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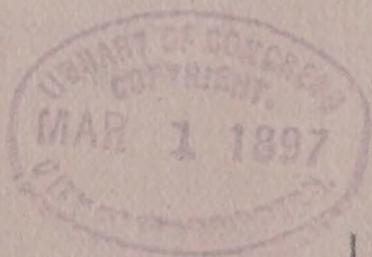
THE WRECK OF THE CORSAIRE

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William
BY
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AUTHOR OF "THE WRECK OF THE GROSVENOR," "MA-
ROONED," "A THREE-STRANDED YARN," ETC.

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THE WRECK OF THE CORSAIRE.

I.

ALL day long there had been a pleasant breeze blowing from abeam; but as the sun sank into the west the wind fined into light, delicate curls of shadow upon the sea that, at the hour of sundown, when the great luminary hung poised like a vast target of flaming gold upon the ocean-line, turned into a surface of quicksilver through which there ran a light, wide, long-drawn heave of swell, regular as a respiration, rhythmic as the sway of a cradle to the song of a mother.

The ship was an Indiaman named the *Ruby*; the time long ago, as human life

runs, in this century nevertheless, when the old traditional conditions of the sea-life were yet current—the roundabout Indian voyage by way of the Cape—the slaver sneaking across the brassy parallels of the Middle Passage—the picaroon in the waters of the Antilles dodging the fiery sloop whose adamantine grin of cannons was rendered horribly significant to the eye of the greasy pirate by the cross of crimson under whose meteoric folds the broadside thundered.

I was a passenger aboard the *Ruby*, making the voyage to India for my pleasure. The fact was, being a man of independent means, I was without any sort of business to detain me at home. Your continental excursion was but a twopenny business to me. Here was this huge ball of earth to be circumnavigated whilst one was young, with spirits rendered waterproof by health. Time enough, I thought, to amble about

Europe when Australia began to look a long way off. So this was my third voyage. One I had made to Sydney and Melbourne, and a second to China; and now I was bound to Bombay with some kind of notion beyond of striking across into Persia, thence to Arabia, and so home by way of the classic shores of the Mediterranean.

Well, it happened this 18th of June to be the captain's birthday. His name was Bow; he would be fifty-three years old that day he told us, and as he had used the sea since the age of thirteen he was to be taken as a man who knew his business. And a better sailor there never was, and never also was there a person who looked less like a sailor. If ever you have seen a print of Charles Lamb you have had an excellent likeness of Captain Bow before you—a pale, spare creature of a somewhat Hebraic cast of countenance, with a brow undarkened by any stains of weather. His

memory went far back; he had served as mate in John Company's ships, had known Commodore Dance who beat Linois and spoke of him as a perfect gentleman; deplored the gradual decay of the British sailor, and would talk with a wistful gleam in his eye of the grand and generous policy of the Leadenhall Street Directors in allowing to their captains as much cubic capacity in the ships they commanded for their own private use and emolument as would furnish out the dimensions of a considerable smack.

It was his birthday, and long ago all of us passengers had made up our minds to celebrate the occasion by a supper, a dance on deck, and by obtaining permission for Jack forward to have a ball, on condition that we should be allowed to ply him with drink enough to keep his heels nimble, and no more. We were in the Indian Ocean climbing north, somewhere upon the longitude of Am-

sterdam Island, so formidable was the easting made in the fine old times. The latitude, I think, was about 12° south, and desperately hot it was, though the sun hung well in the north. Spite of awnings and wet swabs the planks of the deck seemed to tingle like tin through the thin soles of your boots. If you put your nose into an open skylight the air that rose drove you back with a sense of suffocation, so heavily was the fiery stagnation of it loaded with smells of food and of the cabin interior, though there never was a sweeter and breezier cuddy with its big windows and windsail-heels when the thermometer gave the place the least chance. But when the sun was nearly setting, some sailors quietly came aft and fell to work to make a ball-room of the poop. They took the bunting out of the signal locker and stretched it along the ridge-ropes betwixt the awning and the rail until it was like standing inside a huge Chinese lantern for color.

They hung the ship's lamps along in rows, roused up the piano from its moorings in the cuddy, embellished the tops of the hencoops with red baize, and in fifty directions not worth the trouble of indicating, so decorated and glorified the after-end of the ship that when the lamps came to be lighted with streaks of pearl-colored moonshine glittering upon the deck betwixt the interstices of the signal flags, and movement enough in the tranquil lift of the great fabric to the swell to fill the eye with alternations of swaying shadow and gleam, this ball-room of almond-white plank and canvas ceiling of milky softness and walls of radiant banners was more like some fairy sea-vision than a reality, especially with the glimpse you caught of the vast silent ocean solitude outside with its sky of hovering stars and a stillness as of a dead world in the atmosphere—such a contrast, by heaven! to the revelry within the shipboard pavilion, when once

the music had struck up and the forms of women in white gowns fluffing up about them like soapsuds were swimming round the decks in the embrace of their partners, that a kind of shudder would come into you with the mere thinking of the difference between the two things.

The music was good; there was a steerage passenger, a lady, who played the piano incomparably well; then there was a cuddy passenger who blew upon the flute very finely indeed. A military officer returning to India after a long invaliding spell at home had as light, delicate and accomplished a hand on the fiddle as any of the best of the first violins which I have heard in the crackest of orchestras. When the committee of passengers had been talking about and arranging for this band the chief officer told them that if they thought there would not be instruments enough there was a man forward, a fellow named Ratt,

who played the fiddle exquisitely and, if we wished it, he would make one of the instrumentalists. We consented, and for several days previous to this night you might have heard Ratt rehearsing in the 'tween decks, scraping in a way that made the military gentleman who had been invalided look somewhat grave. He spoke of Ratt with a foreboding eye, and what he feared happened. The man could indeed play, but he had no sense of *time*. All went wrong with the first dance-air that was struck up. The tune he made was right enough; but it was always darting ahead and bewildering the others, and finally the band came to a stop, though Ratt continued to play several bars, whilst the military gentleman in great temper was shouting to him to go away. I should have felt sorry for the poor fellow had he not been saucy, for he had dressed himself with extraordinary care, greased every separate hair upon his head as though it had been a

rope-yarn, and had arrived aft with a sailor's expectation of seeing plenty of fun and getting plenty of drink. It ended in the chief mate grasping him by the collar and tumbling him down the poop ladder. I afterwards heard that he went forward and in a towering passion threw his fiddle overboard, swearing that he would never play upon anything again but the Jew's harp and then only for hogs to dance to; there was no longer any taste left amongst human beings, he said, for downright real good music.

The merriment aft was scarcely affected by this instant's failure. The moment Jack had been tumbled off the poop the instrumentalists began afresh and the decks were once more filled with sliding and revolving couples. I had slightly sprained my ankle that morning by kicking against a coil of rope and was unable to dance; but this was no deprivation to me on a burning hot night like that, with no place for the draughts

out of the fanning canvas to come through, and the smell of blistered paint rising in a lukewarm breathing off the sides of the ship as though the sun still stood over the main-truck. So squatting myself on a hencoop I sat gazing at the merry, moving, radiant picture and listening to the music and to the laughter of the girls which came back from the canvas roof of the poop in echoes soft and clear as the notes of the flute.

II.

THERE were thirty-two cabin passengers in all, and we had a poopful, as you will suppose. There were more than a dozen girls, dark and fair, most of them pretty enough. There were a few young married ladies too and a little mob of dignified mammas. The men were of the old-fashioned mixture, a few military officers, a sprinkling of Civil Service young gentlemen, fierce old men with white whiskers and gleaming eyes, with peppercorns for livers and with a capacity of putting on the tender aspects of Bengal tigers when anything went wrong—merchants, judges, planters—I can scarce remember now what they were. There were lanterns enough to make a bright light and some of them being of

colored glass threw bars of ruby and of emerald against the yellow radiance of the clear flame and the ivory streaks of moonlight. Far aft was the wheel with the brass upon it reflecting the lustre till it glowed out against the blackness over the stern like a circle of dull fire upon the liquid obscurity. Grasping the spokes of it was the figure of a seaman, smartly apparelled in flowing duck and a grass hat on "nine hairs"; his shape, dim in the distance, floated up and down against a bright star or two; but there was little need for him to keep his eye on the course. The calm was dead as dead could be. Half-an-hour since the ship's head was northwest and now it was west, and the swell was under the bow with a strange melancholy sob of water breaking into the pauses betwixt the music and sounding like the sigh of a weeping giant somewhere in the blackness over the side.

And black the water was spite of the air being brimful of the soft silver of the moonlight. On either hand the planet's wake the ocean ran in ebony to the indigo of the night sky; but you only needed to steal to the break of the poop clear of the awning to mark how gloriously the luminary was limning the ship as if she had no magic for the deep that night. Every sail was a square of pearl, every shroud and backstay, every brace and halliard a rope of silver wire; the yards of ivory, with hundreds of stars of moonlight splendor sparkling and flashing in the dew along the rails. The Jacks had rigged up lanterns forward and were cutting capers on the forecastle and in the waist to some queer music that was coming out of the darkness upon the booms. It was strange enough to see their whiskered faces revolving in the weak, illusive light, to witness apparitions of knobs and warts and wrinkles storm-darkened

to the hue of the shell of a walnut showing out for an instant to the glare of a lantern. There was great laughter that way and a jovial growling of voices. I believe the sailors had got, with the captain's leave, some of the women of the steerage passengers to dance with, and their happiness was very great; for give Jack a fiddle, and a girl to twirl to the sawing of it, and a drink of rum and water to fill up the short measures for his breathing-times, and he will ask for no other paradise ashore or afloat.

Much was made of old Captain Bow. He looked as if he had taken all day to dress himself, so skewered was he in a garb of the old school; tail-coat, a frill, a collar half-way the height of the back of his head, buff waistcoat, tight pantaloons, shoes like pumps, and a heavy ground-tackle of seals dangling from the rim of his vest.

"Captain shows nobly to-night, sir," said the chief mate to me.

“Ay!” said I, “little enough of the salt in *him* you’d think.”

“He dances well enough for an old shellback,” said the mate. “A man needs a ship for a dancing-master to teach him how to spread his toes as the Captain does.”

“Aren’t you dancing?” I asked.

“No, it’s my watch on deck. I’ve got the ship to look after. But it’s little watching she wants. Oh, blow, my sweet breeze, blow!” he whispered, with a pensive cock of his eye at the sea through a space between the flags. “It isn’t to be the only birthday aboard us, I allow, Mr. Catesby. If the cockroaches below aren’t celebrating some festival of their own, then are we manned with marines, sir. Phew! the Hooghley of a dead night with bodies foul of the cable and the gangway ladder is a joke to this. What’s become of the wind? What’s become of the wind?”

and he stole away to the wheel softly whistling between his teeth.

It was too sultry to eat; the very drink you got was so warm that you swallowed it only for thirst, and put down the glass with a sort of loathing. When I took a peep through the after skylight and saw the tables laid out for supper for the special birthday feast that was to be eaten, my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth, and I felt as if I should never be able to eat another blessed morsel of food this side the grave. Every dish looked exhausted with perspiration; the hams were melting, the fowls shone like varnish, much that had come solid to the table was now fluid. However I was one of the committee and it would not do for me to be absent, so when the bell rang to announce supper and the music stopped, I stepped up to the wife of a colonel and, giving her my arm, fell in with the procession and entered the cabin.

It is a picture I need but close my eyes to vividly witness anew. There were two tables, one athwartships well aft, and the other running pretty nearly down the whole length of the cabin. The interior was lighted with elegant silver lamps, and along the length of the ceiling there was a plentiful embellishment of ferns, goldfish in globes, and so forth. On either hand went a range of berths, the bulkheads richly inlaid, the panels hand-painted, and there was many another little touch full of grace and taste. Far aft, at the centre of the athwartship table—his quaint, old-fashioned figure showing like a cameo upon the dull ground of the bulkhead behind him—sat the captain, talking to right and left, with a dry, kind smile lying wrinkled upon his face like the meshes of a South African spider's web. On either side of him went a row of passengers, and on down to the foot of the table that was over against the cuddy

front. The ladies' dresses were handsome; we were a rich assemblage of folks for the most part, and had thoroughly overhauled our wardrobes that we might do fitting honor to this very interesting occasion. Jewels sparkled in white ears, and upon white wrists and fingers. We were not lacking in turbans and feathers, in thick gold chains, immense brooches bearing the heads of the living or of the departed. There was much popping of champagne corks, much rushing about of stewards, much laughter, and a busy undertone of talk. The memory of the picture dwells in me with an odd pertinacity. I had shared in more than one festive scene on board ship in my time, but in none do I recall the significance which the framework of vast ocean solitude outside, of the deep mystery of the wide moonlit shadow, and the oppressive peace of the tropical night, communicated to this one. It might have been the number of the folks

assembled; their gay, and in many instances, even splendid attire, the essentially shore-going qualities of the merry-making, clearly defining themselves in the heart of the deep—like the sight of a house in a flood. In fact the scene completely dominated all ship-board habits, and the thoughts which grew out of them. It made every heave of the fabric upon the weak, black, invisible swell a sort of wonder, as though some novel element were introduced; the familiar creak of a bulkhead, the faint jar of the rudder upon its post made one start as one would to such things ashore.

“You are refusing everything the stewards offer you, Mr. Catesby,” said the colonel’s lady by my side. “You are in love.”

“I am in a fever, madam,” I replied: “the tropics usually affect me as a profound passion. In fact I feel as if I could drown myself.”

“Why make a voyage to India, then, Mr. Catesby? Is there not the North-West Passage left to explore, with the great Arctic Circle to keep ye cool?”

“Madam,” said I, “I perceive your husband in the act of rising to make a speech.”

A short, fiery-faced Irishman, with whiskers like silver wires projecting cat-like from his cheeks, stood up to propose the captain's health. Glasses were filled, and the little colonel blazed away. When he had made an end (old Bow steadfastly watching him all the while with a smile of mingled incredulity and delight), the skipper's health was drunk with cheers and to the song of “He's a jolly good fellow,” the air of which was caught up by the ship's company forward, and re-echoed to the cuddy with hurricane lungs from the fore-castle. Then old Bow rose straight and unbending in his tightly-buttoned coat on to his thin shanks; but at that moment

there was a movement of a little group of the stewards at my end of the table ; the colonel's lady by my side was whispering with animation to what was in those days called a "griffin," a handsome young fellow seated on her left ; and being half dead with heat, and in no temper to listen to old Bow, whose preliminary coughs and slow gaze around the table threatened a very heavy bestowal of tediousness, I slipped off my chair, sneaked through the jumble of stewards, and in a moment was ascending the poop ladder, breathing with delight the night atmosphere of the sea, that tasted cold as a draught of mountain water after the hot, food-flavored air of the cuddy.

III.

FORWARD the sailors had come to a stand, and were talking, smoking, drinking, and eating by the will-of-the-wisp glare of the few lanterns which hung that way. There was nobody aft, saving the helmsman and the second officer who had turned out to relieve the chief mate that he might join the supper party. He lay over the rail abreast of the wheel, and I could hear him quietly singing. The lanterns burnt brightly ; against the brilliant atmospheric haze of moonshine to larboard—*larboard* was then the word—the bunting which walled the poop glistened like oiled paper. The monotonous voice of old Bow was still returning thanks below ; again and again his deep sea notes were broken by loud

cheers. The life under decks, the speechifying and the huzzaing there, the brightness of the light, the frequent chink of glasses, put a wild sort of mocking look into the emptiness of this deck with its lanterns swaying to the roll of the ship, and the motionless figure of the steersman showing unreal, like some image of the fancy down at the end of the vessel, through the vista of bunting and kaleidoscopic light and white awning framing a star-studded square of dark ether over the taffrail.

Yet I still wanted air. The poop was smothered up with flags and canvas ; the cross-jack was furled, spanker brailed up, and the mainsail hung from its yard in festoons to the grip of its gear. There was no wing of canvas therefore near the deck to fan a draught along, and so it came into my head to jump aloft and see what sort of coolness of dew and night were to be had in the maintop. I got on to the rail and laid hold of the

main shrouds, and leisurely travelled up the ratlines. Methought it was as good as climbing a hill for the change of temperature the ascent gave me. The iron of the futtock shrouds went through and through me in a delicious chill, and with the smallest possible effort I swung myself over the rim of the top and stood upon the platform, rapturously drinking in the gushings of air which came in little gusts to my face out of the pendulum beat of the great maintopsail against the mast to the tender swing of the tall fabric.

If ever you need to know what a deep sense of loneliness is like, go aloft in a dead calm when the shadow of the night lies heavy upon the breathless ocean, and from the altitude of top, cross-tree or yard, look down and around you! The spirit of life is always strong in the breeze or in the gale of wind. There are voices in the rigging; there is the organ note of the billow flung foaming

from the ship's side; there is a tingling vitality in the long floating rushes of the fabric bursting through one head of yeast into another. All this is company, along with the spirit shapes of the loose scud flying wild, or the sociable procession of large, slow clouds. But up aloft in such a clock-calm as lay upon the deep that night you are *alone!* and the lonelier for the distant sounds which rise from the decks—the dim laugh, the faint call, liker to the memories of such things than the reality.

The body of the ship lay thin and long far beneath me like a black plank, pallid aft with the spread of awning, with an oblong haze of light in the main hatch where the grating was lifted, and dots of weak flame from the lanterns forward, resembling bulbous corposants hovering about the forecastle rail. The ship's hull was complexioned to the aspect of the leaf of the silver tree when lighted by the stars by the broad raining.

of the moonshine. Yet, as she slightly rolled, breaking the black water from her side into ripples, you saw the phosphor starting and winking in the ebony profound there, like the reflection of sheet-lightning. Exquisitely lulling was the tender pinion-like flapping of the light, moonlit canvas, soaring spire-fashion in ivory spaces high above my head, with the pattering of dew falling from the cloths as they swayed. A sound of thin cheering from the cuddy floated to me; presently a fiddle struck up somewhere forwards, and a manly voice began *Tom Bowling*. Now, thought I, if they would only strip the poop of its awning, that I might see them dancing by the lantern light when supper was over, and they had fallen to caper-cutting afresh! What a scene of pigmy revelry *then!* What a vision of Lilliputian enjoyment!

I seated myself Lascar fashion and lighted a cigar. Could I have distin-

guished the figure of a midshipman below I should have hailed him, and sent down the end of a line for a draught of seltzer and brandy. But the repose up here, the dewy coolness, the royal solitude of the still, majestic night, with sentinel stars drowsily winking along the sea-line, and the white planet of the moon sailing northwards into the west amid the wide eclipse of its own soft silver glory, were all that my fevered being could pray for.

It is as likely as not that after a little I was nodding somewhat drowsily. I recollect that my cigar went out, and that on sucking at it and finding it out I would not be at the trouble of lighting it again. I say I might have been half-asleep sitting, still Lascar fashion, with my back against the head of the lower-mast, when on a sudden, something—soft, indeed, but amazingly heavy—struck me full on the face and chest, and fell upon my knees, where it lay

like a small feathered-bed. But for my back being supported, I must have been stretched at full length and, for all I know, knocked clean overboard, or, worse still, hurled headlong to the deck.

IV.

I WAS so confounded by the shock and the blow that for some moments I sat goggling the object that lay as lead upon my knees like a fool. I then threw it from me, and stood up. It fell where a slant of moonshine lay clear upon the side of the top, and I perceived that it was a big sea-bird, as large as a noddy, white as snow saving the margin of its wings, which were of a velvet black. It had a long, curved beak, and I gathered from the look of one of its pinions, which overlaid the body as though broken, that its width of wing must have come proportionally very near to that of the albatross. I could see by the moonshine that the eyes were closing by the slow drawing

down of a white skin. The creature did not stir. I stood staring at it full five minutes, gripping the topmast rigging to provide against its rolling me out of the top should it rise suddenly and strike out with its wings, but there was no stir of life in it. It was then that I caught sight of something which seemed to glitter in the thick down upon its breast like a dewdrop on thistle-down. It was a little square case of white metal, apparently a tobacco-box, secured to the bird's neck. By this time the passengers had come up from supper, and were dancing again on the poop. I could see nothing for the awning, but the music was audible enough, and I could also catch the sliding sounds of feet travelling over the hard planks, and the gay laughter of hearts warmed by several toasts. The Jacks were also at work forward. An occasional note of tipsy merriment, I would think, rose up from that part of the

ship; but there was no lack of earnestness in the toe and heeling there; the slap of the sailors' feet upon the decks sounded like the clapping of hands; and I could just catch a glimpse of the figure of the fiddler in the obscurity which overlaid the booms quivering and swaying as he sawed, as though the noise he made was driving him crazy.

I seized the big bird by the legs and found its weight by no means so considerable as I should have supposed from the blow it dealt me. So, tightly binding its webbed feet with my pocket-handkerchief, that they might serve me as a handle, I dropped with this strange, dead sea-messenger through the wide square of the lubber's hole into the main shrouds, and leisurely descended. The chief mate stood at the head of the starboard poop ladder as I reached the rail.

"Hillo!" he called out, "good sport there, Mr. Catesby. What star have

you been shooting over pray? And what *is* it may I ask? A *turkey*?"

A shout of this sort was enough to bring everybody running to look. The music ceased, the dancing abruptly stopped. In a moment I was surrounded by a crowd of ladies and gentlemen shoving and exclaiming as they gathered about the skylight upon which I had laid the big sea-fowl.

"What is it, Mr. Catesby? My stars! a handsome bird surely," exclaimed Captain Bow.

"Oh, Captain," cried a young lady, "is the beautiful creature dead really?"

"See!" shouted a military man, "the creature's breast is decorated with a crucifix. No, damme, it's a trick of the light. What is it, though?"

"A silver pouncebox, I declare," exclaimed a tall, stout lady, with a knowing nod of the feather in her head.

"A sailor's nickel tobacco-box more like, ma'am," observed the mate, "with

some castaway's writing inside, or that bird's a crocodile."

"Let's have the story of the thing, Mr. Catesby," said the captain.

I briefly stated that I had ascended to the maintop to breathe the cool air up there and that whilst I was nodding the bird had dashed against me and fallen dead across my knees.

"Oh, how dreadful!" "Oh, how interesting!" "Oh, I wonder the fright didn't make you faint, Mr. Catesby!" and so on, and so on from the young ladies.

"Shall I cast the seizing of the box adrift, sir?" said the mate.

"Ay," responded the captain.

The officer with his knife severed the laniard of sennit and made to lift the lid of the box. But this proved a long job, inexpressibly vexatious to the thirsty expectations of the onlookers, owing to the lid fitting as to resist, as though soldered, the blade of the knife.

When opened at last, there was disclosed, sure enough, inside, a piece of paper folded, apparently a leaf from a logbook.

“Bring a lantern, some one,” roared the mate.

Some one held a light close to the officer, who exclaimed, after opening the sheet and gazing at it a little, “Any lady or gentleman here understand Spanish?”

“I do,” exclaimed the handsome young “griffin” who had sat next to the colonel’s lady at table.

“Will you kindly translate this then?” said the mate, handing him the letter.

“It’s French,” said the young fellow; “no matter; I can read French.”

He ran his eye over the page, coughed and read aloud as follows:—

“*The Corsaire*, June 12th, 18—. This brig was dismantled in a hurricane ten days since. Three of us survive. At the time of our destruction our latitude was 8° south, and longitude $81^{\circ} 10'$

east. Should this missive fall into the hands of any master or mate of a ship he is implored in the name of God and of the Holy Virgin to search for and to succor us. He will be richly." * * *

"Last words illegible," said the young fellow, holding the paper close to his nose.

"Humph!" exclaimed Captain Bow. He hummed over the latitude and longitude, and addressing the mate said, "The wreck should not be far off, Mr. Pike."

"Oh, Captain, *will* you search for the poor, poor creatures?" cried one of the younger of the married ladies.

"Twelfth of June the date is, hey?" said the captain, "and this is the eighteenth. In six days the deluge, madam—at sea. Well, we shall keep a bright look-out, I promise you. D'ye want to keep the bird, Mr. Catesby?"

"No," said I, "the box will suffice as a memorial."

"Then, Mr. Pike, let it be hove overboard," said the captain.

"Strike up '*Tom Bowling*' for its interment," cried the little Irish colonel, "'*Faithful below he did his duty,*' you know. Nearly knocked poor Catesby overboard, though. What is it, a Booby?"

"How *can* ye be so rude, Desmond?" said his wife.

"'Tis the bird I mane, my love," he answered.

The girls would not let it be hove overboard for a good bit. They hung over the snow-white creature caressing its delicate down and strong feathers with fingers whose jewels glittered upon the plumage like raintdrops in moonlight. However, ere long the music started anew. The people that still hovered about the bird drew off, and the mate sneaking the noble creature to the side quietly let it fall.

V.

WELL, next day, I promise you, this incident of the bird gave us plenty to talk about. In fact it even swamped the memory of the dance and the supper, and again and again you would see one or other of the ladies sending a wistful glance round the sea-line, in search of the dismasted brig—as often looking astern as ahead, whilst one or two of the young fellows amongst us crept very gingerly aloft, holding on as they went as though they would squeeze all the tar out of the shrouds, just to make sure that there was nothing in sight. However, there was a professional look-out kept forward. I heard the captain give directions to the officer of the watch to send a man on to the fore-royal yard from

time to time to report if there was anything in view; but as to altering his course with the chance of picking up the Frenchman, *that* was not to be expected in old Bow, whose business was to get to Bombay as fast as the wind would blow him along; and indeed, seeing that the *Ruby* had already been hard upon four months from the river Thames, you will suppose that, concerned as we might all feel about the fate of *The Corsaire*, the softest-hearted amongst us would have been loth to lose even a day in a search that was tolerably certain to prove fruitless—as the mate proved to a group of us whilst he stood pointing out our situation and the supposed position of the brig upon a chart of the Indian Ocean lying open upon the skylight.

We got no wind till daybreak of the morning following the dance, and then a pleasant air came along out of south-southeast, which enabled the *Ruby* to

expand her stunsails, and she went floating over the long sapphire swells of the fervid ocean under an overhanging cloud of cloths which whitened the water to starboard of her, till it looked like a sheet of quicksilver draining there. This breeze held and shoved the ponderous bows of the Indiaman through it at the rate of some four or five miles in the hour. So we jogged along, till it came to the fourth day from the date of my adventure in the maintop. The fiery breeze had by this time crept round to off the starboard bow, and the ship was sailing along with her yards as fore and aft as they would lie. It was a little before the hour of noon. The captain and mates were ogling the sun through their sextants on either hand the poop, for the luminary hung pretty nearly over the royal trunk with a wake of flaming gold under him broadening to our cut-water, so that the *Ruby* looked to be stemming some burning river of glory

flowing through a strange province of dark blue land.

Suddenly high aloft from off the main-top-gallant-yard—whose arm was jockeyed by the figure of a sailor doing something with the clew of the royal—came a clear, distant cry of “Sail-ho,” and I saw the man levelling his marline-spike at an object visible to him a little to the right of the flying-jibboom end.

“Aloft there!” bawled the mate, putting his hand to the side of his mouth, “how does she show, my lad?”

“’Tis something black, sir,” cried the man, making a binocular glass of his fists. “’Tis well to the starboard of the dazzle upon the water. It is too blinding that way to make sure.”

“Something black!” shouted the little colonel, whose Christian name was Desmond. “*The Corsaire*, Captain Bow, without doubt. Anybody feel inclined to bet?”

Some wagering followed, whilst I stepped below for a telescope of my own, and then went forward and got into the fore-rigging, with the glass slung over my shoulders. There was no need to ascend above the top. I levelled the telescope when I gained that platform, and instantly saw the object with a handbreadth of the gleam of the blue sea past her, showing that she was well this side of the horizon from the elevation of the foremast, and that she would be visible from the poop in a little while. There was but a very light swell on; the spires of the *Ruby* floated steadily through the blue atmosphere. I had no difficulty in commanding the object therefore, and the powerful lenses of my telescope brought her close. It was a wreck, a sheer hulk indeed, and without a shadow of a doubt *The Corsaire*. Her masts were gone, though a fragment of bowsprit remained. Whole lengths of her bul-

work were apparently crushed flat to the covering-board; nevertheless, the hull preserved a sort of rakish aspect, a piratical sheer of long, low side. "Let her prove what she will," thought I, "I am a Dutchman if yonder craft hasn't carried a bitter and poisonous sting in her head and tail in her time."

They had "made" eight bells on the poop, and the mellow chimes were sounding upon the quarter-deck, and echoing in the silent squares of canvas, as I descended the rigging and made my way aft. I told Captain Bow that the craft ahead was a hulk, and without doubt *The Corsaire*; on hearing which the passengers went in a rush to the side and stood staring as though the object were close aboard, some of them pointing and swearing they could see her, though at the rate at which we were shoving through it she was a fair hour and a half yet behind the horizon from the altitude of the poop.

However, when I came up from tiffin some little while before two o'clock, the hulk lay bare upon the sea over the starboard cathead, with a light like the flash of a gun breaking from her wet black side to the languid roll of her sunwards, and a crowd of steerage-passengers and sailors forward staring at her. At any time a wreck at sea, washing about in the heart of some great ocean solitude, will appeal with solemn significance to the eye of one sailing past it. What dreadful tragedy has she been the little theatre of, you wonder? You speculate upon the human anguish she memorializes, upon the dark and scaring horrors her shape *may* entomb. But it is a sight to appeal with added force to people who have been at sea for many long weeks, without so much as the glimpse of a sail for days at a time to break the enormous monotony of the ocean, or to furnish a fugitive human interest to the

ever-receding sea-line—that most mocking of all earthly limitations.

“Anybody see any signs of life aboard of her?” exclaimed Captain Bow. “My sight is not what it was.”

There were many sharp young eyes amongst us, and some powerful glasses; but there was nothing living to be seen. She looked to have been a vessel of about two hundred and fifty tons. Her copper sheathing rose to the bends, and was fresh and bright. She had apparently been pierced for ten guns, but this could be only conjecture, seeing that her bulwarks had been torn to pieces by the fall of her spars. There was a length of topmast, or what-not, riding by its gear alongside of her, with a raffle of canvas and running rigging littering the fore-part. Her wheel stood, and her rudder seemed sound. She was flush-decked, but all erections such as caboose, companion, and so forth, were gone. Yet she sat with something

of buoyancy on the water, and her rolling was without the stupefaction you notice in hulls gradually filling. As her stern lifted, the words, *Le Corsaire, Havre*, rose in long, white letters upon the counter, with a sort of ghastliness in the blank stare of them by contrast with the delicate blue of the sea. Old Bow hailed her loudly; then the mate roared to her with the voice of a bull, but to no purpose. I said to the second mate, who stood alongside of me at the rail:—

“Yonder to be sure is the ship from which the sea-bird brought the letter the other night. There were three living men aboard her a few days ago. Are they below, think you?”

“Been taken off, sir, I expect,” he answered. “Or dead of hunger, or thirst, and lying corpses in the cabin. Or maybe they drowned themselves. Mr. Pike’s hail was something to bring a dying man out of his bunk to see

what made it. No, sir, yonder's an abandoned craft or a coffin anyway."

Some ladies standing near overheard this, and at once went to work to induce the captain to bring the *Ruby* to a stand, and send a boat. I listened to them intreating him; he shook his head good-naturedly, with a glance into the north-western quarter of the sea. "Oh, but dear Captain," the ladies reasoned, "after that letter, you know, as though you were appointed by Providence to receive it—surely, surely, you will not sail away from that wreck without making quite sure that there is nobody on board her! Only conceive that the three poor creatures may be dying in the cabin, that they may have heard your cry and Mr. Pike's, and even be able to *see* this ship through a porthole, and yet be too weak to crawl on deck to show themselves?" What followed was lost to me by the second mate beginning to talk:—

“She’ll have been a French privateer,” he said to me. “What a superb run, sir! Something in her heyday not to be easily shaken off a merchantman’s skirts. Of course she’ll have thrown all her guns overboard in the hurricane. Does the capt’n mean to overhaul her, I wonders,” he continued throwing a look aloft. “He’ll have to bear a hand and make up his mind or we shall be losing her anon in yonder thickness. Mark the depression in the ocean line nor’west, sir. D’ye notice the swell gathers weight too and there’s a dustiness in the face of the sky that way that’s better than a hint that the Bay of Bengal is not so many leagues distant ahead as it was a month ago.”

He was rattling on in this fashion, more like one thinking aloud than talking to a companion, when there was a sudden clapping of hands among the ladies who surrounded the captain, and at the same moment I heard him tell

the mate to swing the topsail to the mast and get one of the starboard quarter-boats manned. All was then bustle for a few minutes, the mate bawling, the sailors singing out at the ropes, men manœuvring with the boats' grips and falls. I went up to the captain.

"Who has charge of the boat?" said I.

"Second mate," he answered.

"Any objection to my accompanying him, Captain?"

"Not in the least, Mr. Catesby. I will only ask you, should you board her, to look alive. The weather shows rather a suspicious front down there," indicating with a nod of his head the quarter to which the second mate had called my attention. "But, bless my heart! there'll be nothing to see, nothing worth sending for. It is only to please the ladies, you know."

I sprang into the boat as she swung at the davits. It was a trip, a treat, a pleasant break for me; besides, my

being the first to receive the letter gave me a kind of title, as it were, to the adventure.

"There's room for others," said the second mate, standing erect in the stern sheets with a wistful glance at a knot of pretty faces at the rail.

There was no response from male or female. "Lower away now lively, lads," cried the mate. Down sank the boat, the blocks were dexterously unhooked, out flashed the oars and away we went.

I couldn't have guessed what weight there was in this ocean swell till I felt the volume of it from the low seat of the ship's quarter-boat. The *Ruby* looked to be rolling on it as heavily again as she seemed to have been when I was on her deck, and the beat of her canvas against the mast rang in volleys through the air like the explosion of batteries up there. The wreck came and went as we sank and soared, and

I caught the second mate eyeing her somewhat anxiously as though theorizing to himself upon the safest dodge to board her. She was farther off than I should have deemed possible, so deceptive is distance at sea, and though the five seamen pulled cheerily, the job of measuring the interval between the two craft, what with the voluminous heave of the swell running at us, and what with the roasting sunshine that lay like a sense of paralysis in the backbone, proved very tedious to my impatience to come at the hulk and explore her. As we swept round under her stern, supposing that her starboard side would be clear of wreckage, I glanced at the *Ruby* and saw that they were clewing up her royals, and hauling down her flying jib with hands on the cross-jack-yard rolling the sail up. There were spars and a litter of trailing gear on either side the hulk; every roll was a spiteful snapping at the

ropes with a drag of the floating sticks which sometimes made the water foam.

“We must board her astern,” said the mate, “and stand by for a handsome dip of the counter.”

Our approach was very cautious; indeed, it was necessary to manœuvre very gingerly indeed. We got on to the quarter, and watching his chance the bow oarsman cleverly sprang through the crushed rail as the deck buoyantly swung down to the heave of the boat, carrying the painter with him; the mate followed, and I, after a tolerably long interval, wanting perhaps the nerve and certainly the practised limbs of the sailors. In truth I may as well say here that I should have stuck to the boat and waited for the mate's report but for the dislike of being laughed at when I returned. I very well knew I should not be spared, least of all by those amongst the passengers who would have forfeited fifty pounds rather than have quitted the ship.



VI.

THE hull had a desperately wrecked look inboards with the mess of ropes, staves, jagged ends, crushed rails, rents manifesting the fury of the hurricane. I swept a glance along in expectation of beholding a dead body, or if you will, some scarcely living though yet breathing man; but nothing of the kind was to be seen. The mate hung his head over the companion hatch from which the cover had been clean razed and peered down, then shouted and listened. But no other sound followed than the long moan and huge washing sob of the swell brimming to the wash-streak with a dim sort of choking, gurgling noise as of water streaming from side to side in the hold.

“Hardly worth while exploring those moist bowels, I think, sir,” said the mate.

“Oh, yes,” said I, “if we don’t take a peep under deck what will there be to tell? This is a quest of the ladies’ making, remember, and it must be a complete thing or ‘stand by,’ as you sailors say.”

“Right you are, sir,” said he, “and so here goes,” and with that he put his foot upon the companion ladder and dropped into the cabin.

I followed at his heels, and both of us came to a stand at the bottom of the steps whilst we stared round. There was plenty of light to see by streaming down through the skylight aperture and the hatch. The cabin was a plain, snuff-colored room with a few sleeping berths running forward, a rough table somewhat hacked and cut about as if with the slicing of tobacco, a row of lockers on either hand, a stand of

firearms right aft and some twenty cutlasses curiously stowed in a sort of bracket under the ceiling or upper deck. Hot as it was above, the cabin struck chill as though it were an old well. Indeed you saw that it had been soused over and over again by the seas which had swept the vessel, and there was a briny, seaweedy flavor in the atmosphere of it that made you think of a cave deep down in a sea-fronting cliff. We looked into the sleeping berths going forward to where a movable bulkhead stopped the road. It was not easy to walk; the increasing weight of the swell was defined by the heavy though comparatively buoyant rolling of the hull. The deck went in slopes like the roof of a house from side to side with now and again an ugly jerk that more than once came near to throwing me when a sudden yawn forced the dismasted fabric into a swift recovery.

“There’s nobody aft here, anyway,” said the mate; “no use troubling ourselves to look for her papers, I think, sir.”

“No; but this is only one end of the ship,” I answered. “There may be a discovery to make forward. Can’t we unship that bulkhead there, and so get into the ’tween-decks?”

We laid hold of the frame, and after peering a bit, for this part of the cabin lay in gloom, we found that it stood in grooves, and without much trouble we slid it open, and the interior to as far as a bulkhead that walled off a bit of fore-castle lay clear before us in the daylight shining through the main-hatch. Here were a number of hammocks dangling from the deck, and some score or more of seamen’s chests and bags in heaps, some of them split open, with quantities of rough wearing apparel scattered about, insomuch that I never could have imagined a scene of wilder disorder, nor one more suggestive of

hurry and panical consternation and delirious headlong behavior.

“Nobody here, sir,” said the mate.

“No,” I answered; “I suppose her people left her in their boats, and that one of the wretches who were forced to remain behind wrote the letter we received the other night.”

“At sea,” said the mate, “there is no imagining how matters come about. I allow that the three men have been taken off by some passing vessel. Anyway, we’ve done our bit, and the capt’n I expect ’ll be waiting for us. Thunder! how she rolls,” he cried, as a very heavy lurch sent us both reeling towards the side of the craft.

“Hark!” cried I, “we are hailed from the deck.”

“Below there!” shouted a voice in the companion hatch. “They’ve fired a gun aboard the Indiaman, sir, and have run the ensign up half-masted. The weather looks mighty queer, sir.”

“Ha!” cried the mate; “come along, Mr. Catesby.”

We walked cautiously and with difficulty aft, gained the companion ladder and ascended. My instant glance went to the *Ruby*. She had furled her mainsail and fore and mizzen top-gallant-sails, hauled down her lighter staysails and big standing jib, and as I glanced at her a gun winked in a quarter-deck port, and the small thunder of it rolled sulkily up against the wind. In fact, whilst we were below the breeze had chopped clean round and the *Ruby* was to leeward of the wreck, with a very heavy swell rolling along its former course, the wind dead the other way, beginning to whiten the ridges on each huge round-backed fold, and a white thickness—a flying squall of vapor it looked to me, with a seething and creaming line of water along the base of it as though it was something solid that was coming along—sweeping within half-a-mile of

the wreck right down upon us. The mate sent a look at it and uttered a cry.

“Haul the boat alongside,” he shouted to the fellow in her. “Handsomely now, lads. Stand by to jump into her,” he cried to the seaman who had been the first to spring on board the wreck with the end of the line.

They brought the boat humming and buzzing to the counter ; the sailor standing on the taffrail plumped into her like a cannon-shot ; 'twas wonderful he didn't scuttle her. The mate whipping the painter off the pin or whatever it was that it had been belayed to held it by a turn whilst he bawled to me to watch my chance and jump. But the wreck lying dead in the trough was rolling in quite a frenzied way, like a see-saw desperately worked. Her movements, combined with the soaring and falling of the boat, were absolutely confounding. I would gather myself together for a spring and then, before I could make it, the boat

was sliding as it might seem to me twenty or thirty feet deep and away.

“Jump, for God’s sake, sir!” cried the mate.

“I don’t mean to break my neck,” I answered, irritable with the nervous flurry that had come to me with a sudden abominable sense of incapacity and helplessness.

As I spoke the words, sweep! came the white smother off the sea over us with a spiteful yell of wind of a weight that smote the cheek a blow which might have forced the strongest to turn his back. The hissing, and seething, and crackling of the spume of the first of the squall was all about us in a breath, and in the beat of a heart to the *Ruby*, and the ocean all her way vanished in the wild and terrifying eclipse of the thick, silvery, howling, steam-like mist.

“By——, I have done it *now!*” cried the mate.

The end of the painter had been

dragged from his hand or he had let it fall! And the wind catching the boat blew her over the swell like the shadow of a cloud. The seamen threw their oars over and headed for us, their faces pale as those of madmen.

“They’ll never stem this weather,” cried the mate, “follow me, Mr. Catesby, or we are dead men.”

He tore off his coat, kicked off his boots and went overboard without another word.

Follow him! To the bottom, indeed! but nowhere else, for I could not swim a stroke. But that was not quite it. Had I had my senses I might have grasped the first piece of wreckage I could put my hand upon and gone after him with it to paddle and hold on till I was picked up. But all this business coming upon us so suddenly, along with the sudden blinding of me by the vapor, the distracting yelling of the wind and the sickening bewilderment

caused by the wreck's violent rolling, seemed to have driven all my wits clean out of my head. The boat was scarcely more than a smudge in the thickness, vanishing and showing as she swept up and rushed down the liquid acclivities, held with her bow towards the hulk by the desperately-plied oars of the rowers. The mate was borne down rapidly towards her. I could just see three of the sailors leaning over the side to drag him out of the water; the next instant the little fabric had vanished in the thickness, helplessly and with horrible rapidity blown out of sight the moment the men ceased rowing to rescue their officer.

I do not know how long all this may have occupied; a few minutes maybe sufficed for the whole of the tragic passage. I stood staring and staring, incredulous of the truth of what had befallen me, and then with an inexpressible sickness of heart I flung myself

down upon the deck under the lee of a little space of bulwark, too dizzy and weak with the horror that possessed me to maintain my footing on that wildly swaying platform.

VII.

I HAD met in my travels with but one specimen of such weather as this; it was off the Cape of Good Hope to the westward; the ship was under topmast and topgallant studdingsails, when, without an interval of so much as twenty seconds of calm, she was taken right aback by a wind that came with the temper of half a gale in it, whilst as if by magic a fog, white and dense as wool, was boiling and shrieking all about her.

For some time my consternation was so heavy that I sat mechanically staring into that part of the thickness where the boat had disappeared, without giving the least heed to the sea or to the wreck. It was *then* blowing in earnest,

the ocean still densely shrouded with flying vapor, and an ugly bit of a sea racing over the swell that rolled its volumes to windward. A smart shock and fall of water on to the fore-castle startled me into sudden perception of a real and imminent danger. The fore-scuttle was closed, but the main and companion hatchways yawned opened to the weather; there were no bulwarks worth talking of to increase the wreck's height of side, and to hinder the free tumbling of the surge on to the decks, so if the wind increased and the sea grew heavier, the hulk must inevitably fill and go down like a thunderbolt!

It would be idle to try to express the thoughts which filled me. I was like one stunned: now casting an eye at the sea to observe if the billows were increasing, now with a heart of lead watching the water frothing upon the deck, as the hull heaved from one side to another; then straining my sight

with a mad passion of eagerness into the vapor that shut off all view of the ocean to within a cable's length of me. There was nothing to be done. Even could I have met with tarpaulins, there was no sailor's skill in me to spread and secure them over the open hatches. However, when an hour had passed in this way, I took notice of a small failure of the wind, though there was no lightning of the impenetrable mist. The folds of the swell had diminished, and the sea was running steadily; the hull with her broadside dead on, rose and fell with regularity, and though at long intervals the surge struck her bow, and blew in crystals over the head, or fell in scores of bucketfuls upon the deck, nothing more than spray wetted the after-part of her.

It was now about six o'clock in the evening. In two hours time the night would have come down, and if the weather did not clear, the blackness

would be that of the tomb. What would the *Ruby* do? Remain hove-to and await for moonlight or for day-break to seek for me? A fragment of comfort I found in remembering that the wreck's position would be known to Captain Bow and his mates, so that their search for me, if they searched at all, ought not to prove fruitless; though to be sure much would depend upon the drift of the hulk. Presently, fearing that there might be no water or provisions on board, I was seized with a sudden thirst, bred by the mere apprehension that I might come to want a drink. There was still light enough to enable me to search the interior, and now I suppose something of my manhood must have returned to me, for I made up my mind to waste no moment of the precious remaining time of day in imaginations of horror and of death and in dreams of desperate despondency. I went on my hands and knees

to the hatch, lest if I stood up I should be knocked down by the abrupt rolling of the craft, and entered the cabin. On deck all was naked and sea-swept from the taffrail to the "eyes," and if there were aught of drink or of food to be had it must be sought below. I recollected that one of the forward berths or cabins, which the second mate and I had looked into, had shown in the gloom as a sort of pantry; that is to say, in peering over my companion's shoulders, I had caught a glimpse of crockery on shelves, the outlines of jars and so forth. But the inspection had been very swift, scarce more than a glance. I made for this cabin now, very well remembering that it was the last of a row of three or four on the starboard side. I opened the door, and secured it by its hook to the bulkhead that I might see, and after rummaging a little I found a cask of ship's bread, a small cask (like a harness cask) a quarter full

of raw pickled pork, a jar of vinegar, two large jars of red wine, and best of all, a small barrel about half full of fresh water, slung against the bulkhead, with a little wooden tap fixed in it, for the convenience as I supposed of drawing for cabin use. There were other articles of food, such as flour, pickles, dried fruit, and so on; the catalogue would be tedious, nor does my memory carry them.

I poured some wine into a tin pannikin, and found it a very palatable, sound claret. I mixed me a draught with cold water, and ate a biscuit with a little slice of some kind of salt sausage, of which there lay a lump in a dish, and found myself extraordinarily refreshed. I cannot tell you indeed how comforted I was by this discovery of provisions and fresh water, for now I guessed that if the weather did not drown the wreck, I might be able to support life on board of her until the *Ruby* took me off, which

I counted upon happening that night if the moon shone, or most certainly next morning at latest. My heart however sank afresh when I regained the deck. The sudden change from the life, the cheerfulness, the security of the Indiaman, to *this*—"Oh, my God! my God!" I remember exclaiming as I sank down under the lee of the fragment of bulwark, with a wild look around into the thickness and along the spray-darkened planks of the heaving and groaning derelict. The loneliness of it! no sounds saving the dismal crying of the wind sweeping on high through the atmosphere, and the ceaseless seething and hissing of the dark-green frothing seas swiftly chasing one another out of sight past the wall of vapor that circled the wreck, with the blank and blinding mist itself to tighten as with a sensible ligature into unbearable concentration the dreadful sense of solitude in my soul.

Slowly the wind softened down, very

gradually the sea sank, and their worrying note of snarling melted into a gentler tone of fountain-like creaming. But the vapor still filled the air, and so thick did it hang that, though by my watch I knew it to be the hour of sundown, I was unable to detect the least tinge of hectic anywhere, no faintest revelation of the fiery scarlet light which I knew must be suffusing the clear heavens down to the easternmost of the confines above this maddening blindness of mist.

Then came the blackness of the night. So unspeakably deep a dye it was that you would have thought every luminary above had been extinguished, and that the earth hung motionless in the sunless opacity of chaos out of which it had been called into being. The hours passed. I held my seat on the deck with my back against a bulwark station. It was a warm night with a character as of the heat of steam owing to the moisture that loaded and thick-

ened the atmosphere. Sometimes I dozed, repeatedly starting from a snatch of uneasy slumber to open my eyes with ever-recurring horror and astonishment upon the blackness. Gleams of the sea-fire shot out fitfully at times from the sides of the wreck, and there was nothing else for the sight to rest upon. At midnight it was blowing a small breeze of wind and the sea running gently—at midnight I mean as I could best reckon; but the darkness remained unchanged, and I might know that the fog was still thick about me by no dimmest spectre of moon or star showing.

VIII.

I THEN slept, and soundly too, for two or three hours, and when I awoke it was daylight, the sea clear to the horizon, the sky a soft liquid blue with masses of white vaporous cloud hanging under it like giant bursts of steam, and the sun shining with a sort of misty splendor some degree or two above the sea-line. There was a pleasant air blowing out of the north, with power to wrinkle the water and no more. My limbs were so cramped that for a long while I was incapable of rising; when at last my legs had recovered their power I stood erect and swept the ocean with my eyes. But the light blue surface went in undulations naked to the bend of the heavens on all sides. I looked and looked

again, but to no purpose. I strained my sight till an intolerable torment in my eyeballs forced me to close my lids. There was nothing in view. I very well remember falling on my knees and grovelling upon the deck in the anguish of my spirit. I had so surely counted on daylight exhibiting the *Ruby* somewhere within the circle which inclosed me that the disappointment that came out of the bald vacancy of the ocean struck me down like a blow from a hammer. Presently I lifted up my head and regained my feet, and feeling thirsty moved with a tread of lead to the yawning hatch, sending the most passionate, yearning glances seaward as I walked, and halting again and again to the vision of some imagination of break in the continuity of the gleaming girdle—some delicate shoulder of remote cloud, some imaginary speck which dissolved upon the blue air whilst my gaze was on it.

I mixed some wine and water, and

made a light repast off some biscuit and a piece of Dutch cheese that was on the shelf. I then thought I would look into the cabins for a chair to sit upon on deck, for a mattress to lie upon, for something also that might make me a little awning, and pushed open the door of the berth immediately facing the pantry, as I may call it. The wreck was rolling very lightly, and her decks were now as easy of stepping as the Indian's. This berth contained a bunk and bedding, a sailor's chest, some clothes hanging against the bulkhead, but nothing to serve my turn. The next was similarly furnished, saving that here I took notice that a small quantity of wearing apparel lay about as though scattered in a hurry, and that the lid of a great box, painted a dark green with the letter D in white upon it, had been split open as though the contents were to be rifled, or as though the lock had resisted and there had been no time to coax it

save by a chopper. I passed into a third cabin. This had some comfort of equipment in the shape of shelves and a chest of drawers, and had doubtless been the commander's. There was a very handsome telescope on brackets, a few books, a quadrant, a large silver timepiece, a small compass and one or two other matters of a like sort upon a little table fitted by hinges in a corner; there were three chests in a row with a litter of boots and shoes, a soft hat or two, a large handsome cloak costly with fur, and so forth, strewed about the deck.

I was looking with some wonder at these articles when my eye was taken by something bright near the smallest of the three chests. I picked it up; it was an English sovereign. Others lay about as though a handful had been clutched and dropped—here being the same manifestations of terrified hurry as, it seemed to me, I witnessed in the

other cabins. The lid of the small chest was split in halves, and the chopper that had seemingly been wielded rested against the side of the box. A massive padlock was still in the staples. I lifted the half of the lid and was greatly astonished by the sight of a quantity of gold pieces lying in divisions of a tray that fitted the upper part of the chest. Each division contained coins of various nations. They were all gold pieces—English, Portuguese, Brazilian and coins of the United States. I prized open the padlocked part of the lid and seized the tray to lift it that I might observe what lay underneath. But the weight of gold in it was so great that I had to exert my utmost strength to raise one end of the tray on to the edge of the box; which done, I was able to slide it along till the bottom of the box was revealed.

The sight of the gold had filled me with expectations of beholding some

amazing treasure under the tray. What I there saw was a heap of rough, brick-shaped stuff of a dull, rusty, reddish tint. I grasped a lump, and though I had never seen gold in that form before, I was satisfied by the extraordinary weight of the piece I held that all those coarse, rough, dull-colored bricks were of the most precious of metals. I slid the tray back to its place and let fall the two halves of the lid with another look around me for any article that might be useful to me on deck. The excitement kindled by the spectacle of the gold rapidly died away. I dully mused on it, so to speak, whilst my eye roamed, languidly speculating about it, with a strange indifference in my thoughts, concluding that it represented the privateersman's sorted plunder; that in all likelihood when the rush had been made to the boats one or more had split open this chest to fill their pockets, but had been obliged to fly for their lives

ere they could find time for more than a scrambling clutch at the tray. But it was the contents no doubt of this chest—if indeed this chest held all the treasure of the buccaneer—that was indicated by the writer of the letter in the concluding line of it, the closing words of which had been found illegible by the young fellow who translated the missive.

I put the telescope under my arm and passed into the cabin, and found a small chair near the arms rack, and near it upon the deck lay a great cotton umbrella, grimy and wet with the saturation of the cabin. I took it up thankfully and carried it with the chair up the steps. There was a great plenty of ropes' ends knocking about. I cut a piece and unlaid the strands, and securing the umbrella to a stanchion, sat down on the chair under it; and indeed without some such shelter the deck would have been insupportable, for low

as the sun still was in the east, his fires were already roasting, and I well knew what sort of temperature was to be expected as he floated higher, leaving my form with a small blotch of southern shadow only attached to it.

I passed the morning in sweeping the horizon with the telescope. It was a noble glass—a piece of plunder, with an inscription that represented it as a gift from the officers of a vessel to her commander; I forget the names, but recollect they were English. The placidity of the day dreadfully disheartened me. There was but little weight in the languid air to heave the *Ruby* or any other vessel into view. The sea under the sun was like brand new tin for the dazzle of it, and as the morning advanced the heavy, vaporous clouds of daybreak melted out into curls and wisps like to the crescent moon, with a clear sky rising a pale blue from the horizon to overhead to where it swam into the brassy

glory which flooded the central heavens. Weary of sitting, and exhausted by looking, I put down the glass and went to the main hatch with the idea of making out what water there was in the hold. The pumps were gone and the wells of them sank like black shafts under the deck. But whatever there was of water in the hulk lay so low that I could not catch so much as a gleam of it. There was some light cargo in the hold—light as I reckoned by the sit of the wreck upon the water; chiefly white wooden cases, with here and there canvas bales; but whatever might have been the commodities there was not much of them, at least amidships, down into which I stood peering.

I then walked on to the forecastle and lifted the hatch-cover. This interior looked to have been used by the people of the *Corsaire* as a sort of sail-locker. The bulkhead extended but a very short distance abaft the hatch, and the deck

was stowed with rolls of sails, coils of spare rigging, hawsers, tackles, and so forth. I put my head into the aperture and took a long and careful survey of the interior, for the mate and I had not explored this part of the brig, and it was possible, I thought, I might find the bodies of the three survivors here. But there was nothing whatever to be witnessed in that way; so I closed the hatch again and went aft.

IX.

THE day passed, the light breeze lingered, but it brought nothing into sight. I would think as I sent my glance along the naked, sea-swept, desolate deck, gaunt and skeleton-like, with its ragged exhibition of splintered plank and crushed bulwark, that had there been a mast left in the hull I might from the summit of it be able to see the *Ruby*, whose topmost cloths lay sunk behind the horizon to the eyes which I levelled from the low side of the wreck. "Oh!" I would cry aloud, "if I could but be sure that she was near me though hidden!" Maddening as the expectation might have been which the sight of her afar would have raised in me, yet the mere having her in view, no matter how

dim, deceptive a speck she proved, would have taken a deal of the bitterness, the heart-subduing feeling of hopelessness out of the wild and awful sense of desolation that possessed me.

The sun sank; with the telescope trembling in my hands I made a slow, painful circle of the ocean whilst the western magnificence lay upon it, and then let fall the glass and fell into the chair, and with bowed head and tightly-folded arms, and eyes closed to mitigate by the shadowing of the lids the anguish of the fires which despair had kindled in them—for my heart was parched, no relief of tears came to me—I waited for the darkness of a second night to settle down upon the wreck. But on this day the gloom fell with the brilliance of stars, and some time after eight the moon rose, a moist, purple shield, at whose coming the light draught of wind died out and the ocean flattened into a breathless, polished surface. When presently the

moon had soared and whitened, the sea looked as wide again as it was to the showering of her light, brimming the atmosphere with a delicate silver haze; indeed there went a shadowing round about its confines to the shaft of moonlight on the water that made it seem hollow where the wreck lay, and it was like floating in the vastness of the firmament that bent over it to glance over the side of the hull and see the mirror-like breast studded with reflections of the larger stars, and to follow the shadow of the deep, curled at the extremities as it seemed, to the tropic astral dust that twinkled there like dew trembling to the breath of a summer night wind.

I had brought up some blankets from below and these I made a kind of mattress of under the shelter of the umbrella. It was about ten o'clock, I think, when I threw myself down upon them. A pleasant breeze was then blowing directly along the wake of moonlight, and the

water was rippling like the murmurs of a fountain against the sides of the pale, silent, gently-rolling hull. I lay awake for a long time listening to this cool, refreshing, tinkling sound of running ripples, with a mind somewhat weakened by my distress. Indeed, many thoughts wearing a complexion of delirium passed through my head with several phantasies which must have frightened me as a menace of madness had my wits been equal to the significance of them. For example, I can recall seeing, as I believed, the *Ruby* floating up towards the wreck out of the western gloom, luminous as a snow-clad iceberg, with the soft splendor of the moonshine on her canvas; I recollect this, I say, and that I laughed quietly at the thought of her approach, as though I would ridicule myself for the fears which had been upon me throughout the day; then of jumping up in a sudden transport and passion of delight; when the vision instantly

vanished, whereupon a violent fit of trembling seized me, and I sank down again upon the blankets groaning. But the agitation did not linger; some fresh deception of the brain would occur and win my attention to it.

This went on till I fell asleep. Meanwhile the breeze continued to blow steadily, and the rippling of water along the bends was like the sound of the falling of large raindrops.

I awoke, and turning my head towards the forepart of the wreck, I spied the figure of a man erect and motionless on the forecastle. The moon was low in the west; I might guess by her position that daybreak was not far off. By her red light I saw the man. I sat erect and swept a glance round; there was no ship near me, no smudge upon the gloom to indicate a vessel at a distance. Father of heaven! I thought, what *is* it? Could yonder shadowy form be one of the three sailors who had been left on the wreck?

Surely I had closely searched the hull; there was nothing living aboard of her but myself. The sweat-drops broke from my brow as I sat motionless with my eyes fixed upon the figure that showed with an inexpressible ghostliness of outline in the waning moonlight. On a sudden there arose another figure alongside of him, seemingly out of the hard planks of the deck; then a third; and there the three of them stood apparently gazing intently aft at me, but without a stir in their frames, that I could witness. Three of them!

I rose to my feet and essayed to speak, but could deliver no more than a whisper. I tried again, and this time my voice sounded.

“In the name of God, who, and what are you?”

“Ha!” cried one of them. He said something to his companions, in words which were unintelligible to me, then approached, followed by the others, all

three of them moving slowly, with a wavering gait, as though giddy.

“Som drink for Christu’s sake!” said the man who had cried Ha! pointing his finger at his mouth, and speaking in a tone that made one think of his throat as something rough, like a file. By this time it was clear to me they were no ghosts. I imagined them negroes, so dark their faces looked in the dim west rays and failing starlight. Whence they had sprung, in what manner they had arrived, I could not imagine; but it was not for me to stand speculating about them in the face of the husky appeal for drink.

X.

THERE was a parcel of candles in the pantry—as I term it. I had a flint and steel in my pocket, and followed by the men, I led the way below, bidding them stand awhile till I obtained a light; and after groping and feeling about with my hands, I found the paper of candles, lighted one, and then called to the men. They arrived. I pointed to the jars, saying in English, there was wine in them; and then to the slung cask of water, and then to the food on the shelves. They instantly grasped each one of them a pannikin, and mixed a full draught and swallowed it, with a strange trembling sigh of relief and delight. They then fell upon the biscuit and sausage, eating like famished wolves

both fists full, and cramming their mouths. They were not very much more distinguishable by the feeble light of the candle than on deck; however, I was able to see they were not blacks. The man who had addressed me was of a deep Chinese yellow, with lineaments of an African pattern, a wide flat nose, huge lips, eyes like little shells of polished ebony glued on porcelain. His hair was the negro's black wiry wool. He wore a short moustache, the fibres like the teeth of a comb, and there was a tuft of black wool upon his chin. Small gold earrings, a greasy old Scotch cap, a shirt like a dungaree jumper, and loose trousers thrust into a pair of half Wellingtons, completed the attire of the ugliest, most villainous-looking creature I had ever set eyes on. His companions were long-haired, chocolate-browed Portuguese, or Spaniards—*Dagos* as the sailors call them; I noticed a small gold crucifix sparkling upon the mossy breast

of one of them. Their feet were naked, indeed their attire consisted of no more than a pair of duck or canvas breeches, and an open shirt, and a cap. They continued to feed heartily, and several times helped themselves to the wine, though before doing so, the yellow-faced man would regularly point to the jar with a nod, as though asking leave.

“You Englis, sah?” he exclaimed, when he had made an end of eating. I said yes. “How long you been heär, sah?”

I told him. He understood me perfectly though I spoke at length, relating in fact my adventure. I then inquired who he and his companions were, and his story was to the following effect: That he was the boatswain, and the other two able seamen of a Portuguese ship called the *Mary Joseph*, bound to Singapore or to some Malay port. The vessel had been set on fire by one of the crew, an Englishman, who was skulking

drunkenly below after broaching a cask of rum. They had three boats which they hoisted out ; most of the people got away in the long-boat, six men were in the second boat, he and his two comrades got into the jolly-boat. They had with them four bottles of water, and a small bag of ship's bread, and nothing more. They parted company with the other boats in the night, and had been four days adrift, sailing northwards by the sun as they reckoned, under a bit of a lug, and keeping an eager look-out though they sighted nothing ; until a little before sundown that evening, they spied the speck of this wreck, and made for it, but so scant was the wind and so weak their arms that it had taken them nearly all night to measure the distance which would be a few miles only. They got their boat under the bow—she was lying there now, he said—and stepped on board one after the other. This explained to me their apparition. Of course

I had not seen the boat or heard her as she approached, and to me, lying aft, the three men rising over the bows looked as though, like ghostly essences, they had shaped themselves on the forecastle out through the solid plank.

I addressed the others, but the yellow man told me that their language was a jargon of base Portuguese, of which I should be able to understand no more than here and there a word, even though I had been bred and educated in Lisbon.

“We mosh see to dah boat,” he exclaimed, and spoke to his mates, apparently to that effect.

I extinguished the candle, and followed them on deck. It was closer upon day-break than I had supposed. Already the gray was in the east, like a filtering of light through ash-colored silk, with the sea-line black as a sweep of India ink against it, and the moon a lumpish, distorted mass of faint dingy crimson, dying out in a sort of mistiness westwards, like

the snuff of a rushlight in its own smoke. Even whilst the three fellows were manœuvring with the boat over the bow, the tropic day filled the heavens in a bound, and it was broad morning all at once, with a segment of sun levelling a long line of trembling silver from the horizon down to mid-ocean. My first glance was for the *Ruby*, but the sea lay bare in every quarter. The fellows came dragging their boat aft; I looked over and saw that the fabric was of a canoe-pattern, with a queer upcurled bow, and a stern as square as the amidship section of the boat; four thwarts, short oars with oval-shaped blades, and a small mast with a square of lugsail lying with its yard in the bottom of the boat.

The yellow man pointing to her exclaimed in a hoarse, throaty, African guttural, "It is good ve keep hor. Dis wreck hov no 'atch; she sink, and vid-out hor," nodding at the boat again, "were ve be?"

I said yes, by all means let us secure the boat. He exclaimed that for the present she would lie safely astern, and with that they took a turn with the line that held her and she rested quietly on the sea clear of the quarter.

Forthwith the three fellows began to explore the hull. The yellow man or boatswain, as I must henceforth call him, said no more to me than this as he pointed to the yawning hatches: "You are gen'elman," with an ugly smile intended no doubt for a stroke of courtesy as he ran his eye over me: "ve are common sailor. Ve vill see to stop dem hole. More fresh vataire to drink ve need. Possib more bee-low. Also tobacco." And thus saying he cried out to the others in their own dialect, and the three of them went to the main hatchway and disappeared down it.

I lifted the telescope and ran it over the sea, then sighed as with a breaking heart I laid the glass down again upon

the deck. A strong sense of dismay filled me whilst I sat musing upon the men who were now coolly rummaging the vessel below. The rascality which lay in every line of the ugly yellow ruffian's face, coupled with the stealthy, glittering glances, the greasy, snaky hair, the dark piratic countenances of the others might well have accounted for the apprehension, the actual consternation indeed which fell upon me whilst I thought of them. But that was not all. The recollection of the gold rushed upon me as a memory that had clean gone out of my mind, but that had suddenly flashed back upon me to communicate a sinister significance to the presence of the three Portuguese seamen. I can clearly understand now that my brain, as I have said, had been weakened by the horror of my situation, and by the long madness of expectation which had held it on fire whilst I searched the sea and waited for the *Ruby* to appear. So that, instead of accepting

these three foreign sailors as a kind of godsend with whose assistance I might be enabled to doctor up the wreck so as to fit her to float until help came, not to speak of them as companions in misery, human creatures to talk to, beings whose society would extinguish out of this dreadful situation the intolerable element of solitude—I say instead of viewing these men thus, as might have happened, I believe, had I been my old self, a profound fear and aversion to them seized me, and such was the state of my nerves at that time, I call to mind that I looked at the boat that hung astern with a sort of hurry in me to leap into her, cast her adrift, and sail away.

With an effort I mastered my agitation, constantly directing glances at the sea with a frequent prayer upon my lip that if not the *Ruby*, then at least some ship to rescue me would heave into view before sundown that night.

XI.

THE men were a long while below. I stepped softly to the companion hatch, and bent my ear down it that I might know if they had made their way through the 'tween decks bulkhead into the cabin. The chink of money was very distinct, but that was all. Presently, however, I heard them talking in low voices, but their tongue was Hebrew to me, and I went back to my chair, looking yet again around the sea-line. I think they had been at least an hour below when they arrived on deck, emerging through the main hatch. They had walked forward without taking any notice of me, and disappeared through the fore-scuttle, whence, after a while, they arose bearing amongst them several tarpaulins which

they had come across. I took it that there was a carpenter's chest down there, for the yellow boatswain flourished a hammer in one hand, and a box of what proved to be roundheaded nails in the other. They carefully secured the hatch with a couple of these tarpaulins, then came to the quarter-deck, and similarly roofed the skylight and the companion hatch, saving that they left free a corner flap to admit of our passage up and down.

"Dis is sailor vork," said the boatswain giving me a nod, whilst his face shone like a yellow sou'-wester in a squall of wet with the sweat that flooded his repulsive visage. "Dat vataire keep out now, sah."

"It is well done," said I, softening my voice to disguise the emotion of disgust and aversion which possessed me at sight of the ugly, treacherous, askant sort of stare he fastened upon me whilst he spoke. "Have you breakfasted?"

He came close to me before answer-

ing; the other two meanwhile remaining at the hatch and looking towards me.

“Ay,” he then said, “dere ish plenty biscuit, plenty vataire, plenty beef,” indicating with a grimy thumb a portion of the hold that lay under the cabin floor. “Dere ish plenty gold too,” he added in a hoarse, theatrical sort of whisper, with a sudden gleam in his little horrible eyes which to my fancy was so much like the blue flash off some keen and polished blade of poniard as anything I can figure to liken it to.

“Yes,” said I carelessly, “plenty, I believe. But I must break my own fast now. We shall need fresh water before the day’s out, and, praised be the saints, there is plenty of it, you say.”

With that I went to the hatch, turned the flap of the tarpaulin and descended, eyed narrowly by the two fellows who stood beside it, and as I gained the interior I heard them say something to the boatswain, who responded with an off-

hand sort of *ya, ya!* as though he would quiet a misgiving in them. I made a hurried meal off some wine, biscuit and cheese, and noticing as I passed on my way to the cabin again that the door of the berth in which the chest of gold stood was shut, I tried the handle and found it locked. The key was withdrawn. Smothering a curse upon the hour that had brought these creatures to the wreck, I lighted a cigar (of which I had a leather case half-full in my pocket), more for the easy look of it than for any need I felt for tobacco just then, and went in a lounge to the shelter of my umbrella. The boatswain was examining the telescope when I arrived. He instantly put it down on perceiving me and went forward to where his mates were. They peered first over one side, pointing and talking, and arguing with amazing volubility and with astonishing contortions; they then crossed to the other side, and looked over and fell into the same kind of hot,

eager talk and gesticulations. It was easy to guess that they spoke about the spars which floated, held by their gear, against the wreck. After a bit they came to an agreement, disappeared in the fore-castle and returned with tackles and coils of rope. One of them went over the side, and after a while there they were hauling upon purchases and slowly bringing the spar out of water, the boat-swain talking and bawling with furious energy the whole while. I went forward to help them, and the yellow ruffian nodded when I seized hold of the rope they were pulling at, and cried with a hoarse roar of laughter, "Yash, yash. Ve make a mast, ve make a yart, and ve put up sail, and ve steer to our own countree and be reech men."

Dagos as they were, they had some trick of seamanship amongst them. There was stump enough left of the foremast to secure the heel of a spar to, and by four o'clock that afternoon, with

a break of but a single half-hour for a meal and a smoke (they had found plenty of pipes and tobacco in the seamen's chests between decks), they had rigged up and stayed a jury-mast and crossed it with a yard manufactured from a boom of the wreckage to larboard; which, light as the breeze was, yet furnished them with spread of sail enough to give the sheer-hulk steerage way.

I had lent them a hand and done my landsman's best, and had gone aft to rest myself and to sweep the sea with the telescope for the hundredth time that day. The three men were below getting some supper. The hull was stirring through the water at a snail's pace to a weak, hot wind blowing right over her taffrail out of the southeast. The helm was amidships, and her short length of oil-smooth wake showed her going straight without steering. I could distinctly hear the men conversing in the cabin. I reckoned because they knew

their lingo was unintelligible to me that they talked out. There was a fiery eagerness in the tones they sometimes delivered themselves in, but earnestly as I listened I could catch no meaning but that of their imprecations, which readily enough took my ear owing to a certain resemblance between them and Spanish and Italian oaths. A short interval of silence followed. All three then came on deck, one of them carrying a jar and another a canvas bag. I instantly observed that every man of them had girded a cutlass to his side. They seemed to avoid my gaze as they walked to the pin to which the line that connected the boat was belayed, and hauled her alongside. I threw away my cigar and stood up. The first idea that occurred to me was, they were going to victual the boat, sway the chest of gold into her and sail away from me; and I cannot express with what devotion I prayed to my Maker that this might

prove so. I looked from one to the other of them. Once I caught a side-long glance from the boatswain; otherwise they went to this business as though I were not present, talking in rough, hurried whispers, with an occasional exclamation from the yellow ruffian, that was like saying, "Make haste!" When the boat was alongside one of them dropped into her, and received the jar and bag from the other. He then returned, and the moment he was inboards the boatswain, rounding upon me, drew his cutlass and pointed to the boat.

"Be pleased to get in and go away!" he exclaimed.

"Go away!" I echoed, too much thunderstruck by the villain's order to feel or witness the horror of the fate designed for me. "What have I done that you should——?"

He interrupted me with a roar. "Go quick!" he cried, lifting his weapon as though to strike, "or I kill you!"

The hands of the others groped at the hilts of their cutlasses; all three eyed me now, and there was murder in every man's look. Without a word I stepped to the side, and sprang into the boat. One of them threw the line off the pin into the sea. "Hoise your sail and steer that way, or we shoot!" bellowed the yellow ruffian, waving his cutlass towards the sea astern. God knows there were small arms enough in the cabin to enable them to fulfil *that* threat. I grasped the halliards, mastheaded the little lug, and throwing an oar over the stern, sculled the boat's head round, and in a minute was slipping away from the hull, at the stern of which the three men stood watching me, the blade in the boatswain's hand shining to the sun like a wand of fire as he continued to point with it into the southeast.

XII.

HERE now was I adrift in the mighty heart of the Indian Ocean in a small boat like a canoe ; so shaped that she was little likely to lie close to the wind, hundreds of leagues from the nearest point of land, and in a part of the deep navigated in those days at long intervals only—I mean by the Dutch and English traders to the east ; for the smaller vessels kept a much more westerly longitude than where I was, after rounding the Cape ; often striking through the Mozambique or so climbing as to have the Mauritius aboard. Never was human being in a more wildly-desperate situation. I did not for an instant doubt that this was the beginning of the end, that if I was not capsized and drowned out of hand

by some growing sea, I was to perish (unless I took my own life) of hunger and thirst. Yet the rage and terror which were upon me when I looked over my shoulder at the receding wreck passed away, with the help of God to be sure, ere the figures of the miscreants who had served me thus had been blended by distance out of their shapes into the body and hues of the hull. I thought to myself it is an escape, at all events. I *may* perish here; yet is there hope; but had I stayed *yonder* I was doomed: the sight of the gold had made them thirsty for my life. In my sleep, ay, or even waking, they would have hacked me to pieces and flung me overboard to the sharks here.

In this consideration, I say, I seemed to find a source of comfort. If I died as I now was, it would be God's act, whereas had I remained in the wreck I must have been brutally butchered by the wretches whom the devil had de-

spatched to me in the darkness of the morning that was gone. Nevertheless I was at a loss to comprehend their motive in thus using me. First of all by sending me away in their boat, they had robbed themselves of their only chance of escape should the wreck founder. Then again, I was a man with a serviceable pair of hands belonging to me, and how necessary willing help was to persons circumstanced as they were, they could easily have gathered from the labors of the day. Besides, they would be able to judge of my condition by my attire, and how could they be sure that I should demand the treasure or put in my claim for a share of it? But I need not weary you with my speculations. The sun sank when there was a space of about a league betwixt my boat and the wreck, and the darkness came in a stride out of the east. The wind was weak and hot, and there was a crackling noise of ripples round about the boat as she lay

with scarce any way upon her, lightly but briskly bobbing upon the tropic ocean dimples. When the darkness came I let fall my sail, intending later on, when the wreck should have got well away towards the horizon, to head north; for methought the further I drew towards the equator out of these seas the better would be my chance of being rescued. The stars were very plentiful, rich, and brilliant that night. I gave God thanks for their company, and for the stillness and peace upon the ocean, and I prayed to Him to watch over and to succor me. When the moon rose I stood up and looked around, but saw nothing of the wreck; on which I hoisted my sail afresh and headed the boat north, as I conjectured, by the position of the moon. There was a deal of fire in the sea, and I would again and again direct my eyes at the fitful flashing over the side with a dread in me of witnessing the outline of a shark.

The moon had been risen about two hours, when I spied the gleam of water in the bottom of the boat. I was greatly startled, believing that she was leaking. Certainly there had been no water when I first entered her nor down to this minute had I noticed the gleam or heard the noise of it in her. There was a little pewter mug in the stern sheets, a relic of the ship from which the Portuguese had come. I fell to baling with it, and presently emptied the boat. No more water entered, for which at first I was deeply thankful; but after a little I got musing upon how it could have penetrated, seeing that no more came; and then a dreadful suspicion entering my mind, I looked for the jar which the Portuguese had handed into the boat, and saw it lying on its bilge in the bows. I picked it up and shook it; it was empty! It had been corked by a piece of canvas which still remained in the bung, but on the jar capsizing through

the jerking of the boat, the water had easily drained out, and it was this precious fluid which I had been feverishly baling and casting overboard!

Maddened as I was by this discovery, I had yet sense enough remaining to sop my handkerchief in the little puddle that still damped the bottom of the boat, and to wring the moisture into the pewter measure. But at the outside half a pint was the utmost I recovered, which done I sat me down, my face buried in my hands, with my eyes scorched as though they were seared by the burning tears that rose to them from my full and breaking heart.

The night passed. Hour after hour I lay in a sort of stupefaction in the stern sheets, taking no notice of the weather, my eyes fixed upon the stars, a little space of which directly over my head I would crazily essay to number. Once I pressed the handkerchief to my parched lips, but found the damp of it brackish, and threw

it from me. But I would not touch the precious drop of water I had preserved. Too bitterly well did I guess how the morrow's sun would serve me, and the very soul within me seemed to recoil from the temptation to moisten my dry and burning tongue.

The memory of the early hours of that morning, of daybreak, of the time that followed, is but that of a delirium. I took no heed of my navigation. The sheet of the sail was fast, and the boat travelled softly before the gentle breeze that sat in little curls upon the water. I recollect thinking in a stupid, half-numbed way, that the boat was pursuing the path of the wreck whose one sail would suffer her to travel only straight before the wind. But the pain of thirst, the anguish of my situation, the maddening heat of the sun, the cruel, eternal barrenness of the ocean; these things combined, lay like death upon me. I was sensible only that I lived and suf-

ferred. There was biscuit in the canvas bag which had been put in the boat. I thought by munching a fragment to ease the anguish in my throat, but found I could not swallow. Ah, heavenly God! the deliriousness of the gaze which I fastened upon the clear, cool, blue water over the side, the horrible temptation to drink of it, to plunge, and soak, and drown in it, the torment of the seething and creaming noises of its ripples against the burning sides of the boat, which sickened the atmosphere with their poisonous smell of hot paint!

The night came—a second night. Some relief from the thirst which tortured me I had obtained by soaking my underclothes, and wearing the garments streaming. It was a night of wonderful oceanic beauty and tenderness: the moon, a glorious sphere of brilliancy, the wind sweet and cool with dew, and the sea sleeping to the quiet cradling of its swell. I had not closed my eyes for

many a long weary hour, and nature could hold out no longer. It was a little before midnight I think that I fell asleep; the boat was then sailing quietly along, and steering herself, making a fair straight course of her progress—though to what quarter of the heavens she was carrying me I knew not, nor for a long while had thought of guessing. When I awoke the darkness was still upon the ocean, and the moon behind a body of high light cloud which she whitened and which concealed her, though her radiance yet lay in the atmosphere as a twilight. Right ahead of me, but at what distance I could not imagine, there floated a dark object upon the water. My glance had gone to her sleepily, but the instant it fell upon her I sprang to my feet, and bounded like a dart into the bow of the boat, and stood with my hands on the square of the canoe-shaped stem, straining my sight into the gloom.

She was a ship—no doubt of that;

yet she puzzled me greatly, the light was so thin and deceptive that I could distinguish little more than the block of blackness she made upon the dark sea. Apparently she was lying with all sails furled, or else hauled up close to the the yards. One moment I would think that she was without masts, then I imagined I could perceive a visionary fabric of spar and rope. But she was a ship! Help she would yield me—the succor of her deck, and, oh my God! one drink, but *one* drink of water!

I flung the oars over, and weak as I was fell to rowing with might and main. The boat buzzed through the ripples to the impulse of my thirst-maddened arms. The shadow ahead slowly loomed larger and closer, till all in a breath I saw by a sudden gleam of moonlight which sparkled through a rent in the cloud, that she was the *Corsaire!*

XIII.

I DROPPED the oars, let fall the sail, and stood with my eyes fixed upon her, considering a little. Would the men murder me if I boarded her? Or would they not fill my empty jar for me on my beseeching them, on my pointing to my frothing lip as the yellow man had done, on my asking for water only, promising to depart at once? Why, it was better to be butchered by their cutlasses than to perish thus. I felt mad at the thought of a long sweet draught of wine and water out of a cold pannikin, and rendered utterly defiant, absolutely reckless by my sufferings, and by the dream and allurements of a drink of water, I fell to the oars again, and rowed the boat alongside the wreck.

I now noticed for the first time that the mast and sail which the fellows had erected were gone. Indeed the mast lay over the side, and the sail floated black under it in the water. I listened; all was hushed as death in the motionless hulk. I secured the painter of the boat to the chain plate, sprang on to the deck and stood looking a minute. Close to the wheel lay the figure of a man. He was sound asleep as I might suppose, his head pillowed on his arm, the other arm over his face in a posture of sheltering it. He was the only one of the three visible. Wildly reckless always and goaded with the agony of thirst I went straight to the hatch and dropped into the cabin. The blackness was that of a coal-mine, but I knew the way, and after a little groping found the pantry door and entered. With an eager hand I sought for a candle, found one and lighted it, and in a few minutes my thirst was assuaged and I was standing

with clasped uplifted hands thanking God for the exquisite comfort of the draught. Yet I drank cautiously. My need made me believe that I could have drained a cask to its dregs, but I forced my dreadful craving to be satisfied with scarce more than a quarter of a pint. The drink relaxed the muscles of my throat and I was able to eat. Afterwards I drank a little again, and then I felt a new man.

I stayed about twenty minutes in the pantry, in which time I heard no kind of noise saving a dim creak now and again from the hold of the wreck. Extinguishing the candle I entered the cabin and stood debating with myself on the course I should follow. Water I must have: should I fill a jar and carry it stealthily to the boat and be off and take my chance of managing the business unheard? Yes, I would do that, and if I aroused the sleepers, why, see-

ing that I was willing to go they might not refuse me a supply of drink. . . .

I was musing thus when there was the sound of a yawn on deck. At that moment I remembered the array of cutlasses that embellished the cabin ceiling. It was the noise the fellow made, the perception that one of the three at all events was awake with his mates somewhere at hand to swiftly alarm, which put the thought of those cutlasses into my head, or it is fifty to one if in the blackness of that interior I should have recollected them. I sprang upon the table and in a moment was gripping a blade. The very feel of it, the mere sense of being armed, sent the blood rushing through my veins as though to some tonic of miraculous potency. "Now," thought I, setting my teeth, "let the ruffians fall upon me if they will. If my life is to be taken it shall not be for the want of an English arm to defend it."

I jumped on to the deck, went stealthily to the foot of the steps and listened. The man yawned again, and I heard the tread of his foot as he moved, whence I suspected him to be the yellow boatswain, the others being unshod, though to be sure there were shoes enough in the 'tween decks for them had they a mind to help themselves. As I sent a look up through the lifted corner of tarpaulin over the hatch I spied the delicate, illusive gray of daybreak in the air, and so speedy was the coming of the dawn that it lay broad with the sun close under the rim of the horizon ere I could form a resolution whilst listening to make sure that he who was on deck continued alone. Then hearing him yawn again and no sound of the others reaching my ears, I mounted the steps and gained the deck.

It was the Portuguese boatswain, as I had imagined. He was in the act of seating himself much in the same place

where I had seen him sleeping when I had boarded the vessel ; but he instantly saw me as I arose, and remained motionless and rigid as though blasted by a flash of lightning. His jaw dropped, his hideous little eyes protruded bright with horror and fright from their sockets, and his yellow face changed into a sort of greenish tint like mottled soap or the countenance of a man in a fit. No doubt he supposed me a spectre, rising as I did in that way out of the cabin when the rogue would imagine me a hundred miles off, or floating a corpse in the water, and I dare say but for the paralysis of terror that had fixed his jaw some pious sentences would have dropped from him. For my part I hung in the wind undecided, at a loss to act. I sent a look over my shoulder to observe if the others were about, and the movement of my head seemed like the release of him from the constraint of my eye. He leapt into an erect posture and

rushed to the side, saw the boat, uttered a cry for all the world resembling the rough, saw-like yell of the albatross stooping to some bait in the foaming eddies of a wake, in a bound came back to the binnacle, the body of which stood, though the compass, hood and glass were gone, and thrusting his hand into it pulled out a pistol which he levelled at me. The weapon flashed as I ran at him. Ere he had time to draw the cutlass which dangled at his hip, I had buried the blade, the large heavy hilt of which I grasped with both hands, deep in his neck, crushing clean through his right jaw; and even whilst he was in the act of falling I had lifted and brought the cutlass down upon him again, this time driving the edge of it so deep into his skull that the weight of him as he dropped dead dragged the weapon out of my hand, and it was a wrestle of some moments to free the blade.

I swept round fully prepared for the confrontment of the others, who, I took it, if they were sleeping below, would rush up on deck on hearing the report of the pistol. My head was full of blood; I felt on fire from my throat to my feet. God knows why or how it was, for I should have imagined of myself that the taking of a human life would palsy my muscles with the horror of the thing to the weakness of a woman's arm; and yet in the instant of my rounding, prepared for, panting for a sight of the other two, I seemed conscious of the strength of a dozen men in me.

All was still. The sun had risen in splendor; the ocean was a running surface of glory under him, and the blue of the south had the dark tenderness of violet with the gushing into it of the hot and sparkling breeze which had sprung up in the north with the coming of the morn. Where were the others? My eyes reeled as they went from the corpse of the

Portuguese to the pistol he had let drop. I picked it up; it was a rude weapon belonging to the armory of the *Corsaire*. I conjectured that the miscreant would not have thus armed himself without providing a stock of ammunition at hand, and on putting my arm into the binnacle stand I found, sure enough, a powder-horn and a parcel of pistol-bullets. I carefully loaded the weapon, narrowly seeing to the priming, all the while constantly glancing along the deck and listening. Then with the pistol in one hand and the cutlass in the other, I stepped below, furious and eager for a sight of the dead man's mates.

The lifted tarpaulin let the morning sunshine fall fair into the cabin, and now I saw that which had before been invisible to me; I mean a great blood-stain upon the deck, with a spattering of blood-drops and spots of more hideous suggestion yet, round about. A thin trail of blood went from the large stain upon

the floor along through the passage betwixt the berths, and so to the main hatch. Ha! thought I, *this* signifies murder! I found nothing in the cabins. The door of the berth in which the chest of gold stood was locked, but on putting my whole weight against it with knee and shoulder it flew open. The contents of the place were as I had before taken notice of; and there were no signs here of either dead or living men. I regained the deck, and walking forward observed a thin line of blood going from the coamings of the main hatch to the side. It was the continuation and termination of the trail below, and most unmistakably denoted the passage of a bleeding body borne through the hatch and cast overboard. I walked further forward yet, and on the forecastle witnessed another wide stain of blood. It looked fresher than the other—nay, it was not yet dry, and the heat went out of my body, and ice-cold shudders swept through my limbs

as I turned my back upon it, sick, dizzy, and trembling.

Those horrible marks gave me the whole story as fully as though the dead brute aft had recited it to me at large ere I struck him down. He had murdered his mates one after the other to be alone with the gold. It had been murder cold and deliberate, I was sure. There were no signs of a struggle; there were no hints of any previous conflict in the person of the yellow Portuguese. It was as though he had crept behind the men one after another, and struck them down with a chopper. Indeed I was as sure of this as though I had witnessed the deed; and there was the chest of gold in the cabin to explain the reason of it. How he hoped to manage if he fell in with a ship (and I know not what other expectation of coming off with his life he could have formed) it is useless to conjecture. Some plausible tale no doubt he would have taken care

to prepare, claiming the gold as his by law of treasure-trove.

I let fall the weapons, and lay over a little strip of bulwark, panting for breath. My eyes were upon the water over the side, but a minute after, on directing them at the sea-line, I spied the sails of a ship, a square of pearl glimmering in the blue distance, and slightly leaning from the hot and brilliant breeze gushing fair down upon her starboard beam. Scarce had my mind had time to recognize the object as a ship, when it vanished; a reddish gloom boiled up mist-like all about me; the ocean to a mile away from the side of the wreck turned of the deep crimson of blood, spinning round like a teetotum; then followed blackness, and I remember no more. . . .

XIV.

WHEN consciousness returned I found myself lying in a bunk in a ship's cabin. The place was familiar to me, and I recollect in a weak way trying to find out why it should be so. "Why, confound it all," I muttered, "this is my cabin aboard the *Ruby*. God! what a dream it has been!"

"Very glad your senses have returned to you, Mr. Catesby. It's been a doocid long faint, sir," exclaimed a familiar voice, and no less a person than the second mate of the *Ruby* came to my bedside.

A moment after the door opened, and the doctor of the ship entered. I was about to speak; he peremptorily motioned silence, felt my pulse and brow, nodding approvingly; then addressing the mate, thanked

him for keeping watch and told him he could go. As my dawning intellects brightened, my eagerness to make sure of the reality of the adventure I had come through grew into a little fever. When I looked round the cabin and saw my clothes hanging upon the bulkhead, my books, the twenty odds and ends of the homely furniture of my berth, I could not but believe that I had fallen ill, been seized perhaps with a fever, and that the incidents of the wreck, the open boat, the murderous Portuguese, were a mere vision of my distempered brain. But for some hours the doctor had his way, would not suffer me to talk, with his own hand brought me broth and wine, and now, finding me strong enough I supposed to support a conversation, went out, and in a few minutes returned with Captain Bow.

It was *then* my suspicion that all that had happened to me was most horribly and fearfully real was confirmed. The

boat that had left me aboard the wreck had been sighted sweeping down in the mist; twenty ropes' ends had been hove at her from the *Ruby*, and in few minutes her people were safe on the Indiaman's deck. Sail was shortened to close-reefed topsails, but a black blowing night drew around, as you know, and when the dawn broke the wreck was nowhere visible. Light, baffling weather followed. Meanwhile Bow swore that he would not quit these waters till he had exhausted the inside of a week in search for me. At sunrise that morning the wreck was signalled from the fore-top-gallant yard of the *Ruby*. The ship was immediately headed for it, and in a couple of hours was close aboard. The chief officer was sent in charge of a boat, and I was found lying, dead as they thought, a fathom's distance from a large stain of blood, whilst aft was the body of a half-caste with his head cut open. They left *him* as he lay, but me they handed into the

boat to carry on board, with the design of giving me a Christian burial, till the doctor, looking at me, asked if they wanted to add to the horrors of the wreck by drowning a living man, and ordered me to be conveyed at once to my bed.

This was the captain's story, and I then told mine. Both he and the doctor exchanged looks as I talked. It was tolerably evident to my mind that they only believed in about a quarter of what I told them.

"But, Captain," I cried, "on my solemn honor as a gentleman, as I am alive here to say it, there was gold to the value of many thousands of pounds in the chest."

"Yes, yes," he answered with a glance of compassion at me. "I don't doubt it, Mr. Catesby. So much the better for the mermen when it goes down to them; it will render the mermaids more placable, I don't doubt."

"But, gracious mercy!" I cried, "it

is only the sending of a boat, you know. Why, sir, there's enough in that chest to yield a little fortune to every mother's son of us aboard."

"Yes, yes," said Captain Bow, with a faint smile of concern at the doctor, who kept his eyes with a knowing look in them fastened upon the deck. "But we took you off the wreck, my dear sir, a little before nine o'clock, and it is now after four, and as our speed has been a comfortable eight knots ever since, you may reckon the hulk at sixty miles' distance astern. No, Mr. Catesby, we're bound to Bombay this time in earnest, sir. No more hunting after wrecks this voyage."

But I got every man-jack of the passengers, with the whole ship's company to boot, to credit my story up to the hilt before we had measured half the length of the Bay of Bengal, and such was the conviction I had inspired forwards at all events that the third mate one night told

me it was reported that a number of the fore-castle hands had made up their minds to charter, if possible, if not, then to run away with, a country wallah on the *Ruby's* arrival at Bombay, and sail the Indian Ocean till they fell in with the wreck—if she was still afloat.

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