintance, passed the usual inane remarks about the absurdly inconvenient arrangements generally of the ship. Some half a dozen stewards were showing the

passengers to their places at table, as they passed in through the doorways; and upon my entrance I was at once pounced upon by one of the aforesaid stewards, who, in semi-confidential tones, remarked:

“This way, if you please, sir. It’s Cap’n Dacre’s orders that you was to be seated close alongside of him.”

As I followed the man down the length of the roomy, handsome apartment, I could scarcely realise that it was the same that I had seen when the ship lay loading in the dock. Then, the deck (or floor, as a landsman would call it) was carpetless, the tables, chairs, sofas, lamps, and walls of the cabin were draped in brown holland, to protect them from the all-penetrating dust and dirt that is always flying about, more or less, during the handling of cargo, and the room was lighted only by the skylights; now, I found myself in a scene as brilliant, after its own fashion, as that afforded by the dining-room of a first-class hotel. The saloon was of the full width of the ship, and some forty feet long by about eight feet high; the sides and the ceiling were panelled, and painted in cream, light blue, and gold; and it was furnished with three tables—one on either side of the cabin, running fore-and-aft, with a good wide gangway between, and one athwartships and abaft the other two, with seats on the after side of it only, so that no one was called upon to turn his or her back upon those sitting at the other two tables. The tables were gleaming with snow-white napery, crystal, and silver; and were further adorned with handsome flowering plants in painted china bowls, placed at frequent intervals; the deck was covered with a carpet in which one’s feet sank ankle deep; the sofas were upholstered in stamped purple velvet; and the whole scene was illuminated by the soft yet brilliant light of three clusters of three lamps each suspended over the centres of the several tables. Abaft the aftermost table I caught a glimpse of a piano, open, with some sheets of music upon it, as though someone had already been trying the tone of the instrument.

Conducted by the steward, I presently found myself installed in a chair, between two ladies, one of whom was seated alongside the skipper, on his right. This lady was young—apparently about twenty-one or twenty-two years of age, above medium height—if one could form a correct judgment of her stature as she sat at the table—a rich and brilliant brunette, crowned with a wealth of most beautiful and luxuriant golden-

chestnut hair, and altogether the most perfectly lovely creature that I had ever beheld. I felt certain, the moment my eyes rested upon her, that she must certainly be the subject of my friend the waterman's enthusiastic eulogies. The other lady—she who occupied the seat on my right—was stout, elderly, grey-haired, and very richly attired in brocade and lace, with a profusion of jewellery about her. She was also loud-voiced, for as I passed behind her toward my seat she shouted to the elderly, military-looking man on her right:

"Now, Pat, don't ye attempt to argue wid me; I shall be ill to-morrow, no matther what I ait, or don't ait; so I shall take a good dinner and injoy mesilf while I can!"

Captain Dacre—a very fine-looking, handsome, whitehaired man, attired in a fairly close imitation of a naval captain's uniform, and looking a thorough sailor all over—was already seated; but upon seeing me he rose, stretched out his hand, and remarked:

"Lieutenant Conyers, I presume? Welcome, sir, aboard the *City of Cawnpore*; and I hope that when next you see Gravesend you will have fully recovered the health and strength you are going to sea to look for. It is not often, Mr Conyers, that I have a brother sailor upon my passenger list, so when I am so fortunate I make the most of him by providing him—as in your case—with a berth at the table as nearly alongside me as possible. Allow me to make you known to your neighbours. Miss Onslow, permit me to introduce Lieutenant Conyers of our Royal Navy. Lady O'Brien—General Sir Patrick O'Brien—Lieutenant Conyers."

Miss Onslow—the beauty on my left—acknowledged the introduction with a very queenly and distant bow; Lady O'Brien looked me keenly in the eyes for an instant, and then shook hands with me very heartily; and the general murmured something about being glad to make my acquaintance, and forthwith addressed himself with avidity to the plate of soup which one of the stewards placed before him.

Presently, having finished his soup, the general leaned forward and stared hard at me for a moment. Then he remarked:

"Excuse me, Conyers—it is no use being formal, when we are about to

be cooped up together on board ship for the next two months, is it?—are you the man that got so shockingly hacked about at the capture of that piratical slaver, the—the—hang it all, I've forgotten her name now?"

"If you refer to the *Preciosa*, I must plead guilty to the soft impeachment," answered I.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "hang me if I didn't think so when I heard your name, and saw that scar across your forehead. Wonderfully plucky thing to do, sir; as plucky a thing, I think, as I ever heard of! I must get you to tell me all about it, some time or another—here, steward, hang it all, man, this sherry is corked! Bring me another bottle!"

I am rather a shy man, and this sudden identification of me in connection with an affair that I had already grown heartily tired of hearing referred to, and that I fondly hoped would now be speedily forgotten by my friends, was distinctly disconcerting; I therefore seized upon the opportunity afforded me by the mishap to the general's sherry to divert the conversation into another channel, by turning to my lovely left-hand neighbour with the inquiry:

"Is this your first experience of shipboard, Miss Onslow?"

"This will be my third voyage to India, Mr Conyers," she answered, with an air of surprise at my temerity in addressing her, and such proud, stately dignity and lofty condescension that I caught myself thinking:

"Hillo, Charley, my lad, what sort of craft is this you are exchanging salutes with? You will have to take care what you are about with her, my fine fellow, or you will be finding that some of her guns are shotted!"

But I was not to be deterred from making an effort to render myself agreeable, simply because the manner of the young lady was almost chillingly distant, so I returned:

"Indeed! then you are quite a seasoned traveller. And how does the sea use you? Does it treat you kindly?"

"If you mean Am I ill at sea? I am glad to say that I am *not*!" she replied. "I *love* the sea; but I hate voyaging upon it."

“That sounds somewhat paradoxical, does it not?” I ventured to insinuate.

“Possibly it does,” she admitted. “What I mean is that, while I never enjoy such perfect health anywhere as I do when at sea, and while I passionately admire the ever-changing beauty and poetry of the ocean and sky in their varying moods, I find it distinctly irksome and unpleasant to be pent up for months within the narrow confines of a ship, with no possibility of escape from my surroundings however unpleasant they may be. There is no privacy, and no change on board a ship; one is compelled to meet the same people day after day, and to be brought into more or less intimate contact with them, whether one wishes it or not.”

“That is undoubtedly true,” I acknowledged, “so far, at least, as meeting the same people day after day is concerned. But surely one need not necessarily be brought into intimate contact with them, unless so minded; it is not difficult to make the average person understand that anything approaching to intimacy is unwelcome.”

“Is it not?” she retorted drily. “Then I am afraid that my experience has been more unfortunate than yours. I have more than once been obliged to be actually rude to people before. I could succeed in convincing them that I would prefer not to be on intimate terms with them.”

And therewith Miss Onslow ever so slightly turned herself away from me, and addressed herself to the contents of her plate with a manner that seemed indicative of a desire to terminate the conversation.

I thought that I already began to understand this very charming and interesting young lady. I had not the remotest idea who or what she was, beyond the bare fact that her name was Onslow, but her style and her manners—despite her singular hauteur—stamped her unmistakably as one accustomed to move in a high plane of society; that she was inordinately proud and intensely exclusive was clear, but I had an idea that this fault—if such it could be considered—was due rather to training than to any innate imperfection of character; and I could conceive that—the barrier of her exclusiveness once passed—she might prove to be winsome and fascinating beyond the power of words to express. But I had a suspicion that the man who should be bold enough to attempt the passage of that barrier would have to face many a rebuff, as well as the

very strong probability of ultimate ignominious, irretrievable defeat; and as I was then—and still am, for that matter—a rather sensitive individual, I quickly determined that I at least would not dare such a fate. Moreover, I seemed to find in the drift of what she had said—and more particularly in her manner of saying it—a hint that possibly I might be one of those with whom she would prefer not to be on terms of intimacy.

“Well,” thought I, “if that is her wish, it shall certainly be gratified; she is a surpassingly beautiful creature, but I can admire and enjoy the contemplation of her beauty, as I would that of some rare and exquisite picture, without obtruding myself offensively upon her attention; and although she has all the appearance of being clever, refined, and possessed of a brilliant intellect, those qualities will have no irresistible attraction for me if she intends to hide them behind a cold, haughty, repellant manner.” And therewith I dismissed her from my mind, and addressed myself to the skipper, “This new ship of yours is a magnificent craft, Captain,” said I. “I fell incontinently in love with her as the waterman was pulling me off alongside. She is far and away the most handsome ship I have ever set eyes on.”

“Ay,” answered Dacre heartily, his whole face kindling with enthusiasm, “she is a beauty, and no mistake. You have some fine, handsome frigates in the service, Mr Conyers, but I doubt whether the best of them will compare with the *City of Cawnpore* for beauty, speed, or seagoing qualities. My word, sir, but it would have done you good to have seen her before she was put into the water. Shapely? shapely is not the word for it, she is absolutely beautiful! She is to other craft what,”—here his eye rested upon Miss Onslow’s unconscious face for an instant—“a perfectly lovely woman is to a fat old dowdy. There *is* only one fault I have to find with her, and that is only a fault in my eyes; there are many who regard it as a positive and important merit.”

“And pray what may that be?” I inquired. And, as I asked the question, several of the passengers who had overheard the skipper’s remark craned forward over the table in eager anticipation of his reply.

“Why, sir,” answered Dacre, “she is built of iron instead of good, sound, wholesome heart of oak; that’s the fault I find with her. I have never been shipmates with iron before, and I confess I don’t like it. Of course,” he

continued—judging, perhaps, from some of the passengers' looks that he had said something a trifle indiscreet—"it is only prejudice on my part; I can't explain my objection to iron; everybody who ought to know anything about the matter declares that iron is immensely strong compared with wood, and I sincerely believe them; still, there the feeling is, and I expect it will take me a month or two to get over it. You see, I have been brought up and have spent upwards of forty years of my life in wooden ships, and I suppose I am growing a trifle too old to readily take up newfangled notions."

"Ah, Captain, I have met with men of your sort before," remarked the general; "you are by no means the first person with a prejudice. But you'll get over it, my dear fellow; you'll get over it. And when you have done so you'll acknowledge that there's nothing like iron for shipbuilding. *Apropos* of seafaring matters, what sort of a voyage do you think we shall have?"

The skipper shrugged his shoulders.

"Who can tell?" he answered. "Everything depends upon the weather; and what is more fickle than that?—outside the limits of the trade-winds and the monsoons, I mean, of course. If we are unlucky enough to meet with a long spell of calms on the Line—well, that means a long passage. But give me as much wind as I can show all plain sail to, and no farther for'ard than abeam, and I'll undertake to land you all at Calcutta within sixty days from to-day."

We were still discussing the probability of the skipper being able to fulfil his promise, when a howling squall swept through the taut rigging and between the masts of the ship, causing the whole fabric to vibrate with a barely perceptible tremor, while the swish and patter of heavy rain resounded upon the glass of the skylights.

"Whew!" ejaculated the general, "what a lively prospect for to-night! What are we to do after dinner to amuse ourselves; and where are we men to go for our smoke?"

"I think," said I, "we shall find a very comfortable place for a smoke under the overhang of the poop. The tide is ebbing strong by this time, so the ship will be riding more or less stern-on to the wind, and we shall find a

very satisfactory lee and shelter at the spot that I have named."

"Ay," assented the skipper. "And when you have finished smoking, what can you wish for better than this fine saloon, in which to play cards, or read, or even to organise an impromptu concert? There is a capital piano abaft there; and I am sure that among so distinguished a company there must be plenty of good musicians."

And so indeed it proved; for when, having finished our smoke, the general and some half a dozen more of us returned to the cuddy, we found that several of the younger ladies of the party had already produced their music, and were doing their best to make the evening pass pleasantly for themselves and others. Miss Onslow was one of the exceptions; she had not produced any music, nor, apparently, did she intend to take anything more than a passive part in the entertainment; indeed it is going almost too far to say even so much as that, for it appeared doubtful whether she even condescended so far as to regard herself as one of the audience; she had provided herself with a book, and had curled herself up comfortably in the corner most distant from the piano, and was reading with an air of absorption and interest so pronounced as really to be almost offensive to the performers. In almost anyone else the manifestation of so profound an indifference to the efforts of others to please would have been regarded as an indication of ill-breeding; but in her case—well, she was so regally and entrancingly lovely that somehow one felt as though her beauty justified everything, and that it was an act of condescension and a favour that she graced the cuddy with her presence at all. And indeed I was very much disposed to think that this was her own view of the matter. Be that as it may, we all spent an exceedingly pleasant evening; and when I turned into my bunk that night I felt very well satisfied with the prospects of the voyage before me.

Chapter Two.

At sea—a wreck in sight.

I was awakened at six o'clock the next morning by the men chorussing at

the windlass, and the quick clank of the pawls that showed how thoroughly Jack was putting his heart into his work, and how quickly he was walking the ship up to her anchor. I scrambled out of my bunk, and took a peep through the port in the ship's side, to see what the weather was like; it was scarcely daylight yet; the glass of the port was blurred with the quick splashing of rain, and the sky was simply a blot of scurrying, dirty grey vapour. I made a quick mental reference to the condition of the tide, deducting therefrom the direction of the ship's head, and thus arrived at the fact that the wind still hung in the same quarter as yesterday, or about south-east; after which I turned in again, the weather being altogether too dismal to tempt me out on deck at so early an hour. As I did so there was a loud cry or command, the chorussing at the windlass abruptly ceased, and in the silence that temporarily ensued I caught the muffled sound of the steam blowing-off from the tug's waste-pipe, mingled with the faint sound of hailing from somewhere ahead, answered in the stentorian tones of Mr Murgatroyd's voice. Then the windlass was manned once more, and the pawls clanked slowly, sullenly, irregularly, for a time, growing slower and slower still until there ensued a long pause, during which I heard the mate encouraging the crew to a special effort by shouting: "Heave, boys! heave and raise the dead! break him out! another pawl! heave!" and so on; then there occurred a sudden wrenching jerk, followed by a shout of triumph from the crew, the windlass pawls resumed their clanking at a rapid rate for a few minutes longer when they finally ceased, and I knew that our anchor was a-trip and that we had started on our long journey.

Everybody appeared at breakfast that morning, naturally; there was nothing to prevent them, for we were still in the river, in smooth water, and the ship glided along so steadily that some of us were actually ignorant of the fact of our being under way until made aware of it by certain remarks passed at the breakfast-table. After breakfast, the weather being as "dirty" as ever, I donned my mackintosh and a pair of sea boots with which I had provided myself in anticipation of such occasions as this, and went on deck to look round and smoke a pipe. A few other men followed my example, among others the general, who presently joined me in my perambulation of the poop; and I soon found that, despite a certain peremptoriness and dictatorial assertiveness of manner, which I attributed to his profession, and his position in it, he was a very fine fellow, and a most agreeable companion, with an apparently

inexhaustible fund of anecdote and reminiscence. Incidentally I learned from him that Miss Onslow was the daughter of Sir Philip Onslow, an Indian judge and a friend of Sir Patrick O'Brien, and that she was proceeding to Calcutta under the chaperonage of Lady Kathleen, the general's wife. While we were still chatting together, the young lady herself came on deck, well wrapped up in a long tweed cloak that reached to her ankles, and the general, with an apology to me for his desertion, stepped forward and gallantly offered his arm, which she accepted. And she remained on deck the whole of the morning, with the wind blustering about her and the rain dashing in her face every time that she faced it in her passage from the wheel grating to the break of the poop, to the great benefit of her complexion. She was the only lady who ventured on deck that day—for the weather was so thick that there was nothing to see, beyond an occasional buoy marking out the position of a sandbank, a grimy Geordie, loaded down to her covering-board, driving along up the river under a brace of patched and sooty topsails, or an inward-bound south-spainer in tow of a tug; but this fact of her being the only representative of her sex on deck appeared to disconcert Miss Onslow not at all; she was as absolutely self-possessed as though she and the general had been in sole possession of the deck, as indeed they were, so far as she was concerned, for she calmly and utterly ignored the presence of the rest of us, excepting the skipper, with whom and with the general she conversed with much vivacity. By the arrival of tiffin-time we had drawn far enough down the river to be just meeting the first of the sea knocked up by the strong breeze, and I noticed that already a few of the seats at table that had been occupied at breakfast-time were vacant —among them that of Lady O'Brien—but my left-hand neighbour exhibited a thoroughly healthy appetite—due in part, probably, to her long promenade on deck in the wind and the rain. She was still as stately and distant in manner as ever, however, when I attempted to enter into conversation with her, and I met with such scant encouragement that ere the meal was half over I desisted, leaving to the skipper the task of further entertaining her.

By six o'clock that night we were abreast of the buoy which marks Longnose Ledge, when the pilot shifted his helm for the Elbow, and we began to feel in earnest the influence of the short, choppy sea, into which the *City of Cawnpore* was soon plunging her sharp stem to the height of the hawse pipes, to the rapidly-increasing discomfort of many of the

passengers. By seven o’clock—which was the dinner-hour—we were well round the Elbow, and heading to pass inside the Goodwin and through the Downs, with most of our fore-and-aft canvas set; and now we had not only a pitching but also a rolling motion to contend with; and although the latter was as yet comparatively slight, it was still sufficient to induce a further number of our cuddy party to seek the seclusion of their cabins, with the result that when we sat down to dinner we did not muster quite a dozen, all told. But among those present was my left-hand neighbour, Miss Onslow, faultlessly attired, and to all appearance as completely at her ease as though she were dining ashore. The general made a gallant effort to occupy his accustomed seat, but the soup proved too much for him, and he was compelled to retreat, muttering something apologetic and not very intelligible about his liver. We remained in tow until the tug had dragged us down abreast the South Foreland, where she left us, taking the pilot with her; and half an hour later we were heading down Channel under all plain sail to our topgallant-sails.

When I went on deck to get my after-dinner smoke the prospect was as dreary and dismal as it could well be. It was dark as a wolf’s mouth; for the moon was well advanced in her last quarter—which is as good as saying that there was no moon at all—and the thickness overhead not only obliterated the stars but also rendered it impossible for any of their light to reach us; one consequence of which was that when standing at the break of the poop it taxed one’s eyesight to the utmost to see as far as the bows of the ship; the wind was freshening, with frequent rain squalls that, combined with the intense darkness, circumscribed the visible horizon to a radius of about half a cable’s length on either hand; and through this all but opaque blackness the ship was thrashing along at a speed of fully ten knots, with a continuous crying and storming of wind aloft through the rigging and in the hollows of the straining canvas, and a deep hissing and sobbing sound of water along the bends, to which was added the rhythmical thunderous roaring of the bow wave, and a frequent grape-shot pattering of spray on the fore deck as the fabric plunged with irresistible momentum into the hollows of the short, snappy Channel seas. It was black and blusterous, and everything was dripping wet; I was heartily thankful, therefore, that it was my privilege to go below and turn in just when I pleased, instead of having to stand a watch and strain my eyeballs to bursting point in the endeavour to avoid running foul of some of the numerous craft that were knocking about in the Channel on that

blind and dismal night.

When my berth steward brought me my coffee next morning he informed me, in reply to my inquiries, that the weather had improved somewhat during the night, and that, in his opinion, the temperature on deck was mild enough for me to take a salt-water bath in the ship's head, if I pleased. I accordingly jumped out of my bunk and, hastily donning my bathing togs, made my way on deck. I was no sooner on my feet, however, than I became aware that the ship was particularly lively. She was on the port tack, and was heeling over considerably, so much so indeed that, when she rolled to leeward, to keep my footing without holding on to something was pretty nearly as much as I could well manage. Then there was a continuous vibrant thrill pervading the entire fabric, suggestive of the idea that her blood was roused and that she was quivering with eager excitement, which, to the initiated, is an unfailing sign that the ship is travelling fast through the water. Upon reaching the deck I found the watch engaged in the task of washing decks and polishing the brasswork, while Mr Murgatroyd, as officer of the watch, paced to and fro athwart the fore end of the poop, pausing every time he reached the weather side of the deck to fling a quick, keen glance to windward, and another aloft at the bending topmasts and straining rigging.

For Mr Murgatroyd was "carrying on" and driving the ship quite as much as was consistent with prudence; the wind, it is true, had moderated slightly from its boisterous character of the previous day, and was now steady; but it was still blowing strong, and had hauled round a point or two until it was square abeam; yet, although the lower yards were braced well forward, the ship was under all three royals, and fore and main-topgallant and topmast studding-sails, with a lower studding-sail upon the foremast! She was lying down to it like a racing yacht, with the foam seething and hissing and brimming to her rail at every lee roll, and the lee scuppers all afloat, while she swept along with the eager, headlong, impetuous speed of a sentient creature flying for its life. The wailing and crying of the wind aloft—especially when the ship rolled to windward—was loud enough and weird enough to fill the heart of a novice with dismay, but to the ear of the seaman it sang a song of wild, hilarious sea music, fittingly accompanied by the deep, intermittent thunder of the bow wave as it leapt and roared, glassy smooth, in a curling snow-crowned

breaker from the sharp, shearing stem at every wild plunge of it into the heart of an on-rushing wave. I ran up the poop ladder, and stood to windward, a fathom back from the break of the poop, where I could obtain the best possible view of the ship; and I thought I had never before beheld so magnificent and perfect a picture as she presented of triumphant, domineering strength and power, and of reckless, breathless, yet untiring speed.

“Morning, Mr Conyers,” shouted Murgatroyd, halting alongside me as I stood gazing at the pallid blue sky across which great masses of cloud were rapidly sweeping—to be outpaced by the low-flying shreds and tatters of steamy scud—the opaque, muddy green waste of foaming, leaping waters, and the flying ship swaying her broad spaces of damp-darkened canvas, her tapering and buckling spars, and her tautly-strained rigging in long arcs athwart the scurrying clouds as she leapt and plunged and sheared her irresistible way onward in the midst of a wild chaos and dizzying swirl and hurry of foaming spume: “what think you of this for a grand morning, eh, sir? Is this breeze good enough for you? And what’s your opinion of the *City of Cawnpore*, now, sir?”

“It is a magnificent morning for sailing, Mr Murgatroyd,” I replied; “a magnificent morning—that would be none the worse for an occasional glint of sunshine, which, however, may come by and by; and, as for the ship, she is a wonder, a perfect flyer—why, she must be reeling off her thirteen knots at the least.”

“You’ve hit it, sir, pretty closely; she was going thirteen and a half when we hove the log at four bells, and she hasn’t eased up anything since,” was the reply.

“Ah,” said I, “that is grand sailing—with the wind where it is. But you are driving her rather hard, aren’t you? stretching the kinks out of your new rigging, eh?”

“Well, perhaps we are,” admitted the mate, with a short laugh, as he glanced at the slender upper spars, that were whipping about like fishing-rods. “But you know, Mr Conyers, we’re *obliged* to do it; there is so much opposition nowadays, and people are in such a deuce of a hurry always to get to the place that they are bound to, that the line owning the fastest

ships gets the most patronage; and there's the whole thing in a nutshell."

"Just so; and it is all well enough, in its way—if you don't happen to get dismasted. But I find the morning air rather nipping, so I will get my bath and go below again. Will you kindly allow one of your men to play upon me with the head-pump, Mr Murgatroyd?"

"Certainly, Mr Conyers, with pleasure, sir," answered the mate. "Bosun, just tell off a man to pump for Mr Conyers, will ye!"

The ship was by this time so lively that I was not at all surprised to meet but a meagre muster at the breakfast-table. Yet, of the few present, Miss Onslow was one, and the soaring and plunging and the wild lee rolls of the ship appeared to affect her no more than if she were sitting at home in her own breakfast-room. She was silent, as usual, but her rich colour, and the evident relish with which she partook of the food placed before her, bore witness to the fact that her silence was due to inclination alone. About an hour after breakfast the young lady made her appearance upon the poop, well wrapped up, and began to pace to and fro with an assured footing and an easy, graceful poise of her body to the movements of the deck beneath her that was, to my mind at least, the very poetry of motion. The skipper and I happened to be walking together, at the moment of her appearance, and of course we both with one accord sprang forward and, cap in hand, proffered the support of our arms. She accepted that of the skipper with a graciousness of manner that was to be paralleled only by the frigid dignity with which she declined mine.

The breeze held strong all that day, and for the five days following, gradually hauling round, however, and heading us, until, with our yards braced hard in against the lee rigging, and the three royals and mizzen topgallant-sail stowed, we went thrashing away to the westward against a heavy head-sea that kept our decks streaming as far aft as the mainmast, instead of bowling away across the Bay under studding-sails, as we had hoped. Then we fell in with light weather for nearly a week, that enabled all hands in the cuddy to find their sea legs and a good hearty appetite once more, the ship slowly traversing her way to the southward, meanwhile; and finally we got a westerly wind that, beginning gently enough to permit of our showing skysails to it, ended in a regular North Atlantic gale that compelled us to heave-to for forty-two hours

before it blew itself out.

The gale was at its height, blowing with almost hurricane fury, with a terrific sea running, about twenty hours after its development, and we in the cuddy were, with about half a dozen exceptions, seated at breakfast when, above the howling of the wind, I faintly caught the notes of a hail that seemed to proceed from somewhere aloft.

“Where away?” sharply responded the voice of the chief mate from the poop overhead.

I heard the reply given, but the noises of the ship, the shriek of the gale through the rigging, and the resounding shock of a sea that smote us upon the weather bow at the moment, prevented my catching the words; I had no difficulty, however, in gathering, from Mr Murgatroyd’s inquiry, that something had drifted within our sphere of vision, probably another vessel, hove-to like ourselves. A minute or two later, however, Mr Fletcher, the third mate, presented himself at the cuddy door and said, addressing himself to the skipper:

“Mr Murgatroyd’s respects, sir; and there’s a partially dismasted barque, that appears to be in a sinking condition, and with a signal of distress flying, about eight miles away, broad on the lee bow. And Mr Murgatroyd would be glad to know, sir, if it’s your wish that we should edge down towards her?”

“Yes, certainly,” answered Captain Dacre. “Request Mr Murgatroyd to do what is necessary; and say that I will be on deck myself, shortly.”

The intelligence that a real, genuine wreck was in sight, with the probability that her crew were in a situation of extreme peril, sent quite a thrill of excitement pulsating through the cuddy; with the result that breakfast was more or less hurriedly despatched; and within a few minutes the skipper, Miss Onslow, and myself were all that remained seated at the table, the rest having hurried on deck to catch the earliest possible glimpse of so novel a sight as Mr Murgatroyd’s message promised them.

As for Dacre and myself, we were far too thoroughly seasoned hands to hurry—the ship was hastening to the assistance of the stranger, and

nothing more could be done for the present; and it was perfectly evident that Miss Onslow had no intention of descending to so undignified an act as that of joining in the general rush on deck. But that she was not unsympathetic was evidenced by the earnestness with which she turned to the skipper and inquired:

“Do you think, Captain, that there are any people on that wreck?”

“Any people?” reiterated the skipper. “Why, yes, my dear young lady, I’m very much afraid that there are.”

“You are *afraid*!” returned Miss Onslow. “Why do you use that word? If there are any people there, you will rescue them, will you not?”

“Of course—*if we can*!” answered the skipper. “But that is just the point: *can* we rescue them? Mr Murgatroyd’s message stated that the wreck appears to be in a sinking condition. Now, if that surmise of the mate’s turns out to be correct, the question is: Will she remain afloat until the gale moderates and the sea goes down sufficiently to admit of boats being lowered? If not, it may turn out to be a very bad job for the poor souls; eh, Mr Conyers?”

“It may indeed,” I answered, “for it is certain that no boat of ours could live for five minutes in the sea that is now running. And if that barometer,”—pointing to a very fine instrument that hung, facing us, in the skylight—“is to be believed, the gale is not going to break just *yet*.”

“Oh dear, but that is dreadful!” the girl exclaimed, clasping her hands tightly together in her agitation—and one could see, by the whitening of her lips and the horror expressed in her widely-opened eyes, that her emotion was not simulated; it was thoroughly real and genuine. “I never thought of that! Do I understand you to mean, then, Captain, that even when we reach the wreck it may be impossible to help those on board?”

“Yes,” answered Dacre; “you may understand that, Miss Onslow. Of course we shall stand by them until the gale breaks; and if, when we get alongside, we find that their condition is very critical, some special effort to rescue them will have to be made. But, while doing all that may be possible, I must take care not to unduly risk my own ship, and the lives which have been intrusted to my charge; and, keeping that point in view,

it may prove impossible to do anything to help them."

"And you think there is no hope that the gale will soon abate?" she demanded.

"I see no prospect of it, as yet," answered the skipper. "The barometer is the surest guide a sailor has, in respect of the weather; and, as Mr Conyers just now remarked, ours affords not a particle of hope."

"Oh, how cruel—how relentlessly cruel—the wind and the sea are!" exclaimed this girl whose pride I had hitherto deemed superior to any other emotion. "I *hope*—oh, Captain, I *most fervently hope* that you will be able to save those poor creatures, who must now be suffering all the protracted horrors of a lingering death!"

"You may trust me, my dear young lady," answered the skipper heartily. "Whatever it may prove possible to do, I will do for them. If they are to be drowned it shall be through no lack of effort on my part to save them. And now, if you will excuse me, I will leave Mr Conyers to entertain you, while I go on deck and see how things look."

The girl instantly froze again. "I will not inflict myself upon Mr Conyers—who is doubtless dying for his after-breakfast smoke," she answered, with a complete return of all her former hauteur of manner. "I have finished breakfast, and shall join Lady O'Brien on deck."

And therewith she rose from her seat and, despite the wild movements of the ship, made her way with perfect steadiness and an assured footing toward the ladder or stairs that led downward to the sleeping-rooms, on her way to her cabin.

"A queer girl, by George!" exclaimed Dacre, as she disappeared. "She seems quite determined to keep everybody at a properly respectful distance—especially *you*. Have you offended her?"

"Certainly not—so far as I am aware," I answered. "It is pride, skipper; nothing but pride. She simply deems herself of far too fine a clay to associate with ordinary human pots and pans. Well, she may be as distant as she pleases, so far as I am concerned; for, thank God, I am not in love with her, despite her surpassing beauty!"

And forthwith I seized my cap, and followed the captain up the companion ladder to the poop.

Upon my arrival on deck I found that we were under way once more, Mr Murgatroyd having set the fore-topmast staysail and swung the head yards; and now, with the mate in the weather mizen rigging to con the ship through the terrific sea that was running, we were “jilling” along down toward the wreck, which, from the height of the poop, now showed on the horizon line whenever we both happened to top a surge at the same moment. The entire cuddy party were by this time assembled on the poop, and every eye was intently fixed upon the small, misty image that at irregular intervals reared itself sharply upon the jagged and undulating line of the horizon, and I believe that every telescope and opera-glass in the ship was brought to bear upon it. After studying her carefully through my own powerful instrument for about ten minutes I made her out to be a small barque, of about five hundred tons register, with her foremast gone at a height of about twenty feet from the deck, her main-topmast gone just above the level of the lower-mast-head, and her mizenmast intact. I noticed that she appeared to be floating very deep in the water, and that most of the seas that met her seemed to be sweeping her fore and aft; and I believed I could detect the presence of a small group of people huddled up together abaft the skylight upon her short poop. An ensign of some sort was stopped half-way up the mizen rigging, as a signal of distress; and after a while I made it out to be the tricolour.

“Johnny Crapaud—a Frenchman!” I exclaimed to the skipper, who was standing near me, working away at her with the ship’s telescope.

“A Frenchman, eh!” responded the skipper. “Can you make out the colours of that ensign from here? If so, that must be an uncommonly good glass of yours, Mr Conyers.”

“Take it, and test it for yourself,” I answered, handing him the instrument.

He took it, and applied it to his eye, the other end of the tube swaying wildly to the rolling and plunging of the ship.

“Ay,” he said presently, handing the glass back to me, “French she is, and no mistake! Now that is rather a nuisance, for I am ashamed to say that I

don’t know French nearly well enough to communicate with her. How the dickens are we to understand one another when it comes to making arrangements?”

“Well, if you can find no better way, I shall be very pleased to act as interpreter for you,” I said. “My knowledge of the French language is quite sufficient for that.”

“Thank you, Mr Conyers; I am infinitely obliged to you. I will thankfully avail myself of all the assistance you can give me,” answered the skipper.

The sea being rather in our favour than otherwise, we drove down toward the wreck at a fairly rapid pace, despite the extremely short sail that we were under; and as we approached her the first thing we made out with any distinctness was that the barque was lying head to wind, evidently held in that position by the wreck of the foremast, which, with all attached, was under the bows, still connected with the hull by the standing and running rigging. This was so far satisfactory, in that it acted as a sort of floating anchor, to which the unfortunate craft rode, and which prevented her falling off into the trough of the sea. It would also, probably, to some extent facilitate any efforts that we might be able to make to get alongside her to take her people off.

To get alongside! Ay; but how was it to be done in that wild sea? The aspect of the ocean had been awe-inspiring enough before this forlorn and dying barque had drifted within our ken; but now that she was there to serve as a scale by which to measure the height of the surges, and to bring home to us a realising sense of their tremendous and irresistible power by showing how fearfully and savagely they flung and battered about the poor maimed fabric, it became absolutely terrifying, as was to be seen by the blanched faces and quailing, cowering figures of the crowd on the poop who, stood watching the craft in her death throes. Hitherto the violence of the sea had been productive in them of nothing worse than a condition of more or less discomfort; but now that they had before their eyes an exemplification of what old ocean could do with man and man’s handiwork, if it once succeeded in getting the upper hand, they were badly frightened; frightened for themselves, and still more frightened for the poor wretches yonder who had been conquered in their battle with the elements, and were now being done to death by their

triumphant foe. And it was no reproach to them that they were so; for the sight upon which they were gazing, and which was now momentarily growing plainer to the view, was well calculated to excite a feeling of awe and terror in the heart of the bravest there, having in mind the fact that we were looking upon a drama that might at any moment become a tragedy involving the destruction of nearly or quite a dozen fellow beings. Even I, seasoned hand as I was, found myself moved to a feeling of horrible anxiety as I watched the wreck through my telescope.

For the feeling was growing upon me that we were going to be too late, and that we were doomed to see that little crouching, huddling knot of humanity perish miserably, without the power to help them. We were by this time about a mile distant from the wreck; and another seven or eight minutes would carry us alongside. But what might not happen in those few minutes? Why, the barque might founder at any moment, and carry all hands down with her. For we could by this time see that the hull was submerged to the channels; and so deadly languid and sluggish were her movements that almost every sea made a clean sweep over her, fore and aft, rendering her main deck untenable, and her poop but a meagre and precarious place of refuge.

And even if she continued to float until we reached her, and for some time afterward, how were her unfortunate people to be transferred from her deck to our own? One had only to note the wild rush of the surges, their height, and the fierceness with which they broke as they swept down upon our own ship, and the headlong reeling and plunging of her as she met their assault, to realise the absolute impossibility of lowering a boat from her without involving the frail craft and her crew in instant destruction; and how otherwise were those poor, half-drowned wretches to be got at and saved. Something might perhaps be done by means of a hawser, if its end could by any means be put on board the sinking craft; but here again the difficulties were such as to render the plan to all appearance impracticable. Yet it seemed to offer the only imaginable solution of the problem; for presently, as we continued to roll and stagger down toward the doomed barque, Captain Dacre turned to me and said:

“There is only one way to do this job, Mr Conyers; and that is for the Frenchmen to float the end of a heaving-line down to us, by which we may be able to send them a hawser with a bosun’s chair and hauling

lines attached. If it is not troubling you too much, perhaps you will kindly hail them and explain my intentions, presently. I shall shave athwart her stern, as closely as I dare, with my main-topsail aback, so that you may have plenty of time to tell them what, our plans are, and what we want them to do."

"Very well," said I; "I will undertake the hailing part of the business with pleasure. Have you a speaking-trumpet?"

"Of course," answered the skipper. "Here, boy,"—to one of the apprentices who happened to be standing near—"jump below and fetch the speaking-trumpet for Mr Conyers. You will find it slung from one of the deck beams in my cabin."

Dacre then took charge of the ship in person, conning her from the weather mizen rigging, and sending Murgatroyd for'ard with instructions to clear away the towing-hawser, and to fit it with a traveller, bosun's chair, and hauling-lines, blocks, etcetera, all ready for sending the end aboard the barque when communication should have been established with her. And at the same time, the boy having brought the speaking-trumpet on deck, and handed it to me, I stationed myself in the mizen rigging, alongside the skipper, for convenience of communication between him and myself.

Chapter Three.

We rescue the crew of a French barque.

We were now drawing close down upon the barque, steering a course that, if persisted in, would have resulted in our striking her fair amidships on her starboard broadside, but which, by attention to the helm at the proper moment, with a due allowance for our own heavy lee drift, was intended to take us close enough to the sinking craft to enable us to speak her. Presently, at a word from the skipper, the third mate—who was acting as the captain's *aide*—sang out for some men to lay aft and back the main-topsail; and at the same moment the helm was eased gently up, with the result that our bows fell off just sufficiently to clear the barque's starboard quarter.

I shall never forget the sight that the unfortunate craft presented at that moment. Her foremast and jib-boom were under the bows, with all attached, and were hanging, a tangled mass of raffle, by the shrouds and stays, leaving about twenty feet of naked, jagged, and splintered stump of the lower-mast standing above the deck; and her main-topmast was also gone; but the wreckage of this had been cut away and had gone adrift, leaving only the heel in the cap, and the ragged ends of the topmast shrouds streaming from the rim of the top. She had been a very smart-looking little vessel in her time, painted black with false ports, and under her bowsprit she sported a handsomely-carved half-length figure of a crowned woman, elaborately painted and gilded. She carried a short topgallant forecastle forward, and a full poop aft, reaching to within about twenty-five feet from the mainmast; and between these two structures the bulwarks had been completely swept away, leaving only a jagged stump of a stanchion here and there protruding above the covering-board. She was sunk so low in the water that her channels were buried; and the water that was in her, making its way slowly and with difficulty through the interstices of her cargo, had at this time collected forward, and was pinning her head down to such an extent that her bows were unable to lift to the 'scend of the sea, with the result that every sea broke, hissing white, over her topgallant forecastle, and swept right aft to the poop, against the front of which it dashed itself, as against the vertical face of a

rock, throwing blinding and drenching clouds of spray over the little group of cowering people who crouched as closely as they could huddle behind the meagre and inadequate shelter of the skylight.

I counted fourteen of these poor souls, and in the midst of them, occupying the most sheltered spot on the whole deck, I noticed what at first looked like a bundle of tarpaulin, but as we swept up on the barque's starboard quarter I saw one of the men gently pull a corner of the tarpaulin aside with one hand, while he pointed at the *City of Cawnpore* with the other, and, to my amazement, the head and face of a woman—a young woman—looked out at us with an expression of mingled hope and despair that was dreadful to see.

"Good God, there's a woman among them!" exclaimed Dacre. "We must save her—we must save them all, if we can; but it looks as if we shall not be given much time to do it in. I suppose they want to be taken off? They'll never be mad enough to wish to stick to that wreck, eh? Hail them, Mr Conyers; you know what to say!"

"Barque ahoy!" I hailed, in French, as, with main-topsail aback, we surged and wallowed slowly athwart the stern of the stranger, "do you wish to be taken off?"

At the first sound of my voice, the man who had pointed us out to the woman rose stiffly to his feet and staggered aft to the taffrail, with his hand to his ear.

"But yes," he shouted back, in the same language; "our ship is sinking, and—"

"All right," I interrupted—for time was precious—"we will endeavour to get the end of a hawser aboard you. Have you any light heaving-line that you can veer down to us by means of a float? If so, get it ready, and we will try to pick it up on our return. We are now about to stand on and take room to wear, when we will come back and endeavour to establish a connection between the two craft. Have the line ready and veered well away to leeward at once."

"But, monsieur," replied the man, wringing his hands, "we have *no* line—no anything—you see all that we have,"—indicating the bare poop with a

frantic gesture.

“You have a lot of small stuff among the gear upon your mizenmast,” I retorted; but although I pointed to the mast in question, and the man glanced aloft as I did so, I very much doubted whether he comprehended my meaning, for our lee drift was so rapid that we were by this time almost beyond hailing distance.

“Fill the main-topsail,” shouted the skipper. “What have you arranged?” he demanded, turning to me.

I told him. He stamped on the rail with impatience. “It is clear that it will not do to trust overmuch to them for help; we shall have to do everything ourselves. Mr Murgatroyd!” he shouted.

The mate came aft.

“Is that hawser nearly ready?” demanded the skipper.

“All but, sir,” answered the mate. “Another five minutes will do it.”

“Then,” said the skipper, “your next job, sir, will be to muster all the light line you can lay your hands upon, and range it along the larboard rail—which will be our weather rail, presently, when we have got the ship round—and station half a dozen men, or more, all along the weather rail, each with a coil, and let them stand by to heave as we cross the barque’s stern. My object is to get a line aboard her as quickly as possible, by means of which we may send the hawser to them. For they appear to be a pretty helpless lot aboard there, and, if they are to be saved, there is very little time to lose.”

“Ay, ay, sir,” responded Murgatroyd; and away he went to perform this additional duty.

Captain Dacre now showed the stuff of which he was made, handling his ship with the most consummate skill and judgment, wearing her round upon the port tack the moment that he could do so with the certainty of again fetching the barque, and ranging up under her stern as closely as he dared approach. Eight of the strongest and most skilful seamen in the ship were ranged along the weather rail, and as we drew up on the

barque's starboard quarter—with our main-topsail once more thrown aback—man after man hurled his coil of light, pliant line with all his strength, in the endeavour to get the end of it aboard the barque. But such was the strength of the gale that line after line fell short—checked as effectually in its career as though it had been dashed against a solid wall—and although, after his first failure, each man hauled in his line and, re-coiling it with the utmost rapidity, attempted another cast, all were unsuccessful, and we had the mortification of feeling that at least twenty minutes of priceless time had been expended to no purpose. And what made it all the worse was that during that twenty minutes absolutely nothing had been done by the Frenchmen toward the preparation of a line to veer down to us. Within three minutes of the moment when the first line had been hove we were once more out of hailing distance, and the main yards were again being swung.

"We will have another try," said the skipper; "but if we fail again it will be all up with them—if, indeed, it is not already too late. That barque cannot possibly live another half-hour!"

There seemed to be no room to regard this otherwise than as a plain, literal statement of an incontrovertible fact; we were all agreed that the unfortunate craft had settled perceptibly in the water since we had first sighted her; and at the same rate another half-hour would suffice to annihilate the very small margin of buoyancy that appeared to be still remaining to her, even if she escaped being earlier sunk out of hand by some more than usually heavy sea. But this seemed to have been temporarily lost sight of by the little crowd of onlookers that clustered closely round us on the poop, in the absorbing interest attendant upon our endeavours to get a line on board the barque, and was only recalled to them—and that, too, in a very abrupt and startling manner—by the significance of the skipper's last remark. The imminence and deadly nature of the Frenchmen's peril was brought home to them anew; and now they seemed to realise, for the first time, the possibility that they might be called upon to witness at close quarters the appalling spectacle not only of a foundering ship but also of the drowning of all her people. Instantly quite a little hubbub arose among the excited passengers, General O'Brien and some half a dozen other men among them pressing about poor Dacre with suggestions and proposals of the most impossible character. And in the midst of it all I heard Miss Onslow's clear, rich voice

exclaiming bitterly:

“Cruel! cruel! To think that we are so near, and yet it seems impossible to bridge the few remaining yards of space that intervene between those poor creatures and the safety that we enjoy! Surely it *can* be done, if only anyone were clever enough to think of the way!”

“Now, ladies and gentlemen,” remonstrated the skipper, “please don’t consider me rude if I say that none of you know what you are talking about. There are only two ways of getting a line aboard that wreck; one way is, to *carry* it, and the other, to *heave* it. The former is impossible, with the sea that is now running; and the latter we have already tried once, unsuccessfully, and are now about to try again. If any of you can think of any other *practicable* way, I shall be glad to listen to you; but, if not, please leave me alone, and let me give my whole mind to the job!”

Meanwhile I had been watching the run of the sea, at first idly, and with no other feeling than that of wonder that any vessel in the water-logged condition of the barque could continue to live in it, for it was as high and as steep a sea as I had ever beheld, and it broke incessantly over the barque with a fury that rendered her continued existence above water a constantly-recurring marvel. Heavy as it was, however, it was not so bad as the surf that everlastingly beat upon the sandy shores of the West Coast; and as I realised this fact I also remembered that upon more than one occasion it had been necessary for me to swim through that surf to save my life! “Surely,” thought I, “the man who has fought his way through the triple line of a West African surf ought to be able to swim twenty or thirty fathoms in this sea!” The idea seemed to come to me as an inspiration; and, undeterred by the thought that the individual who should essay the feat of swimming from the one ship to the other would be seriously hampered by being compelled to drag a lengthening trail of light rope behind him, I turned to the skipper and said:

“Captain Dacre, there appears to be but one sure way of getting a line aboard that wreck, and that is for someone to swim with it—Stop a moment—I know that you are about to pronounce the feat impossible; but I believe I can do it, and, at all events, I am perfectly willing to make the attempt. Give me something light—such as a pair of signal halliards—to drag after me, and let a good hand have the paying of it out, so that I may

neither be checked by having it paid out too slowly, nor hampered on the other hand by having to drag a heavy bight after me; and I think I shall be able to manage it. And if I succeed, bend the end of a heaving-line on to the other directly you see that I have got hold, and we will soon get the hawser aboard and the end made fast somewhere."

The skipper looked at me fixedly for several seconds, as though mentally measuring my ability to execute the task I had offered to undertake. Then he answered:

"Upon my word, Mr Conyers, I scarcely know what to say to your extraordinarily plucky proposal. If you had been a landsman I should not have entertained the idea for a moment; and, even as it is, I am by no means sure that I should be justified in permitting you to make the attempt. But you are a sailor of considerable experience; you fully understand all the difficulty and the danger of the service you have offered to undertake; and I suppose you have some hope of being successful, or you would not have volunteered. And upon my word I am beginning to think, with you, that the course you suggest is the only one likely to be of any service to those poor souls yonder—so I suppose—I must say—Yes, and God be with you!"

The little crowd round about us, who had been listening with breathless interest, cheered and clapped their hands at this pronouncement of the skipper's—the cheer being taken up by the crowd of miners gathered in the waist—and General O'Brien, who was standing at my elbow, seized my hand and shook it enthusiastically as he exclaimed:

"God bless you, Conyers; God bless you, my boy; every man and woman among us will pray for your safety and success!"

"Thanks, General," answered I. "The knowledge that I have the sympathy and good wishes of you all will add strength to my arm and courage to my heart; but the issue is in God's hands, and if it be His will, I shall succeed." Then, turning to the skipper, I said:

"I propose that you shall take the ship up as close as possible to the wreck, precisely as you did at first; and I will dive from the flying-jib-boom-end—which will approach the wreck more closely than our hull;

and it will be for you to watch and so manoeuvre the ship—either by easing up the fore-topmast staysail sheet, or in any other way that you may think best—that she shall be kept fair abreast of and dead to leeward of the wreck until we can get the end of the hawser aboard and made fast. After that I think we may trust to the difference in the rate of the drift of the two craft to keep the hawser taut."

"Yes, yes," answered the skipper; "you may trust to me to do my part, Mr Conyers. If you can only manage to get the end of the hawser aboard and fast to the wreck, I will attend to the other part of the job. And now, you had better go and get ready for your swim; for I am about to wear ship."

I hurried away to my cabin and shifted into ordinary bathing attire; and while thus engaged I became aware that Dacre was wearing ship and getting her round upon the starboard tack once more. By the time that my preparations were completed and I had made my way out on the main deck, the ship was round, and heading up for the wreck again. As I appeared, threading my way forward among the great burly miners who were clustering thick in the waist, they raised a cheer, and the cuddy party again clapped their hands, some of them shouting an encouraging word or two after me.

On the forecastle I encountered Murgatroyd, the chief mate, who held a coil of small thin line in his hand.

"Here you are, Mr Conyers," he exclaimed, as I joined him. "This coil is the main signal halliards, which I have unrove for the purpose—they are better than new, for they have been stretched and have had the kinks taken out of them. And if they are not enough, here are the fore halliards, all ready for bending on at a second's notice. I shall pay out for you, so you may depend upon having the line properly tended. Now, how will you have the end? will you have it round your waist, or—?"

"No," said I. "Give it me as a standing bowline, which I can pass over my shoulder and under my arm. So; that will do. Is the hawser fitted, and all ready for paying out?"

"Yes," answered the mate, "everything is quite ready. I've left about five

fathoms of bare end for bending on; and I think you can't do much better than take a turn with it round the mizenmast, under the spider-band."

"That is exactly what I thought of doing," said I. "In fact it is about the only suitable place."

I stood talking with Murgatroyd until we were once more almost within hail of the barque, when, with the bowline at the end of the line over my left shoulder and under my right arm, I laid out to the flying-jib-boom-end, upon which I took my stand, steadying myself by grasping the royal stay in my left hand. The motion away out there, at the far extremity of that long spar, was tremendous; so much so, indeed, that seasoned as I was to the wild and erratic movements of a ship in heavy weather, the sinkings and soarings and flourishings of that boom-end, as the vessel plunged and staggered down toward the wreck, made me feel distinctly giddy. The wait was not a very long one, however, and in less than five minutes I found myself abreast the barque's starboard quarter, and within a hundred feet of it. I was now as close to the wreck as Captain Dacre dared put me; so, as the ship met a heavy sea and flung me high aloft above the white water that seethed and swirled about the stern of the sinking craft, I let go my hold upon the stay and, poising myself for an instant upon the up-hove extremity of the boom, raised my hands above my head as I bent my body toward the water, and took off for a deep dive, my conviction being that I should do far better by swimming under water than on the surface. As I rushed downward I heard Dacre shout: "There he goes! God be with him!" and then I struck the water, head downward, almost perpendicularly, and the only sound I heard was the hissing of the water in my ears as the blue-green light about me grew gradually more and more dim. With my body slightly curved, and my back a trifle hollowed, I knew that even while plunging downward I was also rushing toward the barque, and presently I struck out strongly, arms and legs, as I caught sight, through the water, of a huge dark body, at no great distance, that I knew to be the swaying hull for which I was making. At length, gasping for breath, I rose to the surface, and found that I was within twenty feet of the barque's stern, with the whole of her crew upon their feet, anxiously watching me, while a man stood at her taffrail, holding a coil of rope in his hand. The instant he saw me he shouted: "Look out, monsieur; I am about to heave!"

“All right; heave!” I shouted in return, gasping in the midst of the wild popple that leaped about the labouring craft; and the next instant a flake of the uncoiling end of the line hit me sharply across the face. I seized it tightly, and sang out:

“Haul me to the starboard mizen chains!” The man flung up his hand in reply and, holding on to the rope, started *at a run* along the deck, dragging me after him. It was a good job that I had thought of taking a turn round one arm, or in his eagerness he would have dragged the rope out of my grasp; as it was, the strain he brought to bear, added to that of the long length of line trailing behind me, almost tore my arms out of their sockets. Moreover, I was half suffocated by the deluge of water that came crashing down upon me like a cataract off the deck of the wreck every time that she rolled toward me. Luckily, this condition of affairs was of but brief duration; and presently I found myself in the wake of the mizen chains, and in imminent danger of being struck and driven under by the overhanging channel piece; I watched my opportunity, however, and, as the barque rolled toward me I seized the lanyards of one of the shrouds, got a footing, somehow, and dragged myself in over the rail. I felt terribly exhausted by the brief but fierce buffeting I had received alongside; but time was precious—the *City of Cawnpore* was still square athwart the stern of the wreck, but driving away to leeward at a terrible rate, and I knew that unless we were very smart we should still fail to get the hawser from her—so I flung up one arm as a signal to Murgatroyd to pay out and, crying out to the Frenchmen to come and help me, began to haul upon the line I had brought aboard with me. By dint of exhortation so earnest that it almost amounted to bullying I succeeded in awaking the Frenchmen to a sense of the urgency of the case, and persuaded them to put some liveliness into their movements, by which means we quickly hauled in the whole of the signal halliards, to the other end of which a light heaving-line was bent. This also we dragged away upon for dear life, and presently I had the satisfaction of seeing the end of the *City of Cawnpore’s* towing-hawser being lighted out over her bows. This was a heavy piece of cordage for us to handle, but we dragged away at it breathlessly, and at length, when I had almost begun to despair of getting it aboard in time, we hauled the end in over the taffrail and, all hands of us seizing it, led it to the mizenmast, round the foot of which I had the satisfaction of passing a couple of turns and securing it. So far, so good; the most difficult part of my task was now accomplished; for I knew that

Murgatroyd would attend to the work at his end of the hawser, and do everything that was necessary; so I turned to the Frenchman who had assisted me aboard, and said:

“Are you the master of this barque, monsieur?”

“At your service, monsieur,” he answered, bowing with all the grace of a dancing-master.

“Very good,” said I. “You have a lady on board, I think?”

“But yes, monsieur: my wife!” and he flourished his arm toward the bundle of tarpaulin that still remained huddled up under the shelter of the skylight.

“She will of course have to go first,” I said. “Are there any preparations she would wish to make before being transferred to the other vessel?”

Without replying to my question, the man hurried away to the heap and, unwrapping the tarpaulin, extricated a young, and rather pretty but terribly frightened woman from its folds. As he did so, I saw that she held a baby in her arms!

“What!” exclaimed I, as I joined the little group, “a baby also?”

“Yes, monsieur,” answered the man. “You see we wrapped them both up in a tarpaulin, to protect them as much as possible from the cruel sea.”

“A very wise precaution,” I commented. “But this increases our difficulties somewhat: I greatly doubt whether mother and child will be able to make the passage together. Madame will scarcely have the strength to hold herself and the baby safely at the same time; the little one might be washed out of her arms and lost.”

“Oh, monsieur, what shall I do?” wailed the poor, terrified creature. “Have we to cross by that rope?”

“I fear there is no other way,” I replied gently.

“I can never do it! I can never do it!” she ejaculated despairingly. “The sea

will drag me and my little Mimi off, and we shall be drowned!”

“Under the circumstances, monsieur, there seems to be only one thing for it,” said I; “you must go first, carrying the child, and as soon as you are safe, I will follow with madame. Is that arrangement to your liking?”

The man intimated that it was; and forthwith we commenced the preparations necessary to secure for the poor little wailing mite of humanity a chance of surviving the fearful journey. And a fearful journey it certainly was, even for a strong man; how much more so, then, for a weak, terrified woman, or a helpless child, less than a year old?

The arrangement was this: The *City of Cawnpore’s* to wing-hawser was now stretched between the two vessels, one end being made fast to the barque’s mizenmast, while the other end led in over the *City of Cawnpore’s* bows, through a warping chock, and was secured somewhere inboard, probably to the windlass bitts—it would have been much more convenient had the hawser been made fast to the foremast, about fifteen or twenty feet from the deck; but a very heavy intermittent strain was being thrown upon it, and I imagined that Dacre did not care to run the risk of springing so important a spar. The effect of this was that the *City of Cawnpore*, with both topsails thrown flat aback, was now actually riding by her hawser to the barque, as to a sea anchor, the deeply-submerged hull of the French craft offering sufficient resistance to the drift of the *City of Cawnpore* to keep the hawser taut, except at the rather frequent intervals when the heave of the sea flung the barque far enough to leeward to temporarily slacken it. And it was by means of this hawser—at one moment taut as a bar, and, at the next, sagging slack enough to dip into the water—that the Frenchmen were to be hauled from their ship to ours.

Meanwhile, the work of securing the hawser aboard the *City of Cawnpore*, and the clearing away of the travelling-gear, had been going briskly forward, and at the moment when the Frenchman and I came to an understanding I saw the slung bosun’s chair hove over the *City’s* bows and come sliding along the hawser toward us. The French skipper saw it, too; and tenderly taking the child from the arms of his almost swooning wife, he carefully wrapped it in his jacket, which he removed for the purpose, and then, with my assistance, securely lashed the bundle to his

body. The bosun's chair had by this time arrived at the barque's taffrail, and was awaiting its first freight; so, as there was no time to lose, I hustled the poor fellow away from his wife, assisted him into the chair, saw that he had a good grip with both hands, and waved for Murgatroyd to haul away, which he instantly did. I next turned to the lady, and begged her to once more shelter herself temporarily in the tarpaulin, my object being to spare her the sight of the terrible passage of her husband and child over and through that narrow stretch of ravening sea. But, as it happened, there was no need for my solicitude; she cast one glance at the swaying, dangling figure of her husband, and then, with a wild, wailing shriek, flung herself upon her knees, with her hands clasped over her eyes.

And truly a terrible sight it was for a woman to contemplate, especially with the knowledge that she would presently be obliged to herself undertake the dreadful journey. The sea was running so high that, close to each other as we were, when the crest of a wave interposed between us and the *City of Cawnpore* the latter was hidden half-way to the height of her tops; and the headlong fury with which each wave came sweeping down upon us, foam-capped, and with arching crest, was alone enough to strike terror to the stoutest heart. That, however, was not the worst of it; for although Murgatroyd might safely be trusted to exercise the utmost judgment in the manipulation of the hauling-line, there were moments when—the two craft being upon the opposite slopes of a huge surge, with the hawser strained taut from one to the other—any luckless individual who might be so unfortunate as to be caught half-way between the two vessels would be momentarily buried some thirty feet deep in the heart of the rushing hill of water, and about equally exposed to the two dangers of suffocation or of being swept off beyond the reach of rescue, and drowned out of hand. This double danger overtook the unfortunate French skipper and his baby, but they got through all right, the child escaping suffocation mainly in consequence of the careful and secure manner in which she had been enveloped in her father's coat.

Then came madame's turn. It was impossible to so effectually enwrap her as had been the case with the child, but I did the best I could with a strip of the tarpaulin over her head and shoulders, well secured round her body with a length of the main-topgallant brace, and then, lashing her firmly to my own body, I took my place in the bosun's chair, wrapping my

arms tightly round my quaking companion, and then taking a firm grip upon the lanyards of the chair. The next instant I was whirled off the barque's taffrail, and found myself dangling close over the seething white water between the two vessels. Then, while I was in the very act of shouting a few encouraging words through the tarpaulin to my companion, I heard the roaring crash of a heavy sea as it struck and swept over the unfortunate barque from stem to stern, and the next instant I felt the water envelop me and whirl and drag me hither and thither with a strength that it seemed impossible to resist; then as suddenly I found myself in the air again, with the great wave-crest rushing and roaring away from me toward the ship, the topmast-heads only of which were visible above the foaming ridge of water that had just swept past me. In another second or two, however, the end of her flying-jib-boom reared itself high above the seething wave-crest, her sharp bows, smothered in spray, quickly followed, and then the entire hull of the ship hung balanced for an instant upon the top of the wave ere her bows dipped, revealing the full length of her deck crowded with people, every one of them with their faces turned in my direction. A few more jerks and swings, every one of which seemed imbued with a devilish desire to unseat and hurl myself and my companion to destruction, and we were hauled safely up on to the rail of the *City of Cawnpore*—to an accompaniment of triumphant cheers from the spectators—and quickly released.

Before I could recover breath to say a word, the bosun's chair was swiftly sliding along the hawser, on its way back to the barque; and presently, after some apparent delay and hesitation on the part of those aboard the doomed vessel, it swung off her taffrail, on its return journey, with a man seated in it. Swiftly the chair traversed about a third of the distance between the two vessels, and then it was overtaken by and deeply buried in the heart of an oncoming sea, even as I had been. For a few breathless seconds the chair and its occupant were lost to view; then, as the ship surmounted the wave, the chair again appeared; *but it was empty*; its late occupant had vanished! There was a cry of dismay as this became manifest, and with one consent everybody craned over the rail and peered down into the leaping water, in the hope of discovering the missing man, while a few of the smarter hands on the forecastle sprang for rope's-ends, which they quickly coiled and stood by to heave to him, should he reappear. But he never did; and after watching for a full two

minutes he was given up, and the chair was again hauled aboard the barque. A further delay now took place, no one seeming to have the courage to undertake the short but terrible passage; at length, however, a man stepped forward and placed himself in the chair, and the journey began. Half the passage was accomplished ere he was overtaken, when, like the rest of us, he was submerged for a few awful seconds; and when next we saw him he was just in the very act of falling from the chair, having apparently been dragged out of it by the fierce, sweeping rush of the sea. Shouts of horror at this fresh disaster, and of encouragement to the man, at once arose, in the midst of which I seized the end of a good long coil of line which a man was holding ready to throw, and, quickly tying a bowline therein, threw the bight over my shoulder, poised myself for a dive, waiting, with one foot on the topgallant rail, to see just exactly what was happening, before taking the leap. The unfortunate man sank, upon striking the water; but presently the man beside me sang out “There he is!” pointing at the same time down at the water about thirty feet from our bows; and, peering down, I at length caught sight, indistinctly, of what looked like a human form, twisting and writhing a few feet below the surface. I instantly dived, and the next moment found myself within arm’s reach of the man, whom I seized by the hair and dragged to the surface, when all that I had to do was to fling my arms about his body, and hold on like grim death, Murgatroyd and his people at once undertaking the rather delicate task of getting us both safely inboard. This was soon accomplished; but meanwhile the bosun’s chair hung stationary midway between the two vessels, our people seeming doubtful of the utility of proceeding further.

But there was no time to lose if the remaining Frenchmen were to be rescued—for it was perfectly evident to everybody that the barque could not possibly float much longer—so, shrewdly guessing at the source of the inaction, I requested Murgatroyd to haul the chair aboard; and, this being done, I seated myself in it and requested them to haul me across to the barque. Twice was I caught by the sea during this journey, and each time it seemed that I emerged at the precise moment when, it would have been impossible to resist the drag for even another second; but I reached the barque safely and, at once scrambling out of the chair, proceeded to despatch the Frenchmen in rotation: the task proving less difficult than I had expected, my voluntary journey to them seeming to have inspired them with fresh courage.

At length, by dint of lashing the weaker men into the chair, and earnestly cautioning the strong ones to hold on with all their might, I succeeded in securing the passage of the entire remainder of the Frenchmen to the *City of Cawnpore*; and then came the task of effecting my own retreat. Of course this could have been accomplished by means of the hawser and the bosun's chair; but this would have involved the loss of the hawser and all the hauling-gear attached—which it would have been necessary to cut away. I thought it a pity to inflict this loss upon the ship, merely to save myself the discomfort of being hauled through the water from one ship to the other, so as soon as the last Frenchman was safely aboard the *City of Cawnpore* I proceeded to cut and cast adrift the hawser from the barque's mizenmast, and a few minutes later the massive rope's-end flew overboard, quickly followed by the heaving-line, in the end of which I had knotted a bowline for my own accommodation. I had just thrown this bowline over my shoulder, and was watching the coils of the line go leaping overboard, one after the other, as the rescuing ship went drifting rapidly to leeward, when a perfect mountain of a sea came roaring down upon the wreck, sweeping unbroken in over her bows and right aft until it reached the front of the poop, against which it broke with terrific violence, smashing in the entire front of the structure, as I judged by the tremendous crashing of timber that instantly followed. Checked for the fraction of an instant by its impact with the poop, the sea piled itself up in a sort of wall, and then came surging and foaming along the deck toward me. I saw that it would inevitably sweep me off my feet, so, to avoid being dashed against the poop rail, I unhesitatingly leapt overboard, and, while still under water, felt the weight of the sea falling upon me that I had jumped overboard to avoid. The pressure was as that of a mountain, and it drove me downward until the light dwindled to a sombre green twilight, while the whirling water seemed to clasp me about as with a thousand arms, flinging and dragging me hither and thither but ever downward, until I could hold my breath no longer, when with a great irresistible gasp my lungs filled with water, darkness and silence profound and impenetrable shut me in, a thousand quaint, fantastic fancies thronged my brain, and—I knew no more.

Chapter Four.

The catastrophe.

My next sensation was that of pain—burning, stabbing, racking pain, of so excruciating a character that I incontinently groaned aloud. Then, as though in response to my groan, I heard—vaguely, and without any immediate comprehension of the meaning of the words—a voice say:

“There, I think that will do, General; he is in pain, now, thank God!—which means that he is coming round—and there is every reason to hope that he will pull through. Thanks for your valuable assistance. I can manage single-handed, now. You might make it known that Mr Conyers shows signs of returning consciousness, and that I have every hope of saving him. I fancy the intelligence will be not altogether unwelcome to at least one of the cuddy party.”

“By Gad! yes; I think I know who you mean. I’ll make a point of telling the news in her hearing,” was the reply. “Are you sure there is nothing else that I can do, doctor?”

“Nothing more, thank you—except, perhaps, that you might suggest the value of quietness of movement on the part of anyone coming below. No slamming of cabin-doors, or anything of that sort, you know,” answered the first voice, which I now recognised as that of the ship’s doctor on board the *City of Cawnpore*.

“All right; I’ll see to it,” replied the other voice, now quite familiar to me as that of General O’Brien. A gentle click of the cabin-door latch succeeded; and I opened my eyes languidly, to see Scudamore’s sharp-cut features bending close to mine, with an earnest, intent look in his kindly eyes.

“Well,” he exclaimed heartily, as our eyes met, “how do you feel now?”

“In horrible pain,” I answered, with another involuntary groan. “What is the matter with me, doctor? What has happened?”

“Only that you have been drowned; and that you have kept the general and myself busy, for two mortal hours and more, practising artificial respiration, before you would consent to come back to life. That is all!”

Then I remembered everything, and began to wonder by what means I had been recovered from those profound depths wherein my last conscious moments had been spent. I put the question to Scudamore, and he answered:

“Oh, as to that, we had no difficulty. There was a light heaving-line attached by one end to the hawser, and in the other end you had knotted a bowline which you passed over your shoulders and under your armpits. We simply hauled you aboard by means of that.”

“And how long did the barque live after I left her?” I asked.

“How long?” repeated the doctor, in surprise. “Why, not ten seconds! She was in the very act of foundering, stern first, when you jumped; and it was undoubtedly her suction that did the mischief. You must have been dragged fathoms deep by her; and but for the line round you, you would probably never have come to the surface again.”

“And what of the French people? Are they all right?” I demanded.

“Yes; thanks to you, they are,” answered Scudamore. “The man you jumped overboard after was the worst case; but, luckily, I had succeeded in resuscitating him before you were hauled aboard. You have saved fifteen human lives to-day! That is something to be proud of, is it not? And now, no more talking at present; what you require is sleep; and if you do not mind being left alone a minute or two I will go to my cabin and mix you a draught that will give you a good long nap, from which I have no doubt you will awake feeling as well as ever.”

So saying, the medico softly withdrew, quietly closing the cabin-door behind him, only to return a few minutes later with a draught of decidedly pungent taste, which, at his command, I tossed off instanter. Whether it was due to the potency of the draught, or to exhaustion, or to both combined, I know not, but certain it is that as I sank back upon the pillow my eyes closed, and almost instantly I went drifting off into the land of dreams.

When I next awoke it was well on toward evening, for the light had grown so dim that I could only indistinctly discern the various objects about the cabin. But there seemed to have been no abatement of the gale, for the

ship was rolling and plunging as wildly as ever; the scuttle was frequently being dimmed by the dash of seas against the ship's side; and the screaming of the gale through the rigging still rose high above every other sound.

My body seemed to be bruised and aching all over; but, with this exception, I felt little or none the worse for my morning's adventure; I was very comfortable, but distinctly hungry; and I was lazily endeavouring to make up my mind whether I would go to the trouble of dressing, and hunting up a steward to find me something to eat, or whether I would remain where I was until somebody came to me, when the problem was solved by the opening of my cabin-door, and the entrance of the doctor. He advanced on tiptoe to the side of my bunk, and bent close over me, peering into my face to see whether I happened to be awake.

"What is the time, doctor?" I asked.

"Oh, so you *are* awake, eh?" he responded. "Well, how do you feel?"

"Sore and aching from head to foot, but otherwise all right—excepting that I am uncommonly hungry," I answered.

"Hungry, eh?" said Scudamore. "Let me feel your pulse."

He laid his fingers upon my wrist for a few seconds, and then said:

"Well, there doesn't seem to be very much the matter with you now; you have had a good, long, sound sleep—I have been in and out from time to time, just to see that you were going on all right—and a good dinner will not hurt you. Will you have it brought to you here, or would you rather turn out and dress?"

"Oh, I will turn out, of course!" I exclaimed.

"Very well, then," said the doctor, "I will send a steward to help you to dress—you will need a little assistance, with the ship cutting these wild capers—and if you do not dawdle too long over your toilet you will be just in good time for dinner. There goes the first bell," he added, as the strident clamour suddenly pealed out from somewhere on the deck above.

He left me, and presently my berth-room steward appeared with my shaving-water, and I scrambled—rather more feebly than I had expected—out of my bunk. The operation of dressing proved to be a considerably more lengthy one than I had anticipated, for I found that I was decidedly shaky on my legs, and I had to sit on the sofa and take a short rest at frequent intervals, with the result that the second dinner bell rang before I was ready to leave my cabin. I was not very late, however, arriving in the cuddy last, it is true, but in time to see my immediate predecessors just taking their seats. As I crossed the threshold of the brilliantly-lighted apartment, leaning upon the arm of the steward, the entire company rose to their feet; every eye was turned upon me; and suddenly General O'Brien shouted, in great excitement:

"Three cheers for our gallant friend Conyers! Hip, hip, hip, hurrah!"

The three cheers thus unexpectedly called for were enthusiastically given—even the ladies joining in—to my great confusion, and as I passed aft between the two tables everybody within reach must needs shake hands with me, and say something complimentary, until I felt so uncomfortable that I began to wish I had remained below. I noticed that Miss Onslow was on her feet, like the rest; but she appeared to have risen rather to avoid any appearance of singularity than with the intention of paying me a compliment; while the rest were almost boisterously enthusiastic she remained absolutely calm and devoid of the slightest sign of emotion, except that her cheeks and lips were colourless; a slight curl in her beautiful upper lip seemed to indicate a feeling of contempt for such an outburst of enthusiasm, and she steadfastly kept her gaze turned away from me, except for one brief fraction of a second, as I drew near to take my place beside her. Then, for the space of a lightning-flash, our glances met; and, if anything so inconceivable as a display of emotion on her part could be credited as within the range of possibility, I would almost have sworn that I caught in her eyes the flash of tears. But, the little ovation over, we all sat down; and as she at once began talking to the skipper about the gun mounted as a trophy in front of Government House, Calcutta, I had not an opportunity to verify my suspicion.

As we seated ourselves I gave vent to a sigh of relief, believing that—my fellow-travellers having expressed their approval of my behaviour of the morning—the affair was now at an end. But scarcely were we settled in

our places when the French skipper's wife—a very charming little woman, who, with her husband, had been received into the cuddy by Dacre as his guests, and who had apparently failed to recognise me upon my entrance—learning from her neighbour what all the hubbub was about, must needs add to my confusion by rushing to me and throwing herself upon her knees, as she poured forth her expressions of gratitude with a mingled fervour and grace that I found particularly discomposing. Then her husband followed suit, thanking me with manly earnestness and heartiness for what I had done. This further act of homage, so publicly performed, disconcerted me to such an extent that I hastened to dismiss the embarrassingly grateful pair by assuring them that they were making altogether too much of what I had done, which was no more than any other man, confident of his swimming powers, would have unhesitatingly undertaken, had I not happened to have seized the initiative; that I was of course very glad it had fallen to me to be the means of saving their lives; but that I most earnestly begged them to say no more about it.

When dinner was over, General O'Brien joined me on deck, as I was smoking my pipe; and I seized the opportunity to thank him for the assistance he had rendered in the operation of securing my resuscitation. And I added:

"As I was recovering consciousness I heard the doctor make a remark to you to the effect that someone—I gathered that a lady was being referred to—seemed to be more than ordinarily concerned in the question of my recovery; and I understood from your reply that you perfectly understood to whom Scudamore alluded. Have you any objection to favouring me with the name of the individual?"

"Oh, so you heard that, did you?" remarked the general. "Well, my dear boy, it was not intended for you to hear, I am quite certain; Scudamore would not have made the remark had he been aware that you were sufficiently recovered to hear and understand it. As to my giving you the lady's name—well, I do not think I should be justified in doing so. The matter stands thus, you see. When Scudamore spoke, he and I were of opinion that we had accidentally discovered the entirely unsuspected existence of a more than ordinary interest in you on the part of a certain lady; but since then I have come to the conclusion that we mistook

overpowering excitement for a more tender feeling; hence I do not consider that I ought to enlighten you at all. If any tender feeling exists, why, it is the girl's own secret, for her to retain or not as she pleases; and if she has such a feeling, and is willing that you should know it, depend upon it she will discover a method of enlightening you; while if she has no such feeling it would be the height of bad taste on my part to suggest that possibly she has. So please ask me no more about it, there's a good fellow."

Of course I at once and finally let the subject drop, but somehow I could not help thinking about it, and wondering which of my fellow-passengers was referred to, and for the next day or two I watched to see whether any one of them exhibited more than ordinary cordiality to me; but it was quite unavailing; *all* were alike exceedingly cordial and friendly—except Miss Onslow, who still maintained her former attitude of frigid reserve—so, as it was, after all, a matter that only very slightly interested me, I soon forgot all about it.

From this time forward, for a full month and more, life was absolutely uneventful on board the *City of Cawnpore*: the gale blew itself out that same night, and we got a breeze that carried us right into the north-east trades; then we lost five days on the Line parallels ere we caught the south-east trades; and when they left us we were baffled for two days more before getting a wind that would permit us to make any easting.

We caught this fair wind early one morning in the second week of December; and by noon it was blowing over the larboard quarter quite as strong as we wanted it, with studding-sails abroad on both sides, from the royals down, and every other inch of canvas that would draw. As the afternoon waned the breeze freshened; but Murgatroyd had by this time got preventer backstays rigged, fore and aft, with the avowed determination of carrying on and making the very utmost of so splendid a breeze. And making the most of it, he was, with a vengeance, for the ship was sweeping along like a mist wreath, reeling off her seventeen knots by the log, when the latter was hove at the end of the first dog-watch.

When I went on deck after dinner that night the sky had banked up to windward and astern of us, and heavy masses of cloud were sweeping rapidly athwart the firmament, permitting an occasional brief and hasty

glimpse of the young moon and a few misty stars. It was then blowing strong, with every promise of a windy night before us; and it seemed to me that, with so dim and uncertain a light, it was scarcely prudent to drive the ship at such headlong speed through the night. Indeed I ventured to suggest as much to Dacre, but he only laughed at me.

“It is all very well for you navy men, when you are cruising, to shorten sail at sunset, so that your people may be reasonably sure of an undisturbed night,” he said. “But with us of the red ensign it is different; our owners expect us to pile up the profits for them; and the only way in which we can do that is by making quick passages. But of course, while doing our best to accomplish this, we exercise every possible precaution. For instance, you seem to think that I am rather reckless in driving my ship at this speed through the night; but what have I to fear? We have all the sea-room we want; there are no rocks or shoals in our road for us to fetch up on; and if we should happen to fall in with any other vessels, they will be going the same way as ourselves, so we shall see them in ample time to avoid running over them. And, in addition to all this, we maintain a first-rate lookout, one on each bow, two in the waist, and the officer of the watch up here on the poop; so we need have no fear of collision. Take my word for it, Mr Conyers; you are every bit as safe aboard here, sir, as if you were under the pennant!”

After this, of course, there was nothing more to be said, especially as I was well aware that, in mentioning such a matter at all to the skipper, I had committed an almost unpardonable breach of nautical etiquette.

Notwithstanding the strong breeze the night was quite warm, for we were not very far south of the tropic of Capricorn, and, moreover, it was close upon the midsummer of the Southern Hemisphere; consequently when two bells of the first watch struck, a good many of the passengers were on deck, most of them listening to the miners, who were congregated on the main deck, singing. As for me, I was right aft, on the wheel grating, smoking, and staring skyward at the racing cloud masses as they swept scurrying athwart the face of the moon.

Suddenly a loud yell of dismay and warning arose from the topgallant forecastle, the only words I caught being, ”—*under our bows*!”

The next instant, with a shock that shot me off the grating on to the poop, the ship was brought up all standing—not stopped dead as though she had run into a cliff, but rather as a horse stops when pulled up and thrown on his haunches—and then, as I lay on my back, half stunned by the shock of my fall, and still gazing skyward, I saw the three masts bow forward, bending like fishing-rods, when, with a dreadful rending crash, the entire complicated mechanism of sails, spars, and rigging went by the board, and lay fore and aft along the deck.

There was a moment's pause of utter silence, broken only by the hissing splash and rush of water alongside, and the moaning of the wind over the sea; and then arose the most terrific hubbub to which I had ever been doomed to listen—shrieks, groans, and curses from those injured by the fall of, or buried under, the wreckage from aloft; cries of "We're sinking! we're sinking! God help us!" people calling each other's names; and the voices of Captain Dacre and Mr Murgatroyd shouting orders. Then, all in a moment there arose among the miners a cry of "The boats! the boats! Let's launch the boats!" instantly followed by a rush of the whole crowd of them on to the poop, where as many as could swarmed into the two quarter boats hanging at the davits. These two boats would not hold much more than a quarter of their number, and the moment that this was discovered there arose a sanguinary fight for the possession of the two frail craft, those who were crowded out drawing their knives and attacking the other party. Then Murgatroyd suddenly appeared on the poop with a brace of revolvers in his hands, which he levelled at the fighting, surging mob.

"Come out of those boats, you cowardly blackguards; come out, I say, and stand by to obey orders! D'ye hear, there, what I say? You there with the red head, I'm talking to you: come out of that boat, or by God I'll shoot! You won't? Then take that,"—his pistol flashed as he spoke. "I'll soon see who is master here!"

The next instant the brave fellow was down on the deck, stabbed in a dozen places from behind, and the life kicked and trampled out of him by the fighting, panic-stricken crowd of miners, who were now simply beside themselves with terror, and practically as irresponsible as so many wild beasts.

At this juncture the skipper, with some half a dozen seamen to support him, arrived upon the scene from forward—where he had apparently rushed, at the first alarm, to investigate the condition of the ship; and, pressing his way into the heart of the howling, struggling mob, endeavoured to bring them to their senses by assuring them that there were boats enough for all, but that their only chance of being saved lay in allowing the sailors access to the tackles so that the boats might be properly launched. But before the poor fellow could get any further, he, too, went down and disappeared, amid shouts of “Our lives is as good as yours! We’ve got the boats, and we mean to keep ’em!” and so on. And, in the height of the confusion, someone cut the bow tackle of the larboard quarter boat, with the result that her bow suddenly dropped into the water while her stern still hung suspended from the davit, and every man of the crowd who had scrambled into her was instantly precipitated into the water.

While this was going on upon the poop, the entire crowd of cuddy passengers appeared to be huddled together about the companion, utterly helpless and bewildered, while a party of seamen were working desperately down on the main deck to get the four boats off the gallows. I could not see that anyone was doing anything to clear away the long boat; but that was probably because she had been destroyed by the fall of the mainmast, which appeared to have crashed right down on the top of her.

As for me, I did nothing; for the simple reason that there was nothing to be done; the ship was sinking fast—so fast, indeed, that she would probably plunge head first to the bottom in less than five minutes, which—taking into consideration the state of absolute panic that prevailed, and the inextricable raffle of wreckage that cumbered and filled the decks—would leave no time in which to construct even the rudest kind of raft. No, there seemed to be nothing for it but for all hands to go down with the ship, thanks to the terror-stricken selfishness of the ’tween-decks passengers, who were too ignorant to do anything useful themselves, and too obstinate and distrustful to allow anyone else to do anything. For myself, I had made up my mind not to give in and die so long as I could do anything to help myself; I was a good swimmer, and when the ship went down I should look out for a piece of wreckage, and cling to it until I was picked up by some passing ship, or perished of hunger and thirst.

Suddenly, as I was standing close to the binnacle, watching the frantic mob of fighting miners, a woman emerged from the after companion, close beside me. She glanced round for a moment, in terror at the conflict that was raging about the boats, and then, stepping quickly to my side, laid her hand upon my arm—I could see the gleam and glitter of gems upon it in the dim starlight—and said, in a voice which I at once recognised as that of Miss Onslow:

“Oh, Mr Conyers, what does all this mean? What has happened? Is the ship sinking? For pity’s sake tell me?”

“Miss Onslow,” said I, “summon all your courage to your aid, I beg you, for you will need it. I have the worst possible news to tell you. The ship is sinking fast—she will probably go down in another two or three minutes; and I think it doubtful in the extreme whether any one of us will survive to tell the tale!”

“O God!” she gasped. “My father—I am his only child—and this will kill him! Well, if it *must* be so, God’s will be done!”

Not a word about herself, no outcry of natural fear at the near approach of the King of Terrors! It was of her father, and the heart-breaking sorrow that he would feel at her loss, that she thought at this dread moment! As this idea presented itself to me a world of admiration for such marvellous courage and unselfishness leapt into being within me, and, turning to her, I grasped the hand that still unconsciously rested upon my arm, and said:

“Miss Onslow, I have no hope to offer you; but if you are willing to trust yourself to me I will do my utmost to save you. At the worst we shall be no worse off than we are now.”

“I *will* trust you,” she said simply. “I will do whatever you tell me!”

There was no time to lose, for I could tell, by the feel of the ship, that her course was all but run; so, taking my companion by the hand, I led her right aft to the wheel grating, which we both mounted; and then I peered over the stern at the black water. Merciful Heaven, how near it was! it looked as though one could lean over the rail and dabble one’s hand in it. But it was clear; there was no wreckage or anything else—so far as I could see—to hurt us, should we leap. A lifebuoy was hanging over the

taffrail, suspended by a stout lanyard; and this buoy I hurriedly cut adrift, passing it over Miss Onslow's shoulders and up under her armpits. Then, having thus equipped her, I assisted her to mount the rail, and at once sprang up beside her, taking her hand in mine as I did so.

"Now, are you ready?" I asked.

"Quite!" she answered, as steadily as though I had been about to assist her to step ashore, instead of urging her to leap overboard in the middle of the South Atlantic, on a dark and windy night, with scarcely a hope that she would survive to see the next morning.

"Then jump!" I said; and at the word we both leapt together.

Chapter Five.

The City of Cawnpore's quarter boat.

The height of the poop rail from the surface of the water had by this time grown so insignificant, by reason of the depth to which the hull of the ship had become immersed, that upon striking the water I only descended about a foot below the surface, ere rising again; while my companion was so effectually supported by the lifebuoy that she remained quite dry above the shoulders. The water was not at all cold, indeed it was of quite a pleasant temperature, so I anticipated no discomfort on that account, either for my companion or myself. Now—that we were actually overboard my first anxiety was to place as great a distance as possible between ourselves and the sinking ship, so that we might perchance escape being dragged down by her when she should founder. I therefore at once thrust my left arm through one of the beckets of the lifebuoy, and struck out with all my strength away from the ship, swimming athwart the sea, so that it might not break in our faces, and towing my companion after me. I contrived to place a distance of about a hundred fathoms between us and the ship before she disappeared—which was very considerably more than I had dared to hope for when we jumped overboard—and although this did not carry us quite clear of the vortex created by the sinking ship, it carried us so far away that we were only dragged back somewhat toward the centre, without being taken under. I swam for another ten minutes, and then, deeming that we were so far distant as to be free from all danger of injury by the rising of floating wreckage under us, it seemed advisable to heave-to and husband my strength a little, since I could not tell to what extent it might be taxed in the immediate future. As to my companion, she was put to no exertion whatever, the lifebuoy supporting her perfectly; and when I inquired as to her welfare she informed me that she felt quite as comfortable and as much at ease as could be reasonably expected under the circumstances.

I allowed a quarter of an hour—as nearly as I could guess it—to elapse after the disappearance of the ship; and then, believing that whatever wreckage was likely to float up from her to the surface would already have done so, I thought we might safely return to the scene of the

catastrophe, since it was upon the existence of a certain amount of floating wreckage that I built such slight hope as I entertained of our ultimate preservation. I knew pretty exactly the bearings of the spot where the ship had gone down—having taken them by the moon—and, thus guided, I struck out over the way that we had recently travelled, towing Miss Onslow after me; and as I swam I could not help a feeling of surprise at the height of the sea, which seemed mountainous, now that we were down upon its surface, although from the deck of the ship it had appeared nothing at all extraordinary. I had been swimming some five minutes or so when, as we floated up on the breast of a wave, I saw in the dim moonlight what looked like a quantity of loose, floating wreckage at no very great distance away, but slightly to windward; and toward this we made the best of our way, ultimately arriving in the midst of a quantity of loose, jagged, and splintered planking tangled up with a raffle of spars, sails, and rigging. It was rather dangerous stuff to venture among, as some of the loose planks were lancing about in the wash of the sea with considerable violence, and a blow from a jagged end would have inflicted a more or less serious injury, even had it not killed us outright; but at length I found a little clear space among the wreckage, into which I towed my companion, and presently we found ourselves close alongside one of the masts, with the after-rim of the top riding dry; and on to this I at once climbed, hauling Miss Onslow after me, and lashing her securely to the top by means of an end of rope cut from among the raffle. Here we were reasonably safe and comfortable, for we were upon a raft of buoyant material that would probably float for months, while there was so much of it that it effectually broke the sea and prevented it from washing over us. It was a terrible situation for such a delicately-nurtured girl as she who had so unexpectedly been thrown under my protecting care; but throughout the night she never uttered a single word that could be construed into complaint; nor did she evince the slightest fear; on the contrary, she exhibited a calm and steadfast courage that filled me with admiration, although the questions that she put to me from time to time rendered it perfectly clear that she very fully realised the desperate nature of our predicament.

Some time during the night—it would probably be about midnight—the wind dropped to a light breeze, and the sea began to go down, until by daylight there was only a very gentle air blowing, with very little sea, but a long, heavy swell; the clouds all went drifting away out of sight, leaving

the sky clear; and there was, generally, a very promising prospect that the coming day would be fine.

The moment that it was light enough to see, I scrambled up on the wreckage and took a long look round, in the hope of descrying a sail, but the horizon was bare. Then, as the light grew stronger, I proceeded to minutely inspect the mass of wreckage that had afforded us shelter throughout the night, with the view of ascertaining its capabilities as a refuge for a more or less lengthy period—until, in fact, we were either taken off by a passing ship, or perished of starvation. There seemed to be a great deal of it—much more than I could satisfactorily account for—but as the dawn spread and brightened, and objects grew increasingly distinct, everything became intelligible, even to the cause of the catastrophe that had so suddenly and terribly hurled us from a situation of safety and comfort into one of the direst peril and uncertainty. For I found that while my companion and I were clinging to the wreckage of the ill-fated *City of Cawnpore's* mainmast—the whole of which had somehow come adrift from the hull—we were surrounded by and tangled up with a large quantity of planking and woodwork, some of which we recognised as having belonged to our own ship, while the remainder resolved itself into the shattered hull of a large, timber-laden, wooden ship which had been cut nearly half through by the tremendous impact of our own vessel upon it when she struck it and so destroyed herself in the darkness of the preceding night. A minute inspection of this wreck enabled me to clearly understand exactly what had happened: the stranger had been dismasted—for her spars were still attached to her hull—and had, at the same time, or subsequently, become water-logged to such an extent as to submerge her hull nearly to the level of the deck; her crew had abandoned her; and she had been left washing about, a scarcely visible yet truly formidable death-trap, for our own good ship to blunder upon to her destruction. The force of the blow had turned the stranger nearly bottom up, so I could not even make a guess at her nationality, and, worse still, it had robbed us of a possible chance of slightly bettering our condition by taking up our quarters aboard her.

In addition to the mass that my hapless companion and I had taken refuge upon there were a few small quantities of detached wreckage floating here and there within a radius of about a quarter of a mile, and among these I by and by noticed something that looked so much like a

capsized boat that—as there seemed to be no sharks about—I determined to swim out and examine it. I mentioned my resolution to Miss Onslow, who made no demur whatever to being left alone for a time, merely remarking, with a somewhat wan smile:

“If it should by good fortune prove to be a boat, please do not, in your elation, sail away, forgetting that you have left me behind.”

I assured her that she might absolutely depend upon my never forgetting that I had undertaken to save her, and therewith plunged into the warm sea.

Swimming a long, steady stroke, it did not take me very long to reach the object for which I was aiming, and which proved, as I had conjectured, to be a ship’s boat, swamped, and floating keel up. And not only so, but when I got alongside her I was delighted to find that she was one of the *City of Cawnpore’s* quarter boats—no doubt the one that the miners had cut partially adrift ere the ship went down—the especial significance and importance of this discovery arising from the fact that poor Dacre had made a point of having every item of each boat’s equipment stowed within her, and properly secured; so that, unless something very untoward had happened, it was reasonable to hope that I should find this craft thus furnished. And, sure enough, she appeared to be so, when I at length managed to right her, for, as she rolled over, I caught sight of the oars, masts, and sails—the latter neatly encased in canvas coats—all securely lashed to the thwarts. Without waiting to further investigate, I got hold of her by the stern and, hanging on by one hand, proceeded to scoop the water out of her with the other. This was a long job, considerably more than an hour being spent in removing the comparatively small quantity of water necessary to enable me to get into her; but, once in her, I made much better progress, using my two hands to throw the water out, until—having got rid of sufficient to enable me to move about without again filling the boat—I managed to find a baler, when I made short work of baling her dry. This done, I took stock of my prize, and found that I had come into possession of a twenty-eight-foot gig, in a perfectly sound and undamaged condition, equipped with four sixteen-foot ash oars, a mast and sails, rowlocks, bottom-boards, stretchers, rudder and yoke, baler, boat-hook, and—priceless treasure, under the circumstances—two breakers of fresh water securely lashed to

the bottom-boards to serve as ballast. With such a prize as this what might not be possible? With a thankful heart I cast adrift the oars, shipped a pair, and—standing up fisherman fashion, with my face toward the bow—paddled the boat to the pile of wreckage whereon I had left Miss Onslow.

The sea had by this time gone down to such an extent that I had no difficulty in putting the boat alongside the wreckage, taking the young lady on board, and shoving clear again without damaging the boat in the least. My clothes were by this time quite dry, and those of my companion nearly so; we were therefore, comparatively speaking, comfortable, excepting that we were both sensible of the possession of a most healthy and hearty appetite, which we had no means of satisfying. A casual remark by Miss Onslow upon this unpleasant feature of our adventure set me thinking, with the result that before leaving our mass of wreckage for good, I secured the signal halliards—to serve as a fishing-line—together with a fair supply of other small cordage, the main-royal—which I cut away from the wreckage to serve as a sort of tent, to shelter my companion from the dew at night-time—and a small spike nail or two, which, with considerable labour, I cut out of the planking of the derelict that had brought disaster upon us. These last I secured with the rather hazy idea that it might be possible for me to file them down and convert them into fish-hooks with the aid of a small file that formed one of the implements in my pocket-knife. Thus provided, I shipped the boat's rudder and yoke, stepped the mast, set the sails, and shoved off, my intention being to shape a course—as nearly as I could hit it off—for Cape Town, in the hope that ere long we might be fallen in with and picked up by some craft bound thither. The boat, however, had scarcely begun to gather way when I espied, at no very great distance, what I took to be a floating hencoop; and realising that, if my conjecture happened to be correct, the coop would probably be found to contain drowned poultry that, in our desperate situation, would serve for food, I headed the boat for it. My surmise again proved to be well founded; the object turned out to be a coop, and it contained seventeen dead fowls, the whole of which I secured. And in gaining possession of the poultry I found it necessary to break away two or three of the slats or bars that formed the front of the coop, thus discovering that they were secured to the body of the coop by long, thin, wire nails, out of which I soon satisfied myself that I could make very promising fish-hooks by merely bending them into the

requisite shape, I secured about a dozen of these nails; and then made sail with a fair wind upon an approximately due east course. Although the wind was light the boat slipped through the water at a very satisfactory pace; and in half an hour's time we had run the wreckage completely out of sight.

During the progress of the foregoing operations my companion had been very quiet, looking on with an air of interest at everything I did, and occasionally volunteering her assistance where she seemed to think she might possibly be able to make herself useful, but otherwise saying little. Now, however, that we had once more settled down into a condition of comparative inactivity she began to question me as to our whereabouts, what were my intentions, and so on; all of which questions I replied to as accurately as I could. Then, after meditating for several minutes, she said:

"And what do you think are our chances of escape, Mr Conyers? Do you consider that they are favourable enough to justify you in taking so very much trouble?"

"Ah," answered I, "if you had asked me that question last night, when we jumped overboard together from the sinking ship, I should probably have found some difficulty in answering you at once hopefully and truthfully; for, as a matter of fact, I may now tell you that I really had *no* hope, and that, in acting as I did, I was merely obeying that instinct that urges us all to fight for life so long as we have any fight left in us. But *now* that we have come into possession of this fine and well-equipped boat I can honestly say that I consider our chance of ultimate escape is excellent. Of course everything depends upon the weather: if a gale were to spring up, the boat would probably be swamped or capsized by the heavy sea that would quickly rise—although even under such adverse conditions as those of a gale I should bring all my sailorly training and knowledge to bear on the task of preserving the boat as long as possible. But if Providence will only favour us with fine weather for, say, a week, I have scarcely a shadow of doubt that within that time we shall be fallen in with and picked up by a craft of some sort. For you must understand that we are right in the track of ships bound round the Cape; and those vessels are now so many in number that, making a rough guess, I should be inclined to say that an average of at least one vessel per day must pass

within a few miles of this spot. Of course it may happen that several days will pass without a single craft of any kind coming along, but, to maintain the average, it is equally likely that three or four may pass in the course of a dozen hours. So you see our chance of being rescued is fairly good."

"Yes. But," she objected, "suppose it were unfortunately to happen that several days—say seven or eight—were to elapse without our seeing a sail; and that, afterwards, such ships as we might see were to pass us at such a long distance that although they would be perfectly visible to us, we should be quite invisible to them: What then?"

"In that case," said I, "there would be but one course open to us: we should simply be obliged to keep sailing on until a ship approached us near enough to see us, taking every care of ourselves meanwhile, and omitting no opportunity to procure such means of supporting life as the ocean has to offer us. And that reminds me that neither food nor drink has passed our lips since dinner, last night: I know you are hungry, because you said so some time ago; and, as for me, I am famishing. The food at our disposal is not particularly inviting—simply raw chicken and cold water—but it is at least fresh, and I think we ought to make the most of it while it is in that condition."

Miss Onslow's appetite was not, however, as yet quite keen enough to admit of her partaking of raw fowl; but she drank a little water out of the baler—the only utensil we possessed. As she returned the baler to me she remarked:

"You must not allow my squeamishness to be a bar to the satisfaction of your own appetite, if you feel hungry enough to eat raw flesh. I have been told that sailors are so often reduced to desperate straits that they eventually become reconciled to the idea of eating almost anything, and are consequently, as a rule, much less fastidious than such pampered mortals as myself. Moreover, you must not forget that it is of the last importance that *your* strength should be maintained—for your own sake, and for mine as well—if it is not too presumptuous of me to say such a thing—therefore please make a meal, if you can. And, although I fully realise how absolutely dependent upon you I am, I should like you to understand that I do not mean to be a mere helpless burden to you, if it can be avoided. I am perhaps not physically strong enough to be of much

assistance to you; but in all cases where skill rather than great bodily strength is required I hope you will unhesitatingly make use of me. For instance, you are hungry; but you cannot make even such slight preparation of your food as is possible, because you are steering the boat. Again, you will soon need rest, but you will be unable to take it unless I am able to steer the boat in your stead. Therefore please teach me forthwith how to manage the boat, so that I may be able to ‘relieve’ you—as I think you sailors call it—from time to time, as may prove necessary.”

And this was the girl who, while on board ship, had hedged herself in and kept us all at arm’s-length by a barrier of such chill and haughty reserve as had at times approached very nearly to insolence!

Of course I eagerly accepted her offer—for I foresaw that a time would very soon arrive when her assistance would be indispensable—and at once proceeded to initiate her into the art of steering. Unfortunately, we were running dead before the wind at the time—which is the most difficult point of sailing for a novice to master—yet my new pupil seemed to grasp the idea at once and without an effort; and a quarter of an hour later she was watching the run of the sea and checking the tendency of the boat to round-to almost as knowingly and cleverly as though she had been sailing a boat all her lifetime.

The moment that I found she could be trusted alone I took up a position on the midship thwart and, selecting the best-looking fowl from our stock, proceeded to pluck and draw it, afterwards giving it a good wash in the salt water alongside. This done, I cut off a leg and, having skinned it, sliced off a small piece of flesh which, with many misgivings, I placed in my mouth and began dubiously to masticate. The idea of devouring raw flesh seemed to me to be exceedingly repulsive and disgusting, but it was either that or nothing, and, realising the full truth of Miss Onslow’s remark upon the importance of maintaining my strength, I persevered. And presently, when I had conquered in some measure the natural repugnance excited by the idea of such food, I found that really, after all, it was very much a matter of sentiment, and that, so far as the flavour was concerned, there was nothing at all objectionable. The taste was of course novel, and peculiar, but I thought it possible that one might accustom oneself to it without much difficulty. Yet, just at first, a little

sufficed, and when I had despatched one leg I considered that I had made a particularly hearty meal. And I felt so much the better for it that I strove to induce Miss Onslow to try a morsel. She gently reiterated her refusal, however, while expressing her satisfaction that I had been able to eat. Then, noticing that her eyes looked heavy, and that her movements were languid, I arranged the royal as a sort of couch in the stern-sheets for her, and suggested that she should lie down and endeavour to secure some rest; to which suggestion she acceded; and in a few minutes, completely worn out with the unaccustomed excitement, fatigue, and exposure through which she had so recently passed, she was sleeping by my side as placidly as an infant.

The sun was sinking into a bank of smoky-looking cloud that stretched along the horizon on our starboard quarter when my companion awoke, greatly refreshed by her slumbers, but—as she confessed—ravenously hungry. I also was beginning to feel anew the pangs of hunger; so, surrendering the yoke-lines to Miss Onslow, I took advantage of what remained of the fast-waning daylight to prepare a further portion of raw fowl to serve us both, taking care to render the appearance of the flesh as little repulsive as possible. By the time that my preparations—which I had purposely somewhat protracted—were complete, darkness had so far closed down upon us that it was scarcely possible to see what we were eating; and, thus aided, and by dint of much persuasion—accentuated by a reminder that we habitually ate oysters raw,—I succeeded in inducing the poor girl to so far lay aside her prejudices as just to *taste* the food I offered her. That accomplished, I had no further trouble with her, for her hunger was by this time so sharp that food of any sort became palatable, and we both succeeded in making a fairly good meal.

Meanwhile, the bank of cloud that at sunset had been hovering on the verge of the western horizon, had been stealthily creeping zenith-ward, and at the same time spreading out north and south, with a look in it that seemed to portend more wind; so, as a measure of precaution, I went to work, upon the conclusion of our meal, and shortened sail by taking down a couple of reefs in the mainsail, and a single reef in the little stay foresail which the boat carried. And, this done, I rearranged the royal in the stern-sheets as a bed for my companion, urging her to turn in at once and get as much rest as she could.

It was exceedingly fortunate that I had taken the precaution to reef the canvas of our small hooker; for about an hour or so after sunset—very shortly, indeed, after the completion of my preparations—the wind freshened up with quite a touch of spite in it, driving us along at a speed of fully eight knots, and tugging at the mast as though intent on dragging it out of the boat altogether; the sea, moreover, began to rise and break, and by midnight I was in a bath of perspiration induced by anxiety and the effort to keep the boat ahead of and square end-on to the combers. This condition of excessive and painful anxiety, by the way, was quite a new, as well as decidedly unpleasant, experience for me, and I was deeply mortified and annoyed at the discovery of its influence upon me. I first took myself severely to task about it, and then proceeded to seek for the cause of the trouble. I was at first disposed to attribute it to nerve-shock, induced by the occurrences of the preceding twenty-four hours, but a further analysis of my feelings convinced me that my nerves were still to be depended upon as implicitly as ever, and that the real source of my distress lay at my feet, asleep, wrapped up in a sail. Yes; there could be no doubt about it; it was on my companion’s account that I was nervous and anxious; I feared being capsized or swamped simply because of the greatly-increased danger and discomfort that would in that case accrue to *her*!

At length—probably about two o’clock in the morning—it breezed up so fiercely, and knocked up such a sea that I dared not run the boat any longer, so, watching my chance, I put the helm down and hove-to on the larboard tack, with the boat’s head to the northward, and anxiously awaited the coming of daylight. Soon after this, Miss Onslow awoke, and seemed considerably alarmed at the change in the weather and the wild movements of the boat; but I managed to reassure her; and then, observing that I had lashed the port yoke-line, and was no longer doing anything, she suggested that we should change places, and that I should get a little sleep! After my assurances as to the utter absence of any danger I found it somewhat difficult to make her understand—without alarming her—that it was still as urgently necessary as ever for me to watch the boat.

At length the dawn came filtering slowly through a murky and rather angry-looking sky, and as the darkness gradually melted away from off the face of the weltering waters I made out the canvas of a large ship,

some eight miles off, to leeward. She had passed us about an hour earlier, probably not more than three miles away; and had there only been daylight I should doubtless have succeeded in attracting her attention. As it was, there was no hope of any such thing now; she was sailing away from instead of toward us, and sailors seldom look astern; their attention is mostly directed to what lies ahead. And even had it been otherwise, it was too late now to think of making ourselves seen; she was too far off; and chasing her was quite out of the question, for she was bowling along under topgallant studding-sails, making the utmost of a fair wind, while we dared show no more than double-reefed canvas. Fortunately, Miss Onslow was sleeping again, and did not see the stranger, which had run out of sight beyond the horizon by the time that my companion next awoke, so I did not mention the circumstance. The appearance of this vessel, however, was cheering and encouraging, inasmuch as it tended to show that I was still in the track of shipping.

As the day wore slowly on the wind steadily freshened until it was blowing a single-reefed topsail breeze, that brought with it a corresponding increase in the height and run of the seas, which at length became so dangerous that I dared no longer keep the boat under sail, but was constrained to douse the canvas and use it, with the mast and oars, as a floating anchor for the boat. Riding to these, at the full scope of our rather long painter, we were much more easy and comfortable; but this advantage was discounted to a great extent by the fact that during the day two other vessels passed us—at too great a distance to allow of our attracting their attention, low down in the water as we were, and with no means of signalling to them, yet not so far off but that we might have been seen had there been a pair of sharp eyes aboard; while if it had been possible for us to carry sail, we might have easily intercepted either of them. It was a cruelly bitter disappointment to us to see these two craft go sliding along the horizon while I wore myself out with unavailing efforts to attract their attention. My companion bore her disappointment bravely; she even chid me gently when I sank down exhausted into the bottom of the boat, with a bitter curse upon the blindness of the crew, as the second of the two ships vanished beyond the rim of the horizon; and she reminded me more than once of words I had spoken to her earlier in the day, to the effect that although we might miss half a dozen ships through their passing us at too great a distance to allow of our being seen, the seventh would be sure to come booming right down upon us, and our

only difficulty would be to avoid being run down by her. But later on, when the darkness had once more closed down upon us, shutting out everything but the towering, swooping, phosphorescent crests of the threatening seas, I caught her softly, silently, and secretly crying; and the sight of her distress aroused a sudden furious anger in me that caused me to again and still more savagely execrate the blind lookout kept aboard the vessels that had that day passed us. And then I began to wonder, bitterly, how many poor souls—weak, helpless, delicate women and children, and famine-stricken men—had perished miserably, after drifting about the ocean for days that were veritable eternities of suffering, yet might have been rescued had the officer of the watch aboard a passing ship but bestowed a trifle more interest and attention upon the small, distant, indistinctly-seen object that for an instant caught his gaze, and which he all too hastily assumed to be the slanting pinion of some wandering sea bird, or the leaping crest of a distant wave.

We rode thus all through the night, and well on toward noon the next day, when the weather moderated sufficiently to permit me to make sail once more. But as the day wore on the wind gradually hauled round until it was dead on end for us; and nightfall found us heading to the southward, with the wind out at about east-south-east.

This state of things prevailed for the next four days, during which no further vessels were sighted, although it is possible that some may have passed us during the night at such a distance as to be invisible in the darkness. During this time we were put to great straits for want of food, and suffered all the tortures of slow starvation; for the drowned poultry soon putrefied and became so offensive that we had to heave them overboard. I tried to supply the deficiency by fishing, but only succeeded in capturing one small shark, about eighteen inches long, which was fortunately hooked in the mouth in such a way that he could not cut through the line with his teeth. During this time I watched and steered the boat all through the night; Miss Onslow relieving me during the hours of daylight, in order that I might secure a few hours of much-needed rest. But I was far too anxious, as well as in too much suffering, to sleep; the utmost that I could achieve was to doze fitfully and for a few minutes at a time, during which my imagination conjured up the most tormenting dreams, from which I usually awoke with a violent start and a terrified cry. Then I would spring upon a thwart and search the horizon eagerly and

feverishly for the sight of a sail, following this up with a renewed attempt to catch a fish or two. I shall never forget the courage and fortitude exhibited by Miss Onslow during this trying period; she never uttered a single word of complaint or impatience, although it was impossible for her to conceal the fact that she suffered acutely; and whenever she found me unusually silent and, as she thought, giving way to dejection, she always had ready a word or two of encouragement.

Thus matters wearily and painfully progressed with us until six days and seven nights had dragged their slow length away, and a full week had elapsed since the sinking of the *City of Cawnpore*. We were still working our way to the southward, against an amount of wind and sea that were quite as much as the boat could look at; and Miss Onslow was at my feet, wrapped up in the sail, and moaning in her troubled sleep; the hour being about one o'clock in the morning. I was of course *always* on the lookout for a ship, night and day, but the time had now arrived when I began to see craft that had no existence save in my disordered imagination; I was therefore neither surprised nor elated when I suddenly became aware of a vague, indefinite shadow of deeper darkness, faintly and doubtfully showing against the horizon broad on my weather bow; I simply regarded it as another phantom, and thought no more about it. Yet I kept my gaze fixed upon it, nevertheless—since. I had nothing better to occupy my attention; and presently a peculiarity of this vision—not shared by the others I had seen—forced itself upon my notice, inasmuch as that, while the other phantom ships that I had seen had exhibited a propensity to rush over the surface of the ocean at lightning speed, and to appear in half a dozen quarters or more in as many seconds, this one obstinately persisted in maintaining the precise position in which I had at first discovered her. And it presently dawned upon me that she had another peculiarity, namely, that of an opacity sufficiently dense to temporarily blot out any low-lying star that the movement of the boat happened to bring into line with her. The full significance of these peculiarities at length became suggestive, and it began to dawn upon me that possibly the craft out yonder might not, after all, be a phantom; she might be the vessel destined to afford us rescue and salvation; the vessel for which I had all along been looking, and the eventual appearance of which I had so frequently and so confidently predicted to Miss Onslow.

Chapter Six.

The derelict.

The mere possibility that rescue might actually be at hand acted as a tonic upon me, imparting renewed life and hope, and clearing away the more than half-delirious fancies that had clouded and bemuddled my brain; thus enabling me once more to think and act rationally. I pulled myself resolutely together, collected my wandering wits, and peered long and anxiously at the shadowy shape that had, as it were, crystallised out of the surrounding darkness; then I looked away from it toward other points of the horizon to see whether it repeated itself elsewhere. No; it was peculiar to one definite spot; and I no longer had any doubt but that there was a certain tangible something, which could only be a ship, and that I must quickly determine upon the steps necessary to intercept her.

The first thing was to ascertain in what direction she was steering. When I first discovered her she was dead to windward, and since then she had drawn aft a trifle, being now about two points before my weather beam. She could not have overtaken me, because in that case she would have passed so close as to have all but run over the boat, and I could not have failed to see her; and the fact that she had slowly and imperceptibly grown up out of the darkness argued that she was not sailing away from me. Nor could she be sailing toward me, because in that case she would have grown in size and distinctness much more rapidly than she had done. Nor, strangely enough, did she seem to be crossing my course in either direction, the slight change in her bearings being accounted for by the progress of the boat. Possibly she might be hove-to; although it was difficult to imagine why she should be so, unless she had lost a man overboard. But if that were the case she would be showing lights as a guide to her boat, which ought not to be very far away. And why so deadly silent? I could not understand it. But as these ideas flitted through my mind I came to the conclusion that the correct thing to do was to close with her as quickly as possible by making short tacks toward her. So I put down my helm and hove the boat round upon the starboard tack, bringing the vague, black shadow about two points on the weather bow. The flapping of the sails while the boat was in stays awoke my companion, who sat up and, in a weak and husky voice, asked me what was the

matter.

“Nothing,” I answered; “at least nothing of an alarming nature. The fact is that I fancy I can see something, away out there on the weather bow, and I have tacked the boat for the purpose of investigating the object more closely.”

“Whereabout is this object of which you speak?” she asked.

I pointed it out to her, and she almost immediately saw it. “Do you imagine it to be a ship, Mr Conyers?” she inquired.

“I know not what else it can be,” said I. “But,” I added, “we must not be too sanguine of help or rescue just yet. There are one or two points in connection with that object that make me doubtful as to its being a ship.”

“What are they?” she quickly demanded.

I told her that one was the apparent immobility of the object; the other being the fact that no lights were being displayed. And I explained that the two together seemed incompatible with the supposition that the object ahead was a ship, repeating to her, indeed, the arguments that had flitted through my own mind only a few minutes before.

Yet with every fathom that the boat advanced, the shadow grew more palpable, expanded, and approximated more closely to the appearance of a vessel hove-to under bare poles. And at length, after several anxious minutes of alternating hope and doubt, there arrived a moment when doubt became no longer possible, for the shadow had finally resolved itself into the silhouette of a brig under bare poles; even the thin lines of the masts—which, by the way, looked stumpy, as though her topgallant-masts were gone—were perceptible to my practised eye.

Without pausing to puzzle out a possible reason for the singular condition of the vessel, I hastily resigned the yoke-lines to Miss Onslow and, springing upon the mast thwart, proceeded to hail the brig at the full power of my lungs, my delight at once more seeing a vessel so close at hand being coupled with a deadly anxiety lest she should suddenly make sail and get away from me. But to all my hailing there came no reply, nor was a light shown, or any other indication vouchsafed that my cries had

been heard, even though I continued them until the boat was actually crossing the stern of the stranger at a distance of barely fifty fathoms. There was only one inference to be drawn from this strange silence, namely, that the brig was derelict, a surmise that was borne out by the fact that her boats appeared to be gone. Yet I could not detect any sign that anything was wrong with her; she was not sitting particularly deep in the water—so far as I could judge in the darkness—nor did her spars appear to be damaged, except that, as I have already mentioned, her topgallant-masts seemed to have been carried away; there appeared, therefore, to be no reason why we should not venture alongside; and accordingly, as soon as we had stood on far enough to fetch her on the next tack, I hove the boat round and—the brig happening to lie broadside-on to the sea—ran her alongside to leeward, dousing my sails as we came up abreast the stranger's lee quarter. As we shot up alongside I found that the vessel was certainly deeper in the water than I had at first imagined her to be, yet not deeper than might be accounted for by her carrying a heavy cargo; her covering-board seemed to be about eighteen inches above the water, and I therefore had no difficulty in clambering in over her bulwarks from the gunwale of the boat, of course taking care to carry the end of the boat's painter on board with me. Making this securely fast to a cleat in the bulwarks, I glanced fore and aft to see whether I could discover any indication of the presence of human beings on board; but the deck appeared to be deserted; no gleam of light showed either forward or aft; and no sound broke the silence save the wash of the water along the bends, the choking gurgle of the scuppers, and the monotonous jerk-jerk of the spanker-boom at its sheet with the roll of the ship. Under these circumstances I considered that my companion might safely venture aboard, and I accordingly assisted her up the side and in on deck, afterwards dropping the boat astern and carefully securing her by her painter. This done, I conducted Miss Onslow aft to the cabin companion—which was fitted with seat-lockers on each side—begged her to be seated for a short time while I investigated further; and forthwith plunged below.

Arrived at the foot of the companion ladder, I found myself confronted by a bulkhead running athwart the ship, and in this I presently found the handle of a door. Turning this, I found myself—as I had expected—in the cabin, which was of course pitch dark, the panes of the skylight just dimly showing, overhead, with the merest suggestion of a certain faintly—

gleaming something hanging from the beams, and swinging with the roll of the ship, which I presently identified as the extinguished cabin lamp. Groping cautiously with my hands, I presently encountered a table, uncovered, working round which I next came to some lockers upholstered in horsehair—as I gathered from the touch; and while I was groping about on these lockers my hands suddenly encountered what seemed to be a tablecloth, with a few knives and forks, some broken crockery, and a few other matters entangled in its folds, the whole suggesting the idea that the cabin had been the scene of a furious struggle, during which the table, laid for a meal, had been swept of everything upon it. Leaving all this quite undisturbed—in the belief that when I could see just how it all lay I might obtain a clue to the mystery at present connected with the ship—I continued my researches, with the result that I made out the cabin to occupy the extreme after-end of the vessel, with possibly a small sail-room, or something of that kind, abaft it, and that it took up the whole width of that part of the hull; that is to say, there were no staterooms between it and the ship's side, as is sometimes the case. Continuing to grope my way round the cabin, I presently arrived once more at the bulkhead, wherein, on the starboard side, I found another door, giving access to a stateroom, as I soon discovered by finding the bunk, with the bedding still in it, and apparently quite ready for an occupant. It did not take me long to arrive at the conclusion that I was in the skipper's stateroom; for I found that underneath the bunk was a chest of drawers; while in one corner was a wash-basin, etcetera, and in the other what seemed to be a small bookcase. Having progressed thus far, I had hopes of soon finding that of which I was in search, namely, a box of matches. Being a sailor, and well acquainted with sailors' ways, I knew exactly where would be the most likely place to find what I wanted, and, clambering up on the bunk, I felt for the shelf that I knew ought to be at the head of it. Yes, there it was; but as I felt along it I was disappointed to find that there was nothing on it. But was there not? I had not examined the entire length of it when I too hastily jumped to the conclusion that it was empty; as my hand travelled over into the far corner it suddenly encountered quite a little store of things, all heaped together—a clasp knife, a pipe, a piece of stick tobacco, and a few other odd articles, among which was a box about half full of matches!

They proved to be rather damp, and I had to strike a full half-dozen or more before I succeeded in persuading one to ignite, and while thus

employed I was struck for the first time by the coincidence between the condition of affairs on the skipper's shelf and that in the cabin—every loose article had in each case found its way right over to starboard, as far as it could go! What did that point to? Why, obviously, that at some time or another the brig had heeled so heavily to starboard that every movable thing had fetched away by the run and gone over to that side, *and had never been replaced*! I gathered from this that the brig had been suddenly hove over upon her beam-ends, and that her crew, seized with panic, and no doubt under the impression that she was capsizing, had made a rush for the boats and abandoned her, being, as likely as not, blown so far to leeward by the squall that hove the brig over, that they lost sight of her altogether, and imagined that she had foundered. And by and by, when the squall had blown itself out, the brig, with perhaps her canvas blown away, had simply righted again, and had been drifting about ever since. How long ago that might have happened, I could not at the moment guess, but I thought that possibly with the return of daylight I might be able to discover indications enough to furnish me with a clue.

While thinking thus I had succeeded in finding and lighting a small lamp, hung in gimbals from the fore bulkhead, and by its illumination I saw that the stateroom was a nice, clean, cosy little apartment, such as Miss Onslow might occupy without discomfort; and, waiting only to light the cabin lamp—the globe of which was smashed in on its starboard side, as though it had been dashed violently against the deck above—I hurried up the ladder, and invited the young lady to descend. I led her straight to the skipper's stateroom, and urged her to lie down while I proceeded to search for some food, but she declined to take any rest until we had both partaken of a good meal; so I established her comfortably on the sofa-lockers, and proceeded forthwith in search of the pantry.

I found this, as I had expected, in a corresponding position, on the opposite side of the ship to the cabin which I already designated in my own mind as Miss Onslow's; and in it were several tins of preserved meats and soups, a bottle of pickles, some vinegar, a jar of salt, a bottle of pepper, a cask about three-quarters full of potatoes, part of a string of onions, a barrel nearly full of fine cabin biscuit, or "bread," as it is called at sea, a small canister of tea, another of coffee, a jar of brown sugar, and, in fact, a very fair assortment of such commodities as are usually to be found in an ordinary ship's pantry. I observed, by the way, that such

articles as were labelled bore the names of American manufacturers, and I deduced from that fact the impression that the brig was Yankee, an impression that was subsequently confirmed.

I took a biscuit out of the barrel, broke it in two, and handed one piece to Miss Onslow, nibbling at the other myself while I further prosecuted my researches. I did this because the biscuit was hard and dry, and, starving as we were, there was not much likelihood of our eating so much of it as to prove injurious; moreover it would have the effect of taking the sharp edge off our hunger, and enabling us to eat cautiously and in moderation of the more appetising food that I intended to place upon the table as quickly as possible.

My next task was to explore the galley, which I found to be very nicely fitted up with what appeared to be an excellent cooking-stove and a generous supply of implements, the whole of which had, like the articles in the cabin, found their way right over to the starboard side; moreover the top of the stove was rusted in such a way as to suggest that the water from the coppers had been capsized over it—everything, in short, tending to confirm my original impression that the brig had been on her beam-ends. I looked into the coppers, and found them empty. Then I went to the scuttle-butt, but it also was so nearly empty that I did not care to use the small remainder of water in it. There were no more casks on deck, so I concluded that the ship's stock of water was kept below, most probably in tanks. And the thought of the latter reminded me that I had seen a small copper pump in the steward's pantry, so I returned there to get it. Then, with it in one hand, and a lantern in the other, I searched about on deck until I had found the small screw plug that fitted into the tank pipe; and presently I had at my disposal a bucket of sweet fresh water, which I poured into the coppers. I then lighted the galley fire—finding plenty of coal for my immediate wants in the locker—and proceeded to prepare a couple of tins of the preserved soup that I had found in the pantry. Then, while this was cooking, I returned to the cabin to lay the table, but found that Miss Onslow had forestalled me, having cleared away the wreck off the starboard locker, restored the tablecloth to its proper position, and rearranged such portions of the table equipage as had not been smashed in the capsizal. The poor girl looked dreadfully white and thin and weary, but I noticed that during my absence she had found time to take off her hat and to roughly rearrange her hair! Her eyes looked red, as though

she had been crying; so, with the view of toning her up a little, I went to work rummaging in the sofa-lockers, and presently found a few bottles of port wine, the neck of one of which I promptly knocked off, and insisted upon her taking a glass there and then. She obeyed me with a sweet submissiveness that was in extraordinary contrast with her demeanour aboard the *City of Cawnpore*; but a flash of her old spirit returned when she had swallowed the wine, as, handing me the glass, she said:

“There! I have done as you bade me. And now I *insist* upon your taking some also; for you look positively ghastly, and so ill that, unless you take great care of yourself, you will break down altogether!”

I took the wine, and then hurried away back to the galley, where I remained until the soup was ready. Of this we made a moderate meal, and then, without attempting to clear the table, I gently conducted my companion to the skipper’s stateroom, closed the door upon her, and flung myself, just as I was, upon the sofa-lockers of the main cabin, where I instantly fell into a sleep that was absolute oblivion.

I was awakened next morning by a beam of brilliant sunshine flashing intermittently athwart my closed eyelids to the lazy roll of the ship, and, springing to my feet and peering out through the nearest port, I saw that the wind had died away to a flat calm, and that the water was oil-smooth, with very little swell running. I felt greatly refreshed by my sleep—brief though it had been—for it was the first spell of really sound slumber that our precarious situation, and the anxiety attendant upon it, had permitted me to take since the loss of the *City of Cawnpore*; and, prompted thereto by the hilarity resulting from rest and the cessation of anxiety, I started whistling softly as I gazed out through the port. A moment later Miss Onslow’s cabin-door opened for the space of half an inch, and the young lady thus addressed me through the chink:

“Good-morning, Mr Conyers; I am glad to hear you whistling; it shows that your rest has done you good.”

“Thank you, yes,” I answered; “I am feeling quite my old self again this morning. Were you able to get any rest?”

“Yes indeed,” was the reply. “I was so tired that I scarcely remember lying

down; and I have not been awake more than five minutes. What a lovely morning it is! I wonder whether I might venture to trouble you to get me a little water to wash in; there is none in here."

"Certainly," I said. "I will fetch you a bucketful at once, and place it at your door, after which I intend to have a bath myself on deck."

"A bath?" she exclaimed, in a tone of unmistakable anxiety. "You surely do not mean that you are going to bathe in the sea? Oh, *please* do not, Mr Conyers, I beg you; it is *far* too dangerous; for I am sure there must be sharks here."

"I think it exceedingly probable, and therefore I shall not risk going overboard," I answered. "No; my bath will be taken on the fore deck, in a wash-deck tub, if I can find one."

"Thank you," she returned. "And while you are so engaged I will lay the table for breakfast; I still feel most atrociously hungry!"

I answered that I was glad to hear it, now that we were once more in possession of provisions; and then hurried off up on deck to procure the water asked for; after which I went forward, found a wash-deck tub, filled it from over the side, and treated myself to a salt-water bath, the refreshment of which was like a renewal of life to me.

Then, having dressed, I lighted the galley fire, filled and put on a kettle, had a wash in fresh water, and made my way aft to the cabin, where I found Miss Onslow, looking wonderfully fresh and bright after her night's rest, busily engaged in arranging the cabin table for breakfast. Then came the question: What were we to have? I had a strong fancy for a rasher of bacon, which delicacy seemed also to commend itself to my companion. I therefore looked about for the lazarette hatch, which I discovered underneath a mat at the foot of the companion ladder, and was soon overhauling the contents of the storehouse. The craft proved to be abundantly stocked with excellent provisions, among which I discovered an open cask nearly full of smoked hams, one of which I at once appropriated; and half an hour later found the Indian judge's daughter and myself seated before a most appetising breakfast.

And, as we ate, we talked—talked of what we were now to do. My

companion seemed to be under the impression that the discovery of this derelict brig would in some way alter all our arrangements; but I had no difficulty in demonstrating to her that our object—the making of our way to some civilised port from which we could make a fresh start for Calcutta—still remained the same, the only difference being that whereas on the previous day we had possessed only an open boat, and were starving, we now had a vessel under our feet that, if staunch, would prove far safer and more comfortable than the boat, while we also possessed food in abundance. But, as I pointed out to her, there was a certain price to pay for these advantages, namely, the greatly-increased labour of handling the brig, as compared with the boat; and I thought it advisable to make the young lady understand at once that I should from time to time require her assistance. But I presently discovered that there was no need for me to dwell upon this point; she quickly informed me that she had already planned for herself the performance of what might be called the "domestic" part of the work, such as the preparation of meals, and so on; while she also expressed her perfect readiness to steer, when required, or in any other way assist me, so far as she could. And here I could not avoid being impressed afresh with the extraordinary change that misfortune had wrought in this girl; for whereas while on board the *City of Cawnpore* she had maintained a demeanour of haughty and repellent reserve that was almost insolent, she now exhibited a gentle submissiveness and amiability of manner, with a quiet, steadfast courage under circumstances, of peculiar and terrible hardship and privation for a gently-nurtured woman, that, conjoined with her exceptional beauty of face and form, exercised a fascination upon me so potent that I frequently found it exceedingly difficult to maintain that equable coolness and strict friendliness of behaviour demanded by the exigencies of our peculiar situation. All of which, however, is merely parenthetical.

Breakfast over, a busy day awaited me. I had used my eyes to good purpose, even while taking my morning tub; and had observed, among other things, that the brig's canvas was not furled; it had simply been blown clear and clean out of the boltropes. When the accident befell her she had been under courses and single-reefed topsails, spanker, fore-topmast staysail, and jib, for there the boltropes still were, with small fluttering rags of canvas still adhering to them, here and there. There was no difficulty whatever in arriving at a correct conclusion as to what had happened,—the aspect of the ship told the story as plainly as her own

crew could have related it. The thing had happened after nightfall—that part of the story was made clear by the litter that had been shot off the cabin table, and which showed that the skipper and one of the mates had been at supper at the time. The single-reefed topsails indicated that it had previously been blowing strong, and I took it that the night had settled down so dark and cloudy that the officer of the watch had failed to note the approach of the squall until too late. The topsail halliards had been let go fore and aft when the squall swooped down upon them, but before it was possible to do anything further the brig had been hove down upon her beam-ends, a panic had seized the crew, they had made a mad rush for the boats, under the conviction that the vessel was capsizing, and they had either been swamped, or had been driven out of sight to leeward, before the brig had righted again. There was no doubt that the squall had been of exceptional violence, for not only were all the sails blown away, but both topgallant-masts were gone at the caps—not only broken off but actually torn away, the rigging that held them having parted.

It would be strange indeed if a vessel, having passed through such an ordeal as this, should not show signs of having been more or less strained, and I was quite prepared to find that she had a considerable amount of water in her. And this anticipation was so far confirmed that, upon sounding the well, I found close upon three and a half feet of water in the hold. This was bad enough, still it was hardly as bad as I had expected; and now, the next thing to find out was whether she was still leaking, or whether what she contained had all drained into her during the time when she lay hove down on her beam-ends. This could be done by patiently waiting some few hours, and then sounding the well again. Or it could be done equally effectively by pumping the hooker dry, and then seeing whether any more water drained into her. It was vitally necessary to restore her to her normal condition of buoyancy as speedily as might be, in view of a possible recurrence of bad weather. But the same contingency rendered it almost, if not quite, as necessary to bend and set a sufficient amount of canvas to put the ship under control; and the first question to be settled was: Which should I first undertake? I considered the matter for a minute or two, and came to the conclusion that the pumping out of that three and a half feet of water would leave my hands in such a blistered and raw condition that they would be practically useless for such work as bending sails; so I determined to undertake the

latter job first, especially as there was of course the chance that the weather might continue fine after the springing up of a breeze, in which event, if the brig were under canvas, she would be making headway during the operation of pumping her out.

I was under the impression that on the preceding night I had detected the presence of what might prove to be a sail-locker abaft the after bulkhead of the cabin, so I now descended with the object of further investigating. My surmise proved well founded, for when I opened the door in the bulkhead there lay a whole pile of sails before me, each sail neatly stopped, and many of them apparently quite new. I had come to the conclusion that I would bend the fore-topmast staysail first, and after a great deal of laborious work in turning over the various bundles of canvas I came to what I was searching for, but not until I had previously encountered new fore and main-topsails, which I managed, with considerable difficulty, to drag on deck.

The bending of the staysail was no very serious matter; it simply meant letting go the halliards, dragging upon the downhaul, cutting the boltrope away from the hanks, passing the new seizings, hoisting the sail foot by foot until I had got all the seizings finished, bending the sheets afresh, and there we were.

But to bend a topsail, single-handed, was a much more difficult job. I decided to bend the main-topsail first; and by the time that I had completed my task the day was done and it was growing so dark that I could scarcely see to finish off properly. Nevertheless I was very well content with my day's work, for I now had canvas enough on the brig to place her under command whenever the breeze might choose to come.

Meanwhile Miss Onslow had been no less busy than myself, in another way. She had started by making herself complete mistress of the brig's resources, looked at from a housekeeper's point of view; and in course of the process had discovered—what I had already suspected, but had not found time to verify—that outside the cabin, and alongside the companion ladder, was another stateroom, that, judging from its appearance and contents, had belonged to the mate. This cabin she had overhauled, making an inventory of its contents—which she handed to me—and had then tidied it up and made it ready for my occupation.

Moreover, she had taken possession of the galley, and had prepared a good, substantial, and appetising dinner in a style that, if not quite equal to that of a professional cook, betrayed at least an aptitude that was as creditable as it was opportune. She had also found time to do something —I had not the remotest idea what—to her dress that had gone a considerable way toward renovating its appearance and obliterating the disfigurement caused by the action of the sea water upon it; while in other ways she had spruced-up her appearance to an extent that excited my fervent but carefully-concealed admiration.

At sunset that night it was still stark calm, and the sky had a fine, clear, settled aspect that, combined with a slight disposition to rise on the part of the brig's barometer, led me to anticipate that the calm was destined to endure for a few hours longer. For this I was devoutly thankful, for I had been toiling like a slave all day, fully exposed to the scorching rays of a cloudless sun, and I was fatigued to the verge of exhaustion; it was a great comfort, therefore, to feel that I should not be called upon to look after the ship all night, but might safely indulge in a few hours' sleep. That I might do so with the greater confidence, I routed out a tarpaulin from below, and with it rigged up a tent on the wheel grating, as a shelter from the heavy dew; bringing up the bed from the mate's bunk, and turning in on deck. This arrangement ensured that in the event of a breeze springing up during the night I should instantly become aware of it, and be ready to promptly take such measures as might appear necessary.

Chapter Seven.

We pick up a shipwrecked crew.

The night passed without incident of any sort; and when I awoke at dawn there was still no sign of wind, for which I was thankful; for, while I was naturally anxious to be making some progress, it was vitally necessary to get more sail upon the brig; and this little spell of calm weather happened most opportunely for my purpose.

A bath, an early breakfast, and I went to work once more, the bending and setting, of the fore-topsail being my first job. I finished this about noon, and considered that I had done very well when at dusk I had added to my spread of canvas the standing jib and spanker.

It was a whim of Miss Onslow's that our midday meal should be tiffin; dinner being reserved until the work of the day was over, when—as the young lady sagely remarked—we could both spare time to do due justice to the meal. Thus it happened, upon the day in question, that it was quite dark when at length, having washed and polished myself up after the labours of the day, I took my place at the table in the brig's little cabin. It was then still flat calm; but we had scarcely finished the meal when a little draught of air came down through the open skylight, cool and refreshing, and at the same moment the sound of a faint rustling of the canvas reached our ears. I at once sprang up on deck, and found that a light air from about east-south-east had sprung up, taking us aback and giving the brig sternway. The pressure of water upon the rudder had forced the helm hard down, however, causing the brig to box off; I had nothing to do, therefore, but to trim sail and steady the helm at the proper moment, when the vessel gathered headway and began to move quietly through the water on a southerly course, close-hauled on the larboard tack.

I was now obliged to take the wheel; but it was not long before I made the discovery that, under the sail now set, the brig was practically steering herself, and by the time that I had been at the wheel half an hour I had contrived to hit off so accurately the exact amount of weather-helm required to keep the craft going "full-and-by," that I was able to lash the wheel, and attend to other matters.

And there was still plenty awaiting my attention. Among other immediate demands upon my energies there was the boat to be secured; thus far she had been hanging on astern by her painter, but she was far too valuable a possession to be any longer neglected; and now that a breeze had sprung up I determined to secure her forthwith and while it was still possible to do so. The brig carried a pair, of davits on each quarter, so I hauled the boat up on the starboard side, made her fast, slipped down into her and hooked on the tackles, and then, climbing inboard once more, hauled them both hand-taut. Then, going forward, I brought aft a snatch-block that I had previously been using, led the falls, one after the other, through this to the winch, and, with Miss Onslow hanging on to the rope to prevent it slipping on the barrel of the winch, managed to hoist the boat and secure her.

The weather continued fine, and the wind light, all through the night, the ship's speed being barely three knots; and once more I turned in on the wheel grating and slept soundly, the ship steering herself so perfectly that I found it quite unnecessary to interfere with the wheel; and when I awoke at sunrise she was still stealing along as steadily as ever.

The sky looked so beautifully fine and clear when I went below to breakfast, in response to Miss Onslow's summons, that it came upon me quite as a shock to discover—as I did by a casual glance—that the mercury was falling; not much, but just enough to indicate that the breeze was going to freshen. Now, I had no objection whatever to the wind freshening—within certain limits; up to the point, say, where the brig could just comfortably carry the canvas that was now set—I was in a hurry to arrive somewhere, and, within the limits above named, I should have heartily welcomed an increase of wind. But the mischief was that when once the strength of the wind began to increase, there was no knowing how far it might go; it might go on increasing to the strength of a whole gale, in which case it would become necessary for me to shorten sail, unless I chose to accept the alternative of letting my canvas blow away. And even in so small a vessel as the brig, to shorten sail was a serious matter, when there happened to be only one person to undertake the work; yet, if it came on to blow, it would have to be done, since it would never do to let the sails blow away, so long, that is to say, as they could be saved by hard work. There was, however, time enough to think about that; there was a still more serious matter demanding my attention,

namely, the getting rid of the water in the hold. To this task, accordingly, I addressed myself immediately after breakfast, first taking the precaution to most carefully sound the well. The result of this preliminary operation was so far reassuring that I found a depth of just three feet six inches of water, the merest trifle more than the rod had showed forty-eight hours before, thus demonstrating that the hull was once more practically as tight as a bottle. Thus encouraged, I got to work at the pump, working steadily and systematically, exerting my strength to the best advantage, and sparing my hands as far as possible by enwrapping the handle first in canvas and then in a strip of a blanket taken from one of the forecastle bunks. It was terribly back-breaking work—this steady toil at the pumps, and when midday arrived and I knocked off to get a meridian altitude of the sun, wherefrom to compute our latitude, I was pretty well exhausted; but I had my reward in the discovery that I had reduced the depth of water in the hold by nearly eight inches—thus showing that, after all, the quantity of water was not nearly so formidable as it had at first seemed, existing indeed only in the more or less inconsiderable spaces not occupied by the cargo. After tiffin I again went to work, and toiled steadily on until sunset, by which time I had reduced the depth by a further six inches, at the same time fatiguing myself to the point of exhaustion.

And all through this day of toil I had been maintaining a most anxious watch upon the weather, without detecting any disquieting sign whatever; it is true that the wind strengthened somewhat—sufficiently, in fact, to bring the brig's speed up to close upon five knots, but this was the reverse of alarming, especially as the sky remained clear. But when at length we sat down to dinner that evening, I found that the mercury still manifested a disposition to sink. Apart, however, from this behaviour on the part of the barometer, every omen was so reassuring that when Miss Onslow bade me goodnight, and retired to her cabin, I unhesitatingly settled myself again upon the wheel grating for the night, and soon fell into the deep sleep of healthy fatigue.

I was awakened some time during the night—I had no idea whatever of the hour—by the loud rustling of canvas; and upon starting to my feet I found that the wind had strengthened so considerably that the slight amount of weather-helm afforded by the lashed wheel had at length proved insufficient, with the result that the brig had shot into the wind, throwing both topsails aback and her fore and aft canvas a-shiver.

Instinctively I sprang to the wheel and put it well over, just in time to pay the vessel off again; but it was fully half an hour before I had again hit off the exact position of the wheel with sufficient nicety to allow of its being again lashed, and the brig once more left to take care of herself.

During this operation I had been anxiously scanning the sky, but beyond a few small: and scattered fleeces of cloud here and there, it remained as clear as it had been at sunset; and, having at length adjusted the wheel to my satisfaction, I came to the conclusion that I might safely leave matters as they were until the morning, and secure a little more rest while the opportunity remained to me. I therefore resumed my recumbent position upon the wheel grating, and was soon once more asleep.

This time, however, I slept less soundly than before. The curious instinct of watchfulness even in slumber that is so quickly developed in sailors and others who are constantly exposed to danger was now fully aroused, and although I slept, my senses and faculties were so far on the alert that when, somewhat later, the wind suddenly breezed up in a spiteful squall, I heard the moan of it before it reached the brig, and was broad awake and on my feet in time to put the helm up and keep broad away before it. The wind came away strong enough to make me anxious for the topmasts for a few minutes; but as the yards were braced sharp up, while the brig was running away dead before it, the wind struck the sails very obliquely, and the spars were thus relieved of a great deal of the strain that would otherwise have come upon them.

Of course there was no more sleep for me that night, for when at length the squall had blown itself out it left behind it a strong northerly breeze that very soon knocked up a sea, heavy enough to make me ardently wish for daylight and the opportunity to shorten sail.

And when the dawn at length appeared, I grew more anxious than ever, for the new day showed as a long, ragged gash of fierce, copper-yellow light glaring through a gap in an otherwise unbroken expanse of dirty grey cloud, struck here and there with dashes of dull crimson colour. The air was unnaturally clear, the heads of the surges showing up against the wild yellow of the eastern horizon jet black, and as sharp and clean-cut as those that brimmed to the brig’s rail. The aspect of the sky meant wind in plenty, and before long; and I realised that unless I could contrive to

shorten sail in double-quick time the task would pass beyond my power, and the canvas would have to remain set until it should blow away.

At length Miss Onslow made her appearance on deck, bright, fresh, and rosy from her night's sleep; and a cry of dismay broke from her lips as she took in the state of affairs at a single comprehensive glance.

"Oh, Mr Conyers!" she exclaimed, "how long has it been like this? Are we in any danger?"

"Only in so far that we stand to lose some of our sails, unless I can contrive to get them clewed up before it comes on to blow any harder," answered I. "I have been waiting for you to come on deck and relieve me at the wheel," I continued, "in order that I may get about the job at once."

"But why did you not call me?" she demanded, as she stepped up on the wheel grating beside me and took the spokes from my hands.

"Oh," said I, "it has not been bad enough to justify me in disturbing you, thus far; nevertheless I am very glad to have your help now, as I believe there is no time to lose. Kindly keep her as she now is, dead before the wind, and I will get about the work of shortening sail without further delay."

So saying, I hurried away forward, letting go the trysail outhaul and the main-topsail halliards on my way; passing next to the fore-topsail halliards, which I also let run. I then squared the yards, hauled in, brailed up and furled the trysail, and next took the reef-tackles, one after the other, to the winch, heaving them as taut as I could get them; after which I jumped aloft, passed the reef earrings, and tied the knittles. We were now tolerably safe—the brig being under close-reefed topsails—so I hove-to while we took breakfast, after which I hauled down and stowed the jib, got the brig away before the wind again, with Miss Onslow at the wheel, and resumed pumping operations.

I toiled all through the day, reducing the amount of water in the hold to a depth of eighteen inches only, and then hove-to the brig on the port tack for the night, both of us being by this time so completely exhausted that rest was even more important to us than food, although I took care that we should not be obliged to go without the latter.

About two hours after sunset the wind freshened up still more, and by midnight it was blowing so heavily, and so mountainous a sea was running, that I dared not any longer leave the brig to herself; it became necessary to constantly tend the helm, although the craft was hove-to; and in consequence I had no alternative but to pass the latter half of this night also at the wheel, exposed to a pelting rain that quickly drenched me to the skin. It was now blowing a whole gale from the northward; and so it continued for the next thirty hours, during nearly the whole of which time I remained at the wheel, wet, cold, and nearly crazy at the last for want of rest; indeed, but for the attention—almost amounting to devotion—of my companion I believe I should never have weathered that terrible time of fatigue and exposure. An end to it came at last, however; the gale broke, the wind softened down somewhat, and at length the sea went down sufficiently to permit of the wheel being once more lashed; when, leaving the brig in Miss Onslow's charge, with strict injunctions that I was at once to be called in the event of a change for the worse in the weather, I went below, rolled into the mate's bunk, and instantly lost all consciousness for the ensuing ten hours. It was somewhere about midnight when I awoke; yet when I turned out I found Miss Onslow still up, and not only so but with a hot and thoroughly appetising meal ready for me. We sat down and partook of it together; and when we had finished I went on deck, had a look round, found that the weather had greatly improved during my long sleep, and so turned in again until morning.

When I next went on deck the weather had cleared, the wind had dwindled to a five-knot breeze—hauling out from the eastward again at the same time—and the sea had gone down to such an extent as to be scarcely perceptible; I therefore shook out my reefs, and once more made sail upon the ship—a task that kept me busy right up to noon. The weather being fine, I was able to secure a meridian altitude of the sun, and thus ascertain the latitude of the brig, with the resulting discovery that we were already to the southward of the Cape parallels. This was disconcerting in the extreme, the more so from the fact that the easterly wind was forcing us still farther to the southward; but there was no help for it, we could do nothing but keep all on as we were and hope for a shift of wind. The fact of our being so far to the southward accounted, too, for the circumstance that we were not falling in with any other vessels.

Hitherto I had been so fully employed that I had found no time to search for the ship's papers, or do more than ascertain the bare fact that she was of American nationality, that she was named the *Governor Smeaton*, and that she hailed from Portland, Maine; but now that the weather had come fine once more, I determined to devote a few hours to the work of overhauling the vessel and discovering what I could about her. So I went to work and instituted a thoroughly systematic search, beginning in the skipper's cabin—having of course first obtained Miss Onslow's permission—and there, stowed carefully away in a lock-up desk—which, after some hesitation, I decided to break open—I found the ship's papers intact, enclosed in a small tin case. And from these I learned, first, that her late master was named Josiah Hobson, and second, that she was bound on a trading voyage to the Pacific, with a cargo of "notions." Then, in another drawer, also in the skipper's cabin, carefully stowed away under some clothes, I found the log-book, and a chart of the Atlantic Ocean, with the brig's course, up to a certain point, pricked off upon it; and from these two documents I learned that the brig had sailed, on such and such a date, from New York, with what, in the way of weather, progress, and so on, had befallen her, up to a date some five weeks later, whereon entries had been made in the log-book up to noon. The remarks respecting the weather at that hour gave no indication of any warning of the catastrophe that must have occurred only a few hours later. This last entry in the log-book enabled me to determine that the brig had been drifting about derelict for nearly three weeks when we two ocean waifs fell in with and took possession of her. The "notions" of which her cargo consisted seemed, according to the manifest, to comprise more or less of nearly everything that could possibly captivate a savage's fancy; but in addition to these multitudinous articles there were—somewhere in the ship—a few bales of goods—mostly linen, fine muslins, silks, and ready-made clothing—consigned to a firm in Valparaiso, which I believed would be of the utmost value to Miss Onslow and myself, if I could but find them, and which, under the circumstances, I felt I could unhesitatingly appropriate to our use. I therefore determined that my next task should be to search for these bales; which, being composed of rather valuable goods, and destined moreover to be discharged at the brig's first port of call, I thought would probably be found on top of the rest of the cargo and near to one of the hatches.

The next day proved even finer than its predecessor, the wind holding in

the same direction but of perhaps a shade less strength than on the day before, while the sea had gone down until the water was smooth as the surface of a pond excepting for the low swell that scarcely ever quite disappears in mid-ocean; it was an ideal day for taking off the hatches, and I therefore determined to commence my examination of the cargo at once, beginning with the main hatch. To knock out the wedges, remove the battens, and roll back the tarpaulin was not a difficult job, and when I had got thus far, the removal of a couple of the hatches was soon effected. Luck was with me that day, for no sooner had I got the hatches off than my eyes fell upon a bale bearing marks which, according to the testimony of the vessel's manifest, showed it to be one of those of which I was in search. It was too large, and was too tightly wedged in among others to admit of my moving it unaided, but with the assistance of a strop on the mainstay, and the watch tackle, I soon broke it out and triumphantly landed it on deck. The manifest gave the contents as ready-made clothing—men's and women's; which was exactly what Miss Onslow at least needed more than anything else; so I opened it forthwith, and then called the young lady to overhaul the contents and select what she would, while I gave her a spell at the wheel. In ten minutes she came aft, with her arms full of neatly-folded white material, and disappeared below. Then she came on deck again, had a further search, and this time carried off a load of coloured fabric; after which she remained invisible for nearly three-quarters of an hour. Finally she reappeared clad in an entirely new rig-out from top to toe; and very sweet and charming she looked, although I regret being unable to inform my female readers of the details of her costume. Then I had my innings, and after a considerable amount of rummaging succeeded in finding a couple of suits of light tweed that I thought would fit me, together with a generous supply of underclothing. This done, and our more pressing needs in the matter of clothing met, I returned the despoiled bale to its place in the hatchway, replaced the hatches, and battened everything securely down once more. The remainder of the day I devoted to the task of pumping the ship dry.

The two succeeding days were quite devoid of incident; the weather held fine, and the wind so light that the brig made barely three knots in the hour, on a taut bowline; there was nothing particular to do, for the small air of wind that continued to blow hung obstinately at east, and we were still driving slowly south, the vessel steering herself. Under these circumstances, as I was daily growing increasingly anxious to fall in with

a sail of some sort that would take us off, and convey us to a civilised port, or even lend me a few hands to help in carrying the brig to Cape Town, I spent pretty nearly the whole of the day in the main-topmast crosstrees, from whence I could obtain the most extended view possible, and perhaps be thus able to intercept some craft that would otherwise slip past us unseen.

On the third day after my raid upon the cargo I was aloft as usual—the hour being about ten a.m.,—while Miss Onslow was busy in and out of the galley. The ship was creeping along at a speed of about two and a half knots, when, slowly and carefully sweeping the horizon afresh with the telescope, after a rather long spell of meditation upon how this adventure was likely to end, a small, hazy-looking, ill-defined object swam into the field of the instrument. The object was about one point before the weather beam, and was so far away that the rarefaction of the air imparted to it a wavering indistinctness of aspect that rendered it quite unrecognisable. The fact, however, that it was visible at all in the slightly hazy atmosphere led me to estimate its distance from the brig as about ten miles, while, from its apparent size, it might be either a boat, a raft, or a piece of floating wreckage. But whatever it might be, I determined to examine it, since it would be nothing out of my way, and would merely involve the labour of getting the ship round upon the other tack; so I continued to watch it until it had drifted to a couple of points abaft the beam—which occurred just two and a half hours after I had first sighted it, thus confirming my estimate as to its distance—when I put the helm hard down, lashed it, and then tended the braces as the brig sluggishly came up into the wind and as sluggishly paid off on the starboard tack. When the brig was fairly round, and the helm steadied I found that the object bore a full point on the lee bow, and that we should probably fetch it with ease. It was now distant about ten and a half miles, so there was plenty of time for us to go below and get tiffin ere closing it.

It was within about two hours of sunset when we at length came up with the object; but long ere then I had, with the assistance of the telescope, made it out to be a large boat, apparently a ship’s longboat, unrigged, and drifting idly before the wind. Yet her trim, sitting low, as she was, on the water, showed that she was not empty; and at length, when we were within some two miles of her, I suddenly observed a movement of some sort aboard her, and a couple of oars were laid out—with some difficulty, I

thought. I was at the wheel when this occurred—for I had discovered, some time earlier in the afternoon, that although, with the wheel lashed, the brig could be made to steer herself fairly well upon a wind, she was just a trifle too erratic in her course to hit off and fetch such a comparatively small object as we were now aiming for, and consequently I had been steering all through the afternoon—but I at once called Miss Onslow to relieve me while I ran the ensign—the stars and stripes—up to the peak, as an encouragement to the occupants of the boat, and an intimation that they had been seen. It was tedious work, our snail-like closing with the boat, and it was rendered all the more so by the fact that those in her, after vainly attempting for some five minutes to use the oars, had given up the effort, and were once more invisible in the bottom of the boat, while the oars, left to take care of themselves, had gradually slid through the rowlocks and gone adrift. This simple circumstance, apparently so trivial, was to me very significant, pointing, as I considered it did, to a condition of such absolute exhaustion on the part of the strangers that even the loss of their oars had become a matter of indifference to them. Who could tell what eternities of suffering these men had endured ere being brought into this condition? It was quite likely that that lonely, drifting boat had been the scene of some ghastly tragedy! Who could tell what sight of horror might be passively awaiting us between the gunwales of the craft? I once more resigned the wheel to Miss Onslow's hand, with strict injunctions to her not to leave it or attempt to get a peep at the interior of the boat, on any account, and then went forward to prepare a rope's-end to drop into her as we drew up alongside. I conned the brig in such a manner as to bring the boat alongside under the lee fore chains, and then, when the proper moment had arrived, let go the weather main braces and swung the topsail aback.

My intention was to have jumped into the boat with a rope's-end, as she came alongside, taking a turn anywhere for the moment; but as, with main-topsail aback, we crept slowly down upon the poor, forlorn-looking waif, a gaunt, unkempt scarecrow suddenly upreared itself in the stern-sheets and, uttering queer, gibbering sounds the while, scrambled forward into the eyes of the boat, with movements that somehow were equally suggestive of the very opposite qualities of agility and exhaustion, and held out its lean, talon-like hands for the rope which I was waiting to heave. As we drifted alongside the boat I hove the rope's-end; the man caught it, and *collapsing*, rather than stooping, with it, he made it fast to

the ring-bolt in the stem. Then, uprearing himself once more, stiffly, and as though fighting against a deadly lethargy, he made a staggering spring for the brig's rail, missed it, and would have fallen headlong backward into the boat had I not caught him by the collar. Heavens! what a skeleton the man was! He was fully as tall as myself, and had all the appearance of having once been a big, brawny Hercules of a fellow, but so wasted was he now that, with scarcely an effort, I with one hand lifted him in over the bulwarks and deposited him on deck, where he again limply doubled up and sank in a heap, groaning. But he kept his eyes fixed upon my face and, stiffly opening his jaws, pointed to his black and shrivelled tongue; and I, at once recognising his condition, ran aft and, taking a tumbler from the pantry, quickly mixed about a wineglassful of weak brandy and water, with which I sped back to him. I shall never forget the horrible expression of mad, wolfish craving that leapt into the unfortunate creature's bloodshot eyes as I approached and bent over him. He glared at the tumbler, and howled like a wild beast; then suddenly snatched at my hand as I held the liquid to his lips, and clung so tightly to me that before I could withdraw the tumbler he had drained it of every drop of its contents. Even then he would not release me, but continued to pull and suck at the empty tumbler for several seconds. At length, however, he let go, groaning "More, more!" This time I mixed a considerable quantity of weak grog in a jug, and took it on deck with me, remembering that there were others in the boat alongside who were also probably perishing of thirst. I administered a further small quantity of the mixture to my patient, and it was marvellous to see the effect of it upon him, his strength seemed to return to him as though by magic, and as he sat up on the deck he muttered, thickly:

"More drink; more drink, for the love of God! I'd sell my soul for a tumbler of the stuff!"

Powerful though the fellow's adjuration was, I refused his request, considering that, after his evidently long abstention, it would do him more harm than good—perhaps kill him, even—to let him drink too freely at first; so, putting the jug and tumbler out of his sight and reach, I turned my attention to the longboat alongside. She was a fine, big, powerful boat, and evidently, from her appearance, had belonged to a large ship. Now that I had time to look at her attentively I saw that her masts and sails were in her, laid fore and aft the thwarts, together with six long oars,

or sweeps; she bore, deeply cut in her transom, the words "*Black Prince* Liverpool"; there were six water breakers in her bottom; and, huddled up in all sorts of attitudes eloquent of extremest suffering, there lay, stretched upon and doubled over the thwarts, and in the bottom of the boat, no less than fifteen men—whether living or dead it was difficult for the moment to say. At all events it was evident that there was no time to be lost, for if the men were not actually dead their lives were hanging by a thread; so, recovering possession of the jug of weak grog and the tumbler, I slid down into the boat and, taking them as they came, wetted the lips of each with a little of the liquid. Some of them were able to swallow it at once, while others had their teeth so tightly clenched that it was impossible to get their jaws apart; but eventually—not to dwell at unnecessary length upon a scene so fraught with lingering, long-drawn-out suffering—I contrived to restore every one of them to consciousness, and to get them aboard the brig, where I spent several hours in attending to them and, with Miss Onslow's assistance, administering food and drink in small quantities until their strength had so far returned to them that there was no longer any danger of their perishing, when I got them below into the forecastle, and left them to rest undisturbed. The next day they were all so far recovered as to be able to move about and even to climb on deck out of the forecastle, unaided; and on the second day seven of them reported themselves fit for such light duty as taking a trick at the wheel, and so on. Among the first to recover were the cook and steward, who at once assumed their proper duties, much to my satisfaction; for necessary as it had hitherto been for me to avail myself of Miss Onslow's assistance, it went sorely against the grain for me to see her day after day performing such mean duties as that of cooking, and it was a great relief to me when I was able to inform her that henceforward she would be relieved of such work.

The unexpected acquisition of these sixteen men, constituting, as they did, a really strong crew for such a small craft as the brig, relieved me of a very heavy load of anxiety; for now I felt that, with a tight and seaworthy vessel under my feet, and a crew that would enable me to handle and take care of her in any weather, there was no reason whatever why my companion and I should not speedily reach Cape Town and the end of our troubles. There was but one thing remaining to occasion me any uneasiness, and that was the fact that the chronometer had run down and stopped during the time that the brig had been drifting about, derelict,

and consequently I had no means of ascertaining my longitude—a most awkward predicament to be in, especially when approaching a coast. But, as though Fate were satisfied with what she had already inflicted upon us, and had now relented so completely as to be eager to hasten our deliverance, it happened that on the very day when my new crew reported themselves—as fit for duty, we fell in with a homeward-bound China clipper, from the skipper of whom I obtained our longitude, and was thus enabled to start the chronometer again. The information thus afforded me showed that we were within two hundred and forty miles of the South African capital, or little more than twenty-four hours' run if the wind would but chop round and come fair for us.

Chapter Eight.

The crew take possession of the brig.

The process of nursing the rescued men back to health and strength had afforded me an opportunity to learn their story, which, briefly, was to the effect that their ship, the *Black Prince*, of Liverpool, had sailed from Melbourne for home on such a date, and that all had gone well with them until such another date, when the ship was discovered to be on fire in the fore hold. Every effort had then been made to subdue the flames, but ineffectually, the fire continuing to spread, until, some three hours after the discovery of the outbreak, the flames burst through the deck, when it became apparent that the ship was doomed, and the boats were ordered out. According to the narrative of the men the ship had been abandoned in a perfectly orderly manner, the passengers going away in the cutters and gigs, in charge of the captain and the three mates, while the remaining portion of the crew, for whom room could not be found in these boats, were told off to the longboat. They had remained by the ship until she burned to the water's edge and sank, and then made sail in company, steering a north-west course. Then, on the fourth day, a westerly gale had sprung up, and the boats had become separated. This was supposed to have occurred about a fortnight before we had fallen in with them; but they admitted that they were by no means sure as to this period, for on the twelfth day after abandoning the ship their provisions had become exhausted and they had been subjected to all the horrors of

starvation, during the latter portion of which they had lost all account of time.

Having heard their story, it became necessary to tell them my own, which I did in considerable detail, winding up by informing them that, the brig having been found derelict, the salvage money upon her would amount to something very considerable, and that, while by right the whole of it might be claimed by Miss Onslow and myself, we would willingly divide it equally among all hands instead of offering them ordinary wages for their assistance in taking the vessel into port.

I was rather disappointed to observe that this generous offer—as I considered it—evoked no show of enthusiasm or gratitude on the part of my crew; they accepted it quite as a matter of course, and as no more than their due, although they were fully aware that, between us, Miss Onslow and I had already taken care of and sailed the brig for several days, and—barring such an untoward circumstance as a heavy gale of wind—could no doubt have eventually taken her into Table Bay. I said nothing, however, knowing from past experience that forecastle Jack is not overmuch given to a feeling of gratitude—perhaps in too many cases the poor fellow has little or nothing to be grateful for—but proceeded with the business of the vessel by appointing Peter O'Gorman, late boatswain, and John Price, late carpenter, of the *Black Prince*, to the positions of chief and second mate respectively. This done, the two men named at once picked the watches; the port watch assumed duty, the starboard watch went below, and everybody apparently settled forthwith into his proper place. While the ceremony of picking the watches was proceeding I availed myself of the opportunity thus afforded to take stock of our new associates as a whole, and, after making every allowance for the effects of the hardship and suffering that they had so recently passed through, I was compelled to confess to myself that they were by no means a prepossessing lot; they, one and all, O'Gorman and Price not excepted, wore that sullen, hang-dog, ruffianly expression of countenance that marks the very lowest class of British seamen, the scum and refuse of the vocation. Still, we had not far to go, and I consoled myself with the reflection that they would probably prove good enough to serve my purpose.

On the following morning, immediately after breakfast, I secured a set of

observations of the sun for my longitude, Miss Onslow noting the chronometer time for me; and immediately afterwards I descended to the cabin to work them out. While on deck, engaged with the sextant, I had noticed that my movements were being watched with extraordinary interest by the hands on deck, and when, upon my return to the cabin, I proceeded to make my calculations and afterwards prick off the brig's position on the chart, I could not help observing that the steward—who was busying himself in and out of the pantry at the time—betrayed as keen an interest in my doings as any of the people on deck. Miss Onslow was also watching me; and when I had finished and was about to roll up the chart she asked me if I had found out the ship's position, whereupon I pointed it out to her, at the same time casually mentioning the fact that we were still one hundred and eighty miles from Table Bay. As I said this, I saw the steward leave his pantry and go on deck. I thought nothing of it at the time, believing that he had done so in the ordinary course of his duty, but a little later on I had reason to believe that his errand was to inform his shipmates as to the position of the brig.

Having put away the chart, and waited a few minutes for Miss Onslow—who had announced her intention of going on deck—we both made our way up the companion ladder, and took a few turns fore and aft the weather side of the deck, together, from the wheel grating to the wake of the main rigging. My companion was in high spirits at the favourable turn that seemed to have occurred in our affairs, and was chatting with me in animated tones as to what would be best to do upon our arrival in Cape Town, when O'Gorman, who had been forward among the crew, came slouching aft along the deck, in true shell-back fashion, and, with the rather abrupt salutation of "Morning misther; mornin', miss," unceremoniously joined us.

"Well, O'Gorman, what is it?" said I, for I had met and spoken to him several times already on that same morning, and imagined that he now had some matter of ship's business to discuss with me.

"I see you takin' a hobseirwashin just now," he remarked.

"Yes," I answered, finding that he paused as though expecting me to reply.

“D’ye mane to say, thin, that ye’re a navigator?” he demanded.

“Certainly I am,” I answered, rather testily, my temper rising slightly at what I considered the boorish familiarity of his tone and manner, which I determined to at once check—“what of it, pray?”

“Well, ye see, we didn’t know—you didn’t tell us yesterday—that you was a navigator,” he returned, leering curiously at me out of his eye corners.

“Was there any particular reason why I should inform you that I happen to be a sailor?” I demanded, fast getting really angry at this impertinent inquisition into my qualifications.

“Oh,” he retorted, “av coorse we all knew you was a sailor-man; we could see that widout anny tellin’. But a navigator too—bedad, that makes a mighty differ!”

“In what way, pray?” demanded I. “Have you been drinking, this morning, O’Gorman?”

“The divil a dhrop,” he returned. And then, before I could say another word, he abruptly turned and walked forward again, saying something to the men on deck as he went, who instantly dropped such work as they were engaged upon, and followed him below into the forecastle.

I was astounded—fairly taken aback—at this extraordinary behaviour, an explanation of which I was determined to demand at once. With this view I turned to Miss Onslow, whose arm was linked in mine, and requested her to kindly excuse me for a moment.

“No,” said she, “I will not. I know perfectly well what that glitter in your eye means: you are angry at that sailor’s impertinence, and mean to give him a well-deserved reprimand. But I would rather that you did nothing of the kind, please; the man knows no better; and I do not suppose he really *meant* to be rude at all. But I confess I do not like the expression of his face: there is a mixture of low cunning, obstinacy, and cruel brutality in it that renders his appearance dreadfully repulsive; so please oblige me by taking no notice whatever of his behaviour.”

There was a certain subtle flattery in the apparent inconsequence of my

companion's last few words that made them peculiarly acceptable to me; but discipline is discipline, and must be maintained, at all hazards, even when a crew has been picked up in such irregular fashion as mine had been; and I was determined to at once impress upon this Irish ruffian the fact that I was skipper of the brig, and that I intended to exact from him the respect and deference of manner due to the position. So I said to my companion:

"I have no doubt you are perfectly right in your estimate of the man's intentions; but he was altogether too insolent of manner to please me, and he must be taught better; moreover, I wish to ascertain precisely what he meant by the remark that my being a navigator made 'a mighty differ.' So please allow me to go forward and put these little matters right. I shall not be gone longer than five minutes, at the utmost."

"I will not consent to your going, just now, even for five *seconds*," answered Miss Onslow, with quiet determination. "You are just angry enough to use the first words that may rise to your lips, without pausing to consider whether they happen or not to be offensive, and I am sure that is not a safe temper in which to engage in an altercation with that man. He is insolent, insubordinate, and altogether a most dangerous man to deal with—one can tell that by merely glancing at his eyes—and I have a firm conviction that if you were perchance to offend him, he would without compunction stab you, or do you some other dreadful injury—perhaps kill you outright. Therefore,"—with a most ravishing smile, and a tightening of her grip upon my arm—"you will be pleased to consider yourself as my prisoner for the present."

"And a most willing prisoner, too—at any other time," answered I, with an attempt to fall in with the playful mood in which she had spoken the last words, while yet my anger was rising, and my anxiety increasing, as I noted the continued absence of the men from the deck. "But at this moment," I continued, "I have no option; that fellow O'Gorman must be brought to book *at once*, or my authority will be gone for ever; and that would never do; the others would only too probably take their cue from him, and become insolent and insubordinate in their turn, and there is no knowing what excesses they might in that case commit!"

My companion turned pale as she at length realised that it was

something more that mere anger springing from my wounded dignity that was moving me; she gazed anxiously into my eyes for a moment, and then said:

“Have you any weapons of any kind?”

“None but these,” I answered, indicating by a glance my doubled fists; “and, in case of need, a belaying-pin snatched from the rail. But,” I added cheerfully, “there is no need for weapons in this case; I shall but have to firmly assert my authority, and the fellow will be brought to his bearings forthwith.”

“I wish I could think so!” exclaimed Miss Onslow earnestly. “But, somehow, I cannot; I utterly distrust the man; it is not only his appearance but his behaviour also that is against him. He is a sailor, and, as such, must know perfectly well what respect is due to a captain; and I cannot think he was ever allowed to behave to his former captain as he just now behaved to you. I have a presentiment that he means mischief of some kind. And see, too, what influence he appears to possess over the rest of the men.”

“Precisely,” I agreed. “You see you are coming rapidly round to my view of his conduct; and therefore I think you will agree with me as to the immediate necessity for me to assert myself.”

“Yes,” she assented—“if you can do so *effectively*. But you must not go among those men unarmed. They have their knives; but you have nothing. Let us go downstairs and see if we cannot find a pistol, or something, in one or the other of our cabins. I have never yet thoroughly searched my cabin, to see what it contains.”

“I have searched mine,” said I, “and have found no weapon of any kind; but—ah, there is O’Gorman, now coming out of the forecastle—and the rest of the men following him. And, by Jove! they are coming aft! You are right, there is something in the wind. Kindly go below for a few minutes, until the discussion which I foresee has come to an end.”

“No, indeed, I will not,” whispered my companion, as she strengthened her hold upon my arm; “I will remain here with you, whatever happens. They will never be such despicable cowards as to use violence in the

presence of a woman."

There was no time to say more, for O'Gorman, with all hands excepting the man at the wheel behind him, was now within hearing distance of us. I looked him squarely in the eye, and at once braced myself for conflict; for there was a sullen, furtive, dogged expression in his gaze, as he vainly attempted to unflinchingly meet mine, that boded mischief, although of what precise nature I could not, for the life of me, guess.

He so obviously had something to say, and was, moreover, so obviously the spokesman for all hands, that I waited for him to begin, determined to take my cue from him rather than, by speaking first, afford him the opportunity of taking his cue from me. He shifted his weight, uneasily, from leg to leg, two or three times, glanced uncomfortably from Miss Onslow's face to mine, removed a large quid of tobacco from his cheek and carefully deposited it in his cap, and betrayed many other symptoms of extreme awkwardness and perturbation of mind for a full minute or more without discovering a way of saying what he had to say; and so uncouthly ridiculous an exhibition did he make of himself that presently I detected a tremor of repressed laughter in the pressure of my companion's hand upon my arm, and a second or two later the young lady's risibility so far mastered her that she felt constrained to bury her face in her pocket-handkerchief under pretence of being troubled with a sudden fit of coughing.

O'Gorman, however, was not to be so easily deceived; he at once observed the convulsion and recognised it for what it was, and the circumstance that he had excited the mirth of a girl seemed to sting him into action, for he suddenly straightened himself up and, with a vindictive glare at Miss Onslow, exclaimed:

"Ah! so ye're laughin' at me, eh? All right, my beauty; laugh away! Yell laugh the other side ov y'r purty face afore long!"

"O'Gorman!" I exclaimed fiercely, advancing a step or two toward him and dragging Miss Onslow after me as she tenaciously clung to my arm. "What do you mean, sir? How dare you address yourself to this lady in such an insolent fashion? Take care what you are about, sir, or I may find it very necessary to teach you a lesson in good manners. What do you

want? Why do you stand there staring at me like an idiot? If you have anything to say, please say it at once, and get about your duty."

"Oho, bedad, just listen to him!" exclaimed the fellow, now thoroughly aroused. "Get about me juty, is it? By the powers! but there's others as'll soon find that they'll have to get about their juty, as well as me!"

I was by this time brought to the end of my patience; I was in a boiling passion, and would have sprung upon the man there and then, had not Miss Onslow so strenuously resisted my efforts to release myself from her hold that I found it impossible to do so without the exercise of actual violence. At this moment one of the men behind O'Gorman interposed by muttering:—loud enough, however, for me to hear:

"Don't be a fool, Pete, man! Keep a civil tongue in your head, can't you; you'll make a mess of the whole business if you don't mind your weather eye! What's the good of bein' oncivil to the gent, eh? That ain't the way to work the traverse! Tell him what we wants, and let's get the job over."

Thus adjured, O'Gorman pulled himself together and remarked, half—as it seemed—in response to the seaman, and half to me:

"We wants a manny things. And the first ov thim is: How fur are we from Table Bay?"

"Well," answered I, "if it will afford you any satisfaction to know it, I have no objection to inform you that we are just one hundred and eighty miles from it."

"And how fur may we be from the Horn?" now demanded O'Gorman.

"The Horn?" I exclaimed. "What has the Horn to do with us, or we with the Horn?"

"Why, a precious sight more than you seem to think, mister," retorted the man, with a swift recurrence to his former insolent, bullying manner. "The fact is," he continued, without allowing me time to speak, "we're bound round the Horn; we mean you to take us there; and we want to know how long it'll be afore we get there."

“My good fellow,” said I, “you don’t know what you are talking about. We are bound to Table Bay, and to Table Bay we go, or I will know the reason why. You may go round the Horn, or to the devil, afterwards, and welcome, so far as I am concerned.”

“Shtop a bit, and go aisy,” retorted O’Gorman; “it’s yoursilf that doesn’t know what you’re talkin’ about. I said we’re goin’ round the Horn, didn’t I? Very well; I repait it, we’re goin’ round the Horn—in this brig—and I’d like to know where’s the man that’ll purvent us.”

“Ah! I think I now understand you,” said I, with an involuntary shudder of horror as the scoundrel’s meaning at last burst upon me, and I thought of the dainty, delicately-nurtured girl by my side; “we picked you up, and saved your lives; and now you are about to repay our kindness by turning pirates and taking the ship from us. Is that it?”

“By the piper! ye couldn’t have guessed it thruer if ye’d been guessin’ all day,” answered O’Gorman coolly.

“My lads,” exclaimed I, appealing to the group of seamen standing behind the Irishman, “is this true? Is it possible that you really contemplate repaying this lady and myself for what we have done for you, with such barbarous ingratitude?”

The men shuffled uneasily, looked at one another, as though each hoped that his fellow would accept the invidious task of replying to my question; and presently Price, the carpenter, spoke:

“Ay, sir; it is true. We are sorry if it is not to your liking, but we have very particular business in the Pacific, and there we must go. This is just our chance; we shall never have a better; and we should be fools if we did not take it, now that it has come in our way.”

“Very well,” said I bitterly; “you are sixteen men, while I am one only; if you are absolutely resolved to perpetrate this act of monstrous ingratitude I cannot prevent you. But I positively refuse to help you in any way whatever—you have no power or means to compel me to do that—so the best plan will be for us to part; this lady and I will take the boat, with sufficient provisions and water to enable us to reach Table Bay, and you may find your way round the Horn as best you can.”

O’Gorman simply laughed in my face.

“Take the boat, is it?” he exclaimed, with a loud guffaw. “Oh no, misther; that won’t do at all at all. We shall want the boat for ourselves. And we shall want your help, too, to navigate the brig for us, and we mane to have it, begor’ra!”

“I fail to see how you are going to compel me to do anything that I may resolve *not* to do,” retorted I, putting a bold face upon the matter, yet momentarily realising more clearly how completely we were in their hands, and at their mercy.

“You do?” exclaimed O’Gorman; “then wait till I tell ye. If ye don’t consint to do as we want ye to, we’ll just rig up a bit of a raft, and send ye adrift upon her—*alone*; d’ye understand me, misther—*alone*!”

“No,” interposed Miss Onslow, “you shall do nothing of the kind, you cowardly wretches; where Mr Conyers goes, I go also, even if it should be overboard, with *no* raft to float us.”

“Oh no, my purty,” answered O’Gorman, with the leer of a satyr, “we’d take moighty good care you didn’t do that. If Misther Conyers won’t be obligin’, why, we’ll *have* to spare *him*, I s’pose; but we couldn’t do widout you, my dear; what’d we do—”

I could bear no more. “Silence, you blackguard!” I shouted, while vainly striving to shake off Miss Onslow’s tenacious hold upon my arm, that I might get within striking reach of him—“silence! How dare you address a helpless, defenceless woman in that insulting manner? What do you expect to gain by it? Address yourself exclusively to me, if you please.”

“Wid all me heart,” answered O’Gorman, in nowise offended by my abuse of him. “I simply spoke to the lady because she spoke first. And bedad, it’s glad I am she did, because it’s give me the opporchunity to show ye how we mane to convart ye to our views. Navigate the brig for us, and ye’ll nayther of ye have any cause to complain of bad tratement from anny of us: refuse, and away ye goes adhrift on a raft, while the lady ’ll stay and kape us company.”

To say that I was mad with indignation at this ruffian’s gross behaviour

but feebly expresses my mental condition; to such a state of fury was I stirred that but for the restraining hold of the fair girl upon my arm—from which she by no means suffered me to breakaway—I should most assuredly have “run amok” among the mutineers, and in all probability have been killed by them in self-defence; as it was, my anger and the bitterly humiliating conviction of my utter helplessness so nearly overcame me that I was seized with an attack of giddiness that caused everything upon which my eyes rested to become blurred and indistinct, and to whirl hither and thither in a most distracting fashion, while I seemed to lose the control of my tongue, so that when I essayed to speak I found it impossible to utter a single intelligible word; moreover, I must have been on the very verge of becoming unconscious, from the violence of my agitation, for I had precisely the same feeling that one experiences when dreaming—a sensation of vagueness and unreality as to what was transpiring, so that, when Miss Onslow spoke, her voice sounded faint and far away, and her words, although I heard them distinctly, conveyed no special significance to my comprehension.

“Mr Conyers will acquaint you with his decision in due time, when he has had leisure for reflection,” said she, in those haughtily scornful tones of hers that I remembered so well. Then I felt and yielded to the pressure of her guiding hand, and presently found myself groping my way, with her assistance, down the companion ladder and into the cabin. She guided me to one of the sofa-lockers, upon which I mechanically seated myself; and then I saw her go to the swinging rack and pour out a good stiff modicum of brandy, which she brought and held to my lips. I swallowed the draught, and after a few seconds my senses returned to me, almost as though I were recovering from a swoon, Miss Onslow assisting my recovery by seating herself beside me and fanning me with her pocket-handkerchief, gazing anxiously in my face the while.

“There, you are better now!” she exclaimed encouragingly, as she continued to regard me. “Oh, Mr Conyers,” she continued, “I am so *very* sorry to see you thus. But I am not surprised, after all the hardship, and anxiety, and hard work that you have been called upon to endure since the wreck of the unfortunate *City of Cawnpore*. What you have so bravely borne has been more than sufficient to undermine the health of the strongest man; and now, when we hoped that a few hours more would bring us to the end of our troubles, comes the cruel shock and

disappointment of these wretches' base ingratitude to complete what hardship, anxiety, and suffering have begun. But cheer up; all is not yet lost, by any means; our deliverance is merely deferred until you shall have carried out the wishes of these men; therefore, since we have no alternative, let us accept the inevitable with a good grace—do what they require as speedily as may be, and so bring this unfortunate adventure to an end. And," she continued, after a barely perceptible pause, "have no anxiety on my account; O'Gorman and his accomplices will not molest me if you will but conform to their wishes. And, if they *should*, I shall be prepared for them: 'Fore-warned is fore-armed'!"

You may imagine how deeply ashamed of myself and of my late weakness I felt as I listened to the heroic words of this delicately-nurtured girl, who had known nothing either of danger, privation, or hardship until this frightful experience of all three had come to her with the wreck of the ship which was to have conveyed her to her father's arms. Yet terrible as her situation was, she uttered no word of repining, her courage was immeasurably superior to mine; her sympathy was all for me; there was no apprehension on her own behalf; and now, at the moment when a new and dreadful trouble had come upon the top of all that we had previously undergone, when our brightest hopes were dashed to the ground, it was she who found it needful to encourage me, instead of I having to comfort and encourage her!

Nor would she permit me to suffer the humiliation of having proved less strong than herself; at the first word of apology and self-condemnation that I uttered she silenced me by laying the whole blame upon the anxiety and fatigue to which I had been of late exposed; and when at length she had salved the wound inflicted upon my self-esteem by my recent loss of self-control, she set about the task of coaxing me to yield with at least an apparent good grace to the demands of the men—seeing that we were completely in their power, and could do no otherwise—in order that we might secure such full measure of good treatment from them as they might be disposed to accord to us. And so convincingly did she argue that, despite my reluctance to acknowledge myself conquered, I at length gave in; being influenced chiefly thereto, not by Miss Onslow's arguments, but by the galling conviction that in this way only could I hope to save her from the violence with which the scoundrels had almost openly threatened her in the event of my non-compliance.

This matter settled, I went on deck, where I found the entire crew congregated about the binnacle, awaiting me. They watched my approach in silence—and, as I thought, with ill-concealed anxiety—until I was within two paces of the group, when I halted, regarding them steadfastly. By this time I had completely recovered the command of my temper, and my self-possession; and as I noted their anxious looks I began to realise that, after all, these fellows were by no means so independent of me that they would be likely to wantonly provoke me; and I resolved to bring that point well home to them, with the view of driving the most advantageous bargain possible.

“Well, men,” said I, “I have considered your proposal;—and have come to the conclusion that I will accede to it—upon certain conditions which I will set forth in due course. But, first of all, I should like to know what you would have done supposing I had not happened to have been a navigator?”

The rest of the men looked at O’Gorman, and he replied:

“Oh, you’d just have had to join us, or have gone overboard.”

“Yes,” said I. “And what then? How would you have managed without anyone to have navigated the ship for you?”

“We should ha’ had to ha’ done the best we could,” replied Price nonchalantly.

“To what part of the Pacific are you bound?” asked I.

“To an oiland in latichood—” began O’Gorman.

“To an island?” I interrupted. “And do you think you would ever have succeeded in finding that island without the assistance of a navigator? Do you think you would ever have reached the Pacific at all? By what means would you ascertain your whereabouts and avoid dangers?” I demanded.

There was a long silence, which Price at length broke by replying:

“Oh, we’d ha’ managed somehow.”

“Yes,” said I, “you would have managed somehow—for a few days, or weeks, as the case might be; at the end of which time you would either have run your ship ashore, and lost her; or you would have found yourselves hopelessly out of your reckoning, with no knowledge of where you were, or how to steer in order to reach your destination.”

Nobody attempted to reply to this, all hands evidently realising the truth of what I had said, and pondering upon it. At length, however, when the silence had grown embarrassing, O’Gorman broke it, by asking—in a much more civil tone than he had yet chosen to adopt with me:

“Well, misther, allowin’ all this to be thrue, what of it?”

“Nothing, except that before propounding the conditions upon which I am willing to agree to your proposal, I wished to make it perfectly clear to you all that you can do absolutely nothing without my help,” said I. “You have chosen to adopt a very domineering and offensive tone with me, under the evident impression that the young lady and myself are completely at your mercy. And so we are, I willingly admit, but not to the extent that you seem to suppose; because, if you will reflect for a moment, you will see that you dare not murder, or even ill-treat me, or the young lady. Here we are, in the South Atlantic, and not a man among you all possesses knowledge enough to take this brig from where she now floats to a port; hence you are as much at my mercy as I am at yours. You can do absolutely nothing without me. Therefore, if you require my assistance you must agree to my terms.”

“Very well, sorr,” answered O’Gorman; “let’s hear what thim terms are.”

“In the first place,” said I, “you will all treat the lady with the utmost respect, no one presuming to speak to her except in reply to any remark which she may be pleased to make.”

“I shan’t agree to that,” shouted Price aggressively. “We’re all goin’ to be equal, here, now; and if I feel like speakin’ to the gal, I shall speak to her, and I’d like to know who’ll stop me.”

“Oh, shut up, Chips, cawn’t ye!” exclaimed one of the other men—a Cockney, if his tongue did not belie him, “shut up, and stow that ‘equality’ yarn of yours. We’ve all heard that before, and I, for one, don’t believe in

it; it's all very well among a lot o' sailor-men like ourselves, but you'll never be the equal of the lidy—no, nor of the gent neither—not if you was to live to be as old as Mathusalem; so what good would it do you to talk to her? Why, she wouldn't *look* at an old tarry-breeches like you or me, much less talk to us! Garn! You go ahead, sir; *we'll* look awfter Chips, and keep him in order; never fear!"

"I hope you will, for your own sakes," I retorted significantly, leaving them to interpret my meaning as they chose. "My next condition," I continued, "is that the cabin and the staterooms are to be left to the exclusive use of the lady and myself, the steward only being allowed access to them.

"My next condition is that no man shall have more than two gills of rum per day—half to be served out at midday, and the remainder at four bells of the first dog-watch. In the event of bad weather, or other especial circumstances, the allowance may be increased at my discretion, and by so much as I may consider necessary.

"And my last condition is that when this business is concluded, the lady and I are to be allowed to take the boat, with a sufficient stock of provisions and water, and to quit the ship within sight of some suitable harbour, to be chosen by myself."

A dead silence followed this bold announcement on my part, which was at length broken by O'Gorman, who, looking round upon his motley crowd of followers, demanded:

"Well, bhoys, you've heard what the gintleman says. Have anny of ye annything to say agin it?"

"Yes; I have," answered the irrepressible Price. "I don't care a ropeyarn whether I'm allowed to speak to the gal or not; but I thinks that O'Gorman and me, seein' that we're to be the mates of this here hooker, ought to berth aft, and to take our meals in the cabin; and I'm for havin' our rights."

"You will do neither the one nor the other, with my consent, Price, I assure you," said I. "And unless my conditions are absolutely complied with I shall decline to help you in any way."

"Oh, you will, eh?" sneered Price. "You'd better not, though, because I

dessay we could soon find a way to bring ye round to our way of thinkin'. We could stop your grub, for instance, and starve ye until you was willin' to do what was wanted. And if that didn't do, why there's the—"

"Stop!" I exclaimed fiercely, "I have had enough, and more than enough, of threats, my man, and will listen to them no further. Now, understand me, all of you. I have stated the conditions upon which I will meet your wishes, and I will not abate one jot of them. Agree to them or not, as you please. You have taken the ship from me, and now you may do as you will with her; but, make no mistake, I will only help you of my own free will; I would rather kill the young lady and myself with my own hand than submit to compulsion from a crowd of mutineers. Take your own time to decide; *I* am in no hurry."

"Why, he defies us!" exclaimed Price, turning to his companions. "What d'ye say, boys, shall we give him a lesson? Shall us show him that we're his masters?"

"No, mate, we shan't," interposed the fellow who had spoken before; "and if you don't stop your gab about 'lessons' and 'masters' I'll see if I cawn't stop it for you. What we want, mates, is to get to that island that O'Gorman has told us so much about; and here is a gent who can take us to it. What do we want more? Do we want to grub in the cabin? Ain't the fo'k'sle good enough for us, who've lived in fo'k'sles all our lives? Very well, then, let's agree to the gent's terms, and have done with it. What d'ye s'y?"

It soon appeared that the entire party were willing—Price, however, consenting under protest;—so I retired to the cabin and drew up the terms in writing, together with an acknowledgment on the part of the crew that they had taken the ship from me by force, and that I was acting as navigator under compulsion; and this the entire party more or less reluctantly signed—or affixed their mark to—Miss Onslow acting as witness to the signatures of the men. This done, with bitter chagrin and profound misgiving as to the issue of the adventure, I gave the order to wear ship, and we bore up on a course that pointed the brig's jib-boom straight for the far-distant Cape of Storms.

Chapter Nine.

We sight a strange sail.

Having secured possession of the brig, and succeeded in coercing me to become their navigator to some island in the Pacific, the locality of which they had as yet kept secret, upon an errand the nature of which they had not seen fit to divulge to me, the crew at once went industriously to work, under O'Gorman, to put the vessel all ataunto once more, by routing out and sending aloft spare topgallant-masts and yards, bending new sails, overhauling and making good the rigging, and, in short, repairing all damage of every description; and with such goodwill did they work that in ten days from the date of their seizure of the brig everything had been done that it was possible to do, and, so far as the outward appearance of the craft was concerned, there was nothing to show that anything had ever been wrong with her.

Meanwhile, during the progress of this renovating process, the steward had made it his business to give the lazarette a thorough stock-taking overhaul, of the result of which I was kept ignorant. But I gathered that the examination was not altogether satisfactory; for when it was over, and the steward had made his report to O'Gorman, the latter came to me and anxiously demanded to know what our distance then was from the Horn. This was on the afternoon of the third day after the seizure of the brig, and upon carefully measuring off the distance from our position at noon on that day, I found that it amounted to three thousand seven hundred and some odd miles. The distance seemed to be a staggerer to the fellow, and when, in reply to a further question, I informed him that he might reckon upon the brig taking nearly or quite a month to cover it, he made no attempt to conceal his dismay. That something was radically wrong at once became apparent, for there were long conclaves in the forecastle, the object of which, presumably, was to determine how to meet the emergency. I shrewdly suspected that this emergency arose out of the unexpected discovery that the brig's stock of provisions, or water, or both, was insufficient to carry us to our destination; and I fervently hoped that my conjecture might prove correct, as in that case we should be compelled to touch somewhere to renew our stock; and I felt that if in

such a case I failed to secure the arrest of the whole party for piracy I should richly deserve to remain their tool, exposed to the countless vacillating and dangerous humours of a gang of ruffians who had deliberately thrown off every restraint of law and order.

But, in speculating thus, I was reckoning without my hosts; I was crediting O'Gorman and his satellites with scruples that they did not possess. I had not yet fully gauged the villainy of which they were capable.

Thus far, ever since we had borne up for the Horn, we had been favoured with a fair wind, and plenty of it; but on the second day after the occurrence of the above events the wind began to fail us, and by sunset that night it had dwindled away until the brig had barely steerage-way, while the surface of the ocean presented that streaky, oily appearance that is usually the precursor of a flat calm. Meanwhile, during the afternoon, a sail had hove in sight in the north-western board, steering south-east; and when the sun went down in a clear haze of ruddy gold, the sails of the stranger, reddened by the last beams of the luminary, glowed against the clear opal tints of the north-western sky at a distance of some eight miles, broad on our starboard bow.

The stranger was a barque-rigged vessel of some three hundred and fifty tons or so: quite an ordinary, everyday-looking craft, with nothing whatever of an alarming character in her aspect; yet she had not long been in sight when it became quite apparent that O'Gorman and his crew were greatly exercised at her appearance; and I was at first disposed to imagine that their emotion arose from the circumstance of their being fully aware that, in seizing the brig, as they had done, they had committed an act of piracy, and that they now feared detection and its attendant unpleasant consequences. But by sunset I had found occasion to alter my opinion, for it had by then become evident that O'Gorman was manoeuvring, not to avoid but to close with the stranger in such a manner as to avoid arousing any suspicion as to his design!

No sooner did this intention of O'Gorman's become apparent than I began to ask myself what could be his motive for such a course; and the only satisfactory reply that I could find to such a question was that he wished to ascertain whether her skipper had any provisions to spare, and, if so, to endeavour to treat with him for their purchase—I had by this

time seen enough of O'Gorman to recognise that he was quite acute enough to discern the advantage and safety which such a transaction would afford him over the alternative of being compelled to touch at some port, and I had little doubt that my surmise as to his intentions would prove correct. At all events, his determination to speak the barque was evident, and I began to cast about for some means whereby the encounter might be utilised to the advantage of Miss Onslow and myself.

There were two or three ways in which we might possibly be benefited by the incident, if only I could contrive to establish private communication with the skipper of the stranger. In the first place, if the barque happened to be British—of which, however, I had my doubts—I might make her skipper acquainted with all the circumstances relating to the brig's seizure, and appeal to him to compel the Irishman and his gang—by force, if necessary—to surrender Miss Onslow and myself. Or, if that should prove impossible, I might perhaps be able to secure Miss Onslow's transfer to the stranger, when—her safety having been assured—it would matter comparatively little what happened to myself. Or—in the event of both these schemes failing—I might possibly succeed in privately arranging with the skipper to acquaint the authorities with our predicament and request them to take the necessary steps to effect our rescue.

One or another of these plans I might perhaps succeed in putting into effect, provided that the Irishman should prove careless and neglectful enough to permit of my communicating with the skipper of the barque. But would he be so? I very much doubted it. Yet I could but try; and if, as I anticipated, I should find it impossible to obtain private speech with the skipper of the barque, I might still be able to surreptitiously convey to him a letter which would serve my purpose quite as well.

Meditating thus, I made my way below to the brig's snug little cabin, with the intention of forthwith inditing my epistle, and there I found Miss Onslow, seated upon one of the lockers, ostensibly engaged in reading, but with her beautiful eyes fixed upon the gently-swaying lamp that hung in the skylight, with a dreamy, absent look in them that showed her thoughts to be far away.

"Do you happen to know whether the steward is in his pantry, Miss.

Onslow?" I asked, with a glance in the direction of the apartment named, as I entered the cabin.

"No; he is not there; he went on deck nearly an hour ago," she replied. "Do you want anything, Mr Conyers?"

"Nothing more at present than a few minutes' privacy and freedom from espionage," I answered. "Listen, Miss Onslow," I continued, "I have been engaged for the last two hours in quietly observing the manoeuvres of O'Gorman, and I have come to the conclusion that he intends to close with and speak the barque that has been in sight all the afternoon. Now, such a proceeding may, or may not, be to our advantage. If I can succeed in effecting communication with her skipper, it may be possible for us to accomplish one of three things: First, we may, with the assistance of the barque's crew, be enabled to effect our escape from these people altogether. Or, if that should prove impracticable, we may possibly be enabled to secure *your* transfer to the barque. Or, *if* that attempt also should fail, we surely ought to be able, with the help of the barque's people, to communicate with the authorities ashore, and claim from them rescue from our present precarious and exceedingly unpleasant situation."

"Y–e–es," my companion assented meditatively. Then, after a slight pause, she asked:

"Have you ever thought of what the end of this adventure is likely to be, so far as we two are concerned, supposing that we should fail to effect our escape from O'Gorman and his companions?"

"Certainly, the matter is never absent from my thoughts," I answered. "We are bound—upon what I cannot help thinking a fool's errand—to some island in the Pacific, upon which O'Gorman and his party expect to find a certain treasure. This treasure they either will or will *not* find; but in either case I anticipate that, so far as *we* are concerned, the adventure will end in our being landed somewhere at a sufficient distance from a town to permit of O'Gorman getting clear away with the brig before we should have time to give the alarm and secure his capture."

"That, of course, is assuming that you carry out these men's wishes,

without giving them any trouble," commented Miss Onslow. "But," she continued, "what, do you imagine, is likely to be the result—the effect upon us both—if you cause them trouble and anxiety by endeavouring to escape? They have made it perfectly evident to you that they *cannot* dispense with your services. Do you really think it worth our while to irritate and provoke them by attempting to escape? True, they are exceedingly unpleasant people to be brought into such close and constant contact with, but there seems to be no great harm in them, provided that they are allowed to have their own way."

"Ah!" I exclaimed, "you evidently do not know of what a ship's crew may become capable when once they have committed so serious a crime as piracy—for that is what they have done in taking this brig from me. It is not what these men are, now, but what they may become in the future, of which I am thinking, especially so far as you are concerned. I recognise possibilities in the future that may make this brig the scene of hourly peril to you of a nature that I shudder to think of, and it is *your* safety that I am concerned about; that assured, I could face the rest with equanimity."

"Thank you. It is exceedingly good and kind of you to think so much for me, and so little for yourself," answered my companion. She spoke with her face turned away from me, so that I was unable to read its expression, and her voice had an intonation that I would have given much to have been able to translate. Was it merely my imagination—I asked myself—or was there really a recurrent shade of her former hauteur of manner, mingled with just the faintest suggestion of irony and impatience? The fact is that I was at that moment as far from being able to comprehend this lovely but inscrutable woman as when I met her for the first time in the saloon of the *City of Cawnpore*: her moods were as changeable as the weather: there were occasions when her manner toward me was almost as warm and genial and sympathetic as even a lover could require; while there were others when she appeared animated by a set purpose to impress upon me the conviction that our remarkable adventure together invested me with no claim whatever upon her beyond that of the merest ordinary gratitude. As for me, if I have not already allowed the fact to leak out, I may as well here make a clean breast of it and confess that I loved her with all the ardent passion of which a man's heart is capable, and I was resolutely determined to win her love in return; but up to the moment of which I am now speaking I

seemed to have made so little headway that I often doubted whether I had made any at all. I had, however, come at length to recognise that the rebuffs I occasionally met with followed some speech or action of mine of which the young lady did not wholly approve; and so I soon found it to be in the present instance. She remained silent for perhaps half a minute after speaking the words the recounting of which has extorted from me the above explanation, and then continued, with much greater cordiality:

“Believe me, Mr Conyers, I am sincerely grateful to you for your perfectly evident anxiety on my account; but I am obliged to confess that I do not regard our situation as nearly so desperate as you seem to do; I do not think that either of us will have anything to fear from O’Gorman and his companions if you will but reconcile yourself to the performance of the task that they have imposed upon you. What I *do* really fear is what may happen if you wilfully exasperate them by making any attempt to thwart their plans by depriving them of your assistance—without which, I would remind you again, they can do nothing. Help them to carry through their undertaking—never mind whether or not it be a fool’s errand—and I have every confidence that they will treat us with the utmost consideration, after their own rough fashion; but seriously provoke them, and, I ask you, what are likely to be the consequences to us both? Of course if you can so contrive it that we can *both* be rescued by the ship in sight, I shall be more delighted than I can say; but as to your attempting to get *me* transferred to her *alone*—you will think it strange, unaccountable, perhaps, but I feel so very much more safe here, with you to protect me, than I should on board the strange ship, *alone*, that if you are to remain here I would very much rather remain with you.”

Words calculated to send the blood of an ardent lover throbbing through his veins like quicksilver, are they not? Yet they excited not one atom of jubilation in me, for they were uttered in a tone of such coldness and indifference that I felt as certain as I could be of anything that it was wholly of herself, and not at all of me, that the speaker was thinking.

“Very well,” I answered, steeling myself to the adoption of an equally cold manner of speech; “I think I understand your wishes in this matter, and will endeavour to carry them out; if the strangers yonder can be induced to take us *both* out of the hands of these ruffians, well and good; if not, I am to take no other steps?”

She bowed acquiescence, and turned to her book once more, with a manner indicating that the discussion was at an end; and I, accepting the hint, retired at once to my cabin to prepare a letter addressed to the skipper of the stranger, to be conveyed to him if opportunity should permit.

But although I had yielded a seeming acquiescence to Miss Onslow's misguided wish to share my captivity—should it be continued—aboard the brig, it must not be supposed that I had any intention of lending myself to so terribly dangerous and mistaken a proceeding. It was perfectly clear to me that the high-spirited girl had, in some unaccountable way, completely missed the point of my remarks, and utterly failed to comprehend the frightfully precarious and perilous character of her position aboard the brig; moreover, her mere presence there served O'Gorman as a lever and a menace powerful enough to constrain me irresistibly to the most abject submission to his will; so long as she remained where she was, in the power of these ruffians, I could do absolutely nothing, for fear of what they might inflict upon her by way of revenge; but with her removed from their power, and placed in safety, I might possibly be able to bring every one of the wretches into the grip of the law that they had so audaciously defied. And so, when I began to pen my letter to the unknown skipper, I was careful—after briefly describing our peculiar situation—to appeal to him, as powerfully as I could, to effect the rescue of the girl by any means at his command, regardless of what might become of me.

Having at length finished my letter, I folded it up into a suitably small and compact form, placed it by itself in one of my pockets, in readiness to transfer it at the first favourable opportunity to the individual for whom it was intended, and then, filling my pipe, made my way leisurely up on deck to take a look round and see in what direction matters were trending.

It was a magnificently fine and brilliant moon-lit night, with only a few small, scattered shreds of light fleecy cloud floating overhead, and a soft, warm air breathing out from the north-east so gently that it scarcely stirred the oil-smooth surface of the ocean, which indeed it only touched here and there in faint, evanescent cat's-paws that barely sufficed to give the brig steerage-way with squared yards and every possible inch of

canvas spread. As for the barque, she was now about a point on the starboard bow, not more than a mile distant, and was evidently not under command, as she had swung round head to wind, and lay there in the bright moonlight swaying with an almost imperceptible swing over the long, low hummocks of glassy swell, with her canvas—gleaming softly and spectrally under the showering moonbeams. All hands—O'Gorman included—except the man at the wheel, were on the forecastle-head, intently watching her, and talking eagerly together, so I had a good opportunity to take a leisurely survey of her, and draw my conclusions as to her nationality. I went to the companion, secured the night-glass, and took a good look at her; with the result that I concluded her to be of French or Italian nationality—rather an awkward and unexpected development for me, I having foolishly taken it for granted that she would prove to be British and written my letter in English accordingly. And yet, perhaps, if my surmise should prove to be correct, I might be afforded a better opportunity to make an effective appeal for assistance than if the craft were British, for I gravely doubted whether O'Gorman or any of his people spoke French or Italian, and if that were the case they would probably require me to act as interpreter for them, and thus afford me just such an opportunity as I desired. On the other hand, I could not but feel that an appeal for help, made to a French or an Italian crew, was much less likely to meet with a favourable response than if made to a crew of Britons.

These reflections passed through my mind as I stood peering through the tube at the becalmed barque; it did not need a very prolonged scrutiny to enable me to learn all that was possible of her at that distance, and presently I replaced the glass in its beckets, and proceeded to saunter fore and aft the deck, from the wake of the main rigging to the wheel grating, smoking meditatively the while.

By the time that I had smoked my pipe out we had neared the barque to within less than half, a mile; and I was momentarily expecting to hear O'Gorman give the order to round-to and lower away the boat—wondering, meanwhile, how on earth I could possibly contrive to get my letter conveyed to the skipper—when the Irishman came shambling aft and, placing himself at my side, inquired:

"Well, misther, have you finished your shmoke?"

“Yes,” I answered curtly. “Why do you ask the question, pray?”

“Because,” he replied, “I’ll have to ask ye to just step down below *and stay there for the rest of the night*!”

“To step down below—and stay there?” I repeated indignantly. “What do you mean, man? Surely I am not to be sent to my bunk like a child, whether I wish to go or not?”

“Bedad, but ye are thin; so make no more bones about it!” he retorted, with quickly-rising anger.

“But, my good fellow, this is preposterous,”—I began, thoroughly exasperated at such treatment, and keenly anxious not to lose even the most slender chance of communicating with the strangers. But the fellow would permit no argument, his quick temper caught fire instantly at the merest suggestion of remonstrance on my part, and he cut me short by exclaiming furiously:

“Howly Sailor! Phwhat’s the use av’ talkin’ about it? Ye’ve got to go below, and that’s all there is about it. Will ye go p’aceably, or will I have to call some of the hands aft to *make* ye go?”

Again did I feel that terrible, overpowering sensation of murderous anger grip at my heart, as it had already done once before in an altercation with this brutal ruffian, the blood again mounted to my head like fire, and, reckless of all consequences, I was in the very act of pulling myself together for a spring at his throat, when I felt a small hand—the touch of which thrilled me, even at that moment—laid upon my arm, and Miss Onslow’s voice—pitched in its most seductive tones—said:

“Will you please come with me at once—*at once*—Mr Conyers? I have something of the utmost importance to say to you!”

With an effort that caused me to turn sick and giddy, I mastered the impulse that urged me to strike my enemy dead, there and then, and, mute with the intensity of my feelings, permitted my companion to lead me away. We descended the companion ladder in silence; and upon reaching the cabin Miss Onslow—as upon a former occasion—led me to one of the sofa-lockers, upon which she seated herself, gently drawing

me down beside her. Then, looking anxiously into my face, she said:

“Mr Conyers, I could almost find it in my heart to be angry with you. Why —oh, *why* will you persist in laying yourself open to such insults from that great, coarse brute, by condescending to argue with him? What is the use of doing so? Surely you must realise, by this time, that you are quite powerless in the hands of these men, and that you cannot control or influence them in any way. Then, why attempt to do it? The only result is that you are insulted, and at once become positively mad with anger, under the influence of which you will some day—unless you are very careful—do something that you will be exceedingly sorry for. For instance, what would have happened, had I not fortunately chanced to have gone on deck the moment that I heard you and that Irish ruffian in conversation?”

“You are right—perfectly right,” I answered; “and you make me feel very heartily ashamed of myself for my lamentable want of self-control—of which I will take especial care that henceforward there shall be no repetition. Of course I can see clearly enough, now, how positively suicidal it would have been for me to have yielded to the impulse that animated me at the moment when you so fortunately came upon the scene—suicidal for myself, and ruinously disastrous for *you*—which circumstance will, I assure you, amply suffice as an effectual check upon me for the future. We are but two against sixteen, and common sense tells me that, with such odds against us, violence is out of the question; we must depend upon craft and diplomacy to secure our ends.”

“Oh! I am *so* glad to find you taking a reasonable view of our most unfortunate situation,” exclaimed my companion, her eyes sparkling with pleasure. “Of course,” she continued, “I can easily understand how terribly exasperating it must be to you—a naval officer, who has always hitherto been accustomed to the most implicit obedience on the part of your crew—to find yourself defied and insulted by these wretches, and I am not at all surprised that, under such circumstances, you find the provocation all but unendurable; but I am sure you are right in believing, as you say, that we must fight by diplomatic means rather than by a resort to brute force. I feel sure that the latter would be a terrible mistake on our part, and I will not attempt to deny that on the two occasions when you seemed about to resort to such means, I have been most horribly

frightened."

"Yes," I exclaimed, with profound contrition, "I can quite understand that you would be so; and I very humbly beg your pardon for having so terrified you. I have been contemptibly weak at the very moment when I most needed to be strong; but have no further fear; you have effectually cured me of my weakness. And, now, you may as well tell me what was the important matter upon which you so urgently desired to speak to me."

For a moment my companion gazed at me with a most bewitching expression of perplexity in her glorious eyes; then her face lighted up with a smile of amusement, and she broke into a musical laugh.

"What!" she exclaimed. "Do you not yet understand? I only wanted to say to you what I have just said—or, rather I wanted to get you away from that Irishman before your impetuous temper had time to precipitate a disaster."

"I see," said I, "Well—"

I was interrupted by a sound of hailing that seemed to proceed, not from our own forecastle but from some spot a little way ahead of us; and I at once concluded that its source must be the strange barque, the existence of which I had entirely forgotten in the interest of the discussion between myself and Miss Onslow. I listened for a reply from O'Gorman, but there was none; and presently the hailing was repeated—this time from a much nearer point—and immediately followed by an excited shouting and jabbering, in which I believed I could distinguish a word or two of French. I sprang to my feet, and was about to rush up on deck, when Miss Onslow checked the movement by laying her hand upon my arm, and saying:

"*Please* oblige me by staying here. If you were to go on deck, that wretch would only insult you again; so why lay yourself open to such treatment, since you can do absolutely nothing? You *must* school yourself to allow those men to have their own way, since neither persuasion nor force are of any avail with them."

"True," answered I. "But it is instinctive for a sailor—and especially an *officer*—to rush on deck when he hears such an outcry as that,"—as the

shouting and jabbering became momentarily nearer and more excited.

At that instant O'Gorman's voice shouted an order to "Stand by!" immediately followed by a command to the helmsman to "Hard a-starboard!" and presently there occurred a gentle shock—showing that the brig had collided with something apparently on the rounding of her starboard bow—accompanied by a most outrageous clamour, in which "S–a–c–r–és" and other French expletives plentifully abounded.

"Now, take a turn anywhere you can, and as often as you can," shouted O'Gorman, "and then follow me. And if they offer any resistance, knock 'em down, or heave 'em overboard."

"Why, good Heavens! they have run the barque aboard, and are taking her!" I exclaimed, astonished and shocked beyond expression, as it dawned upon me that the wretches were committing a further act of piracy. And I made as though to spring to my feet. In an instant Miss Onslow had seized my hand in hers, gripping me so firmly that I could not break away from her without exercising a certain measure of violence.

"And if they *are*?" said she, "can you do anything to prevent it?"

"No," answered I. "But I will tell you what I *can* do. If you will suffer me to go on deck I can see whether all hands have boarded the barque. And, if they have, and there appears to be the slightest possibility of our being able to effect our escape, I will cut the brig adrift, and make off with her!"

"Do you really think such a feat possible?" demanded my companion, with sparkling eyes.

"I scarcely know," answered I. "If the breeze has freshened at all within the last few minutes, it might be done; not otherwise; because in the latter event they could lower the barque's boats and overhaul us in a very few minutes."

"At all events it is quite worth while to ascertain whether there is any chance of success. Let us go on deck and see!" exclaimed Miss Onslow, her features at once all aglow with excitement as she sprang to her feet.

"Agreed!" cried I, overjoyed to find the young lady so unexpectedly

yielding approval to my rather desperate plan. “I will go on deck first, and ascertain the precise state of affairs; and if I find that there is a sufficiently fair prospect of success to justify us in the attempt I will call to you through the skylight as soon as I need your help.”

My companion regarded me somewhat doubtfully for a moment, and then reseated herself, saying:

“Very well. I think I can trust you *now*. But please be very careful; and do not attempt anything unless you feel certain of success.”

Meanwhile, the uproar that had prevailed for a few minutes prior to and following upon the contact between the two craft had suddenly ceased; and as I emerged from the companion-way I saw that, even supposing there had ever been a prospect of my plan proving successful—which there had not, the wind having died away to the merest breathing—I was now too late. For the two vessels—their hulls prevented from grinding together by several cork fenders hung between them—were so securely lashed together that it would have cost me several minutes’ hard work to cut them adrift. Moreover, O’Gorman, followed by half a dozen of his gang, were just in the act of scrambling inboard again from the stranger. The Irishman saw me upon the instant of my emerging from the companion, and immediately shouted:

“Here, Misther Conyers, ye’re just the man we want! Do you spake Frinch?”

“Yes,” answered I, believing that I saw my opportunity. “Why?”

“Becase,” he replied, “the chaps aboard the barque don’t seem to be able to undershtand a worrud we say to thim; and bedad we’re in the same fix with regar–rd to thim. So we want an interpreter; and maybe you’ll be able to act that same for us.”

“Very well,” said I; “what do you want me to do?”

“Whoy, we’ll take it kindly of ye if you’ll just be so obligin’ as to shtep aboard the barque, and say what we want ye to say,” answered the fellow. “But, mind,” he added warningly, “don’t ye attimpt to say annything else, or by the Piper it’ll be the worse for ye—and for the young woman

down below. I can undershtand Frinch like a native—so I shall know everything that you say—but begorra the Oirish brogue of me makes it difficult for thim froggies to undershtand me when I shpake to thim."

"All right," I answered, perfectly easy in my mind, "you can stand alongside me, and hear everything that passes."

So saying, without further ado I leapt upon the brig's bulwarks, from thence to those of the barque, and so down upon her deck, closely followed by O'Gorman.

Chapter Ten.

We plunder the French barque.

As my feet touched the barque's deck, I flung a lightning glance about me to gather as much information as possible, not knowing but that at any moment such knowledge might be of priceless value to me. The craft was somewhat bigger than I had at first set her down to be, being of fully four hundred, or maybe four hundred and fifty, tons measurement. Looking for'ard to the swell of her bows, I saw that she must evidently be of a motherly build, which accorded well with the fact that she had lost steerage-way long before such had been the case with the brig. Her decks were in a very dirty and untidy condition, looking as though they had not been washed down, or even swept, for at least a week, and they were lumbered up with quite an unusual number of spars and booms. Yet she was evidently a passenger ship, for the cabin under her full poop was brilliantly lighted up, and through its open door I caught a glimpse of several men and women so attired as to at once proclaim their status on board; moreover, the quarter-deck was also occupied by a group of men and women, evidently passengers, with two or three sailorly-looking men among them, over whom a party of O'Gorman's people were mounting guard, the remainder being stationed on guard over the fore-scuttle, down which I presumed the barque's crew had been driven.

My attention was almost instantly attracted toward the little party on the quarter-deck, and especially toward a grey-haired man in uniform, whom

I imagined might be the skipper. I advanced toward the party, with a bow, and said, in French:

“I wish to speak to the captain of this vessel: may I ask if he happens to be among you?”

The old gentleman in uniform at once advanced a pace and, acknowledging my salute by raising his gold-laced cap, answered:

“I am he. And I demand to know, monsieur, by what right you and your crew of ruffians have dared to run aboard me in this outrageous fashion, driving my crew below, stationing a guard athwart my decks, and frightening my passengers very nearly out of their senses. Are you pirates, or what?”

“Monsieur,” answered I, “there is nothing to be gained by attempting to deceive you, and I will therefore at once say that I fear you will find that you have fallen into the hands of pirates. The big man beside me is their captain, while I, and a young lady aboard the brig, have the misfortune to be their prisoners. I shall probably not be afforded an opportunity to explain to you the unfortunate situation of the young lady and myself; but as soon as I became aware of the intention of these men to board you I prepared a letter which will explain everything—it is unfortunately written in English, but that, I am sure, will prove no obstacle to you. This letter I will presently endeavour to pass, unobserved, to one of you; and if you will kindly act in accordance with the request set forth therein, you will very greatly oblige two most unhappy people.”

“Monsieur,” said the Frenchman, “I will gladly do anything in my power to help you; but as to effecting your rescue—” he glanced expressively at O’Gorman and his companions, and shrugged his shoulders in a way that very clearly indicated his helplessness.

Here O’Gorman cut in. “Well, what has the ould chap got to say for himsilf?” he demanded.

“Why,” answered I, “you heard what he said. He wants to know what we mean by boarding his ship in this outrageous fashion and driving his crew below.”

“Ask him what is the name of his ship, where he is from, and where bound to,” ordered the Irishman.

I put the questions; and the skipper answered:

“This is the *Marie Renaud*, of and from Marseilles, for Bourbon, with a general cargo.”

I translated, turning to O’Gorman—and slightly away from the group of Frenchmen—to do so; and while I was speaking a hand touched mine—which I held, clenched, behind my back, with the letter, folded small, within it—while a voice murmured in my ear:

“Your letter, monsieur?”

I opened my fingers, and felt the missive gently abstracted.

“Thank God for that opportunity!” thought I fervently, as O’Gorman said:

“Ask him if he has plenty of provisions and water aboard.”

I at once saw the villain’s game: he was going to replenish the brig’s stores by plundering the barque, thus rendering it unnecessary to touch at any port. So, while translating the question to the French skipper, I took it upon myself to very tersely mention my suspicions, and to recommend the adoption of any precautionary measures that might suggest themselves.

“The bulk of my stores is stowed in the after hold,” answered the French skipper, “but there is about enough in the lazarette to carry us to Cape Town. If they can be persuaded to be satisfied with what is there only, we shall come to no great harm.”

“You hear?” said I, turning to O’Gorman again, quite certain, by this time, of his inability to understand a single word of French; “they are very short of provisions, having only sufficient in their lazarette to carry them to Cape Town.”

“Is that all?” demanded the Irishman. “Thin, be jabers, *I’m* sorry for thim, for there’s a good manny miles bechuxt here and Cape Town, and I’m

afraid they'll be mortial hungry before they get there. For I'm goin' to help mesilf to everything ateable that the barque carries, and so ye may tell the skipper—bad cess to him for a mismanagin' shpalpeen! Whoy didn't he lay in stores enough to carry him to the ind of his v'yage? And ye may tell him, too, to start all hands to get those stores on deck in a hurry; our own lads will have enough to do in lookin' afther everybody, and seein' that none of the Frenchies thries to play anny tricks wid us."

I translated the gist of these remarks to the French captain, and at the same time gave him a hint to exhibit a proper amount of righteous indignation over the robbery; which he did to perfection, wringing his hands, rumpling his hair, and pacing the deck with the air of a madman while he poured out anathemas enough upon O'Gorman and his gang to sink the entire party to the nethermost depths of perdition. Meanwhile, the French crew, under the supervision of the mates—with Price watching the operation to see that a clean sweep was made of the lazarette—went to work to pass the stores on deck; and in less than an hour everything that the lazarette had contained was safely transferred to the brig, and stowed away.

While this operation was in progress, O'Gorman made a tour of the various cabins, compelling the unfortunate passengers to turn out their trunks before him, and appropriating the whole of their cash, jewellery, weapons, and ammunition, together with as much of their clothing as happened to take his fancy. As he executed his self-imposed task with considerable deliberation, those passengers whose turn was still to come had plenty of time to meditate upon their coming despoilment, and one of them—the individual who had so kindly relieved me of my letter—took it into his head to do me a good turn. Withdrawing quietly to his cabin, he presently reappeared with a mahogany case, to which he unostentatiously directed my attention, immediately afterwards laying it carelessly down in a dark corner of the cabin.

Then he came and stood close beside me, and murmured in my ear:

"A brace of duelling-pistols, with a full supply of ammunition, monsieur. Since apparently they *must* go, I would rather that they should fall into monsieur's hands, if possible. He may perhaps find them useful some time in the future."

“A thousand thanks, monsieur,” returned I, in a whisper. “Should we ever meet again I will endeavour to repay your kindness with interest.”

Then, watching my opportunity, I possessed myself of the case of pistols, made my way on deck with them, and—thanks to the bustle of trans-shipping the stores—managed to slip on board the brig with it and convey it, undetected, to my own cabin. Having done which, I spoke a reassuring word or two to Miss Onslow—who had retired to her own cabin—lighted a pipe, and sauntered up on deck again with the most careless demeanour imaginable.

It was long past midnight by the time that O’Gorman had finished rifling the barque, by which time he had secured all the provisions out of the unfortunate craft’s lazarette, had taken four brass nine-pounder guns, two dozen stand of muskets, the same number of cutlasses and boarding pikes, together with a considerable quantity of ammunition, had emptied one of the barque’s water-tanks, and had robbed them, in addition, of their two best boats—fine twenty-seven feet gigs—with their whole equipment. Then, the weather still being stark calm, he compelled the Frenchmen to hoist out their remaining two boats and to tow the brig clear of and about a mile distant from the barque. Before that moment arrived, however, the French skipper contrived to get a hurried word with me.

“Monsieur,” he said, “the contents of your letter have been communicated to me; and permit me to say that you and Mademoiselle Onslow have the heartiest sympathy and commiseration of myself and my passengers in your most unpleasant situation. But, monsieur, I fear I cannot possibly help you in the way that would doubtless be most acceptable to you—namely, by receiving you on board my ship. The scoundrels who hold you in their power would never permit it; and even were it possible for you and mademoiselle to slip aboard, unperceived, and secrete yourselves, your absence would be quickly discovered, it would be guessed what had become of you, and the pirates would assuredly give chase and recapture you—for the barque, fine ship though she be, certainly *is* a trifle slow—and who knows what vengeance the wretches might wreck upon us for having presumed to abet you in your attempt to escape them? You will perceive, I am sure, that my duty to my passengers forbids my exposing them to such a risk. But I shall now call at Cape Town, to

replace what those villains have taken from me; and you may rest assured that I will not only report the act of piracy that has been perpetrated upon me, but I will also make known the unfortunate situation of yourself and mademoiselle, so that your countrymen may be enabled to take such steps as they may see fit to effect your rescue."

This was as much as I could reasonably hope; and I thanked the skipper heartily for undertaking even so much as that.

In the early hours of the morning a gentle little air from the northward—that gradually strengthened to a nice working breeze—sprang up; and when I went on deck at seven bells the *Marie Renaud* was out of sight, and we were alone once more on the tumbling waste of waters.

From that time forward nothing of importance occurred until we arrived in the longitude of the Horn, our passage of this notorious headland being accomplished in gloriously fine weather—for a wonder—with half a gale of wind from the eastward, blowing over our taffrail, to which we showed every rag that we could set upon the hooker. The actual passage occurred in the early morning—about six o'clock, according to our dead reckoning—and upon working out the sights that I had secured after breakfast for the determination of the longitude, I found that we were thirty miles to the westward of it, and far enough south to permit of our shifting our helm for the mysterious island to which we were supposed to be bound. Accordingly, having verified my figures, and pricked off the brig's position on the chart, I made my way up on deck, and informed O'Gorman of the state of affairs.

"So we're actually now in the moighty Pacific, eh?" he exclaimed in high elation. "Bedad that's good news, annyhow, and we'll cilibrate the occasion by takin' an exthry tot o' grog all round, and dhrinkin' shuccess to the v'yage. But, sthop a minute; ye want to know where ye're to shape a coorse for, now? By the powers, misther, I'll tell ye that same in a brace of shakes. Let me go and get the paper out o' me chist, and I'll soon make ye as wise as mesilf."

The fellow hurried away for'ard, and dived below into the forecastle, from which he soon emerged again, bearing in his hand an oblong envelope. From this he carefully withdrew a paper, folded lengthwise, and, opening

it, read:

"'Latichood: Two, forty-eight, forty; south. Longitood: One hundred and forty-four, ten, ten; west. Approach island from nor'-west, and stand towards it with summit of hill bearin' south-east half-south, which leads through the passage in the barrier reef. Then haul up to south a quarter west for the mouth of the bight'—and that's enough: there's no call to read the rest to ye," he concluded abruptly.

"As you please," answered I; "I have no desire whatever to know anything more of the matter than what is absolutely necessary to enable me to navigate the brig to the spot, and afterwards to make a civilised port in the shortest possible time. I will, however, have a look at the chart, and ascertain the particular island to which those figures of yours refer."

"You might as well bring the chart up on deck, and let me see it: I'd loike to see just where we're bound to, and how long it'll take us to git there," remarked O'Gorman.

I accordingly went below, secured the chart, together with a pencil, a pair of dividers, and a parallel ruler, and took the whole on deck. Then, spreading the chart open, I pricked off the latitude and longitude given by O'Gorman, and, to my astonishment, found that the spot was located in open water.

"I am very much afraid that your information is faulty, O'Gorman," said I, pointing to the spot. "Do you see that? There is no island shown in your latitude and longitude. The nearest land to it is the Marquesas group, and Hiau—the nearest of them—is three hundred and sixty miles distant from your spot."

O'Gorman stared blankly at the chart for a full minute or more, glared suspiciously at me for nearly as long; looked at his paper again, to assure himself that he had made no mistake; and finally rapped out a string of oaths in his consternation. Then he nipped his profanity short off as a comforting reflection occurred to him.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, with a sigh of relief, "but this oiland as Oi'm talkin' about is unbeknownst, so av coorse it won't be drawed on the chart. That's all right, misther; you navigate the brig to that place, and you'll find

an oiland there, safe enough."

"But, supposing that we do *not*," I suggested; "supposing that your information happens to be incorrect; what then?"

"Ay, but it *won't* be," he snarled back; "it'll be correct, and we'll find the oiland where Oi told ye. And if we don't, why bedad it'll be the worse for you and the gal, for we'll cruise for it until we find it, if we has to cruise until the Judgment Day, like the Flyin' Dutchman!"

"All right," I said. "If the island is where you say it is, I will find it for you, never fear. If it is *not*—well, then it will *not* be found; and that is all there is about it."

"Oi tell ye it *will* be found; it *must* be found!" shouted O'Gorman, goaded to fury at the suggestion that perhaps, after all, a dire disappointment lay in store for him. "If the oiland isn't there, it's somewheres thereabouts, widin a few miles more or less; and we've got to find it afore the hooker turns her nose towards home. Now I hopes that's plain enough for ye."

And, smiting the chart a mighty blow with his clenched fist, he turned on his heel and walked forward.

It need scarcely be said that after such a dogmatic statement as this I found my anxiety greatly increased; for I by this time knew the Irishman well enough to be fully aware that no mule could be more obstinate than he, and that, having once made up his mind that his island existed, he would never abandon his search until he had found it—or something that might pass for it. And I was determined that should our search prove unsuccessful, I would at once bear up for the Marquesas, and let him take his choice from among the whole group. Indeed, for a moment I felt tempted to shape as straight a course as I could for the centre of the group, without troubling to hunt for O'Gorman's particular island at all, as I gravely doubted whether it really had an existence outside the man's own imagination. But, on the other hand, his information was drawn from a document that, while stained and discoloured with age, had every appearance—from my casual inspection of it—of being genuine; and, if so, the island might possibly exist, although uncharted. Moreover, O'Gorman had not seized the brig and become a pirate merely to satisfy

an idle curiosity as to the accuracy of the document he had produced; he was going there for a certain definite purpose; to search for something, probably; and, if so, nothing short of our arrival at that particular island would satisfy him. So, having laid off the course upon the chart, I gave it to the helmsman, and called the hands aft to trim sail.

Of our passage into the solitudes of the Pacific I have nothing to relate, save that Miss Onslow's demeanour toward me became, if possible, more perplexing and tantalising than ever. To convey a clear and accurate idea of her varying moods it would be necessary to relate in tolerably minute detail the particulars of our daily intercourse throughout the voyage—a course of procedure which would not only expand my story far beyond its proper limits, but would also entirely alter its character—I must therefore content myself with merely stating that I believe I may, without exaggeration, assert that I never found her upon any two occasions to behave in a precisely similar manner. She appeared to regulate her treatment of me by the behaviour of the men. She had long ago abandoned that almost insolent hauteur of manner that distinguished her at the outset of our acquaintance; but if the weather was fine, the wind fair, the men upon their best behaviour—as sometimes happened—*in* short, *if* things were going well with me in other respects, she invariably kept me at arm's-length by a certain indefinable, but none the less unmistakable, coolness, indifference, and distance of manner just sufficiently pronounced to suggest a desire to be left to herself. But in proportion as difficulties, anxieties, and vexations arose, so did her manner warm to me until there were times when it became almost caressingly tender; so that, as my passion for her grew, I sometimes felt almost tempted to feign an anxiety or a distress that did not exist, for the mere delight of finding her manner warming to me. But I take credit to myself that I always resisted the temptation, fighting against it as a thing to yield to which would be mean and unmanly on my part.

In this strange and contradictory condition of alternate peace, rendered insipid by Miss Onslow's coolness, and anxiety converted into happiness unspeakable by the warmth and tenderness of her sympathy, I carried the brig toward the spot indicated in O'Gorman's document; and at noon on a certain day my observations showed that we had arrived within sixty miles of it. The weather was then brilliantly fine, with a gentle breeze out from about west-north-west, that wafted the brig along over the low, long

mounds of the Pacific swell at a rate of about five knots; consequently, if the island happened to be in the position assigned to it, we ought to reach it about midnight. O'Gorman's desire to be made acquainted with our exact position daily had been growing ever since we had shifted our helm after rounding the Horn, beginning as a condition of languid curiosity, which had strengthened into a state of feverish restlessness and anxiety that, on the day in question, as soon as I had conveyed to him the customary information, found vent in an order that a man should go aloft and maintain a lookout from the topgallant yard until the island should be sighted, the remainder of the crew being set to work during the afternoon to rouse out and bend the cables, and to attend to the various other matters incidental to the approach of a vessel to a port. He also had the spare spars overhauled and suitable ones selected for the purpose of erecting tents in conjunction with the brig's old sails, from all of which I inferred that our stay at the island—should we happen to find it—would be a somewhat protracted one.

As to the probability of our finding the place, I was exceedingly doubtful; for although I was well aware that hitherto unknown islands were still occasionally being discovered in the Pacific, I was equally well aware that these new islands were almost invariably low, and of insignificant dimensions, being, in fact, merely coral reefs that have been gradually lifted above the surface of the ocean; whereas O'Gorman's document contained mention of a *hill*, and the presence of a hill argued a probable existence of ages, and a consequently corresponding likelihood of comparatively early discovery.

But at two bells in the second dog-watch, that night, all doubt was put an end to by a sudden, startling cry from the lookout on the fore-topgallant yard of:

"Land ho; right ahead!"

I was on deck at the time, and far from expecting to hear such a cry; indeed so incredulous was I still that I quite concluded the man had allowed his imagination to run away with him, and was mistaking the shoulder of some low-lying cloud for distant land. So I hailed him with:

"Topgallant yard, there! are you quite sure that what you see is land, and

not a hummock of cloud?"

"Yes, sir," he shouted back; "I'm *quite* sure of it. I've been watchin' it growin' for the last quarter of a hour or more, and it haven't changed its shape the least bit all that time; only growed the leastest bit bigger and clearer."

Meanwhile, O'Gorman had sprung into the rigging and was by this time clawing his way over the rim of the top. Another minute, and he was on the topgallant yard, alongside the other man, peering ahead into the fast gathering dusk, under the sharp of his hand. He stared at it for a good five minutes; then, shouting down "It's all right, mates; it's land, and no mistake!" he swung himself on to the backstay, and came down on deck by way of it. He no sooner reached the deck than he plunged into the forecastle, from which he presently emerged again, bearing in his hand a packet that I presently recognised as his precious document. He came straight aft to me with it, and said:

"Now, misther, I want ye to get a bit of paper and write down the directions that Oi'll read out to ye. Oi'm all right in deep wather, and wid plenty of say-room to come and go upon; but whin it comes to navigatin' narrow channels, and kapin' clear of the rocks, and takin' a vessel to her anchorage, bedad I'm nowhere. So I'll be obliged to ask ye to write down the instructions that Oi've got here, and then ye'll take command of the brig until she's safe at anchor."

"Very well," I said. "Are the instructions very long?"

"Two or three dozen words 'll cover the lot," answered the Irishman.

"All right," said I; "fire away." And drawing a pencil and paper from my pocket, I prepared to copy down whatever he might read to me.

"'Approach island from nor'-west,'" began O'Gorman, "'and stand towards it wid summit of hill bearin' south-east, half-south; which leads through the passage in the barrier reef. Then haul up to south a quarter west, for the mouth of the bight at the bottom of the bay. Stand boldly in until ye come abreast of the big rock at the mouth of the bight, when clew up and furl everything. Follow the bight until ye reach the lagoon, when ye may anchor annywhere not closer than a dozen fadoms of the oiland. The

gems'—oh, bedad, but that's another matther intoirely," he hastily concluded.

"The directions seem explicit enough," said I; "and as no mention is made of any dangers to be avoided I suppose there are none. All the same, we shall need daylight for the job of taking the brig to the berth mentioned, so I shall stand on until four bells in the first watch, and then heave-to for the remainder of the night. At daylight we will fill away again and work round to the nor'-west side of the island, when, if the water happens to be clear, we shall perhaps be able to see the bottom from aloft, and thus safely pilot the vessel to her anchorage. I will con her myself from the fore-topmast crosstrees."

At four bells—ten o'clock—that night, the island showed through the clear darkness upon the horizon as an irregularly-shaped pyramid, with a peak nearly in the centre of it, rising to a height which I estimated at about six or seven hundred feet. The island itself was at that time some ten miles distant, and, measured from end to end, as we then looked at it, I took it to be about four miles across. We hove the brig to, and tried a cast first with the hand lead, and then with the deep-sea lead, but got no bottom, at which I was by no means surprised, as I had already heard that many of the islands in the Pacific—especially those of coral formation—rise sheer from the very bottom of the sea.

At daybreak the next morning I was called by the steward, and, dressing, went on deck, to find that the weather was as it had been all through the preceding day, namely, a light breeze from the westward, with a cloudless sky of crystalline clearness overhead, and a long, low sluggish swell undulating athwart the gently-ruffled surface of the ocean. The island now bore about four points on our weather quarter, some sixteen miles distant; so we filled the main-topsail, got way upon the ship, and hauled up to "full-and-by," when it was found that we should just handsomely fetch clear of the most leeward point of the land.

Viewed by the early daylight, the island presented a most attractive appearance, rising against the background of sky as a picture painted in an infinite variety of delicate purple tones of shadow, through which, with the aid of the glass, could be made out the several declivities, gorges, precipices, and ravines that went to make up the contour of the country. It

was thickly wooded everywhere, seemingly from the water's edge to within some eighty feet or so of the summit, the latter rising naked into the clear air. But attractive as it looked under the soft, subdued light of the early dawn, in the delicate monochrome of distance, and the absence of direct sunlight, it looked even more beautiful when, after sunrise, as we approached it more closely, the countless subtle variations of tint in the foliage, from this in brightest sunlight, to that in deepest, richest purple shadow, became manifest; and so powerful an impression did it make upon the men that I overheard them freely discussing the desirability of making a lengthened sojourn there.

"Yes," said I, when O'Gorman, carried away by his enthusiasm at the beauty of the place, hinted at such a possibility, "that is all very well, and sounds very attractive just now; but has it yet occurred to you that yonder island may be peopled by a race of savages who, if we give them the opportunity, will gladly make a barbecue of all hands?"

"Phew! begorra, but Oi nivver thought of that!" he ejaculated in sudden dismay. "Oi'm obliged to ye for the hint, misther. We'll load the guns and muskets, and make ready generally for the blagguards, if they have the impidence to be there."

And forthwith he shambled away for'ard, unceremoniously cutting into the holiday plans that the men were busily concocting, and instructing them to load the guns and arm themselves in readiness for any emergency that might arise.

As we stood in toward the land I kept a bright lookout for smoke, for huts peeping from among the trees, for canoes hauled up on the beach, or any other indications of the presence of human life on the island, but could see nothing. At this, however, I was not very greatly surprised, for although we were on the lee side of the island, the surf was breaking so heavily all along the shore as to render it impracticable for canoes. If the island happened to be inhabited, the inhabitants would probably be found located on its weather side, which, according to O'Gorman's document, was protected from the surf by a barrier reef, with a passage through it.

As we stood on it became apparent that the island was nearer five than four miles long—as I had estimated it to be on the previous night—that its

general trend was from north-east to south-west, and that, if surveyed and laid down upon the chart, it would present a somewhat flat and irregular crescent-like plan. The barrier reef sprang from the north-east extremity of the island, sweeping seaward on the arc of a circle on its north-western side, and uniting again with the island at its south-western extremity, forming a lagoon of the same length as the island, and about three-quarters of a mile wide at its widest point. The barrier reef, in fact, constituted a magnificent natural breakwater, upon which the surf eternally broke in a loud, sullen roar of everlasting thunder, while inside it the water was smooth as a mill pond, shoaling very gradually from the reef to the shore of the island, which consisted of a narrow beach of dazzling white sand, bordered by a fringe of thousands of cocoa-nut palms, the long, plume-like branches of which swayed gently in the soft, warm morning breeze. It was on this side of the island, I concluded, that, if anywhere, traces of inhabitants would be found, and I scanned the shore carefully and anxiously through the ship’s glass in search of such; but nothing of the kind was to be seen; and I at length closed the telescope with a clash, relieved to believe that, whatever anxieties there might be awaiting me in the immediate future, trouble with hostile natives was not to be one of them.

Chapter Eleven.

The island.

Standing on as we were going, we ratched past the island until it was left a couple of miles astern of us, when we tacked ship, and brought the land on our lee beam. Then, steering full and by, half an hour's sailing sufficed to bring the summit of the hill to the required compass-bearing of south-east, half-south, whereupon we bore dead away for it, and, leaving O'Gorman in charge of the deck, I sprang into the fore rigging and mounted to the crosstrees, from which commanding elevation I intended to con the brig to her anchorage. Miss Onslow was on deck by this time, drinking in, with eager, flashing eyes, the beauty and brilliant colour of the picture presented by the emerald island in its setting of sapphire sea; but as I sprang into the rigging I noticed that her gaze followed me; and when I swung myself out to clamber over the rim of the top—a performance which, to the eye of the landsman, appears distinctly hazardous—she suddenly clasped her hands upon her breast, as though in terror for my safety. The action was trifling enough, perhaps, yet I was disposed to regard it as not quite insignificant, since I had often stood by her side as she had watched—with evidently no stronger emotion than amusement—others perform the same feat.

Upon reaching my perch I found that we were still in deep water, no sign whatever of the bottom being visible through the depths of the exquisitely beautiful, clear, crystalline blue; but ahead, at the very fringe of the breakers that were dashing themselves into diamond and pearl-white spray upon the stubborn rampart of the barrier reef, there was a change of colour that told of shoaling depths; and a qualm of anxiety swept over me as I pictured to myself what would probably happen if, sweeping in before the wind as we were, we should plunge into that belt of seething white water, and find that there was not depth enough to float us. For a few minutes I was full of anxiety; but presently, as we slid nearer and nearer still to the reef, I detected the opening—a narrow passage barely wide enough, apparently, for a boat to traverse, but of unbroken water, merely flecked here and there with the froth of the boil on either hand. We were running as straight for it as though it had been in sight for an

hour; and as we were following the directions given in O'Gorman's paper, this fact seemed to point to an accurate knowledge of the place on the part of the author of those directions; which assumption I fervently hoped would be confirmed in every particular.

As we bore rapidly down upon the reef, the passage through it gradually assumed its true proportion of width, and I saw that there was ample room to allow of the passage, not only of the brig, but of a couple of line-of-battle ships abreast. The island had the appearance of being simply the topmost ridge of a mountain rising with a tolerably even continuous slope from the bottom of the sea; and the barrier reef was merely an excrescence or wall of coral built on to one side of it, and founded at a depth of ten fathoms below the surface of the ocean, as our lead presently told us. The basin thus formed had, during the course of ages, become partially filled with sand, forming a beautifully smooth, and even white floor, gradually sloping upward toward the surface from the reef to the shore of the island. All this was quite plain to me as we drove in through the break in the long, sweeping circle of foam; and, once in still water, I was able from my perch to see the sandy bottom as clearly as though it had been bare of water, every tiny fish and every fragment of weed that passed within a hundred feet of us being perfectly visible.

Once fairly through the opening in the reef and into the basin, we hauled up to south a quarter west, which course brought our jib-boom pointing to what then had the appearance of the mouth of an insignificant stream. But as we slid athwart the basin the opening assumed an appearance of increasingly greater importance, until when within half a mile of it I saw that it was really the comparatively narrow entrance of a fairly spacious little bay, or loch, penetrating for some distance into the land. Soon afterwards the big rock mentioned in O'Gorman's document separated itself from the background of bush and trees with which it had hitherto been merged, and proclaimed itself as an obelisk-like monolith of basalt rearing its apex to a height of some ninety feet above the water level. When fairly abreast of this the canvas was clewed up, and the brig slid into the loch with the way that she had on her. This loch, or channel, wound gradually round for a length of about a cable, and then widened into a nearly circular lagoon about half a mile in diameter, in the very centre of which stood a small islet, thickly overgrown with trees and dense jungle. Keeping this islet on our starboard beam, at a distance of

some twenty fathoms, we slowly circled round it until it was immediately between us and the outlet to the larger lagoon, when we let go our anchor in four fathoms, amid the exultant cheers of the men, who thus found themselves triumphantly at their destination. That we actually had found the identical island referred to in O'Gorman's paper there could be no shadow of doubt, since the landmarks mentioned agreed perfectly; and my strongest emotion was one of surprise that an island of such dimensions should thus far have escaped the notice of the hydrographers.

All hands now went to breakfast; and when the men again turned to, upon the conclusion of their meal, their first act was to swarm aloft and unbend the whole of the canvas, from the royals down—a proceeding which seemed to confirm my previous surmise that they intended their sojourn upon the island to be of some duration. This task occupied them the entire morning; but when they knocked off at eight bells for dinner, the brig's spars and stays were entirely denuded of their canvas. The Irishman had some little difficulty in persuading his satellites to go to work again after dinner, there being a very evident tendency on the part of all hands to take matters easily now, after their long spell at sea; but he eventually got them out from the shadow of the bulwarks and upon their feet again, when the boats were all lowered, the entire stock of the brig's sails, new and old, struck into them, the spare booms launched overboard and towed ashore; and the remainder of the day was spent in erecting tents upon a small open patch of grass, upon the mainland—if I may so call it—that happened to be immediately abreast the brig. Miss Onslow and myself were thus left alone together on board, nobody seeming to take either of us into consideration in the making of their arrangements. There were arguments both in favour of and against this arrangement; for instance, our cabins aboard the brig were unpleasantly hot and stuffy in the parallels that we had now reached, and I had no doubt that we should have found sleeping ashore in a nice, airy tent very much more comfortable; but on the other hand, if we were to be allowed to occupy the brig we should at least be by ourselves, and the risk of nocturnal intrusion would be very much less; I was therefore disposed to consider that, on the whole, matters were more satisfactory as they were. Yet it went against the grain with me that we should be so completely ignored, and our comfort and convenience so completely neglected, by a crowd of graceless, unmannerly louts, and I was casting about for some

means whereby I could compel at least a reasonable measure of consideration from them, when fortune unexpectedly intervened to help me. It happened in this wise.

After conveying ashore the sails and spars, and erecting the tents, the men came off to the brig again, and took ashore their chests and belongings generally, together with an abundant supply of food, and a still more abundant supply of liquor, with the natural result that a regular drunken orgy occurred that night, of such a character as to compel my gratitude that Miss Onslow was not an occupant of any portion of that camp. As it was, I deemed it only prudent to maintain a watch until the riot ashore had ceased, and the rioters had safely subsided into a drunken slumber. But my companion and I had to prepare our evening meal for ourselves, that night, or we should have gone supperless to our cabins. And, in like manner, we also had to prepare our own breakfast next morning.

That simple meal was over some considerable time before there was any stir or sign of movement in the camp on shore; but at length the cook appeared, still, apparently, in a semi-drunken condition, and by and by we saw the men sitting down to breakfast. They occupied an unconscionably long time over their meal, and when it was over most of the party lit their pipes and staggered away back into the sheltering shade of their tents again. There were two or three exceptions, one of whom was O'Gorman, who, after lighting his pipe, strolled down to the water's edge with a paper in his hand that looked very much like the paper from which he had quoted the instructions for making the island, and which he appeared to be studying most intently, with a dubious air that, even as I watched him, rapidly changed into one of steadily-increasing perplexity.

At length, with a gesture of savage impatience, he folded up the paper, slipped it into his breast-pocket, and went off to the tent, from which he presently emerged again followed by two very sick-and-sorry, unwilling-looking members of his gang. The trio tumbled into one of the boats, shoved off, and headed directly for the brig. Miss Onslow was on deck with me, but as soon as I saw that the little party intended boarding the brig, I directed her attention to their condition, and requested her to retire out of sight to her cabin, which she did, very submissively, somewhat to

my surprise.

The distance from the shore to the brig was but short, and in a few minutes the boat was alongside, and O'Gorman on deck, his two companions electing to spare themselves the fatigue of dragging themselves up the brig's side, and stretching themselves out upon the thwarts instead, with their caps drawn over their faces, in which position they almost immediately fell asleep.

It was evident from O'Gorman's embarrassed manner as he approached me that he had something to say, or some proposition to make, without exactly knowing how best to set about it. It seemed to me that he had unexpectedly found himself in some way at a serious disadvantage, but was anxious above all things to prevent my discovering his predicament. Then he was civil, which I had learned to accept as an unerring indication that he wished to inveigle me into consciously or unconsciously rendering him a service.

"The top o' the mornin' to ye, misther," he began. "I hopes that you and the lady slept well last night, in this quiet, snug little harbour; havin' the brig all to yourselves, too."

"Ay," retorted I; "and having to prepare our own supper last night, and our breakfast this morning. As for quiet, the place is quiet enough; it is the drunken blackguards occupying it that make all the row. Oh yes, we slept well enough, thank you—after the crowd ashore had guzzled themselves into a state of drunken insensibility."

"Begorra, thin," he exclaimed, in affected surprise, "did the shpalpeens keep ye awake? Whoy, Oi'd have thought you'd have heard the sorra a sound out here. But it's not goin' to happen again; it was just a bit of a jollification we threated ourselves to upon the strength of foindin' the oiland all right; but there'll be no more of it—barrin', maybe, a bit of a spree when our work's done here, and we're ready to sail for home again. And, as to your breakfast, bedad Oi forgot it intoirely, but Oi'll send the shteward off, wid ordhers that he's to do nothin' but just wait upon ye and the lady, and make things comfortable for ye."

"What the mischief does he want me to do for him?" wondered I. "It must

be something of especial moment, or he would never be so extraordinarily civil and obliging!”

But I merely answered:

“Thanks! It was part of our agreement, you will remember, that we were to be properly looked after, and waited upon. And, while we are upon the subject, there is another matter I should like to mention. It is exceedingly close and stuffy below, in this climate, and I should therefore like to have an awning, or something of the kind, rigged up abaft here, so that I may be able to arrange sleeping places on deck for Miss Onslow and myself while we are lying here.”

“An awning is it?” exclaimed O’Gorman, with effusion. “Begorra ye shall have that same, and welcome as the flowers of spring. Ay, and Oi’ll send ye off a topsail to throw over the spanker-boom and so make ye two illigant staterooms, one on each side the deck.”

“It certainly must be some very extraordinary service that he wishes me to render him!” thought I. But I answered:

“Very well. As soon as the people are sober enough to behave themselves, send them off with the canvas and some lashing, and I will tell them what I want done.”

“Oi’ll do that same,” answered O’Gorman. “And now,” he continued, “I suppose you and the lady ’d loike a run ashore, wouldn’t ye?”

“Yes, certainly,” I answered, “but not to-day. We will wait until everybody has had time to get completely sober again. I do not choose that the lady should be subjected to the annoyance of encountering, and perhaps being insulted by, some half-drunken lout. But you will not require all the boats, I suppose, so you had better send off the smallest one, with a pair of oars, that we may have the means of going to and from the ship and the shore at our own pleasure, and independently of your people.”

This was too much for the fiery temper of the Irishman; genial and obliging as he had striven to be, it had been clearly apparent to me that he was growing increasingly restive under the lengthening list of my demands, and now this cool requisition of a boat was the last straw that

broke the camel's back—or, in other words, exhausted the Irishman's slender stock of patience; he looked at me with blazing eyes for a moment, and then rapped out:

"Boat is it, thin? The divil a boat will I let ye have; if ye want a boat, go ashore and build one for yoursilf. And go to the divil and get your awning, and your canvas, and your lashings, and your cook, too, begorra! for sorra a one of anny of thim will ye get from me! I was a fool to promise ye annything, but I wanted your help, and I thought Oi'd get it by humourin' ye. But *now*, be jabers, Oi'll *make* ye help me, whither ye like it or not; and the divil a thing will I do for ye in return!"

"What is it you want me to do for you?" asked I quietly, determined to keep my temper whatever might happen, and curious to know what service it could possibly be that had caused the fellow to constrain himself so far in the endeavour to conciliate me.

"I want ye to do this—and, understand me, ye'll *have* to do it, whither it plaises ye or not," he answered. "There's a spot somewhere on that bit of an oiland,"—indicating the small islet opposite which the brig was moored—"that I want to find. Whin I first read the paper that speaks of it, it seemed the simplest thing in the worruld to come here and put me fut on it; but now that Oi'm here, and have seen the place, by me sowl I can't see or understand how Oi'm to go about it. And no more can anny of the rest of us. So the long and the short of it is, misther, that you'll have to find the place for us."

"What do your instructions direct you to do?" demanded I.

"My instructions, is it?" repeated O'Gorman. "Oh, begorra, they're simple enough. They say,"—here he paused, fumbled in his breast-pocket, and presently produced the dirty, greasy slip of paper, with the appearance of which I was now becoming familiar, and carefully unfolding it, read:

"'Dhraw a loine from one black rock to the other, and on this loine project another to the summit of the peak, makin' an angle of sixty-foive degrees to the west'ard. Dig there, and,'—well, the rest has got nothing to do with it."

"Um!" said I musingly; "I am not surprised to learn that none of you men

can understand such directions as those; I am not at all sure that I understand them myself. At the same time there is hint enough to put me on the right track. And now, O'Gorman," continued I, throwing all the impressiveness I could muster into my manner, "I want you to listen to me, and mark well what I say, for I am in downright earnest, and no mistake. I gather, from the whole drift of this adventure, that your object in coming here is to hunt for a certain buried treasure, the hiding-place of which is indicated on that paper in your hand. Now, I have brought you to this spot, and it is exceedingly probable that I may be able to help you to find the treasure—if it is still where it was originally hidden—while I am absolutely certain that you will *never* find it without my help—and, when all is done, I can help you to convey your booty successfully home. Now, understand me, I want no reward whatever, either in the shape of a share of the treasure, or otherwise, for affording you this assistance; but I tell you plainly that I will have respectful treatment, and perfect freedom, both for myself and for the lady, together with every one of those little comforts and conveniences for which I have asked. Stop, I have not finished yet," I continued, as I saw that he was about to bluster. "You have been labouring under the delusion, all along, that Miss Onslow's presence among us affords you an effective means of coercing me to do certain things for you. Now, it is time that such an impression should be removed. I am perfectly willing to help you in any and every way, so long as we are both treated with civility and consideration; but if you, or any one of your men, should dare to molest Miss Onslow in any way, or show her the slightest incivility, from that moment I will cease to help or do anything whatever for you—which means, that even should you succeed in obtaining the treasure that you are after, you will never be able to take it home and enjoy it. Now, think over what I have said, and let me know your decision as soon as you have made up your mind. But do not you ever again attempt to coerce me by uttering threats of violence to the lady, for it will not do! My chief stipulation is that she shall be as absolutely secure from insult or injury among you as though she were under the protection of her father's roof, and I mean that she shall be so, or I will send the whole lot of you to the devil, even if I have to accompany you."

To defy the whole gang in so uncompromising a manner was undoubtedly a bold game to play, but it proved to be the right thing to do; for as I stared the Irishman unshrinkingly in the eyes I saw his gaze

wavering under mine, and presently his scowling expression relaxed into a smile as he exclaimed:

“Begorra, Misther Conyers, ye’re a brave man intoirely to brazen the thing out in that stoyle, one against sixteen of us. But it’s yourself that knows right well that ye’ve got the pull of us, by raison of your eddicashin, so I suppose we may as well let ye have your own way, and make no more bones about it. All we want is your help to find the threasure and get it safely home; and if ye’ll give us that ye may have your own way in ivery thing else; it’ll make no real differ to us.”

“Very well,” said I; “you are now speaking like a reasonable and sensible man, and it is a bargain between us that I shall afford you the fullest possible assistance to carry out your schemes—so far as they may be lawful—upon the terms and conditions which I have stipulated. Now, if you will let me have your paper, in order that I may study it as a whole, I shall perhaps be able to gather the writer’s full meaning, and thus enable you to find the exact spot of which you are in search. Meanwhile, you had better go ashore again, and give your immediate attention to the few little matters that I mentioned just now, before you lost your temper.”

The fellow hesitated a moment, gazing doubtfully and still somewhat distrustfully at me, and then, with a sigh, handed over the paper to my keeping. Then, without a word, he turned away, went down over the side into his boat, and was forthwith pulled ashore.

As the boat shoved off from the brig’s side, I opened the paper and glanced at its contents. The complete document read as follows:—

“Latitude 2 degrees 48 minutes 40 seconds South. Longitude 144 degrees 10 minutes 10 seconds West. Approach island from north-west, and stand toward it with summit of hill bearing South-East by a half South, which leads through the passage in the barrier reef. Then haul up to South by a quarter West for the mouth of the bight at the bottom of the bay. Stand boldly in until abreast of the big rock at the mouth of the bight, when clew up and furl everything. Follow the bight until you reach the lagoon, when anchor anywhere not closer than within a dozen fathoms of the island. The gems are buried in the earth at a spot which may thus be identified. Draw a line from one black rock to the other; and on this line

project another to the summit of the peak, making an angle of sixty-five degrees to the westward. Dig there, and the gems will be found at a depth of three feet below the surface. I write this that the treasure may not be lost should I die ere I find opportunity to secure it.

“John Withicombe.”

The document was written in the calligraphy of an evidently educated man; and now that I had it in its complete form in my hands I began to regard the whole matter in a very different light from what I had hitherto done; up to now I had been disposed to regard the adventure as one that was more than likely to prove a wild-goose chase; but as I noted the evidences of intelligence and education that the document revealed on the part of the writer it suddenly dawned upon me that after all there might be something in it. But who was John Withicombe, and how did he become acquainted with the existence of the treasure? Did he hide it himself, or did he discover its whereabouts by accident? And where did the treasure come from?

I was still puzzling over these questions when I was startled out of my reverie by a light step beside me; and, turning, I beheld Miss Onslow regarding me with eyes so brilliant that I could almost fancy they were gemmed with tears.

“So,” she exclaimed playfully, “you have been fighting another wordy battle with that Irish wretch; and this time, having kept your temper under control, you have emerged victorious from the conflict. But oh, Mr Conyers,” she continued, her voice suddenly changing to a tone of deep earnestness, “I cannot express to you how profoundly sorry I am that you should thus continually be harassed and worried on my account—oh yes, I heard everything; I was in the cabin, and the skylight was open, so I could not help hearing what passed. I know that these men are taking advantage of my presence to coerce and terrorise you by means of threats of violence toward me, and I cannot help feeling how dreadfully you are hampered and embarrassed by having me to look after and protect. But you have never wavered or faltered for one instant, you have forgotten all about yourself and have thought wholly and only of me; and —and—I think it only right you should know how greatly I appreciate your goodness, and—how—how—grateful I am for all that you have done and

are still doing for me."

There undoubtedly *were* tears in her eyes as she concluded; but a certain wild, delirious hope, that had half formed itself as I noted the enthusiasm with which she had begun her speech, died out again as she faltered and hesitated, and finally concluded in as sober, impassive, conventional a tone as though she had been thanking me for procuring a cab for her on a rainy night. I hastened to assure her that she was quite mistaken in supposing that her presence aboard the brig was an embarrassment to me; that, on the contrary, it was the only pleasant feature of the whole adventure, so far as I was concerned; and then, fearing lest her gracious mood should tempt me to say more than she would be willing to listen to, I hastily turned the conversation toward O'Gorman's document, which I placed in her hands, asking her to read it and tell me what she thought of it.

She read it carefully through once, and then handed it back to me with the remark:

"I think it is perfectly genuine—everything appears to point in that direction—and I have no doubt whatever that the gems will be found in the spot indicated."

"I am now inclined to that opinion myself," said I. "But how is the spot indicated to be found? The writer, you will observe, mentions two black rocks, but he furnishes no clue whatever as to their whereabouts. Where are we to look for these rocks? and how are we to identify them?"

"That particular passage," answered she, "is, I admit, decidedly obscure. Yet I think the context furnishes a clue to its elucidation. It reads thus: —'anchor anywhere not closer than within a dozen fathoms of the island,'—which I take to mean this small island, or islet, opposite us. The island was evidently the most prominent object in the writer's mind when he penned the words immediately following those that I have just quoted; and I therefore conclude that it is somewhere in that small island—a most suitable hiding-place, I think you will admit—that the treasure lies concealed. And it is there also, I think, that the two black rocks should be searched for. As to how the rocks are to be identified, the writer speaks of them in such a manner as to suggest that there is no possibility of

mistaking them; and I therefore infer that there are two rocks—*and two only*—that can possibly be associated with the instructions given in the paper."

"Yes," said I; "I quite see your line of reasoning; and I believe you are right. At all events, the suggestion is so reasonable that it is quite worth following; and it is upon those lines that I shall advise O'Gorman to go to work. Ah, by Jove! look there! I believe the fellow actually means to stick to his bargain at last: here come the men with the sails and so on that I have asked for; and to-night I hope you will be able to rest in comparative coolness out here on deck, with an awning, and all other proper shelter from the dew."

The boat, with half a dozen hands in her, was soon alongside, and by midday we had not only an awning spread over the whole of the after-deck, from the taffrail to the mainmast, but also a spacious canvas sleeping-tent under it, divided into two compartments, and so arranged that my companion might enjoy the most absolute privacy. The steward also came off, and resumed possession of his usual quarters, and as he was one of the quietest and most respectable men of the party, was as good a cook as "the doctor" himself, and seemed genuinely anxious to do his best for us, it soon appeared as though we were about to be favoured with a spell of peace and quietness.

Meanwhile, O'Gorman religiously refrained from obtruding himself upon us until I had dismissed the boat's crew upon the completion of their labours, when he came aboard, ostensibly to ascertain whether everything had been done to my satisfaction, but actually—as I soon discovered—to claim the assistance that I had undertaken to afford him. And this, of course, I was more than ready to give, now that I had obtained from him what I wanted, being feverishly anxious to bring the entire adventure to a conclusion as speedily as possible, in order that I might be free to convey Miss Onslow in all safety and honour to her father's arms. So I threw myself heartily into the spirit of the search, accompanying O'Gorman and a search-party to the islet, and actively participating in a hunt for the two black rocks. But, after persevering for more than three hours, it became evident that the little spot was so completely overgrown with tangled, impenetrable jungle that but one course was open to us, that of clearing the ground by cutting down and

destroying the network of creepers that choked up the spaces between the tree-trunks. This proved to be a lengthy and arduous undertaking, it being necessary to cut the undergrowth away in blocks, as it were, and then drag the detached masses to the water's edge and tumble them overboard. But after four days of this work, at the end of which there was very little result to show for our labour, we found evidences of the islet having at some previous period been cleared by means of fire, the workers having encountered several charred and blackened tree-stumps; so we determined to adopt a similar course, the vegetation being dry and in excellent condition for such an experiment. Accordingly, the undergrowth was attacked with knives and axes on the weather side of the island, and the detached masses, instead of being hove overboard, were allowed to remain and thoroughly dry in the sun. Then, when our accumulation of dry brushwood seemed sufficient for our purpose, it was set alight, and in half an hour the entire island was a blazing mass, there being just wind enough to fan the flames and cause them to spread. In two hours the operation was complete, the once verdant and beautiful spot having been converted into an ugly patch of flat and fire-blackened soil, some fifty acres in extent, with two conspicuous outcrops of black rock protruding from the ashes and débris of the conflagration.

There was very little doubt in my mind that the two outcrops of rock rendered visible by the destruction of the vegetation upon the islet were those referred to by John Withicombe, and I said as much to O'Gorman, whose impatience to test the truth of my conviction was such that he would have had me go to work with my rods and sextant that same afternoon; but when we attempted to land upon the islet we found that although the ashes were black on the surface they were still a dull glowing red in the heart of them, and so hot that they were not yet to be stood upon, leaving out of the question the veil of acrid, suffocating, blue smoke that still wreathed and curled from out them.

Our enforced detention, however, was by no means wasted time, for now that the surface of the island was bare, and I could see what I had to work upon, I could also see that several long, slender ranging-poles would be necessary, and the obtaining and preparation of these kept all hands busy for the remainder of that day. And immediately after breakfast, next morning, I got out my sextant, and, all hands of us landing upon the islet, we went to work with a will. First of all, I made my way to

one of the masses of rock, and climbed up on it. Both masses had well-defined “peaks,” and I came to the conclusion that the instruction to “draw a line from one black rock to the other” would mean that a *straight* line must be drawn, or *ranged*, from one of these well-defined peaks to the other. So I temporarily removed the telescope from my sextant, and, levelling it upon the extreme peak, or highest point of the rock I occupied, brought it to bear upon the corresponding peak of the other rock. Then I sent a man along with instructions to start from the other rock and walk toward me, halting whenever I raised my hand and sticking a rod perpendicularly in the ground. I met with a great deal more difficulty than I had anticipated in securing the satisfactory execution of this apparently simple operation, but by keeping the telescope levelled from the one peak and bearing upon the other, and making the man hold the rods truly vertical, I at length succeeded in ranging out a perfectly straight line from the one rock to the other. Then, setting the limb of my sextant to an angle of sixty-five degrees, and stationing myself at certain points in the line—which I was easily able to do by means of the rods—I at length found the exact point required, which I marked by driving a stake into the ground. “There,” said I to O’Gorman, “is your point—if my interpretation of the instructions given in your paper is the correct one; and at a depth of a yard or thereabouts below the surface you ought to find your treasure. If you do not find it at this precise spot I would recommend you to try a little to right and left, in line with the poles that, as you see, I have left standing.”

Chapter Twelve.

Finding the treasure.

O’Gorman and his entire train of satellites being now upon the islet, ready to dig until they had reached the buried treasure, I thought the opportunity a good one to afford Miss Onslow a run ashore; so, taking possession of the boat that O’Gorman had graciously intimated I might use—the same craft that had done us such good service ere we fell in with the *Governor Smeaton*—I paddled alongside the brig, and suggested to the young lady that we should devote the remainder of the day to an exploration of the island proper. To this my companion acceded

with alacrity and evident delight; so, packing a small basket with everything required for a substantial luncheon, I stepped the boat's mast, set her canvas, and we got under way, working out through the loch into the big lagoon formed by the barrier reef, and then coasting alongshore until we reached a promising-looking landing-place. Here we ran the boat up on the beach, secured her, and, stepping ashore, decided to lunch before proceeding farther, since it was by this time drawing well on toward midday. Then, having made a hearty meal, we plunged into the jungle, with the idea of reaching the summit of the hill if we could hit upon a practicable path. Viewed from the sea, the island had the appearance of being as completely and thickly overgrown with jungle as had been the islet where O'Gorman and his gang were hunting for treasure, but upon entering the forest we found that it was not so, and that, by keeping our eyes about us, we might manage with very little difficulty to work our way through the comparatively open spaces that occurred at frequent intervals. And we had not proceeded very far when we were fortunate enough to fall athwart a tiny stream, with just the merest trickle of water in it now, but which was evidently, in the rainy season, a roaring, raging torrent. The bed of this stream was full of small boulders, that served very well as stepping-stones, and as we knew we could not go astray if we followed the course of the stream, and as we knew, moreover, that by so doing we should be constantly rising, and as, further, we should thus avoid being impeded by the necessity to wind our way through the jungle, we decided to adopt this course, with the happy result that in about an hour's time we found ourselves close to the summit, and above the line of vegetation. There still remained about a hundred feet of climbing to be done, however, ere we could attain the summit; and this climbing had to be accomplished on a slope of some sixty degrees, composed of fine, loose scoria, that gave way and slid downward as soon as stepped upon. I did not like to be beaten, however, but soon found that, without poles to assist us, we should never make any progress; so we contented ourselves with a walk round the peak—which I now felt convinced was the crater of a quiescent if not extinct volcano—and a leisurely survey of the magnificent panorama that lay spread out beneath us. By the simple process of walking round the peak we obtained a view of the entire island, with its lagoon and barrier reef; and so clear and pure was the atmosphere that we could not only see but also identify every member of the working-party. They were still digging vigorously; but even as we watched them there arose a sudden commotion and an excited rushing

together among them, and a second or two later the sound of their voices reached us; but although it was perfectly evident that the speakers were powerfully excited, we were too far distant from them to distinguish what was said; and presently work was resumed for about ten minutes, at the expiration of which several men leaped down into the excavation, and a minute or two later we saw a not very bulky object lifted out of the hole and laid on the surface of the ground, amid the frantic cheers of the entire party.

“The treasure!” I exclaimed. “They have found it, by Jove! And they have not been very long about it, either. Well, I am sincerely glad and thankful, for now we may hope soon to be homeward-bound, or at least bound to some spot from which it will be possible for us to secure passage to Calcutta.”

I spoke with some enthusiasm; but my companion did not respond; she remained silent, gazing dreamily into the far distance; and when I looked at her, awaiting some answering remark, I saw that she was quite pale, that she was biting her under-lip in a fruitless endeavour to stay its quivering, and that there were undoubtedly tears in her eyes. She averted her face quickly, but I was confident that I was not mistaken as to those indications of emotion. Presently she spoke.

“I am glad,” said she, “that you find cause for rejoicing in the discovery that those wretches appear to have just made; and at first sight it would almost seem as though your troubles should now be nearly over. But I cannot forget that those men have been guilty of two very serious offences—first in seizing the brig from you and compelling you to navigate her to this lonely spot, and next in their act of piracy in connection with the *Marie Renaud*; and I fear—oh, I fear terribly—that by and by, when we are nearing the end of our journey, they will take some desperate step to effectually prevent your ever bearing witness against them. Have you ever thought of that as a possible danger to which you may be exposed?”

“Well, yes,” said I; “I must confess that such a contingency has suggested itself to me; but they will require my help to get their booty home and landed; and I will make it my business to discuss this matter with O’Gorman in such a manner as to convince him that he cannot do

without me. And meanwhile I must see if I cannot forestall any possible action on their part by devising some plan which will enable us to effect our escape in one of the boats when within easy distance of land."

"Do you think such a thing possible?" she demanded, in much more animated tones than those she had shortly before used.

"Why, yes," answered I. "That is to say, we must *make* it possible; we must endeavour to devise some definite scheme, to be carried out at the very first favourable opportunity, and we must then devote all our energies to so arranging matters that when the moment arrives everything will be in readiness."

We discussed this topic at some length, with no very definite result, however; and finally, as it appeared to be exercising a distinctly depressing effect upon Miss Onslow's spirits, I changed the subject, and we made our way down to the boat again, and so aboard the brig.

But as we entered the inner lagoon we found that all hands had knocked off work and had crossed to their camp; and presently O'Gorman made his appearance at the entrance of one of the tents, beckoning us to approach. I waved my hand in assent, but made as though to put Miss Onslow aboard the brig first, whereupon O'Gorman hailed that he wanted us both to land and look at what had been found. So I put a bold face upon it, and ran the boat in upon the beach, from which we walked together up to O'Gorman's tent.

As we entered, the first thing that met my gaze was a rusty and earth-grimed iron chest, measuring about two feet square by perhaps sixteen inches deep, on either side of which sat a man with a brace of cocked pistols in his belt, evidently on guard. The chest had been fastened by two heavy padlocks of distinctly antiquated design, but these had both been smashed, and the lid prised open, not without inflicting some damage to the hinges. I noticed, almost at once, that O'Gorman and his companions wore a decidedly perplexed and slightly chagrined air, and the reason therefor soon became apparent.

"So," said I, in a congratulatory tone, "you soon found your treasure, then. I hope it proves to be worth all the trouble you have taken to secure it?"

“Begorra, thin, it’s mesilf that’d be glad to be able to say ‘yis’ to that,” answered the Irishman. “But I’m puzzled; I can’t make it out,” he continued. “*This* is what we’ve found,”—giving the chest a kick that betrayed a certain amount of temper—“but beyant a gallon or so of pearls there’s nothin’ in it but pebbles; and I’d like ye to say whether you think them pebbles is worth annything or not.”

So saying, O’Gorman raised the heavy lid of the chest, disclosing an interior subdivided into four compartments by thin hardwood partitions running diagonally from corner to corner. One compartment was packed as full as it would hold of pearls, nearly all of which—if one might judge by the top layer—were of very fair size, while a few, scattered here and there, were exceptionally fine; and their exquisite satiny sheen seemed to indicate that they were all of the first water. Miss Onslow could not suppress a cry of admiration and delight as she gazed upon them—which tribute to their beauty—and consequent value—seemed to afford considerable satisfaction to the finders.

“May I touch them?” asked I of O’Gorman.

“Oh yes,” he answered, “I suppose there’s no harm in y’r touchin’ ’em, if ye wants to.”

I plunged my hand down into the heart of the compartment, turning over the pearls, and bringing others to the surface; and it appeared that they were all of pretty much the same quality and value. “Why,” said I, “here is a respectable fortune for each of you in these pearls alone, even if the ‘pebbles’ turn out to be valueless, which is scarcely likely to be the case, or they would not have been so carefully stowed away in this chest. Now, these, for example,” I continued, turning to a contiguous compartment more than half full of crystals that looked like splintered fragments of rather dull glass, “are uncut diamonds. Yes,” as I felt two or three of them between my finger and thumb, “there is no doubt about it: they have the true soapy feel; they are diamonds, and, taken in bulk, of very great value. And here, again,” as I turned to the next compartment, about as full as that containing the diamonds, “these are rubies, unless I am very greatly mistaken; while, as to these,” turning to the last compartment, “they are emeralds—and there are some beauties among them, too, apparently,” as I fished up one or two remarkably fine ones. “Why,

O’Gorman,” I exclaimed, “you are rich men—every mother’s son of you—there are sixteen handsome fortunes in this chest, fortunes big enough to set you all up as gentry, or to ruin you in double-quick time, according to the use that you make of your wealth.”

“Begorra, sorr, that’s the plisintest thing I iver heard ye say!” exclaimed the Irishman, in high glee at my verdict as to the value of the “pebbles,” while the beaming countenances of the twain on guard betrayed that their delight was fully as great as that of their leader.

There were further sounds of revelry ashore, that night, intermingled, more than once, with other sounds suggestive of altercation and quarrel; and just at sunrise, while I was taking a matutinal swim round the ship, I saw all hands march out, in somewhat formal order, along the glade upon which their camp was pitched, and disappear across the sand-spit that formed one side of the loch entrance. Ten minutes later, while I was towelling myself on the fore deck, in the seclusion afforded by the position of the galley, I was startled by what sounded like a distant volley of pistol-shots; and about half an hour afterwards I saw the crowd returning to camp by the way that they had gone. As I watched them shambling along over the somewhat uneven ground I was struck by something rather unusual in their appearance; and presently I discovered what it was: there seemed to be not quite so many of them. By the time that I had slipped into my clothes the party had arrived pretty nearly abreast of the brig, and were close enough, to enable me not only to count but to identify them. *They were now only fourteen in number; and the two absent ones were the men whom I had seen guarding the treasure on the previous night*! Somehow, the absence of these two men instantly became associated in my mind with the volley of pistol-shots that I had heard while overboard; and I began to wonder, gloomily, whether the unearthed treasure had already brought a tragedy in its train. I was full of this idea as I sat down to breakfast; but as Miss Onslow did not make any remark or inquiry concerning the pistol volley, I concluded that she had not heard it, and was careful to say nothing whatever to her about my suspicions.

O’Gorman and his companions remained in the seclusion of their tents all the morning, not one of them, excepting the cook, showing themselves until after dinner. Then the Irishman and two hands appeared; and

presently they jumped into a boat and headed for the brig. I went to the gangway to receive them—so that we might be out of ear-shot of Miss Onslow, who was sitting in the after-end of her sleeping-tent, reading—and, even before the boat got alongside, I could see, by the sober faces of those in her, that something serious was the matter.

O'Gorman boarded the brig alone, leaving his two companions in the boat alongside. I led him for'ard, and not until we had reached the fore deck did either of us open our mouths. Then the Irishman, turning to me with a very serious face, said:

"Misther Conyers, we want y'r help again, son."

"Very well," said I; "I shall be pleased to help you in any way possible. What is it that you wish me to do?"

"We wish ye to divide up the threasure aiqually into fourteen parts, and to give to aich man his own share, so that he may take care of it for himself. As things are now, wid all the gims lumped together in the iron chist, the timptation and the opporchunity to shteal is too great, and we've already lost two of our number through it."

"Lost two of your number? Good Heavens, O'Gorman, what do you mean?" I demanded, my thoughts instantly reverting to the suspicious proceedings of the morning.

"Why," explained O'Gorman, "it's loike this, ye see. Whin we dug up that chist yesterday, and got it over here, we could none of us be satisfied until we'd broke it open and found out what it contained. Then, as we couldn't fasten it up again, we decided to mount guard over it, two men at a time, so that nobody should rob the others by sneakin' away and helpin' himself unbeknownst. But whin the first two guards was relieved, last night, the cook took it into his head that they ought to be searched; and whin this was done, by the Powers! we found that aich of 'em had helped himself to a handful of the stones, and had 'em stowed away in their pockets. We thried 'em there and thin, found 'em guilty, and sintenced 'em to be shot! Which was done this morning."

"So!" I exclaimed in horror, "this is the first result of your so-called good fortune, is it? A theft; and two of your number slain! Man! do you know

that the fourteen of you have committed *murder*!”

“Murder, is it? Sorra a bit!” exclaimed the Irishman indignantly. “We thried the two of ’em, and found ’em guilty, all in regular, proper ordher.”

“But,” said I, “you have no authority or legal right to try men, sentence them to death, and execute them. Whatever *you* may consider it, you will find that the law will regard it as wilful murder.”

“The law?” ejaculated O’Gorman, with a contemptuous sniff. “Oh, begorra, we’ll take our chance of that! But we don’t want any more executions, Misther Conyers, so will ye help us to make a fair division of our prize, that aich man may have his own and not be tempted to shteal from another?”

“Are you making this request on your own account, or on behalf of the rest as well?” demanded I. “Perhaps the others may be unwilling to trust to my fairness.”

“Oh, but they will,” answered O’Gorman. “The proposal was mine, but iverybody agreed to it.”

“Very well, then,” said I. “I am willing to undertake the job, and will do my best to make the division an equitable one.”

So saying, I went aft and explained to Miss Onslow that I was going ashore for an hour or two with O’Gorman, to afford him the benefit of my advice in a certain matter, dived below to my cabin for some sheets of writing-paper, which I rolled up and put in my pocket, and then, returning to the deck, descended the side and entered the boat.

On reaching the shore, O’Gorman led me at once to the largest tent, where I found the entire remainder of the party seated in a circle on the ground, with the chest of treasure-trove in the centre; they had evidently so little faith in each other that each had deemed it necessary to individually watch the chest in his own interest. The incident would have been amusing but for the terrible element of tragedy that had been imparted to it by the proceedings of the morning.

My first act, on entering the tent, was to provide, from my little stock of

writing-paper, fourteen pieces of exactly equal size and shape, which I numbered from one to fourteen; afterwards folding the pieces identically, so that the numbers written upon them were concealed, and it became impossible to distinguish one piece from another. These papers I put on the ground in one of the men's caps, mixing and shuffling them all together; and next I called for a square of canvas. They brought me a boat's lug sail, which I caused to be spread flat and smooth upon the ground; and then I had the chest lifted on to the middle of the sail, seating myself beside it. Then, starting with the pearls, I picked out fourteen of practically equal value, and laid them, singly and well apart, on the canvas before me, explaining my intentions as I did so. Then to these I similarly added fourteen more, and so on, until each heap contained the same number of pearls, and was, as nearly as I could judge, of the same value. There were five pearls left over, and these I reserved as possible make-weights, so to speak, in the further division of the gems. Then I proceeded with the diamonds in the same way, following on with the rubies, and finishing off with the emeralds, until the entire treasure was subdivided into fourteen parts of practically equal value. This done, I inquired whether they were all of opinion that the *division* had been evenly made; and upon receiving a reply to the effect that "they supposed so," I gave the tickets in the sailor's cap a vigorous, final shaking up, and then passed the cap round in succession, requesting each man to take one paper. Then, when all had been drawn, I requested them to open their papers and look at the numbers written thereon. And, finally, the man who held number one was allowed first choice from the fourteen heaps, number two the second choice, and so on, until only one heap was left, which fell to the man holding ticket number fourteen. It was interesting to note the difference in the behaviour of the men in choosing their heaps; some hung fire and seemed quite unable to make up their minds for as much as ten minutes or a quarter of an hour—and they would probably have been longer but for the impatient remonstrances of their fellows—while others simply laid their caps alongside the nearest heap and swept the latter into the former with as little emotion as though they had been purchasing a penn'orth of gooseberries at a street-barrow.

This process of subdivision of the treasure had run away with a considerable amount of time, with the result that when I returned to the brig the usual hour of "supper"—as the evening meal is generally termed at sea—was long past; and, what was of far greater consequence, I

found that during my prolonged absence Miss Onslow had worked herself into a perfect fever of apprehension as to my safety; which was not at all surprising when one came to reflect upon what her situation would have been—alone among all those ruffians—had anything perchance happened to me. But she quickly recovered her spirits when I informed her as to how I had been occupied; and it was a great relief to me to discover, as I did in the course of the evening, by means of sundry subtle questions and remarks, that the poor girl entertained no suspicion whatever of the morning's tragedy. Such being the case, I resolved to keep the news from her as long as possible; and, with a view thereto, I strenuously impressed upon the steward that he was not, under any circumstances whatever, to make the most distant reference to it.

During the fortnight that now ensued, the weather remaining gloriously fine, I took Miss Onslow away in the boat daily, and together we explored the island until we had become perfectly acquainted with every inch of it, and knew exactly where to find its many beauty-spots. On the first two or three days of these excursions we frequently encountered members of O'Gorman's gang wandering about the island in a more or less apparently aimless fashion—most of them carrying canvas bundles in their hands, which they invariably endeavoured unsuccessfully to conceal from our view. At first I was at a loss to understand what all this meant; but on the third day it happened that, on emerging from a jungle-path that we had made for ourselves, we came upon a kneeling man busily engaged in digging a hole with a stick at the foot of a tree. So intent was he upon his occupation that he did not hear us until we were close upon him, and then he sprang to his feet and faced us with an expression of mingled consternation and defiance, that changed to one of confusion as he recognised us. It was the young Cockney whom I have already had occasion to mention once or twice; and he had gradually impressed me as being about the most harmless and well-meaning of the whole gang.

"Hillo, Harry!" I exclaimed, "what are you after? seeking for more treasure?"

"Why, no, sir," answered he, fingering the peak of his cap as he met Miss Onslow's gaze. He hesitated a few seconds, considering, and then proceeded:

“The fact is, Mr Conyers, I was thinkin’ of hidin’ my little whack.”

“Well,” said I, “in that case I am exceedingly sorry that we disturbed you, for now I fear that you will have to hunt for another hiding-place.”

“What for, sir?” demanded he.

“Why, because this lady and I have discovered your secret, don’t you see?”

“Oh, that be blowed!” exclaimed the young fellow. “That don’t make no matter; I ain’t afraid of you or the lidy stealin’ the stuff; I wasn’t hidin’ it from either of you.”

“No?” queried I. “From whom, then, were you hiding it?”

“Why, from the rest of ’em, of course. We’re *all* hidin’ our stuff from one another. We don’t *tell* each other so; but we’re doin’ it all the same.”

“I see,” said I. “You are unable to trust each other. Well, that is a pity. One would have thought that there was not a man among you who would not have felt abundantly satisfied with what he has secured.”

“Maybe we are; but maybe we ain’t,” answered the fellow. “Anyhow, when I sees the rest all distrustin’ one another, I thinks it’s time for me to distrust them. So I spent all day yesterday huntin’ for a good spot, and comed along this way, and thought I couldn’t do better than stow the stuff at the foot of this big tree.”

“Well,” said I, “if I were you I should choose some other place. How are you to know that one of the men you distrust is not even now watching you—and guessing your occupation—from some place of concealment among the bushes? Choose a spot that you can easily find again somewhere in the heart of the bush, and bury it there, where nobody can see what you are about.”

“Thank’ee sir; I will. I think I know a good place not far off,” said the fellow; and therewith, giving a sea-scrape with his foot, he turned away and left us. As for us, we resumed our walk, and were very careful not to turn round or otherwise behave in such a manner as to lead the man to

suppose we desired to watch him.

During the period to which I am now referring, O’Gorman and his men did no work whatever, but—after each had succeeded in satisfactorily concealing his own share of treasure—spent their time in strolling aimlessly—sometimes alone, and sometimes in parties of two or three together—about the island, hunting for fruit, or climbing the cocoa-nut trees to get at the nuts. Then—I think it was about the sixteenth day after the unearthing of the treasure—without any previous warning or notice whatever to me—I saw them striking tents ashore, immediately after breakfast; and by noon everything had been brought off to the brig again, and the men had once more taken up their quarters in her forecastle. The remainder of that day was devoted to the task of rebending the canvas; but it was not until noon of the next day that the brig was again in a condition to go to sea. That afternoon, and the greater part of the following day, was devoted to the task of replenishing the brig’s stock of fresh water, collecting an abundant supply of fruit, and—presumably—recovering possession of their hidden treasure; and after breakfast next morning the crew went leisurely to work to get under way. It took us until noon to work our way out to sea; and as soon as we were fairly clear of the barrier reef, everybody went to dinner.

Chapter Thirteen.

I learn some disturbing news.

The weather had been fine, with moderate breezes from about west-north-west, during the entire period of our sojourn at the island, and we left it under like conditions. Our course for the Horn was a south-easterly one, which brought the wind nicely over the starboard quarter, and the breeze was of just the right strength to enable us to show the whole of our starboard flight of studding-sails to it, and to handsomely reel off our eleven knots per hour by the log. Under these circumstances we were not long in running the island out of sight; and with its disappearance below the horizon I hoped that my troubles—except, of course, such as might arise from bad weather—were at an end. As for the men, their sojourn on the island had done them good, they were in splendid health and—as might be expected of men in their condition who had so easily become wealthy—in high spirits, they seemed anxious to get home, and were, one and all, upon their best behaviour, being apparently desirous of conciliating me to the utmost possible extent, now that their own ends had been served. But although I deemed it sound diplomacy to allow them to believe that their endeavours in this direction were meeting with perfect success, I could not forget that, in the prosecution of their own selfish plans, they had shown themselves to be callously criminal, and utterly indifferent to all the hardship and suffering, mental and bodily, that they were inflicting upon a young, delicately-nurtured, sensitive woman—to say nothing of what they had caused me to endure; and I determined that, if it lay in my power to scheme out such a result, they should, one and all, pay the penalty of their crimes.

The apparently favourable condition of affairs to which I have just referred continued for fully a week after our departure from the island; and then I received a rude awakening. It happened thus:

The weather was still gloriously fine, but the wind had drawn more out from the southward until it was square upon our starboard beam, which, with a decided increase in its strength, had caused us to take in all our studding-sails except the fore-topmast, the boom of which was braced

well forward. It was close upon sunset; and Harry, the Cockney, was at the wheel. The sky away to the westward about the setting sun wore a decidedly smoky, windy look, with a corresponding wildness and hardness and glare of colour that seemed to threaten a blusterous night; so much so, indeed, that, pausing in my solitary perambulation of the deck, I halted near the binnacle to study it. As I did so, the helmsman, with his eye on the weather leach of the main-topgallant-sail, said:

“Don’t look at me, or take any notice of me, sir, because I don’t want them skowbanks for’ard to see me a-talkin’ to you; but I’ve got somethin’ very partic’lar as I should like to s’y, if I can only find a chaunce.”

“Well, fire away then, my lad,” said I. “No time like the present. I am looking to see whether we are going to have a breeze to-night.”

The fellow remained silent for a full minute, chewing vigorously at the plug of tobacco in his cheek, and then said, still gazing intently aloft:

“The long and the short of it’s this, sir. Them two swines, O’Gorman and Price, have been s’yin’ that after that business with the French barque, and the shootin’ of Karl and Fritz, it won’t never do to let you and the young lidy ever get ashore again.”

So Miss Onslow’s foreboding had come true, then! We knew too much, and were no doubt to be sacrificed in cold blood to ensure the safety of this piratical gang. But “fore-warned is fore-armed”; moreover, there was this man Harry clearly disposed to be friendly to us, or why should he take the risk of acquainting me with this terrible news? As I realised all the fresh anxiety and watchfulness that this information would entail upon me, I faltered for a moment under a feeling of overwhelming despair; but it was gone instantly; and within the next second or two I had pulled myself together, the fighting instinct had leapt up, alert and eager, and I was once more ready to do battle against the whole ruffianly mob of them for the life and honour of the girl that I now loved beyond any other earthly thing.

“And what do the men say to it?”

I asked, stepping up on the grating and, hands in pocket, balancing myself jauntily to the heave and roll of the plunging hull as I continued to

gaze contemplatively at the windy sky away on our starboard quarter.

“Why,” answered, Harry, “it’s no use denyin’ that they’re all of the same mind as t’other two. They s’ys that you knows enough to hang all hands of us, and that you’d be certain sure to do it, too, if we was only to give yer half a chaunce.”

“And what is *your* opinion upon the matter, my man?” demanded I.

“Well,” said he, “I thinks as p’rhaps they’re right, so far as that goes. But I don’t hold with murder; and I said as I thought we might be able to plan out a way of makin’ ourselves safe without doin’ no hurt to you and the young lidy. But they wouldn’t listen to me; they’re all for makin’ theirselves *safe*, as they calls it.”

“And what is their scheme?” asked I.

“Why, accordin’ to their present way of thinking they intends to ast you to make the Brazilian coast, somewheres about twenty mile or so from some big port; and they’re goin’ to tell you as when we’ve made the land the brig is to be scuttled, and all hands—you and the lidy included—is to take to the boats and land, givin’ ourselves out to be a shipwrecked crew. But, at the last minute, when all is ready for leaving you and the lidy is to be seized, lashed hand and foot, and locked up below, to go down with the brig.”

“A very pretty, diabolical, cold-blooded scheme,” commented I, “and one that would have been very likely to prove successful, had you not warned me. I am infinitely obliged to you, my man, and you may rest assured that I will not forget, the good turn you have done me in making me acquainted with the plan. I shall endeavour to frustrate it, of course. May I depend upon you to help me?”

“Why, as to that, sir,” answered the fellow, “everything’ll depend upon what you makes up your mind to do. I won’t have nothin’ to do wi’ murderin’ of you, that’s certain. But, on t’other hand, I don’t mean to mix myself up with no job that means havin’ my throat cut if the thing don’t happen to turn out all right.”

“Just so,” said I; “I see your position exactly. I will think the matter over,

and see if I cannot devise some practicable scheme to get to windward of those scoundrels, and will then have another talk with you. Meanwhile, kindly keep your ears open; appear to fall in with the plans of the others, and let me know if any alterations are made—you will find it greatly to your advantage to do so."

"Thank'ee, sir; I will," answered the man as I wheeled round, directed a long, scrutinising glance at the canvas, stepped off the grating and squinted into the binnacle, and finally resumed my perambulation of the deck.

Now, here was a nice plot to face, and countermine! A plot that was only to be defeated by subtlety and strategy; for, at the most, there were but three of us, all told, against thirteen ruthless, treacherous men; and it was not to be forgotten that no dependence whatever was to be placed upon the man Harry; his scruples apparently drew the line at cold-blooded murder, but on the hither side of that, consideration for his own safety might tempt him to any conceivable lengths; in short, it needed but very little consideration to demonstrate that if I was to secure his active co-operation, I must make it perfectly clear to him that it would be distinctly to his interest to give it me. Then there was Miss Onslow. She was a woman of a delicate and refined nature, of a magnificent courage certainly, clever, and resourceful; and thus far capable, perhaps, of affording valuable suggestions, but by no means to be involved so tangibly in any scheme against the men as to expose her to their vengeful fury in the event of failure. The question whether I should mention this latest development to her at all was one of long and anxious mental debate with me; on the one hand I was intensely desirous to spare this poor girl any further terror and anxiety; while, on the other, I felt doubtful whether, in a matter that so vitally interested her, I ought not to afford her the opportunity of bringing her keen and clever woman's wit to bear upon the problem that had now thrust itself upon us. I spent an anxious, sleepless night, revolving countless schemes in my head, and abandoning them, one after the other, either as impracticable, or else too dependent upon chance. The whole of the next day and the succeeding night was similarly spent by me; and when I sprang feverishly from my bunk, haggard and hollow-eyed with sleeplessness and worry, on the second morning after my conversation with the man Harry, I had come to the resolution that it was my duty to inform Miss Onslow how matters

stood with us, and to afford her the opportunity to assist me with any suggestions that might occur to her.

An opportunity occurred shortly after breakfast. I had taken my sights for the brig's longitude, worked them out, laid down the result upon the chart, and was abstractedly gazing at the latter as it lay spread out before me upon the cabin table, anxiously seeking inspiration from a study of the coasts, islands, and harbours delineated in miniature upon the white paper, when the young lady stepped out of her cabin and—first assuring herself that the steward was not within hearing—came to my side, and, laying her hand upon my shoulder, said:

"I want you to tell me what is the matter. There *is* something very seriously wrong, I know, for I was watching you all day yesterday, and it was impossible for me to avoid noticing that while, when in presence of the men you did your best to wear an unconcerned manner, the moment that you deemed yourself free from their observation you sank into a mood of gloomy abstraction and reverie, the meaning of which was not to be mistaken. And this morning you look absolutely *ill* with worry, your forehead is seamed with wrinkles of care and anxiety, and—positively you are turning grey about the temples."

And as she spoke these last words her fingers lightly and—as it seemed to me—caressingly touched me on the temples. It was the first time that she had ever done such a thing, and her touch thrilled me through as with an electric shock, moving me to such an extent that I lost my self-control, and forthwith behaved with the recklessness of a madman. I seized her hand, threw my arm about her waist, and, drawing her to me, kissed her on the lips.

"It is your own fault," I exclaimed wildly; "you should not have touched me so tenderly and caressingly. I love you, I tell you; I love you beyond all power of speech to describe, and I have been upon the point of telling you so over and over again, but have been deterred by the knowledge that, unless you can return my love—which you have never given me any reason to suppose is the case—such a confession on my part must necessarily render your situation infinitely more embarrassing than it is now. And hitherto I have contrived to remain master of myself; but when you touched my temples just now—"

“Poor fellow,” she interrupted, astounding me by nestling in my embrace, with flaming cheeks, but looking up at me with smiling eyes that shone like stars, as her arm stole up and twined itself about my neck—“is it indeed so bad as that with you? I knew, of course, that you loved me—the symptoms were quite unmistakable—but I scarcely dreamed of your passion being so violent as it appears to be. Well, never mind, Charlie dear; your very startling, unexpected, and vehement declaration will not produce the effect you seem to have feared, because, you see, it so happens that *I return your love*—how could it possibly be otherwise?”—her tone changing from tenderness to pride—“what woman whose heart is free could possibly fail to love a man whose devotion is what yours is, and has been, to me? Yes, dearest, I love you with my whole heart; and I am proud to think that, despite all my waywardness and shortcomings, you have contrived to discover in me something worth loving. But *this* is not what has been worrying you so terribly this last few days—tell me what it is; I have a *right* to know, now!”

“Yes,” I assented, “you certainly have; but it is terrible news, Florence, and I scarcely know in what words to communicate it to you. Yet, be assured of this, my sweet, that, with the new courage that you have just imparted to me, I will overcome this peril that looms ahead of us, deadly though it be!”

And therewith I related to my sweetheart all that had passed between Harry and myself, at the same time directing her attention to the fact that this grisly peril was still a long way ahead of us; that it was a far cry from where we were to the Horn; and that even after we had rounded that wild headland, practically the whole stretch of the eastern coast of South America would have to be traversed before the time would be ripe for the villains to carry out their devilish scheme of murder and destruction. And then I strove to comfort her by directing her attention to the chances of escape that might befall us, the ships we should be certain to encounter—with the possibility of being able to surreptitiously communicate with one or more of them, craving assistance—and of my determination—as a last resource—to cast away the ship and take our chance of being able to escape in one of the boats during the confusion, rather than tamely navigate her to the spot that should be selected by those fiends for the deed of destruction.

As I told her of the fate that had been planned for us, I saw her blanch to the lips, and her eyes grow wide and glassy with horror; but presently her colour returned and her mouth set in firm, resolute lines; and when at length I ceased to speak, she said:

“My poor Charlie, no wonder that you look worn and worried! But take courage, dear; I cannot believe that God will permit those wretches to murder us in cold blood. He will surely inspire you with an idea that will enable you to defeat and prevent an act of such atrocious wickedness; and I have a sure conviction that in His own good time we shall be accorded a happy deliverance out of all our troubles, and that you will by and by enjoy the satisfaction of happily reuniting me to my dear father—and receiving the usual reward accorded to the all-conquering prince in the fairy tale.”

“God grant it, my dearest!” I exclaimed fervently, as I kissed her. “And now,” said I, “I must go on deck, I suppose, and endeavour to appear as though I had not a care in the world; for if those fellows notice that I am looking gloomy and preoccupied, they will at once guess that I suspect something, and may in that case so precipitate their plans as to render our case more desperate than ever.”

“We will go together,” said the brave girl, “and you shall have an example of the deep duplicity of which I am capable. I will defy any one of them to detect the faintest shadow of care on my brow!”

And therewith she retired to her cabin, and presently emerged again, attired for the deck.

It was a glorious morning of true Pacific weather, with the wind blowing a merry breeze from about west-north-west; the sky, an exquisitely pure and delicate turquoise blue, flecked with patches of fleecy, prismatic-tinted cloud that here and there darkened the sapphire of the sparkling, foam-flecked ocean with broad spaces of deep, rich, violet shadow. As for the brig, she was swarming along at a nine-knot pace under all plain sail supplemented by her starboard studding-sail, with her mast-heads sweeping in wide arcs athwart the blue as she swayed and rose and sank in long, floating rushes over the rugged ridges of the pursuing swell, while dazzling sunshine and purple shadow chased each other in and out

of the hollows of her canvas and athwart her grimy decks. There was a thin, eddying coil of bluish smoke hurrying from the galley chimney under the high-arching foot of the fore-course and out over the port cat-head; and the watch, having no sail-trimming to attend to, were squatted upon their hams on the fore deck, playing cards. The hooker needed no looking after in such weather as this, and the only individual, beside ourselves, abaft the mainmast was the helmsman.

Miss Onslow's appearance on deck never failed to attract the notice of the men, although she had made a point of being up and down every day, and all day long, and I soon discovered that we were the objects of the stealthy regard not only of the group on the forecastle but also of the man at the wheel. But no child could have appeared more completely free from care than she was; she chatted with me about Calcutta, and Simla, described the characteristics of the several castes and classes of natives, illustrating her description with amusing anecdotes that even coaxed a smile upon the sullen, wooden visage of the fellow at the wheel, and spoke of being reunited to her father with an absolute confidence that left no room for even a shadow of suspicion that she entertained the slightest doubt upon that subject.

A considerable period now elapsed without the occurrence of any incident worthy of mention, except that I observed in the men a quite extraordinary devotion to card-playing; they did no work of any kind whatsoever beyond such necessary duties as making, shortening, or trimming sale, as occasion demanded; and when they were not doing this they were playing cards. I was at first somewhat puzzled to account for the feverish and unflagging zeal with which this particular form of amusement was pursued by all hands; for although sailors are fond of an occasional quiet game of cards, they are, as a rule, by no means devotees of the pasteboards. But at length I obtained enlightenment from the man Harry: they were gambling with the gems for stakes! This intelligence disquieted me greatly, for I foresaw possibilities of trouble in it; and by and by it came. Meanwhile, however, I neglected no opportunity to seek intelligence as to any change in the views of these men with regard to the ultimate disposal of myself and Miss Onslow, and learned from time to time—my informant, of course, being Harry—that, so far, nothing had transpired justifying the suspicion that any departure from the original plan was contemplated. This was, in a measure, gratifying, in

so far at least as that it still left me a fair amount of time to evolve some satisfactory scheme for our salvation—a task in which I had not yet succeeded, although I had considered I might almost say hundreds of ideas, only to discard them as either impracticable or unreliable.

At the moment of which I am now about to speak—we were drawing close on toward the meridian of the Horn, but well to the south of it; and the weather was what sailors call “dirty”—a dark, scowling sky overhead, charged with sleet and rain squalls that, when we ran into them, lashed us and stung the skin like whips; the atmosphere was nippingly raw, and thick enough to veil and blot out everything at a distance of more than four miles; and the wind was blowing so fresh from the southward that the men had at length been compelled to unwillingly turn out and snug the brig down to double-reefed topsails, with the mainsail stowed. There was a very steep and ugly beam sea running, and the brig was rolling to it as though bent on rolling the masts out of her; while the decks were mid-leg deep with the water that she dished in over the rail at every roll with a regularity that I was very far from appreciating. Worst of all, there was no pretence whatever on the part of the men to watch the ship or keep a lookout—the scoundrels were well aware that I might be depended on for that; the only man on deck was the helmsman; and from the condition of those who came staggering aft from time to time at the stroke of the bell to relieve the wheel, I more than suspected that a drinking bout was under way in the forecastle. Such a condition of affairs was amply sufficient at any time to create within me a sense of profound uneasiness, much more so at that especial time; for we were then in a part of the ocean notorious for sudden, savage gales, thick weather, and floating ice as deadly as any reef that ever trapped a ship; and the safety of the brig, and of all hands, might at any moment be fatally imperilled by the slightest lack of alertness, or the briefest powerlessness on the part of the crew. It was this conviction alone that restrained me from an immediate endeavour to recapture the brig; the conditions were propitious, for as I have said all hands were below with the exception of the helmsman. The cook, it is true, was in his galley; but if I chose to arm myself with the pistols that had been presented to me by the Frenchman aboard the *Marie Renaud*, it would be no such desperate matter to slip for’ard and clap the hatch over the fore-scuttle, secure the cook in his galley, and then compel the half-drunken helmsman to surrender. But to resort to such measures as those where we then were would have been

sheer madness; and the idea no sooner occurred to me than it was dismissed as impracticable. But although impracticable just then, it might not be so later on, when we should have arrived in less perilous latitudes; and I there and then resolved to do everything that in me lay to facilitate such a *coup* on the first suitable occasion.

Meanwhile, it was little short of madness for the men to drink to excess under the then prevailing conditions of weather and situation; and I determined to remonstrate with O'Gorman for permitting such perilous indulgence. So I went aft and took the wheel, directing the man whom I relieved to ask O'Gorman to come aft, as I wished to speak to him.

The fellow slouched away forward, lurching and slipping along the wet decks, and disappeared down the fore-scuttle. I deemed it not improbable that he would avail himself of the opportunity to help himself to another drink, and that it might possibly be quite five minutes, or even ten, before he returned aft to resume his duty; but a full half-hour elapsed, and still the fellow remained invisible. I had by this time very nearly come to the end of my stock of patience, and was on the point of yelling to the cook—who kept close as a limpet to the shelter of his galley, with the weather-door fast shut—to run to the forecastle and summon someone to relieve me, when I became aware of a din of excited shouts and yells arising from the fore-scuttle, that momentarily grew in intensity until the disturbance was violent enough to suggest that all pandemonium had broken adrift in that small forecastle. The cook, from his position, in the galley, heard the row much more distinctly than I did, and, forsaking his pots and pans, rushed forward, where he stood gaping down through the scuttle in an attitude expressive of combined interest and consternation. I shouted to him to let me know what it all meant, but his attention was so completely absorbed by what was happening below that he had no ears for me; while, as for me, I had my hands quite full with the brig, and dared not release my grasp of the wheel for a single instant lest she should broach-to and get her decks swept, or possibly be dismasted.

Chapter Fourteen.

A double tragedy.

The rumpus continued for nearly ten minutes, and then quite suddenly ceased; and as it did so the cook flung his legs over the coamings of the fore-scuttle, and disappeared down the hatchway. Some five minutes or so later, O'Gorman appeared on deck, ghastly white, and with his cheek laid open in a gash that extended very nearly from his left ear to the corresponding corner of his mouth. The blood was trickling down upon the collar of his jacket and staining the whole of the left breast of the garment, and his hands and cuffs were smeared with blood. It was at once evident to me that there had been a serious scrimmage in the forecastle; a conjecture that was at once confirmed by the fellow himself —who, I may mention, was completely sobered by the occurrence, if indeed he had been the worse for drink at its outbreak.

"Hillo, Misther!" he exclaimed, as he arrived within speaking distance of me, "are ye left all alone to look afther the hooker? Be jabers, that's too bad! Where's the shpalpeen that ought to be doin' his thrick of grindin' wather?"

"I sent him for'ard about three-quarters of an hour ago," said I, "to tell you that I wished to speak to you; and the loafing blackguard never returned. But what has been the matter in the forecastle, and how came you with that wound in your cheek?"

"Oh, begorra, but it's a bad job, intoirely!" he answered. "We was all havin' a little game of cards together, and to make the game lively we was stakin' our gims. Dirk got claned out at last—lost every stone of his share—and then he jumped up and swore that Price had been chatin' him. Price knocked him down for sayin' it; but he jumped up again—wid his mouth all bleedin' from Jack's blow—and, in a wink, before anny of us knew what he was afther, he'd whipped out his knife and drove it clean through poor Chips heart! That was the beginnin' of the row. When we saw what had been done, two or three of us attimpted to seize Dirk and disarm him; but the murthering villain fought like all the furies, layin' my cheek open, stabbin' poor Tom in the throat so that he's bleedin' like a stuck pig, and pretty near cuttin' Mike's hand off. And that's not the worst of it aither. Some of the other chaps took Dirk's side, swearin' that they'd seen Chips chatin', and in two two's, sir, all hands had their knives out,

and we was cuttin' and slashin' at each other loike—loike—sodgers on a field of battle!"

"Are there any hurt beside Tom, Mike, and yourself?" I asked, too completely dazed with the sudden horror of the thing to look at more than one side of it for the moment.

"Ay, begorra," answered the Irishman; "Dirk's done for, I expect; and there's others of us that'll want plenty of watchin' if we're ever to see the other side of the Line again."

"Is that so?" ejaculated I. "Then for Heaven's sake send somebody to relieve me, that I may go for'ard and see what is to be done in the way of stitching and bandaging."

"Ay!" exclaimed O'Gorman, "bad cess to me for forgittin' it; that was what I came aft to ye for."

And therewith he hurried away forward again, and in a few minutes a man came aft and took over the wheel. I hurried below, and found Miss Onslow engaged upon some needlework. She looked up with a bright smile of welcome as I entered, but immediately sprang to her feet, exclaiming:

"Charlie! what has happened? You are as white as a ghost! Have you received information of any fresh villainy?"

"No, dear, no," I interrupted. "Something very serious has certainly happened, but this time it concerns us only very indirectly. The men have been quarrelling and fighting among themselves in the forecastle, and one or two of them are rather seriously hurt. May I enter your cabin for a moment, sweetheart? There is a medicine-chest there, with, probably, a supply of surgical bandages and so on. I will take the whole affair for'ard, as until I have seen precisely what is the matter it will be impossible for me to know what I shall require."

"Then, Charlie, are you going to dress the injuries of those wretched men?" she asked.

"Yes, dear," I answered; "you need not be uneasy, however; they will not

hurt me. They will be quiet enough for some time after this, I expect; and possibly the occurrence may have the effect of causing them to determine on adopting some less inhuman method than murder to get rid of us."

"God grant it—if it should come to the worst," answered the dear girl. "But, Charlie, I was not afraid on your behalf, dear; they will scarcely lay hands on you while you are engaged in alleviating their sufferings. I was about to ask whether you think *I* could be of any use; whether I should go with you."

"Certainly not!" answered I, in accents of sternness that were, however, levelled at the brutes forward, not at the sweet woman who was so ready to forget all that she had endured at the hands of these ruffians, and to undertake, she knew not what, in her willingness to forgive and help them. "No," I continued, "you will remain here, darling; this is your end of the ship, and you can do no better than stick to it. Whatever may be necessary to be done forward, I can and will do."

I secured the medicine-chest—which luckily happened to be a fairly big one for a vessel of the brig's size—and carried it forward to the fore-scuttle, where one of the seamen relieved me of it and passed it below. Half a dozen or so of the gang were now on deck, looking very crestfallen and subdued—to such an extent, indeed, that they actually knuckled their foreheads to me as I appeared among them. I did not waste time, however, by attempting to bring home to them the evil of their ways, but descended at once into the dark, grimy, and evil-smelling hole where, until a few minutes ago, fourteen men had lived in such comfort and harmony as go to make pleasant the existence of forecastle Jack. Heavens! what a filthy place it was! and how woefully changed for the worse since I had last entered it—which was before it had received its present tenants. It was bad enough, even then; but it was infinitely worse now. It was a triangular-shaped apartment, the apex of the triangle being the "eyes" of the vessel. It was barely six feet high from the deck to the under side of the beams, and deck, walls, beams, and roof were all of one uniform tint of greasy black, the result of a coating of dirt so thick that it could actually be scraped off with a knife, or with one's fingernail. It was fitted all round with a double row of bunks, and in addition to them a number of hammocks swung from the beams. The place was unlighted,

save by means of the scuttle, and by a kettle-shaped slush-lamp that swung, flaring and emitting a long streamer of fat, black smoke, from the centre beam. The deck was encumbered with the sea-chests of the original occupants—which had been taken possession of by O'Gorman and his gang—and was littered with tin plates, pannikins, fragments of food, and empty and broken bottles; while its atmosphere was foul with foetid odours, prominent among which were those of bilge-water and cockroaches! Three of the bunks in the lower tier were occupied—two of the occupants lying quiet and still, while the third moved restlessly at intervals, emitting low moans the while—and four men, evidently hurt, reclined upon the deck, with their backs propped up against sea-chests. As for O'Gorman, he stood close by the swaying lamp, holding a dirty, bloodstained rag to his gashed cheek as his eyes rolled gloomily and sullenly about the dark and stifling hole.

I gave my attention first to the figures in the bunks, beginning with the still and silent ones. The one I first approached happened to be the man named Tom. He was lying on his right side, with his white face toward the light, his eyes partly closed and showing nothing but the whites, and a fearful gash about four inches long in the left side of his throat, from which the blood seemed to have been pouring as from a pump, judging from the appearance of his clothes and the bunk; it was merely oozing now. I seized his hand and felt for his pulse; there was none. I tore open his saturated shirt and laid my hand upon his breast; there seemed to be an occasional slight flutter of the heart, but if so, it was so exceedingly faint as to render the matter extremely doubtful; it was clear that the unfortunate man had bled, or was bleeding, to death, and was far beyond such poor and inefficient help as I could afford him. I left him, therefore, and turned to the next bunk, which I now saw was occupied by the body of the carpenter. He lay, stretched out on his back, just as he had been tossed in, and might have been asleep but for the ghastly pallor of his face and the tell-tale purple stain upon the breast of his waistcoat and shirt. He was dead, beyond all doubt; so I turned to the next man, who proved to be a gigantic Dutchman named Dirk Van Zyl, the author of all the trouble. This man, I presently discovered, had received no fewer than nine wounds, four of which, from their extent and situation, I considered desperate. He groaned, and cried, and screamed in the most bloodcurdling fashion when I began to examine him, begging that he might be left alone to die in peace; but I washed his wounds, one by one,

and bound or stitched them up as best I could—the job occupying fully three-quarters of an hour—and when I at length left him, he seemed somewhat easier. The next man claiming my attention was an Irishman named Mike, whose left hand had been struck by the Dutchman's knife such a savage blow exactly on the joint of the wrist that the member was nearly severed. I could do nothing with such an injury as that but bind it up tightly, and place the hand and forearm in splints and a sling, leaving Nature to work out the rest of the cure, if she would. There were three other men who had received rather serious hurts, and for whom I did my best; and finally, I stitched up O'Gorman's face for him, which completed a fairly stiff morning's surgical work. Then, having again examined the man Tom, and found him to be quite dead, I carefully cleansed myself from all traces of my ghastly labour and went aft, reaching the cabin just in time for dinner.

While taking my after-dinner smoke that afternoon, I carefully considered the situation as it had now become altered by the fatal fracas in the forecastle; and—having no desire to be deemed a better man than I really am—I may as well confess at once that, while I was profoundly shocked by what had occurred, it was quite impossible for me to regret it. Indeed, to have done so would have been unnatural, for—apart altogether from the hardship and anxiety that these men had already so callously inflicted upon me, and the woman who was infinitely dearer than life to me—I could not forget that they had all planned and agreed together in cold blood to deliberately destroy my sweetheart and myself, not one of them, except Harry—so far as my information went—possessing even the small modicum of humanity that would have prompted him to demur at the decision, and to urge the adoption of a less fatally stringent course. I therefore felt little or no pity for any of the victims; while, so far as the ultimate escape of Miss Onslow and myself was concerned, the prospect of such a result was distinctly improved by the loss, on the part of our enemies, of two killed and six wounded, of whom three of the latter were unfit for duty. This reduced the number of O'Gorman's gang to nine effectives, or, deducting the cook and steward, a working-party of seven, all told, who would have to be divided into two watches. As I reflected carefully upon the matter, looking at it in all its bearings, it seemed that the moment was opportune for me to endeavour to secure something more than the intermittent and shadowy authority that I had thus far been permitted to exercise; and accordingly, when I

next visited the forecastle, for the purpose of taking a look at my patients —which was near the end of the second dog-watch, that evening—I bluntly directed O'Gorman's attention to the fact that we were now short-handed, and suggested that I should take command of one of the watches. He considered the question for some few minutes, but was suffering altogether too acutely from the smart of his gashed cheek to be able to reflect very deeply upon any subject, and at length yielded a rather sulky and surly assent to my proposal, the more readily, perhaps, since he had no one now left whom he could trust to take Price's place. I was careful to select for my command the watch of which the man Harry was a member, since by so doing we should both be on deck at the same time, and I should thus have an excellent opportunity of conversing with him during the darkness of the night watches, without attracting observation or arousing suspicion.

That same night, as soon as it was fairly dark, the bodies of Price and the seaman Tom—unshrouded, and simply prepared for burial by the attachment to their feet of an iron bar apiece, heavy enough to sink them —were unceremoniously launched over the side, without the slightest symptom of emotion; and in another half-hour their shares of the gems were distributed, more or less evenly, among the survivors, the man Dirk excepted.

On the third day after the tragedy that I have just described, a momentary glimpse of the sun during the forenoon enabled me to confirm my dead reckoning, and to satisfactorily establish the fact that we were actually a few miles to the eastward of the dreaded Horn, although with less southing than I could have wished; the southerly wind that had prevailed for some time having gradually gone round to the eastward so far that it at length became questionable whether we should succeed in weathering the land, and so passing into the Atlantic. And, to make matters worse, the wind continued not only to work round but also to increase in strength, to such an extent that at length the brig, instead of heading east, had broken off to due north, while it had become necessary to snug her down to close-reefed topsails and fore-topmast staysail. The thick weather, moreover, added another element of anxiety, since I had only succeeded in gaining one solitary sight of the sun for nearly a week—and that not when he was on the meridian, hence I was quite unable to determine my exact latitude. But the next morning, shortly after daylight,

when by my reckoning I had still forty odd miles of sea-room, land was made ahead, some five miles distant; and upon standing in a little closer, I was at length enabled to identify it as the headland of Cape Horn itself. Whereupon, we immediately wore round, and stretched away to the southward on the larboard tack, I for one being intensely thankful that we had made the notorious cape during daylight, but for which happy chance the brig would in all probability have gone ashore, and our adventure would have there and then come to a premature end.

But although fortune had so far favoured us that we were enabled for the present to avoid disaster, it was disappointing to discover that our lee drift had been so excessive as to have caused us to lose ground, while the slow but steady downward tendency of the mercury seemed to indicate that, so far from our being justified in expecting any immediate improvement in the weather, there was but too good reason to fear that a change from bad to worse was imminent.

And it needed but a few hours' further experience to prove how well founded were those apprehensions. For, as the day wore on, the aspect of the sky to windward grew increasingly menacing, the hue of the thick canopy of vapour becoming hourly darker and more louring, while the shredded clouds packed ever closer together in larger masses and of wilder and more threatening form and colour, and the wind strengthened until it was blowing a full gale, while the already heavy sea gathered weight so fast that by eight bells in the afternoon watch it had, in my opinion, become perilous to continue sailing the brig, and I accordingly proposed to O'Gorman that we should stow the topsails, and heave-to under storm staysails.

Now, the experience of the first day or two after the fight in the forecastle had led me to hope that the tragedy of the occurrence had frightened and sobered the men so thoroughly that there would be no more trouble with them, so far at least as drink was concerned; but therein I gave them credit for a higher standard of feeling than they possessed; such sobering influence as the incident had exercised upon the fellows had quickly evaporated, and on the particular day to which I am now referring the demon of drink had once more brought them under his influence with just enough effect to render them, one and all, reckless, defiant, and utterly unmanageable. Consequently, my proposal to shorten sail and heave-to

was met with scornful jeers and a point-blank refusal to do any work whatsoever. And the worst of it was that I had held on with the canvas so long that the whole available strength in the ship was now needed to successfully handle it, any attempt to do anything unaided, or with the assistance of only one or two men, being worse than useless. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to let the two double-reefed topsails stand as they were, and blow away or not as fate might decide.

There was one comfort—and only one—to be found in the condition of affairs that I have endeavoured to indicate, and that was that the brig, heavily pressed as she was by her canvas, was ratching fast through the water on a course that was not only carrying her off the land but also somewhat to the eastward, so that, with the moderating of the gale, or even a slight shift of wind, we might hope to pass clear into the Atlantic.

But, after all, the amount of comfort to be derived from this reflection was but small and fleeting in face of the steadily-increasing strength of the gale and the rapidly-growing height and steepness of the sea; even as it was, the man Harry, who happened to be at the wheel at the moment that I now have in mind, found his strength and skill taxed to the utmost to humour the brig along through that wild sea, the perspiration streaming from every pore of him as he stood there, fully exposed to the keen and nipping fury of the blast; and it was perfectly evident that, unless something were speedily done, disaster must quickly overtake us.

And something *was* presently done; for although my representations and suggestion had been met and rejected with scorn and derision, an argument of a most convincing character was soon brought to bear upon the contumacious ones, in the shape of a green sea that came right in over the bows, half-filling the forecastle, and frightening the occupants out of their wits, while it carried away some thirty feet of bulwark on the port side. The deluge of water that poured down through the fore-scuttle was sufficient in volume to actually wash several of the men out of their bunks; and the instant that the inpour ceased, all hands with one accord sprang for the opening, fighting together like savage beasts in their anxiety to reach the deck. But although that unlucky sea had inflicted upon the poor little over-driven brig a rather serious amount of damage, it had produced at least one good result: it had completely sobered all hands and brought them to a realising sense of the necessity to take

immediate steps for the prevention of further mischief.

As the fellows gained the deck and saw the great gap in the bulwarks, and observed the height, steepness, and generally dangerous character of the sea, something very like a panic seized them, and they came rushing aft, with loud and excited outcries, demanding to know what had happened. Meanwhile I had sprung to the wheel, to the assistance of the helmsman, who, it was quite clear, was nearly exhausted by his tremendous and continued efforts to control the movements of the brig.

“Never mind what has happened,” answered I. “What is done, is done, and cannot be helped. What you have now to do is to get down the last reef in those topsails, and take in the fore-topmast staysail, when we will heave-to. Let go your fore and main-topsail halliards, man your reef-tackles, and then away aloft, all hands of you, before worse happens!”

The fellows, by this time quite sober, and fully alive to the perils of their situation, needed no second bidding, but sprang about the deck with all the eager, impetuous haste of men fighting for their lives; and in less time than I could have believed possible they had bowsed out the reef-tackles and were in the fore rigging, on their way aloft to complete the operation of reefing the fore-topsail. O’Gorman set a good example by himself taking the weather yardarm and passing the earring, and all hands were busily engaged in knotting the points when another mountainous sea came swooping savagely down upon us with upreared, hissing crest. I saw that it must inevitably break aboard us, and uttered a loud yell of warning to the hands aloft, who raised an answering shout of dismay as they gazed in horror at the oncoming liquid hill, the crest of which must have been very nearly as high as themselves. Some of them, abandoning their task, sprang for the rigging, and, by the exercise of superhuman agility, actually contrived to reach the top; but the rest remained upon the yard to gaze, apparently paralysed with terror. The poor little brig seemed to shudder, like a sentient thing, as the great wall of water crashed down upon her, burying her to the foremast; and then I saw the whole mast buckle like a fishing-rod when a strong, heavy fish begins to fight for his life, there was a crash of timber as the topmast snapped short off at the cap, and the next instant away went the whole of the top-hamper over the side, flinging far into the raging sea the four unfortunates who had remained clinging to the yardarms! As for the sea,

it swept right aft, filling the decks to the rail, smashing to splinters the boat that was stowed on the main hatch, and carrying away the entire bulwarks on both sides as far aft as the main rigging. By the time that the decks were clear of water, and we were free to think of other matters than our own individual safety, the four men who had been flung overboard—and one of whom was O'Gorman—had disappeared for ever, and we had made the discovery that we had lost our bowsprit and main-topgallant mast, as well as the fore-topmast, and that we had more than four feet of water in the hold. All this, mind you, with night close upon us!

The loss of all head sail of course at once rendered the brig unmanageable, and thus—apart from the effect of the further damage sustained—our situation immediately became one of the extremest peril, a circumstance which, coupled with the tragic disappearance of their leader from their midst, completely cowed and subdued the survivors, to the extent, indeed, of impelling them to come aft and implore me to take full command of the brig. Needless to say I made no difficulty about acceding to this request; for prompt measures were imperative if the vessel was to be saved, and, with her, Florence's and my own life; so without pausing to read the men a moral lesson upon the evils of intemperance, I forthwith issued orders for the goose-winged foresail to be set, by which means we were at length enabled to get the brig before the wind, and thus escape the immediate peril of being swamped. This achieved, the wreck of the fore-topmast and bowsprit was cut away, all canvas was furled, and the brig was once more brought to the wind, and hove-to under bare poles. Then, although the men were inclined to grumble, I insisted upon their going to the pumps and relieving the brig of at least a portion of the water in her hold; for there were times when, the water having accumulated forward, the poor little craft became pinned down by the head to so dangerous an extent that it would have been absolutely suicidal to have left her in that condition. The fellows toiled on until past two bells in the middle watch—by which time they had reduced the depth of water in the hold to two feet—and then knocked off, utterly exhausted, to go below and turn in; while I undertook to keep the deck and watch the ship for the remainder of the night.

Chapter Fifteen.

Our escape and rescue.

The brig, as she lay hove-to, rode comparatively easy and dry, requiring no attention; all, therefore, that I had to do was to maintain a sharp lookout, and be ready to show a light betimes in the event of another craft heaving in sight and steering such a course as would be likely to bring her foul of us. But while my self-imposed duty was thus a light one, demanding only alertness on my part, the situation and condition of the brig were such as to cause me profound anxiety, which was in no degree lessened by the loss of the four men who had gone overboard with the wreck of the fore-topmast. Had the ship been sound this last circumstance would have caused me no regret whatever, for the simple reason that their loss reduced the number of my enemies by four; but their loss, and the casualties due to the fracas in the forecastle, resulted in the reduction of the number of the effective crew to six, of whom the cook and the steward were two who could be relied upon for little or nothing more than mere pulling and hauling, while, of the remaining four, two were still suffering from wounds sufficiently severe to partially disable them; and this reduction, with the brig practically a wreck, was a serious one. Moreover, the glass remained very low, and there was no indication whatever of the speedy abatement of the gale, or even any ground for hope that we had seen the worst of it; on the contrary, the sky looked wilder than ever, while the gusts of wind that frequently swept down upon us were certainly growing more savage as the minutes dragged their slow length away.

At length, after what seemed like an eternity of watching, the lagging dawn came slowly oozing out of the scowling east, revealing a sky of portentous gloom, of a deep, slatey-purple tint, blotched with shreds of flying dirty-white vapour, and a sea that was positively appalling in its height and steepness, and the fury with which it ran. Yet, heavy as was the sea, and swiftly as the great liquid hills came swooping down upon the battered brig, the little craft rode them fairly well, if a trifle languidly—which latter characteristic I attributed to the quantity of water still present in her hull; and after studying her behaviour by daylight for a full half-hour, I came to the conclusion that the sooner that water should be pumped out of her, the better. So, watching my opportunity, I rushed for'ard along the unprotected deck—over which the water washed heavily at times—and called all hands to turn out and pump the ship dry; and

after a great deal of grumbling, and much show of disinclination, I at length succeeded in getting them on deck, and persuading them to man the pumps. They pumped steadily until it was time to knock off for breakfast, when we sounded the well, and found a depth of twenty-one inches.

Breakfast, that morning, was rather a comfortless meal, for the cook, terrified lest he and his galley should be washed overboard together, had not furnished a very appetising spread; while the wild movements of the vessel, the harsh and dismal creaking of her timbers, the frequent heavy washing of water along the decks, and the roar of the gale, all combining together to create a concert of doleful sounds, rendered the cabin a distinctly unpleasant place, of sojourn; I therefore made no long tarrying at the table, merely remaining below long enough to snatch a hasty meal, and to say a few words of comfort and encouragement to my sweetheart, and then hurried on deck again, to see how matters were faring there.

The scene that met my gaze as I emerged from the companion, was depressing and discouraging in the extreme. The sky looked darker and more threatening than ever; the wind was freshening rapidly, and sweeping along in savage gusts that smote the seething wave-crests and tore them into blinding, stinging showers of salt spray, that so thickened the atmosphere as to completely veil and hide everything beyond a distance of half a mile. The sea, mountainous as it had been all through the night, had grown in steepness and height, and had acquired a still more formidable and menacing run during the short time that I had been below; while the fact was unquestionable that the brig was labouring more heavily, and the sea washing in steadily-increasing volume athwart that portion of her deck that lay unprotected through the loss of her bulwarks. It appeared to me that we should do better and ride easier if we showed a small spread of canvas—just sufficient to steady the vessel, to cause her to turn up a good bold weather side to the seas, and to place her under command of her helm; and I accordingly dodged my way to the fore-scuttle, and sang out for all hands to come on deck to make sail. They came at length, four of them, moving with that slow and exasperating deliberation that the merchant seaman assumes when he considers that he is being put upon; and at length, by dint of sheer persistence, I induced them to overhaul the sail-locker, with the result that we found a main staysail, new, and made of good stout canvas, evidently

intended for a storm sail, which, still working with the same deliberation and show of indifference, they finally consented to bend and set. The result was at once apparent: the brig began to move through the water, taking the seas very much easier as she was humoured at them with the helm, while the increased height of weather side that she turned up had the effect of considerably lessening the amount of water washing over the deck, and rendering the task of getting fore and aft comparatively safe.

But I was still not satisfied; great as was the improvement effected by the setting of the staysail, the brig yet seemed to labour more heavily than was to be reasonably accounted for, even by the fact that she had water in the hold; and then it occurred to me to sound the well afresh and ascertain whether the amount of that water was increasing. I accordingly fetched the rod, carefully dried it, and, watching until the brig was for an instant on an even keel, lowered it down the pump barrel. Upon withdrawing it the startling discovery was made that since the men had last been at the pumps the depth of water in the hold had increased by three inches! The water was draining into the hull, somewhere, and that, too, in sufficient quantity to keep us busy. I directed the attention of the men to the condition of the pump rod; and with deep, bitter curses levelled at the weather, the brig—at everything, in short, except the indifference of themselves and their shipmates that had brought us all to this pass—they went to work afresh at the pumps, while I made my way to the forecastle, and, as was my daily wont, attended to the injuries of the two wounded men, Dirk and Mike, who were confined to their bunks. With the brig leaping and plunging so desperately my task was by no means an easy one, and upon this occasion it occupied me so long, that ere I had quite finished, the other men came below, still cursing and grumbling, to get their dinner. I inquired whether they had succeeded in reducing the quantity of water in the hold at all, and was informed—with further curses—that they had only reduced it by about two inches, and that they were willing to be eternally condemned if they ever laid a hand upon the pump brake again. But about six bells in the afternoon watch, while I was at the wheel, the man Harry came aft, sounded the well, and shouting to me “twenty-six inches,” went for’ard again; with the result that, a quarter of an hour or so later, they all came aft once more, and continued pumping for nearly two hours; with what effect, however, I could not say, for none of them condescended to inform me. Nor did

either of them offer to relieve me at the wheel; but that I was not at all surprised at, as they doubtless considered that what they had done at the pumps was quite as much as could be expected of them. I was not forgotten, however; for Florence, making use of the fire that I had caused to be lighted in the cabin-stove, prepared for me a most substantial and appetising meal, consisting of toasted rashers of ham, cabin bread—carefully cleared of weevils—and tea, which she actually brought on deck to me, standing by me and tending the wheel in the cleverest fashion while I hurriedly devoured the food! Not satisfied with doing this for me, the dear girl, knowing that I had been on deck all the previous night, actually proposed remaining at the wheel, in the midst of all the elemental fury, long enough to enable me to snatch a few hours' sleep! What think you of that, shipmates, for devotion on the part of a sweetheart? But that, of course, was going altogether beyond the utmost that I could possibly consent to, and, thanking her heartily for her generous solicitude, I sent her below, with strict injunctions to turn in early and secure a good night's rest. For—although I was careful not to hint as much to her even in the most distant fashion—I did not at all like the way that matters were going with us; the leak and the men's aversion to the labour of pumping, taken together, made up a bad lookout, and I foresaw that unless a change for the better in one respect or the other soon took place, it would speedily come to our being obliged to take to the boats.

Throughout the whole of that wet, wild, cheerless night I stood at the wheel, tending the ship and helping her through the seas; and it was not until dawn was abroad that anyone came to relieve me; when Cockney Harry made his appearance, staggering and dodging his way aft along the flooded decks.

"Mornin', sir," he remarked as he took over the wheel from me. "You looks dead wore out, you do. You surely ain't been at this here muckin' wheel the whole blessed night, have ye, sir?"

"Certainly I have," said I, "seeing that the brig had to be looked after, and neither of you men saw fit to relieve me!"

"Well," admitted the fellow, "that's a howlin' shime, and no mistike. The fact is that we was all dead tired with sweatin' at them infernal pumps. I *meant* to ha' come along and took a spell at water-grindin', but in w'itin'

for them swines to all go to sleep I went to sleep myself, and never woke up agine until five minutes ago."

"Quite so," said I drily. "But, if you really intended to have relieved me, why have waited until the rest were asleep?"

"Well, ye see, sir, it was this way," answered the man. "When we went below lawst night, after knockin' off pumping all hands of us was on the growl, 'cause of the heavy work we'd had to do; and Sam up and said that the best thing we could do 'd be to tike to the boats, as soon as the gale broke, and let the blessed old hooker go to the bottom, rather than have to keep all on pumpin' of her everlastin'ly until we fetched a port. And the rest of 'em agreed with him. Then Dirk ups and asts what was to be done with you and the lidy; and, nobody else seemin' to have a hawnser ready, I says that I supposes you'll both have to come with us. But Dirk, he says No; it won't never do for you to land along of us; you knows enough to hang some of us, and he for one don't mean to take no risks; and t'others all agreed with him; and at last 'twas settled that if the leak don't take up when the gale breaks, we're to take to the boats, leavin' you and the lidy aboard to go down with the brig. I thought I'd wait and hear if anybody had anything else to say about it afore comin' aft to relieve you; and it was while I was w'itin' that I dropped asleep."

"Thank you, Harry, for affording me this very important item of information," said I. "You are a good sort of fellow, and you may depend upon it that I will not forget the service you have done me. And so that scoundrel Dirk would leave the lady and me to drown, would he, after all that I have done for him? Very well! Now, Harry, neither Miss Onslow nor I will be left aboard here to drown, you may take your oath of that. It is clear to me, now, that it must be war to the death between the forecastle and the cabin, and I shall take my measures accordingly. The question is: Which side—cabin or forecastle—do you intend to be on? If you choose to join me, I will do what I can for you; and if you elect to throw in your lot with those murderers for'ard, I will still bear you in mind, so far as I can, consistently with the lady's and my own safety."

"Thank'ee, sir," answered the fellow. "If I might make so bold, sir, what do you intend to do?"

“That,” said I, “I can only tell you in the event of your coming over on my side.”

“Very well, sir,” returned he, “I’ll think it over while you’re tikin’ a rest, and let you know when you come on deck agine.”

And therewith I went below and, flinging myself into my bunk, at once fell into a profound and dreamless sleep that lasted until I was awakened by the discordant clank of the pumps, about four bells in the forenoon watch, when I found Miss Onslow patiently awaiting me in the cabin, with another hot meal all ready for my delectation.

It was apparent to me, immediately upon awaking, that the gale had broken; and when I went on deck I found that the sky had cleared to windward, showing here and there fast—widening patches of blue sky, while the wind had already dropped to the strength of a strong breeze; the sea, however, showed little diminution of height, although it was no longer so steep, nor was it now breaking dangerously; but the brig was rolling as furiously and more sluggishly than ever; and the clear water that gushed from the pumps told a tale that there was no mistaking. I noticed that five men were now working at the pumps—the cook and steward being two of them—and all hands were growling together, and cursing both loud and deep as they toiled at the brakes.

“Well, lads,” said I, approaching them, “what is the news from the pumps? Is there any hope of getting them to suck?”

“Suck?” exclaimed one of them, in tones of ineffable disgust. “No, they’ll never suck no more in this world. There’s up’ards o’ three feet o’ water in the hooker, now, and she’s gainin’ on us at the rate o’ two inches an hour while we pumps at her. She’s bound to the bottom, she is; and I only hopes she’ll keep afloat long enough to let us get the boats afloat without smashin’ of ’em to smithereens alongside. Whereabouts is the nearest land, mister; and how fur off is it?”

“Ask me after I have taken my sights at noon—it looks as though I shall be able to get the sun to-day—and I will tell you,” said I. Then, finding the men sulky, and quite tired of listening to their curses, I went aft and relieved the wheel, remaining there until about a quarter of an hour to

midday, when, the sky having cleared, I sang out for somebody to relieve me while I “shot the sun.” It was Harry who came at my call; and as he took over the wheel he remarked, just loud enough for me to hear, and staring away to windward as he spoke:

“I’ve made up my mind, sir; I’m with you and the lidy. I ain’t agoin’ to have no more truck with them other chaps; they’re no better than murderers; they’ve mide up their minds to leave you and the lidy aboard; and there’s no movin’ of ’em from that.”

“All right, my lad,” said I. “You will find, before many hours are over your head, that you have made a wise choice. Can you read?”

The fellow intimated that he could.

“Then,” said I, “I will write out such instructions as it will be necessary for me to give you, and you must find an opportunity to read them over, unobserved by the rest. And you must also obey them to the letter; for upon your obedience will depend the success or failure of my scheme.”

With which I left him, and went below for my sextant.

Upon working out the result of my meridian observation, I found that we were close upon one hundred and forty miles from Staten Island, which bore North by East a quarter East of us—a distance which might be traversed in less than forty-eight hours by a properly-equipped boat, in fine weather. But what if it should come on to blow again? It was a contingency that I did not care to contemplate. There was one point in our favour: the mercury was rising slowly and steadily; and, please God, if we were able to leave the brig in good time we might succeed in reaching shelter of some sort before the setting-in again of bad weather. And, in any case, it was a contingency that had to be faced, since it was perfectly clear, by this time, that the brig had been so severely battered and strained during the late gale that nothing we could do would avail to keep her afloat much longer.

Having pricked off the brig’s position on the chart, I proceeded to write out my instructions to the man Harry. It may perhaps be thought that, in committing those instructions to paper, I was doing an imprudent thing—that I was, in fact, furnishing irrefutable evidence of my intentions, should

the man choose to play me false, and show the paper to his companions. But I had faith in the fellow; there was an honest look in his eyes; and the fact that he had of his own free will warned me of the other men's intentions was another point in his favour. And, last but not least, I believed that he had wit enough to see that he would be better serving his own interests by attaching himself to me than by throwing in his lot with the others, and that consequently he would have no interest in playing me false; I therefore unhesitatingly handed him his instructions at the first opportunity, and left him to carry them out with as little delay as possible.

Upon returning to the deck, after working out my sights, I found that the men had knocked off pumping, but were hanging about the deck, as though waiting for something, instead of going below to dinner. And presently I found out what was in the wind, the man known as Sam stepping forward to inquire whereabout my observation placed the ship. I told him.

"Then," said he, "if we steers nothe-an'-by-east a quarter east, steady, we're bound to fetch this here Staten Hiland, are we?"

"Certainly," said I. "And I hope that we shall make it some time the day after to-morrow."

"The day a'ter to-morrer!" ejaculated the man. "Do ye mean with this here brig?"

"No," said I; "I mean with the boats. The brig could never fetch it, in her present disabled condition, except with a fair wind, even if you could keep her afloat so long, which I do not for a moment believe."

A grim smile of satisfaction—which the fellow strove to conceal—flickered for a moment over his rugged, sullen features, and then he turned away, without another word, and slouched forward, followed by his companions. As for me, I went aft and took the wheel from the man who was tending it; and, as soon as he had disappeared, lashed it, and set about certain preparations that I felt it was now high time to make. These did not occupy me long, and upon their completion I went below, where—the cook and Steward having been busy at the pumps all the morning—

Florence was awaiting me with a good, appetising dinner prepared by herself. While we were discussing the meal together—the steward having gone forward with the others—I told my companion that the supreme moment was at hand when it would be necessary for us to make a bold dash for our lives, and I warned her to prepare for it by putting all her slender stock of clothing together in a parcel, and to be ready to act with me at a moment's notice as soon as the boats were in the water. She received my intelligence very quietly, and although she lost her colour and became marble-white to the lips for perhaps a minute while I explained my plans, her courage never faltered; and when I had finished she put her hand in mine, with the simple remark:

"Very well, Charlie dear; you have only to tell me what you wish me to do, and you will find me obedient in every particular."

Meanwhile, the wind, which had been blowing a strong breeze at breakfast-time, had been dropping steadily all through the day, until toward the close of the afternoon it had softened down to the strength of a royal breeze, with a corresponding diminution in the height of the sea; yet it was evident that it would not be possible to safely lower a boat for some hours to come. But that the men were eager to be off was also perfectly evident, for instead of manning the pumps again after dinner, they had spent the entire afternoon hanging about the decks, inspecting and overhauling the boats, getting provisions, water, and other necessaries together—the cook lighting a fire in the galley, and boiling a considerable quantity of meat in the coppers—while, at intervals, one or another of them would sound the well, and report the result to his comrades; their actions being marked by a curious commingling of stealthiness and candour, as though they were quite unable to decide whether to keep their intentions a secret from me, or whether it would be possible to still more completely hoodwink me by a pretence of being perfectly frank and open. At length, however, the latter plan seemed to be the favoured one; for about sunset the man Sam came to me with the information that they, had decided to leave the brig at daybreak, and they'd be glad to know whether I thought the hooker 'd keep above water until then without pumpin'. Before replying, I inquired what depth of water there was then in the hold, and at what rate it was making, after which a brief calculation enabled me to assure them that she would probably last until noon next day; but that nevertheless I would recommend them to

prepare for a start the first thing after breakfast; and that the lady and I would be ready by that time.

From this time forward the brig—hove-to, and with her helm lashed—was left to take care of herself, the greatly-improved condition of the weather permitting of this, while the men proceeded, in their own slow, deliberate fashion, with their preparations for abandoning her. As for us aft, our preparations were of the simplest possible kind, consisting merely of the stowing of our clothing in a bundle that could be flung into the boat at a moment's notice—and the very careful loading of the brace of duelling-pistols with which my unknown French friend had presented me. These little matters attended to, I urged Florence to lie down and endeavour to secure a few hours' sleep, following the same good advice myself as soon as she had retired to her cabin.

I was awakened about midnight by the man Harry, who had been anxiously awaiting the moment for the others to get to sleep, in order that he might slip aft, unnoticed, to inform me of the progress of his own particular share in our enterprise.

"Well, Harry," said I, "how do matters stand? Have you succeeded in accomplishing all that I directed you to do?"

"Yes, sir," said he. "I was afride at first that I shouldn't get a chaunce to go down into the fore-peak without bein' noticed; but 'the doctor' made that right by asting for somebody to fetch him up a bit more coal. Which I offered to do for him. Once I was down in the peak, the rest was easy enough; the arms-chist hadn't never been locked, so I collared a couple of pair of pistols, and then scraped the coal away from under the chist until the whole bag o' tricks fetched away and slid down into the water, where nobody won't ever find it again. Then I had a look at the magazine what poor Chips had knocked together. The door was only fastened by a staple, so I soon had it open; and when I'd found a couple o' packets of pistol-cartridges, I just hove everything else I could lay hands on down a'ter the arms-chist. So, even though some of 'em has pistols, they won't have no ammunition for 'em—unless they happened to have a few cartridges by 'em—which makes us all right."

"Capital!" exclaimed I. "And, now, as to the final arrangements of the

men; what are they?”

“Why, ’twas arranged that I was to be on deck, so’s to keep a sort of general heye on the brig and you; and to call all hands for’ard at daybreak—or earlier if the sea flattens down enough to launch a boat afore then. Then we’re goin’ to lower the gig that you had when you picked us up—she bein’ the most wholesomest boat of the two—and put everything into her that we’re goin’ to tike with us—includin’ plenty o’ grub and water. And at the last minute, when we’re ready to shove off, you and the lidy are to be set upon and battened down below, and then we all jumps into the boat and makes sail.”

I considered a while, and then said, reflectively:

“It is just questionable whether it would not, after all, be the best plan to let the scoundrels get right away, and then launch the French boat.”

“That’s no good,” interrupted Harry; “the French boat is stove. Sam thought of that last night; says he: ‘If we don’t mind our weather heye, that there feller aft may break his way out from below a’ter we’re gone, and get away in t’other boat.’ And Dirk, he says: ‘Tike the “doctor’s” coal hammer and smash in a bottom plank. That’ll stop any sich little gime as you speaks of, Sam.’ And a’ter a little more talk, Sam ups and does it while you was below, asleep.”

“The scoundrels!” ejaculated I fiercely. “So they are absolutely determined to murder us, are they? Very well; their blood be on their own heads! Now listen to me, Harry.” And therewith I unfolded my final plans, and gave him a few last instructions; after which Harry went on deck again, to be there in the event of any of the others taking it into their heads to go on deck and have a look round.

Anxious to get as much rest as possible, I flung myself down upon one of the sofa-lockers; but my nerves were just then rather too tautly strung, and all my senses too keenly on the alert, to admit of anything like sound sleep, and I simply dozed, hearing Harry’s every movement on deck, until the grey light of dawn began to ooze down through the skylight, when I went to my berth, soused my head in a basin of cold water, had a good refreshing wash, and then went on deck to look round; the people

forward appearing on deck at the precise moment when I emerged from the companion. They seemed to be rather disconcerted at seeing me, but I feigned not to have noticed it, devoting my immediate attention to the weather. It was quite fine now, with a nice little royal breeze from about due east; the sea had gone down wonderfully during the night, and there was very little more than the heavy swell to contend with, while even that looked a great deal more formidable than it really was. As for the brig, she was much more buoyant than I had expected to find her; I gave her fully six hours longer to live—quite long enough to enable the wretches who meditated my destruction to repair and launch the boat that they had wilfully damaged, while the job would occupy them long enough to enable me to gain a good start and get clear away from them.

The cook went to his galley, and lighted his fire, quite in the ordinary way, and set about preparing breakfast, while the rest, going to the *City of Cawnpore's* gig, looked into her, talking together in low tones. Then they cast off the gripes and tackle falls, and lowered her until her gunwale was just level with the rail, when they began to pass into her and stow the kegs of water, provisions, and other matters that they intended taking with them; and by the extreme care that each man bestowed upon the storage of his own particular bundle of "dunnage," I felt tolerably certain that their respective parcels of gems were concealed therein. Seeing them thus employed, I slipped down below, gave Miss Onslow a call, and then returned to the deck with her and my own bundle, together with the chronometer and sextant, all of which, in an easy, off-hand manner, I placed in the stern-sheets. As I did so, the man Sam looked up, and exclaimed savagely:

"Here, what the—" but was instantly interrupted by one of his mates, who murmured a few words in his ear.

"What is the matter?" demanded I, with a great affectation of innocence; "surely there is room in the boat for the few things belonging to the lady and myself?"

"Oh, ay," he growled surlily; "there's room enough—or, if there ain't, we'll *make* room, so's you and the lady shall have plenty o' clothes for your trip —eh, mates?"

The others responded with a sinister laugh at the grim humour of the joke; but without taking any notice, I looked on at the work with just that amount of interest that I might be reasonably expected to take, until the steward called me to say that breakfast was ready. Then, with a glance of intelligence at Harry—to which he responded—I turned away and went below.

The breakfast was a very good one—just the substantial, appetising kind that one would wish to sit down to upon such an occasion; and I did ample justice to it. At length, at what I judged to be the right moment, I signed to Miss Onslow to go on deck, and then rose to my feet as though to follow her; but instead of springing up the companion ladder I turned to the steward, seized him by the throat, and flung him violently to the deck. The shock stunned him; and before he recovered consciousness I had got him lashed arms and legs together, like a trussed fowl, with a gag in his mouth that I had already prepared for the purpose. Making sure that he was quite secure, and could not possibly release himself, or cry out, I dashed up the companion ladder, and drew over the slide, securing it and the doors with wedges. Harry was sitting on the windlass barrel, taking his breakfast *al fresco*, and acting as lookout generally while the others breakfasted below; and directly he saw me throw up my hand as a signal to him, he slid off the windlass, crept softly to the fore-scuttle, and swiftly closed the hatch, securing it by thrusting a wooden pin through the staple. There was an immediate outcry from below, quickly followed by savage bangs upon the underside of the hatch; but, taking no notice of these manifestations, the fellow rushed aft and at once assisted me to place Miss Onslow in the gig. Then, springing to the tackle falls, we lowered the boat smartly the short remaining distance to the water, and, springing into her, unhooked the tackles and shoved clear of the brig. Then, still working for our lives, we stepped the mast, set the sails, and headed the boat to the northward. Nor were we much too quick; for we had scarcely placed a cable’s length between us and the brig when we heard a crash aboard her, and the next instant we saw the fellows rising out of the forecastle and rushing aft. Of course they at once caught sight of us, and promptly blazed away with their pistols at us; but none of the bullets came anywhere near. Then they began to shout imprecations at us, and prayers to us to return; but we remained equally deaf to both, and in a few minutes—the boat slipping nimbly along through the water—we were out of hearing of them, and congratulating ourselves and each other

upon our good luck in having succeeded in so neatly effecting our escape without being obliged to fight for the possession of the boat.

I headed north, with the intention of making Staten Island if possible; but we had scarcely been under way two hours when Harry, who was forward, keeping a lookout, sighted a sail dead to windward, heading our way, and we at once so manoeuvred the boat as to intercept her. She came bowling down toward us, hand over hand, and when she was within about three miles of us I made her out to be a frigate. She was coming so directly for us that it was impossible for us to miss each other, and within half an hour of the moment when we first discovered her I had the supreme satisfaction of assisting Florence up the side of Her Britannic Majesty's ship *Ariadne*, commanded by my former shipmate and very good friend Harry Curtis; while half an hour later the five men whom I had left aboard the brig were taken off her, and safely lodged in irons on the *Ariadne's* lower deck. Of the excitement that ensued upon our rescue I have no space to dwell; suffice it to say that the *Marie Renaud* had duly arrived in Table Bay, and had there reported the act of piracy of which she had been the victim, my letter being at the same time placed in the hands of the authorities, who, after a proper amount of deliberation, had despatched the *Ariadne* in search of the piratical brig.

Is there anything else to tell? I think not, except it be to mention that Miss Onslow was the heroine of the ship, and every man, fore and aft, her devoted slave during our passage to the Cape, where the six survivors of O'Gorman's gang were duly put upon their trial for piracy upon the high seas. The man Harry, acting upon my advice, offered to turn Queen's Evidence; and the favourable report that I was able to make of his conduct caused his offer to be accepted, with the result that he received a free pardon, while Dirk the Dutchman was sentenced to death, and the other four to penal servitude for life; the Dutchman, however, cheated the gallows by *dying* in prison of his wounds, after lingering for so long a time that it seemed as though he would after all recover.

"And the gems that were the prime cause of so much of your trouble—what became of them?" I fancy I hear some fair reader exclaim.

Well, there proved to be such insuperable difficulties in the way of establishing their rightful ownership that the Home Government very

kindly undertook the charge of them until the man who could satisfactorily prove his right to them should put in an appearance. It was a marvellously curious circumstance, however, that I should have happened to anticipate this precise difficulty and its probable solution, almost at the moment when I first identified the distant *Ariadne* as a man-o'-war; with the result that—well, there is no need to be *too* explicit, is there? it will perhaps suffice if I say that the seaman Harry is to-day living very comfortably indeed as an independent gentleman of considerable means; while the four magnificent suites of jewellery—rubies, diamonds, emeralds, and pearls—that Mrs Charles Conyers, *née* Florence Onslow, sports from time to time are the eternal envy and admiration of all who get the opportunity to see them.

The End.

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