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 **THE BLACK BARQUE** 

A Tale of the Pirate Slave-Ship


Gentle Hand

on Her Last African Cruise

Works of
T. JENKINS HAINS



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"SPRANG WITH THE EASE OF A CAT UPON OUR POOP-
RAIL."

(See page 227)

The
Black Barque

A Tale of the Pirate Slave-Ship
Gentle Hand
on Her Last African Cruise

By
T. JENKINS HAINS

AUTHOR OF
"THE STRIFE OF THE SEA," "THE WIND-JAMMERS," ETC.

Illustrated by
W. HERBERT DUNTON



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MAN

TO THE
MEMORY OF MY GRANDFATHER
Thornton Jenkins
REAR-ADMIRAL UNITED STATES NAVY
AND HIS COUSIN
Sir Robert Jenkins, K. C. B.
VICE-ADMIRAL ROYAL NAVY
WHOSE SERVICES TO THE BLACK MAN SHOULD NOT
BE FORGOTTEN
THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED

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THE SHIP'S COMPANY
OF THE
Gentle Band

OFFICERS

WILLIAM HOWARD, master.
RICHARD HAWKSON, first officer.
JOHN GULL, second officer.
SHERMAN HENRY, third officer.

CREW

PETER RICHARDS, American, boatswain.
JOHN HEYWOOD, American, gunner (who relates the story).

Able Seamen

TIM, American
BILL, Norwegian
HELIGOLAND, Norwegian
GUINEA, Dago
ERNEST, German
MARTIN, Scotch
JOHNS, German
JORG, Finn
PAT, Irishman
GUS, Swede

Ordinary Seamen

JOHNSON, Dane
JONES, Welshman
ANDERSON, Swede
HOLMBERG, Swede
JENNINGS, Dutch
PETE, Dago
TOM, Cockney
JIM, Englishman
GILBERT, half-breed Kanaka
JOHNSON, Norwegian
PACETTI, Dago

WATKINS, steward

| THE "DOCTOR," cook

OWNERS AND PASSENGERS

YANKEE DAN, of Nassau, trader (Daniel Allen).
ROSE ALLEN, his daughter.
LORD RENSHAW, an outcast from society, with money in the enter-
prise.
SIR JOHN HICKS, bankrupt, engaged in the slave traffic.
MR. CURTIS, engaged in the slave traffic.

THE BLACK BARQUE



CHAPTER I.

I SEEK A NEW SHIP

WHEN I struck the beach in Havre, the war with England had turned adrift upon that port's dock heads a strange assortment of men. Many had served in either the American or English navy, and many more had manned French privateers and had fought under Napoleon's eagles. The peace that had followed turned hordes of these fighting men into peaceable merchant sailors without ships, and they drifted about without definite means of support.

I had come over from the States in an old tub of a barque called the *Washington*, after having served as mate for two years on the schooner *General Greene*. The war had taught me something, for I had served in the navy in one of the South Pacific cruises, and had fought in the frigate *Essex*. I was

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only a boy in years, but the service — and other matters hardly worth mentioning here — had hardened my nature and developed the disagreeable side of my character. I was mate of the old hooker, and could have made out well enough if the captain hadn't been somewhat down on me, for I never cared especially for women, and I believed my experience justified my opinion of them, — but no matter.

The old man seemed to think I couldn't be happy without thrashing every day one or more of the miserable dagoes he had had the assurance to tell me were sailors, and, after a nasty voyage of fifty days, I was not sorry to step ashore. I joined the saturnine pier-enders with my pay and discharge as being a remarkably hard and quarrelsome mate with but small experience.

We tied up to one of the long docks, and I had seen that all the canvas was properly unbent and stowed below before being notified of my failings.

The dock-jumpers had made their leap, and we were short-handed enough, so I may have been a bit out of sorts with the extra work and the prospect of breaking out the cargo with only four Portuguese and a third mate, who was the captain's son.

It wasn't the work I dodged, however, nor was it that which caused the outfly. It was started by this third mate coming aboard with a very pretty

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girl whom he had met in town. To see him walking about the main deck with her, when he should have been hard at work, aggravated me. They said he was to marry her, and the dagoes kept looking after him instead of doing what I told them, and then — well, after it was over I didn't care very much.

The only man aboard who seemed interested to any extent was old Richards, the second mate. Richards had served on the frigate *Essex* in her famous cruise, and after the war he had chosen to try his hand in merchant ships, for the change of the man-o'-war's man's life from action to slothful peace had been too much for him. Silent and thoughtful, he had listened to me and was pained at my speech. He was called old Richards because of his quiet manner, although he was not much over thirty-five, and I bore with his sour looks while I went to the quarter-deck to finish my little say with the skipper.

As an American man-o'-war's man, it was my duty to invite the captain ashore to prove to him by the force of my hands that I was the best natured young fellow afloat. As I was a powerful lad, and had served two years under him, he had the good judgment to explain to me that my argument would prove most illogical, and that if I dared to lift a hand against him, he would blow a hole

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through me as big as a hawse-pipe. To lend emphasis to his statement, he produced a huge horse-pistol, and, sticking it under my nose so that I might look carefully down the bore and see what he had loaded it with, he bade me get hence.

I was not very much afraid of the weapon, so I gazed carefully into it, while I pronounced some flattering comments about his birth and the nationality of his mother. Then, lest I might really appear quarrelsome to the few knaves who were enjoying the spectacle, I spat into the muzzle as though it were the receptacle for that purpose, and, turning my back upon him, sauntered ashore, followed by my second mate, whom I thought came to expostulate with me and bring me to a better humour, and return.

I was in a somewhat grim humour, but not by any means quarrelsome. I had lost my ship, but I had a bit of American gold, and as long as a sailor has this commodity he is cheerful enough. I had no sooner landed on the pier than I was accosted by a little ferret-faced fellow, who seemed busy nosing around the dock after the manner of a nervous little dog that noses everything rapidly and seriously, as though its life depends upon its finding something it is not looking for.

“Bon jaw,” he said.

I turned upon him and looked into his ugly face.

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“I’m a Yankee sailor,” said I, “and if you want any business with me you’ll have to speak something I understand. And besides,” I added, edging closer to him, “I don’t allow fellows to talk about me in a foreign language, — unless I’ve got a good reason to think they’re saying something truthful. You savvey? Or I’ll make a handsome monkey of you by changing that figurehead you’ve got there.”

A sudden scowl came over the fellow’s face and went again. “I kin give you all the langwidge you need, young man, but I was only about to do you a favour.”

“‘Virtue is its own reward,’” I said, reaching into my pocket as though for a piece of money. “Cast loose!”

“It’s on account of that reward I reckon you don’t practise it,” grinned the fellow. “Perhaps a more substantial acknowledgment might —”

“Shut up!” I snapped. “If you are an American or English, let’s have your lay.

“Is it a ship you want me to take? For, if that’s your game, you better slant away. Don’t you see I’ve enough ship for the rest of my life, hey?”

The creature sidled closer to me and attempted to slip his arm through mine, but I brushed him away. He flashed that fox-like scowl at me again,

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his little yellow eyes growing into two points. He gave me an unpleasant feeling, and I watched his hands to see if he made any movement. Then I was more astonished, as I noticed his fingers. They were enormous.

“Look a-here now, don’t you think we cud do a bit a bizness without all these here swabs a-looking on? You look like you had sense enough to go below when it rains right hard. What! you follow me? Now there’s a ship without a navigator a-fitting out not far from here, and, if you’ll come go along with me, an’ talk the matter over, there’ll be no harm done except to the spirruts, — an’ they’s free.”

I was very thirsty and could talk no French, so, more to be guided to a place to quench my thirst on good ale than by curiosity, I allowed him to lead me up the dock. I noticed several of the loungers upon the pier-head scowl at me as I went my way, and one tall, fierce-looking fellow, who had been glancing at me frequently, gradually fell away from the group of loafers and strolled up behind us. I paid no further attention to these fellows, but, as I reached the street with its babble of unfamiliar language, a sudden feeling came upon me. I don’t know what it was, but I was only a boy, and the future seemed dark and lonely. I turned and looked back at the *Washington*. She

THE BLACK BARQUE

was the only thing American in sight, and the months I spent aboard her were not to be thrust aside lightly. They had all been too full of work and sorrow.

“Good-bye, old barkey,” I cried, holding my right hand high up, — “good-bye, and may the eternal God — no, bless you.”

I hastened on to where the ferret-faced fellow stood grinning at me. He was peculiarly aggressive, and his shabby unnautical rig only added to this disagreeable characteristic. Richards followed slowly behind, his eyes holding a peculiar look as he joined the little stranger. The man gave a sneer.

“Very sentimental and proper feeling,” said he. “A ship’s like a person, more or less, an’ when one gets used to her he don’t like to give her up.”

“What do you know about sentiment, you swine?” I asked, fiercely. “I’ve a good notion to whang you for your insolence.”

“A very fine spirit,” he commented, as though to himself, as he walked ahead, “a very fine spirit indeed, but guided by a fool. Here’s the ale-house I spoke of, and the sooner we have a mug or two, the better.”

CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN HOWARD

I MIGHT as well say in the beginning that, while I have a sailor's taste for liquor, I'm not especially noted as a drunkard or spirit-wholloper. By the latter I mean given to ruffianism or brawling while under its influence. It is because of a naturally refined and peaceful disposition that I am so constituted, and I take no glory on that account. It is nonsense to suppose all sailors ruffians and all tales of the sea coarse, because some swabs have found that the hand of a knowing mate or skipper lies heavy upon an empty pate. The story of many voyages on American ships is gentle and uneventful as the daily run of a lady's carriage. For evidence, read their logs. We entered the den of our little ferret-faced companion, and had no sooner sat at a table to order the ale than I was aware of the tall, dour man who had followed us from the pier-head. My second mate was too much taken up with the inmates of the place to notice anything

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else. I might as well confess Richards was a very pious fellow, and it must have been much against his wish to have been where he was. The tall man paid little attention to him, but looked at me.

He did not come into the room, but stood in the doorway, his fierce eyes fixed upon my face, and his long, drooping moustache hanging below his jowls, giving him a most sinister appearance. Our companion appeared not to perceive his presence at first, and only when he tilted his mug and threw his head back did his weasel eyes seem to fall in with those of the stranger.

“Come in, you terrier!” I cried. “Come in and have a mug to soak your whiskers in. Sink me, but barbers must be scarce around here. Soldier o’ the guard, hey? No one but a Voltigeer-r-r o’ the guard-r-rd would wear such hangers.”

“Young man,” said the stranger, quietly, “your language is rather unseemly, and should not be applied to one of the cloth. Hark ye! I am a man of peace, sir. I am Richard Raymond, chaplain of the *Guerrière* frigate. I never indulge.” He raised a lean, sinewy hand and shook his head gently at the proffered ale.

“May the devil seize me if you ain’t the holy joe I’m looking for!” I cried. “Sit down, man, sit down.”

“Not in such a place. I but came to plead with

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you not to fill yourself with that liquid. It is ruinous." Here he looked across the room where the proprietor was attending to a group of sailors who were about a table. "It is ruinous, I say, and here I implore you not to drink too much. As a man of God, I ask you, and the chaplain of the *Guerrière*," and he raised his eyes aloft and clasped his hands as if in prayer. I now noticed his clothes were somewhat clerical in cut, though shabby. At this moment, a buxom maid brought some fresh mugs, foaming full, and I tossed her a piece of money. She looked at me and smiled, saying something I failed to understand. Then casting a look at the tall man in the door, she laughed and went her way.

"And why not on the frigate now?" I asked Mr. Raymond, who still seemed to be absorbed in prayer.

"Lost, man, lost!" said my little companion, taking a fresh mug. "Don't you know she was lost?"

"Well," I cried, "what difference? Should a holy man desert his ship any the sooner for being holy, hey? Answer me that. Why didn't you get lost in her? Sink me, but I like a man who will do something more than talk for the good of a soul. I like a bit o' sacrifice now and again to show the meaning true. I'd like to see our friend drink

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this mug of ale to save me from the devil, for, if he'll drink it, I vow I'll not buy another for myself."

"Deliver us from evil," moaned Raymond. "Oh, Henry, I couldn't do it," and his eyes rolled up.

"So your name is Henry, is it?" I asked my little companion.

He looked queerly at me.

"Why didn't you say so before?" I asked, roughly.

"You never asked me," said he. "The chaplain has known me many years."

"Well," I cried, rising and advancing upon Mr. Raymond, "you'll either drink this ale or get it in the face, for I'll not be badgered by every hairy heaven-yelper I run against. Drink!" and I held the mug toward him.

His fierce eyes gleamed curiously, and he reached for the tankard. Then he raised it to his lips, and the long moustache was buried half a foot in the foam. When he let it down it was empty. The next instant something crashed against my head, and I saw many stars. Then came a blank. It must have been some minutes before I came to, and, when I did, I found myself lying upon the floor with my Mr. Henry and the barmaid wiping the blood from my face. The tall man had disappeared; and I struggled to my feet, my head whirling; Upon the floor lay pieces of the mug.

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“Did that sky-pilot do it?” I asked, feebly.

Henry grinned.

“Ah, ah, pauvre garçon, pauvre, pauvre — what eet is, boy? Pauvre boy. C’est poar boy, poar boy,” said the stout girl, wiping my clothes gently and laying a hand on my shoulder.

The effect of a little sympathy was strange, especially from a woman.

“Never mind,” I said, taking her hand from my shoulder and holding it a moment. “Get some fresh ale. There is no damage done. If that fellow was a man of peace, I should not like to come across his breed as man of war. Sit down, you son of a fox,” I continued to Henry, “and let’s have your yarn, and if I see you so much as grin, this shop will be unlucky.” We drew up again to the table.

“I should think,” said Richards, “you have had your say long enough now, and would listen to reason. Steady yourself and get back into some ship before you get in jail. I don’t care any more for the hooker you just left than you do, and wouldn’t go back in her if there was any other vessel wanting hands.”

“I feel flattered at your attentions, my dear Peter,” said I. “It is good of you to follow me to take care of one so young. My morals are pretty bad, and I need a nurse.”

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“That is certain,” said the sailor, with conviction that angered me not a little.

Richards’s manner was a bit trying to me at all times when I wanted to have a say, and this time I lost patience. Yet, when I thought of it afterward, I saw a steady head would have kept me out of much trouble. He was a perfectly balanced man. He would neither lose his head with joy, nor sink with despair at some seeming desperate trouble. He had learned this by experience, and his steady eyes were not those of a dullard. He felt as much as any one, as I soon learned when I gave him the sharp edge of my tongue. He was not a large man, but rather small and wiry. His size, I often thought, had governed his actions, for aboard ship a small man cannot talk too loud. Since he had served with me, I had reason to believe his body had little to do with his mind.

“Peter,” I said, acidly, “I’m looking for a ship. Will you go along in her with me?”

“That I will,” he said, but I thought he was simply falling into my trap to gain time.

“Then, my weasel,” said I, turning to Mr. Henry, “you have two bully boys at your tow-line, for, sink me, I’ll hold my mate to his word if I ship in nothing better than a West Indian sugar-boat. Sail in, my bully. Let’s have the old tune I’ve heard so often.”

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Henry drew up his chair and gloated over us. We were two good enough men to tempt any sort of crimp, but, on account of my size, he addressed himself to me as the leader. I have always had this happen when there were others around, but I take no especial note of it, for it was nothing that I was a well-put-up man. I had nothing whatever to do with my birth.

“You see,” said he, “I don’t make any bones wot I’m up to. I’m after men sech as you an’ me. My father were a Yankee sailor, though my mother were sech as I have to break the commandment wot arguefies for a long life every time I think of her.”

“You can honour her memory by keeping her name off your tongue,” I growled.

“Perhaps so,” he assented; “maybe, but she were hung right here in this town, and her property taken, so that’s why I’m lookin’ out fer men wot’s men. I get ten shillings a head per sailormen, an’ I stands in with the crowd. No shanghai business with me. It don’t pay. Why should a man ruin his business just to shanghai one or two men who will turn against him as soon as they come back, hey? A matter o’ a pound or two an’ a good name fer fair dealin’ gone. Oh, no! I don’t run fer bad ships. I only takes the clippers, an’ I give hand-some.”

“What’s the hooker’s name?” I asked.

THE BLACK BARQUE

“That’s just what I’m coming to if you’ll only say the word to go in her. They want a mate, and they’ll pay a big whack for a good man.”

“Name, you wolf,” I repeated, draining my mug. “Give the name, or pay for this ale and clear.”

“I’ll take you to her —”

He was interrupted by the entrance of a small man who strode quickly into the room and sat at once in an empty chair near the door. As the newcomer entered, Henry half-rose and saluted, receiving a slight nod of recognition in return.

“Who’s your friend?” I asked, gruffly.

“Sh-h! not so loud,” and he scowled at me. “That’s Captain Howard.”

“Who the saints is Captain Howard? Can he drink ale?” I asked.

“I wouldn’t ask him if I were you. He’s not a man of peace,” and he looked at me slantwise.

“I see,” I answered, and I looked the stranger over carefully. He was quite small in stature and his face was pale. His hands were soft, white, and effeminate-looking. Upon one finger a huge diamond sparkled. Just then he turned his gaze to meet mine, and I must admit his eyes gave me quite a turn. They were as glassy and expressionless as those of a fish. His whole smooth face, in fact, seemed to express nothing but vacancy. I had never seen a human face so devoid of expression. There

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was hardly a line in it save about the drooping corners of his mouth.

“He don’t look dangerous,” I said, with a chuckle. “However, I’m not hunting trouble, and, if you think he’ll be offended at my acquaintance, he can go without it.”

“He’s related to the great English house, — them — them ar’stocrats, ye know. That’s the way he’s got the king’s pardon.”

“Pardon for what?” I asked.

He glanced sidewise at me with that ferret look upon his face. “You’ve heard, sure? No? Well, then, that’s the skipper that held up the *Indian Prince*.”

Then I remembered well enough. He was the little fellow with the pirate crew that had held up the big East-Indianman in the China Sea some years back. It was he who took the treasure and squandered it in mad riot in the streets of Singapore, and defied the authorities. Here, indeed, was the man feared by both whites and savages of the Eastern seas, sitting in this little ale-house as unconcerned as though nothing unusual had happened to excite curiosity. I was so taken up looking at him and wondering at his foul crimes that he had received and drunk off his liquor before I realized what had happened. As he left, I seized my mug and drank it.

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“Come along,” I said. “Show me your ship,” and Mr. Henry paid the score and started for the door, while I followed. As I reached it, I turned to see what Richards would do, but he was game.

“Here comes your nourse, sonny,” he said. “I was paid off yesterday, and don’t mind a change if it’s for better,” and he looked so serious that I burst out laughing.

CHAPTER III.

THE BARQUE

HENRY led the way through the streets until we came to the anchorage basin beyond the docks. He was talkative enough, but my head ached from the blow I had received from the man of peace, and I paid little attention to the fellow's words.

We passed a large American ship that had been captured by the English during the war and sold. She loomed up grandly from the small craft lying near, her long, tapering masts still showing the unmistakable Yankee rigging, and her yards having yet a vestige of the white American cloth which has since been a pleasant feature of all our craft. Her paint was worn off, however, and upon her decks a mongrel crew chattered away like a pack of monkeys. I halted a moment and looked at her in disgust.

"What ship is that?" I asked.

"The *Independence* of Boston. She were taken by the English line ship *St. Marys* off Cape St. Roque. She were stove up some. See that big piece spliced into her stern where she was shot

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away. Her mainyard's fished in two places. Took two whole broadsides to fetch her to, they say. That trim-lookin' craft beyond her is the one we're headin' fer,—the one laying head on with the foreyards cockbilled."

We went toward the vessel indicated, and I soon saw what indeed appeared to be a fine craft. She was large, probably five hundred tons, but she was barque rigged, with her mainmast stepped well aft. Her foreyards were lifted to starboard and her main were braced to all angles, giving her the appearance of having been suddenly deserted by her crew after making port. Upon the spars the white canvas lay bent and furled, the clews standing out a foot or two clear of the bunt, and the gaskets hove in taut as brass bands. Her black sides showed a good freeboard, but I thought little of this, as nearly all vessels bound to the westward were going pretty light at that time. She was coppered, and the top band was a good half-fathom clear of the water. She was pierced for six guns on a side, and had several more ports painted along the bulwarks on the main-deck, as was the custom of the day. At a distance she might have been taken for a vessel of twenty or more guns. Her build was English, but her rig was Scandinavian, and I noticed her poop was painted white everywhere except on deck, after the Yankee fashion.

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Three heavy boats were slung amidships on booms. Forward of these a galley was built or lashed upon the deck, and from its window appeared the black head of an African. We went close to the water's edge and Henry hailed.

"Th-war-bull-yah! Ahoy!" he bellowed.

"What's her name?" I asked.

"Ha-Yah-Wah, ahoy!" he bellowed again in answer, and the nigger in the galley waved a white rag in reply.

"May the sharks eat me, you dock wrastler, but that's a queer name for a fine ship! How do you call her?" I asked.

"He's comin' now," said Henry, with a grin. "Names is mostly just sounds, an' furrin sounds is just like others, only different. We'll go aboard her, and you can see the old man an' settle with him. Don't be afraid o' high pay. He'll give it."

In a few minutes a boat left the barque from the side opposite us, where it had been out of sight. It rounded under her stern and came toward us, with the nigger standing aft sculling with the peculiar swing of the Bahama conch. He landed almost at our feet, and Henry motioned me to jump aboard.

"Ole man aboard, hey?" asked Henry, stepping in after me.

"Yassir, disha boat just done taken him abo'd. He's done expected mos' all han's afo' dis."

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“Well, take us over,” said Henry, and he settled himself heavily upon a thwart.

In a short time we were alongside. We clambered up a long hanging ladder amidships, and then over the rail to the main-deck.

As we did so a venerable, white-haired old fellow stepped out of the cabin door and greeted us.

Henry took off his cap and bowed with uncommon civility.

“Captain Watkins, allow me to make known Mr. — Mr. —”

“Heywood,” I suggested.

“Mr. Heywood,” continued Henry. “He is the best mate in Havre, an’ is just off the American ship *Washington*. I knowed you wanted a good mate, so I brought you the best in town.”

The old fellow held out his hand gravely, and said how glad he was to make my acquaintance.

“I am just looking for a good navigator, and if you’ll come at my terms, I’ll reckon we’ll deal.”

I suggested that the terms be made known.

“Well, I reckon on thirty pound a month is all I allow just now. Will you consider that?”

As this was five times as much as any mate I had ever heard of received, I told him I would consider the matter closed.

“An’ your friend, here. I take it he is an American, too, — an’ a sailorman from clew to earring.”

THE BLACK BARQUE

Richards looked at him steadily.

“You are a right smart of a guesser, Mr. Watkins,” said he. “I was second in the *Washington*, but I’ve been in better ships.”

The insolence of old Peter calling the captain mister was almost too much for me. Here was a chance of a lifetime. I turned upon him.

“If you are going to act foolish with one drink of ale, just for a chance to back down, you better get ashore,” I snapped.

“I’ve seen many men more sensible drunk than you are sober, Heywood,” said he, looking calmly at me, “but I’ll not back down.”

“Will you accept the same terms?” asked the old man, kindly.

Richards looked at him in scorn. Then he spat on the white deck.

“I’ll go,” said he, and Captain Watkins turned to me.

“There is no grog served aboard, and no swearing on this ship, Mr. Heywood,” said he. “I am an old man, as you see, and wish my crew orderly and quiet. Do you wish to stay aboard at once?”

I said I would just as soon turn to at once. The rate of pay fairly frightened me, and I was afraid if I went ashore he might get some one else in my place. The appearance of the barque was much in her favour. Her decks were as white as holystone

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could make them, and her gear was all new and carefully selected. Such lines seldom found place upon any ships save men-of-war, and her blocks, with polished brass pins and sheaves, were marvels to me. I stood idly pulling a topsail brace with one hand and looking up at the fine rigging, while Henry talked of his tip for bringing me. Even the sheer-poles were polished brass. The old fellow finally led us below, and handed Henry a small gold piece, and then offered me a few pounds in advance, requesting me to sign a receipt for the same. This I did, and then Henry left, shaking me heartily by the hand as he went over the side. I returned his grip, for I felt he had indeed been my friend.

“You may take the port room there, Mr. Heywood, and put your things shipshape as soon as Henry gets them off your vessel. If the second or third mate comes aft to see me, don’t fail to call me, — er — er, you know I’m quite without officers, sir, but will probably have both them and a crew aboard soon. The papers have not been made out yet, but I believe I have your receipt for your advance. Witnessed by Henry, it will do, I suppose, but I am not afraid of you, Mr. Heywood. You don’t look like a man to take advantage of a ship’s generosity.” Then he went aft, and I went to the

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port room. It meant that I was first mate, and I opened the door with a high heart.

There was nothing at all in the stateroom save an old clay pipe and a twist of tobacco. The bunk was bare, and I sat upon the edge of it speculating upon my good fortune. Finally I lit the pipe and smoked. The smoke wreaths rolled upward, and, as I watched them, I built many pleasant things in the future.

How long I dreamed I don't know, but it was quite late in the afternoon when I heard a hail from the shore that sounded like Henry's. I went on deck and met the nigger coming from the galley to the boat. I noticed what a strapping buck the fellow was, and he saw me watching him.

"Disha hooker'll have er crew soon. Yassir, she will dat," said he, grinning and showing a row of teeth almost as pointed and white as those of a shark. Then he climbed over the rail, and was soon sculling to the shore, where I saw Henry and two men waiting.

They came aboard and were ushered into the cabin by the venerable skipper, whom I had awakened.

"This is Mr. Martin," said Henry, introducing the first one with the air of a man presenting a lord. The fellow pulled off his hat and squared his shoulders, and then looked somewhat disturbed by this

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mark of respect. He was clean shaven, with a great broad head set upon an enormous pair of shoulders. He was short but powerfully built, and his bright eyes were restless. He was no drunken ship-rat, but a strong, healthy sailor.

“Mr. Martin, it gives me pleasure to meet you, sir. As I understand you wish to sign as second mate, I present you to Mr. Heywood, the first officer,” and he nodded to me with a graceful sweep of the hand. He had evidently forgotten Richards, but I did not feel inclined to remind him at that moment.

The fellow looked at me and scowled, at the same time nodding. This sort of thing was more than he had expected. Then he broke forth in broad Scotch that he would sign or go ashore.

“Would twenty pound a month do you?” asked the skipper, wistfully.

The fellow did not understand. The amount probably dazed him. Captain Watkins repeated the offer.

“Weel an’ guid! weel an’ guid!” he cried, slapping his stout leg. “Let’s have a squint o’ th’ goold.”

“I shall be glad to hand you a few pounds at once in advance,” said the old skipper. “Please sign this receipt for four pounds,” and so saying, he produced the money.

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The fellow put it in his clothes and signed the paper at once.

His companion stepped up. He was a Swede and blond. His blue eyes were bleary with liquor, and the old man looked at him and shook his head sadly.

“No drinkin’ and no swearin’ aboard here, my friend — er — er — ”

“Anderson,” said Henry.

“No drinking here, Mr. Anderson. If you’ll accept fifteen pounds a month and three pounds in advance, just scratch off a receipt and we’ll finish up and have dinner.”

This was done and the two men saw Henry over the side, giving him, as I had done, a good tip for his kind interest in getting them such fine berths. Then the big nigger cleared the table and brought in a very substantial meal, at which the captain and we mates fell to.

I was not a little astonished at the appearance of Richards. He was all cleaned up and wore a scarf tied under his newly shaved chin. He was always neat in appearance, but here he was, without anything apparently to tog out with, all rigged as fine as though he were going ashore. His smooth face, sunburned and lined as it was from exposure, seemed to tell of much hardship in the past. He was a solemn-looking fellow at best, and to see him togged out in this shape, with his hands washed and old

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clothes brushed, was strange. He took his place at the table without a word.

“You see,” said Captain Watkins, looking at me with his sharp eyes, “I believe in the equality of all men.”

I nodded, for it was not often the mates and sailors of a ship had a chance to eat in the forward cabin of a vessel, especially together. The Scotchman, Martin, eyed the old fellow narrowly. We could not all be mates.

“One man’s as good as another, and sometimes even better,” said Richards, softly.

“That’s it. Even a black man is as good as a white one. Some people don’t think so, but I know it’s so,” said the skipper.

“I’ve seen some I thought better,” said Richards, helping himself to a piece of boiled meat, “but it don’t keep people from jerking them up for slaves when they get a chance.”

“I have known slavers,” said the old man, gently, “but they are a rough set and capable of any crime. On our last voyage one of those fellows wanted to visit me during a calm, but I was afraid of him and warned him away. A desperate-looking set they were.”

“Must have frightened you badly,” sneered Richards.

The old skipper looked at the sailor. There was

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something like sadness in his voice as he answered.

“I’m of a somewhat timid nature, but cannot help it. I cannot stand seeing poor coloured folk made to suffer. You will know me better after you have sailed with me for a voyage.”

I thought I saw just the glimmer of a smile around the corners of his mouth as he said this, and looked for some reply from my talkative mate. Richards made no further remark, and the conversation turned to more sailor-like topics.

We talked rather late, as the skipper was most fatherly in his manner, and, when the fellow Martin suggested he would go ashore and get his dunnage, it was found that Henry had taken the boat without the nigger, and had not sent it back aboard.

“It is of no great consequence, I hope,” said Watkins. “You two, Mr. Heywood and Richards, may turn in the port room; you, Mr. Martin and Mr. Anderson, to starboard, and perhaps in the morning I can let you have the day ashore.”

Then we separated. Richards and I tossed a coin to see who would get the bunk, and I won. I arranged my coat for a pillow and soon fell asleep, leaving my roommate to shift for himself on the deck.

Once or twice during the night I thought I heard stealthy footsteps overhead, and once it seemed to

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me that the barque was heeling over a bit. Finally I was awakened by a loud banging at my door, and, springing up, found it was broad day. Then it suddenly dawned upon me that the barque was under way.

Opening the door, I found a strange fellow scowling at me. He was dressed as a common sailor and was a bit drunk.

It is just as well to start discipline right aboard a ship, thought I, so I hitched my trousers' belt the tighter before sailing in to show how an American mate whangs the deviltry and liquor out of a foreign skin when aroused from pleasant dreams. I noticed the absence of Richards, but thought he had already turned out for duty. Then I accosted the fellow and asked softly what he wanted.

“What cher doin’ in my room, yer bloomin’ swine?” he howled. “Git out an’ —”

I had stopped him with a right swing on the jaw, and the next instant we were loping about that cabin in fine style. In a moment there was a rush of feet, and something crashed on my head. Then followed stars and darkness.

CHAPTER IV.

SHANGHAIED

WHEN I came again into this world, I found myself lying in a dark, dirty hole of a fore-castle. There was not a man there, but, as I looked over the empty berths, I saw plenty of clothes and bedding, which gave evidence of a full crew.

Getting to my feet, I found my head sorely cut and bruised, and wondered what had happened. A throbbing pain across the eyes did little to aid my thoughts, and, while I stood holding to the ladder down which I had been flung, the scuttle above me was thrust back and the fellow Martin started down.

“Aha!” he said when he saw me, “’twas a guid wan ye got ain yer haid. A clout will do ye na harm, ye thievin’ trixter, ye deceivin’ rascal. Now I’ll give you one for ald lang syne, an’ teach ye better to deceive a honest mon ag’in.”

While talking, he turned back the sleeves of his jumper and made ready to carry out his threat. He saw I made no movement, however, and hesitated.

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“Defend yairself, mon, defend yairself. Do not let me whollop yer like a babe,” and he advanced toward me with his hands before him in some very fair style.

“See here,” I said, “what the mischief has happened? What are you driving at? I’ve played no trick, but it looks like some one has played a trick on me.”

“Ah, na backslidin’, ye corward, na backslidin’! Yer can’t fool a canny sailormaan that way. Put yer hands before yer ugly face, or I’ll whollop ye like er babe.”

“I’m not afraid of your wholloping, Scotty. Let me get a turn about my head a bit, and pull this ragged shirt off. Wonderful clean fo’castle this. No drunks; no filthy dunnage overhauled, no — what infernal ship is this, anyway?”

He saw I was not joking. Indeed, my appearance, as his eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, put joking aside, and my last remark about the vessel was true.

He dropped his hands and stared at me.

“Ware ye sure rung in like the rest? Waren’t ye in the game?” Then he burst into a hoarse laugh and held out his hand. At that minute the tramp of feet sounded overhead, and a half-score of men came clattering down the companion-ladder.

It was a mixed crew, — Norwegians, Swedes, da-

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goes, and Dutchmen, — but all with the unmistakable swing of the deep-water sailor. They stared at me, and then started a gabble of language that in my disturbed condition I failed to understand. They crowded around me and asked questions, and I noticed Anderson eyeing me suspiciously. Then Martin, with a sweep of his hand, cut them off, and began telling how I came aboard. When he was through with his flowery description of Henry, I noticed several men shake their clenched hands aft.

“Well,” said I, “I’m the mate, and I guess I’ll go aft and find out who rapped me over the head. Some fellows in the other watch, I suppose.”

They burst into derisive laughter.

“We’re all mates and captains here,” sung out a big Norwegian addressed as Bill. “You better turn in while you may, friend Heywood. You’re in Henry’s watch, an’ the captain ain’t turned out yet.”

“Who’s the old man?” I asked, bewildered, and thinking I must still be daffy from the crack on the head.

“Ain’t seen him yet,” said several at once.

“Well, what infernal hooker am I in, anyway?” I asked Martin.

“They call her *The Gentle Hand*, but there ain’t na name painted on her. Some says she’s the *Fly-*

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by-Night, Howard's old pirate barque, but that canna weel be. She's light. Not a hundred ton below decks, an' that's mostly stores."

"The *Fly-by-Night* was a cruising brig before the first war with England," I said. "It can't possibly be that old hooker. Besides, she was used against the French by your General Braddock."

"Well, when you find out just what we've gotten into, coom an' tell us," said Martin.

It had been slowly dawning upon me that I had been the victim of a trick, and I felt in my pocket for the advance I had received the day before. The barque was under way, that was certain, but no one seemed to know where she was bound, and, as I fumbled through my clothes, Martin laughed.

"'Twas guid money, Heywood, but 'tis gone. I missed mine this morning. Maybe Anderson can tell where it is," and he grinned.

The money was gone. That was certain. Yet it was no dream. I had received it fair enough. Feeling anger and hatred for the trick upon me, I bound up my head and went up the ladder to the deck to have a look around. Several men called out to me to have a care of the mate, but most of them were busy arranging their belongings, quarrelling and fighting among themselves over the possession of what clothes happened to be common to the crowd. I saw Martin steal a pair of tarpaulin trousers from

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a fellow who was wrestling with the sailor Bill for the possession of a bag of straw bedding. Then I stepped on deck.

The cool air did me good. I went to the rail and looked over. The barque was going steadily to the southward with every rag set. She was heeling but gently, and there was little wind or sea. She was braced a bit to starboard, her port tack aboard, and by her trimming I saw she was under English officers. Every yard just in line with its fellow, from the big main to the little royal that crossed a good hundred and seventy feet above the sea. Far away to the eastward showed the even outline of the French coast, and between us many sails strung along the band of blue, their hulls either just below or rising above the horizon's line. The day was fine and the easterly breeze gentle, and the barque was swinging easily along.

I looked aft and saw men of the mate's watch at work setting up the backstays in the main-rigging, and some on the mizzen topsail-yard, apparently under the direction of Richards, serving a worn foot-rope. The canvas covers were off the guns, and a dozen bright twelve-pounders of polished brass shone in the sunlight. The white deck beneath and the varnished spars above made a pretty picture, and I grew warm to think that I was not indeed the mate of such a craft. They had played

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a fine trick on me to get me aboard sober and without compulsion, signing a receipt for an advance equal to a couple of months' ordinary wages. There were plenty of sailors about the pier-heads, for the war had turned many adrift without means of getting a ship, and there seemed to be no reason why these fellows should try their land-shark game in getting a crew.

As I looked aft it dawned upon me that these men were much better than the ordinary run of common sailors. There was something in the fellow's walk I now saw crossing the deck that spoke of the war-ship. Even the watch I had just seen below were remarkably rough and tough specimens of a rugged humanity.

While I stood there taking in the scene, I saw a man come from aft and walk to the break of the poop. He looked over the barque carefully, and as his gaze came down the fore-rigging it stopped upon me.

He was dressed something after the manner of a preacher, with black cloth coat and stock, and his hair was cut short. As I took his figure in, there was little difficulty in recognizing Richard Raymond, the man of peace. He beckoned me to come aft, and, as I did so, he removed the huge drooping moustache he had been wearing and tossed it over the side.

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“I reckon you know me now, Heywood,” said he, “though it’s been over six years since we parted. I wanted you on this voyage, and took some pains to get ye. That was the old man who welted ye over the head. I’m sorry for it.”

It was Hawkson, sure enough. I recognized him easily now in spite of his gray hair and older look. How I failed to recognize him at first even in his disguise puzzled me. We had made the cruise in the *Petrel* together, and had served on the man-of-war.

“Well, you’ve got me fast enough, though you played a mean trick getting me. Now what’s the game?” said I.

The old privateersman smiled, and his jaws worked as though muttering to himself. His face creased into ugly lines about his large mouth, and he showed his teeth.

“I’m first officer here. That fellow Gull you fouled this morning is second. Remember this first and the rest’ll come easy. Henry is third mate, and I hear them say that you’re to be made gunner. How’s that?”

“Who’s them?” I asked, somewhat nettled.

“Them’s us, sonny. The old man, the two gentlemen aft, myself, and the rest.”

“Where are we bound for, and what’s the hook-

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er's name? It's all well enough to be cribbed aboard a ship, but I'm going to find out what's the game."

"We're bound for the South Pacific; that's all clear as mud, an' we've got a picked crew because the business in hand needs honest men."

"I bow to myself," I answered. "It's well to know."

"What more do you want, hey? Go forrads an' turn in, an' I'll square ye with the fellow Gull. Don't let them see me talkin' too much with ye, sonny, or I'll have to forget the past for the needs o' the present. You're aboard a fine ship."

"Well," I answered, "that's all good enough, but I would like to know her name and who's her skipper, — and what's more, I'm going to find out right away."

Hawkson's eyes glinted with that light I knew so well meant danger, and his ugly mouth worked nervously.

"Perhaps you'd care to go aft and interview the captain about it," said he, with his drawl. "He's a gentleman every inch, and will be a revelation to ye after them packets you've sailed in. Suppose you lay aft and make out your own case. You were always an obstinate youngster, but I reckon since you've been mate your head's swelled worse'n ever."

I knew Hawkson to be one of the most dangerous

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men afloat when aroused, but about this time I was not exactly a lambkin myself. A man does not become mate of a western ocean packet with anything lamblike in his make-up, unless it is by accident for one voyage. I was not quarrelsome, but resented with righteous indignation the manner in which I had been kidnapped in broad daylight without even being under the influence of liquor. The simplicity of the whole affair maddened me, and not even the fellowship of Martin and Anderson or others in the list of victims detracted one jot from the implied lack of ordinary precautions and common sense. I started up the weather side of the poop to go aft, and I noticed several fellows to leeward looking at me.

“Go to lor’ard,” growled Hawkson, fiercely.

But I paid no attention, and was half-way up the steps when a man came up the after companion and walked toward me. As he reached the deck and turned before I had gotten up, I stopped short, looking at him. It was Captain Howard, the pirate.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE FO'C'SLE

I WILL admit my zeal abated a trifle when I met the captain's gaze, but I was not much afraid of any man, so up the ladder I went and toward him.

He saw me approaching and stopped. Then he demanded in a high voice from Hawkson what I wanted and why I was allowed up the weather side of the quarter-deck.

"He's a bit daffy, sir," said Hawkson, touching his cap. "That crack on the pate you gave him has turned his burgoo case. He'll be all right soon, sir."

"Daffy or not," said I, "I want to know what ship I'm in and where she's bound, — and I'm going to find out."

The ugly face of Captain Howard was inscrutable. His glassy eyes like those of some reptile were fixed upon me. His thin, hooked nose appeared like the beak of an albatross. He took off his hat and bowed to me politely, saying:

"It will give me great pleasure to listen to you, sir." I noticed his poll was as smooth and hair-

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less as the sole of my foot, only a red seam that stretched from the crown to his left ear wrinkled its bronzed roundness.

“Well,” I said, more mildly, “I would like to find out what ship I’m in and where she’s going.”

“Were you drunk, sir, when you came aboard her?” he asked, calmly.

“I was not,” I answered, warmly.

“Were you blind?”

“No, sir.”

“Well, then, you have permission to look about you, and, if you’re the sailor you claim to be, you will perceive this is a barque. She is called the *Gentle Hand*. She is bound for the South Atlantic.”

“But I shipped as mate of her,” I stammered.

“That is manifestly impossible. Mr. Hawkson has been mate of her for some time. That was probably a little joke of Watkins, the steward.” Here he threw up his head and burst into a rattling laugh, his mouth slightly open, but his face otherwise unmoved.

“He, he, he!” he rattled, “you’ll be a mate fast enough, — a gunner’s mate. And, if that don’t suit you, Mr. Hawkson will introduce you to the gunner’s daughter. Go forward now and remember that if you come on the weather side of the quarter-deck while I’m here, I’ll write my name on you with a hot iron. Do you see? Ho, ho, ho!”

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That Watkins is a tricky knave and you have my permission to manhandle him. There he is now. Breakfast — ”

As he spoke, the venerable old scoundrel emerged from the door of the forward cabin, and, standing upon the poop step, announced that the morning meal was ready. There was little left for me but to get forward. The “gunner’s daughter” on that ship I knew was the sinister name applied to the breech of one of the guns, and an introduction consisted of being held over it with a naked back, while a sailor cut the victim to ribbons with a cat-o’-nine-tails.

As the old rascal Watkins stood there announcing breakfast, he recognized me and grinned.

“It isn’t well to laugh early in the morning,” I said, as I went past him. The captain went below, and I stopped on the last step of the poop-ladder. “For sometimes it’s rude.” Here I caught him a cuff with the flat of my hand that sounded all over the deck, knocking him a couple of fathoms toward the main-hatch. A man to leeward laughed outright, and even Hawkson chuckled.

The old fellow recovered himself, and his grin was conspicuously absent as he came toward me in a menacing manner.

“Now you trot along, Noah,” said I. “I’ll give

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you one like that every little while until I find that advance money back in my pocket.”

He stopped in front of me, and his mouth worked nervously. His eyes seemed to disappear under his shaggy brows, and his beard fairly bristled with rage.

I was a stout man among stout men, and he saw there was little use speaking out loud. Then he turned and went into the cabin, where Captain Howard was bawling for him to bring his coffee.

“Better have let the old man alone, Heywood,” said Hawkson. “There’s a lot of trouble bottled up in his old carcass.”

“Well, I’m uncorking a few of my own,” I said, “and if that second mate turns out while I have my hands warm, there’ll be some more.”

Hawkson chuckled.

“You’re taking things rather hard, ain’t ye? You’ll be mighty glad they took ye aboard the old pirate before you’re through.”

“Well,” I said, “you’ve not answered my question, and I’m going to find out a few things in my own way. Piracy is nonsense these days, though if there were such things, you’d be in them all right. How did that skipper get command of this vessel, anyway, and where is she headed for?”

“I told you we were bound for the South Atlantic. Just where, you’ll find out by the time we

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get there. We're to stop at Nassau to take the owners aboard and then go ahead. That's all there is to it. Sailing to the Bahamas and then around the Cape of Good Hope over to where the owners want to go. That's plain as mud, ain't it?"

"How about the pay? Do you suppose I'll go for nothing?"

"The pay is good, no fear. You won't lose anything. Why, most of these fellows here have shipped without knowing any more'n you do, so what's the use making trouble for yourself? It's a regular trading voyage. Just plain trading in the Atlantic, an' if we get the best of some trades, why — so much the better for the owners and all hands. The owners are all right, sonny, an' they'll be here to settle."

"Well, if you had only told me this," I answered, "I would probably have shipped anyhow, though I don't care about going forrard again."

"That's what I was afraid of, an' the officers' berths were full. Three or four o' the A. B.'s forrards has been mates before. You'll be all right as gunner if you leave this after-guard alone. It's goin' to take all your care now to clear Watkins. He'll kill you the first chance he gets."

"Bah!" I said, turning to go.

Hawkson left me and went aft. I hesitated a few moments, looking around to see if any one on

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deck had heard our talk, but there was no one near enough, and those who saw us might have thought the mate was giving me a reprimand for whanging the old steward. Hawkson would be friendly in a rough way, and I did not care for all hands to know it. As I was in Mr. Gull's watch, I had four hours below before confronting that gentleman, and I might as well take advantage of them, as my head was very painful. Taking one more look over the vessel and beyond where sunlight danced upon the wrinkled blue surface of the ocean, I went to the forecandle hatch and forthwith below. Here I took possession of a bunk which the thoughtful owners had cleaned and painted, and, announcing my claim to the watch who had finished a late breakfast, sat upon its edge and munched a piece of hard bread.

"I see ye whack the old duffer Watkins," said the fellow Bill. "What'd yer hit him for?"

I told him, and looked at Martin to see if he agreed to my accusations against the old rascal's honesty. He smoked in silence.

"D'ye know who Watkins is?" asked a big Finn with a long black beard, "because if you don't, you're apt to find out too late."

"Do you know me?" I asked.

The fellow looked surlily at me.

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“Because if you fellows down here don’t, some of you will find out all of a sudden.”

I had noticed that they had left the mess things lying about, as if awaiting something, and then I had a grave suspicion that the something was myself, whom they would delegate to clean up after them. It was just as well to take the matter in hand at the beginning, and if there was to be a fracas to see who was to be the boss of that crowd, the earlier the better.

The big Finn gazed at me, but said nothing, and Bill seemed to size me up closely.

“Who and what is that old swab, Watkins?” I asked, suddenly turning upon Bill.

“They say he was mate with Howard when he was a boy. Served thirty years for a few things they did in the China Seas. Killed more’n forty men.”

“Well,” I answered, “if some one had taken him in hand before he’d killed the last thirty-nine, he would have a better chance than he has now for keeping out of the devil’s company. Now you get hold of those mess things, William, and make the Czar’s cousin here lend a hand. If you don’t, I’ll make you wish Watkins was here to run this mess when the watch is called.”

Here I lounged back in my pew, finishing off with a chunk of salt beef and a cup of cold water.

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Afterward I lit a pipe and smoked complacently, while keeping a lookout to see what the crowd would do.

Bill was a fine specimen of the Norwegian sailor, and he surveyed the mess things contemptuously for a few minutes. Then he seized upon a stocky little Dane, and bade him carry the things away. The men, having finished, were talking and smoking, sitting in their pews or upon the sea-chests the more lucky happened to bring aboard. They saw Bill's move, and a murmur of disapproval ran among them. Several pointed at me, but I smoked in silence, feeling much better for having eaten something, and recovered my usual strength and spirits. In a few minutes we might be called on deck, perhaps, to trim sail, but if not, the after-breakfast smoke would be followed by an arranging of the fore-castle. The little Dane entered a loud protest against his new duties, but Bill silenced him quickly with an oath.

"You do as I tell yer. I'll settle with the Yank later," said he.

"There's no time like the present," said I, putting my pipe away and slowly rising out of my pew. "I'm the high cock of this roost, and when I give an order below here there needn't be any settlement called for. Peel off! Get ready, for I'm coming for you, William."

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The loungers looked up, and Martin chuckled.

“Coom, coom, a fair fight, an’ may the best mon win,” he cried. “Gie us room, laddies, gie us room. I’ll back the Yank, mon, and, Anderson, ye knave, ye’ll back yer Scandinavian.”

Bill was not a coward, but he had the blood of a peaceful race in his veins. He was very strong and able, and he cursed me heartily, while I calmly pulled off my upper garment. His fierce threats only made me more determined to put him through, for the more he swore the angrier he became, telling plainly that the matter was not so greatly to his taste.

As gunner or petty officer of any rank aboard ship, it was absolutely necessary to make a clear start, in order to avoid disagreements later. The weaker must be made to act as cook for the mess, and there was no help for it. It was the rule that had to be established in the same old way.

Martin drew a line across the deck with a piece of charred wood. I stepped up to it and placed the toe of my left foot upon it and was ready. Bill quickly swaggered up, and I landed like lightning upon his jaw. He staggered back into the arms of Anderson. Then he spit out a mouthful of blood, and came at me with an oath and a rush.

CHAPTER VI.

I BECOME "COCK OF THE WALK"

THERE was nothing brutal or rough in this encounter, and, if it savours of the commonplace sailor's brawl, I can only say that such are the customs on deep-water ships, and they must continue through all time. Life at sea is not always gentle. There is no use trying to make it so. It is nearly always a fight against the elements, and the roughness prevents the customs from becoming effete as those of the drawing-room, where an easy tongue and sarcastic wit does the hurting. This is said to be refined and not brutal, but for my part I have seen men more brutally and cruelly hurt by words than by fists. A person with a weak stomach will stand an uncommon lot of verbal brutality, but when it takes a physical form, they shrink from it and cry out that it is degrading. It is less degrading than a vile tongue.

When Bill landed upon me, there was something of a mix-up, and some short-arm work that might have proved interesting to lovers of sport. We

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were in pretty good training, and the thuds of our blows sounded healthily through the little fore-castle. The men lounging in their pews and gazing complacently at us, their bodies and legs well out of the way, made a very appreciative audience and left the deck perfectly clear. Their remarks were not always well advised, for they clamoured loudly for Bill to put the finishing touches to me, while I jolted him repeatedly upon the side of his bullet-head.

Finally Martin and Anderson separated us for a breathing spell, and I had a chance to look about the room with the one eye left me for duty. Then I noticed the companionway blocked by the forms of two men who were somewhat remarkable in appearance. They were dressed in the height of fashion, and sat upon the topmost steps smoking and looking interested. The younger was about my own age, and good-looking, and his companion was nearer middle age, with a face describing free living.

"I have your money on that first round," said the younger. "The Yank drew first blood," and he pulled forth a handsome gold watch and noted the time.

"Two to one he loses yet," said the older man, carelessly, as though it was of no consequence whatever.

That stirred something within me.

"Perhaps you would care for a turn," I sug-

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gested, turning sharply at him. But he laughed immoderately, and the younger man joined, slapping his leg, crying:

“I’ll take you! I’ll take you!”

At that instant time was called by Martin, and we went at it again.

There is no use going into the details of the finish, but it will suffice to say that the American eagle which was tattooed upon my breast had no reason to blush. I was somewhat aroused by the unfriendly tone of the Englishman above, and I jolted Bill rather roughly upon the point of his jaw. It was not viciously done, but at the same time I put a bit of weight into my hand, and my heavily limbed antagonist dropped to the floor. Anderson tried to get him to start again, but he reeled as he reached his knees and swayed hopelessly for a space. The motion of the ship seemed to bother him also.

“My money! My money!” cried the younger man above. “The Yank has him going.”

It was more than that, and I felt sorry for Bill. He was out of it, and a heavy jolt might mean something serious. I went to my bunk and began to put my clothes on, while Martin cried for me to wait. “I’ll give you a turn another time,” I said, shortly.

“No, no, he isn’t done for yet,” they all cried, but I knew better.

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Poor Bill! He turned his face up, and I saw his vacant eyes trying to grasp the situation. He was game enough, and struggled to rise, swaying to and fro like an unstayed topmast. The deck would slant away from him and his hand would reach out for support. Then the barque heaved a bit to leeward, and he staggered, swayed, and then pitched forward prone and lay still.

“Pour water over him, mon, pour water over him,” cried Martin, and Anderson sluiced the allowance in the forecastle over the fallen man’s head. Then they raised him and put him in his pew, and, by the time I had finished dressing, he was sitting up regarding me curiously.

“Now, William,” said I, “just as soon as you feel better, you take hold of these mess things and get them cleaned up and shipshape. Jorg there can lend you a hand this morning, and, if he doesn’t bear a hand, I’ll see what kind of skin they raise in Finland.” And I nodded to the bearded fellow who had chosen to question me regarding Watkins. Then I settled myself for a nap, and tied a rag over my bruised side-light, while I smoked and listened to the discussions around me.

The younger man who sat in the companion, and who had backed me, now arose and stood twisting the ends of his little blond moustache while he looked down. His face was tanned a ruddy brown, and

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I was not inclined to find fault with his looks. His companion cursed his luck and Bill, his face almost purple with anger and his black beard fairly bristling.

“I’ll own I’ve lost, Sir John, but may the curse of the vikings strike that lubber I backed,” he growled. “One wouldn’t think there was so little in such a big fellow. I thought Hawkson had a picked crew, but, if that fellow Bill’s the best, they’re a poor lot.”

“I think the Yank proved satisfactorily the Sou’wegian isn’t the best man in the forecastle. Bill is all right enough. Come along. They’ll be all right for our business.”

“And what is their business?” I asked Martin, as they went aft. “Is it to come forrard and try and get on a fracas for their amusement? For if that’s their lay, I’ll see they get one before long if they are passengers.”

“I hear they’re part-owners. The owners will join at the islands. It’s themselves who are runnin’ the vessel an’ expedition,” said the Scot.

“Well, they strike me as a queer lot, and the whole thing don’t seem regular. Here we are in Howard’s old pirate barque, being tricked into signing on. The old rascal is in command, although he must be more than three-quarters of a hundred years old. And here we sail away on an expedition

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no one seems to know anything about except the owners themselves."

"There ain't any such thing as piracy in these times, hey?" said Martin, and he looked at me hard with his bright gray eyes, his whole broad face showing plainly enough that he was more than willing that there should be.

"No, of course not," I said. "How the deuce could a barque like this turn pirate? She isn't fast enough, in the first place."

"Ye is wrong there. There ain't anything afloat that'll go to windward o' this craft. Good mon, just look how she travels! Na, na, friend Heywood, this be a trim ship for a robber, and we're uncommon well manned. Twenty men forrards, and there'll be nigh a dozen more aft, making up to forty when we ship the owners. 'Tis a biggish crowd fer a barque o' five hundred ton. Now I've been a peaceable man an' mate o' a dozen ships, — as you yoursel', — but I wouldna gie thruppence fer me conscience should th' owld raskil aft say th' word. Be you afeard, friend Heywood?"

"Not of you, Watkins, or Howard himself," I answered, "but it's all foolishness to think of dodging men-of-war in these days. I've sailed in a man-o'-war that would clean the South Sea of all floating things in six months. It's not that they're after. They're up to some expedition among the islands.

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Maybe the scoundrel has treasure hid, and these bloods are going out to hunt it. That's more like the lay of it."

"Maybe, maybe, friend Heywood, but even so I'm that keen for the adventure, I'll not stand for the money they robbed us of, if there's a chance to get it back."

"Well, I'll clear at the Bahamas if I get a chance, unless they show me that advance I missed," I said, warmly, "and I'll make that old scoundrel sorry for some of his sins."

Then we smoked in silence until Hawkson's voice bawled out for eight bells, and a rough-looking Dutchman poked his head below and bellowed the news, receiving an old sea-boot full in the face from Martin for his pains.

The morning had passed rapidly enough, and although tired and sore from the incidents of the past few hours, I was not sorry to go on deck and get a breath of fresh sea air.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO KINDS OF HAND - SHAKES

MR. GULL, the second mate, was already on deck when we arrived, and I expected to continue our pleasantries of the early morning. He looked hard at us and said nothing, and then I knew Hawkson had put in a word for me, for no second mate could otherwise have resisted the temptation of taking it out of an able-bodied seaman, no matter how able-bodied he might be. I was informed shortly that I was made gunner, and was henceforth in charge of the barque's battery to see that it was kept in order. But there was no more room aft for any more petty officers. Henry and Watkins occupied the only remaining room, on account of the space occupied by the passengers and their luggage. Jorg, the Finn, I found was the carpenter, but he also had to share the fore-castle.

Before going below, Hawkson summoned all hands, and he and Gull went through the old form of choosing the watches.

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“Bos’n,” said Hawkson, addressing Richards, “you may muster the men aft.”

“Ay, ay, sir,” said the man-o’-war’s man, and he touched his cap with his hand like in the old days aboard the frigate when I had seen him speak to the officer of the deck.

It was something of a surprise to me, and also to the rest, to find the man who had served under me as second mate as bos’n of that crowd. It made me think that perhaps I might dispute the position with him, for I was a navigator and capable of working the ship’s position to a fairly accurate extent, and old Peter Richards was only a plain able seaman. But I soon saw why he had been chosen. He was a trained man and used to the discipline of a fighting ship, and there were plenty of navigators aft. He was very sober and quiet in his manner this day, and I wondered at it, for I was under the impression he had been fooled into going aboard like the rest of us.

“How is it, Peter,” I asked, as he came near me, “are you going to give me my orders?”

“Yes, and I advise you to obey them without making trouble for yourself,” said he, quietly. “You came into the ship with your eyes wide open. Now stand to it. I told you I’d follow you and take care of you.”

He said the last part of his speech with just a

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suspicion of a smile lurking about the corners of his mouth, and I was not in the humour to be laughed at.

“All right, my cock,” said I, “if you are one of the officers and know the destination of this hooker, you will oblige me by telling me her port of destination. If you don’t, I might be tempted to argue the question with you. You are not pretty, Peter, when you smile.”

“Don’t think I would tackle you, Heywood,” said he, looking sternly at me. “You’ve been aboard a fighting craft, and know just what I’ll do if you don’t turn to when I say. I don’t know any more about this vessel than you do, except — well, except that I wouldn’t have picked her out as a choice of ships. If you had used your eyes before you signed on, you could have seen she was something irregular. Brace up and do what you’re told until you find out what you’re in for.”

Then he went along to get the rest of the crew.

The men who had temporarily gone below to get their morning meal, and who had remained below as the port watch, were now lined up with those on deck, and Hawkson began by choosing a huge fellow named Jones. He was a big, burly, red-headed Welshman. Then Gull chose Bill in spite of his appearance. And so it went until each had an equal number of men on a side, Jorg going into

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the starboard, and myself into the port watch, for we were in the fore-castle with the rest, while Richards slung his hammock in Hawkson's room. I started on the forward guns, and spent the rest of the day polishing.

The weather was fine and it was exhilarating to sit in the gun-port to windward and watch the old barque go. The land had now entirely disappeared to the eastward, and we were rapidly drawing off.

The barque was very fast. With a breeze of not more than twelve knots, she was running a full nine knots, seeming hardly to disturb the smooth sea. Her wake was clean, and only the steady pouring of her bow-wave whitened her path.

I sat for hours rubbing the muzzles of the guns with whale-oil and dust, and, as I did so, I watched the flaking foam of the side-wash spread away with its musical hiss and tinkle. Down deep in the blue below a piece of weed now and then flashed past, looking like an eel or snake as the sunlight wavered upon it. It was a warm, lazy day, and I pondered long upon the strange turn of fortune that had suddenly placed me upon the old barque with her sinister past and mysterious future. Here she was all fitted out for a long voyage, but without any cargo to speak of, and that little stowed in such a manner that it was easy of access.

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I gazed aloft at the fine rigging, and noted how well her canvas was cut. Every sail was fitted as aboard a man-o'-war, and all her running gear was of new hemp line of the finest grade, totally unlike the loose laid stuff they used for clew-lines, bunt-lines, leach-lines, and even braces aboard the ordinary western ocean merchantmen. Hawkson had the yards trimmed in a shipshape and seamanlike manner, and the grease or varnish upon them brought out the grain of the wood. They were large for a vessel of five hundred ton. High above, the mainroyal swung across a cloud-flecked zenith, a small white strip, while beneath, in regular rotation, stretched the t'gallantsail, topsail, and mainsail into increasing size until across the main-yard the distance must have been full seventy feet or more.

The breeze hummed and droned under the foot of the great mainsail, sounding restful and pleasant with the easy roll of the vessel.

I was thinking how easy it would be to desert the ship at Providence Harbour, in the Bahamas, and return to the States. It was but a few days' run from there to Savannah, and plenty of small vessels would be bound over at this time of the year. It was degrading to have to polish brass like a common foremast hand. However, if I tired of it, I was really only working my way home. That was the

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best way to look at it. But the thought of home changed the half-formed purpose. What was there in the name for me? Only a poor old mother living in a bit of a house, with a negro girl I had brought from Jamaica some years before. They were dependent entirely upon me and the little money I had saved to eke out an existence, the girl doing all the work and caring for the aged mother. If I went back, there would be only one more to draw on the small hoard, and I might not get another berth very soon. Here was a very proper ship, rigged almost like a man-o'-war, and evidently bound on some special mission. Perhaps there was money to be made. At all events, there would be little lost by staying in her, for the pay in American ships was almost as poor as the English.

While I thought over these matters, I watched the two passengers, who were lounging aft on the quarter, smoking long clay pipes and drinking ale from a tankard filled from a keg in the lazarette. They certainly appeared well-to-do people, and, if they were part-owners, there was little doubt from their manners that they were used to living as gentlemen of wealth and position.

Bill came down from aloft along the weather main-rigging above me, where he had been fastening chafing-gear on the backstays at the point the topsail-yard would touch. He saw me gazing aft

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while I rubbed, and he dropped somewhat ostentatiously upon the deck to attract my attention.

“Welcome, hey?” he said.

“Of course,” I answered, holding out a greasy hand. “Why not?”

“Well, I’ve no grudge, John,” said he. “You licked me fair enough.”

“You haven’t come for another one?” I asked, smiling.

“No,” he said, grasping my fingers in a tarry grip, “no, I believe you’re all right. I youst wanted to ask what you t’ought of the passengers. They say they’re part-owners. Now, I’ve been in American ships ten years and more, an’ I never t’ought to go in a wessel not knowin’ youst where she’s bound, did you?”

“How did you come to ship in her?” I asked.

“Oh, I signed all right. I youst saw she was a fine wessel an’ the pay good, — more’n a mate of an old country wessel, — so I t’ought it all right. Only I’d youst like to find out, friend John, where she’s bound for, — I mean what port.”

“The first is Nassau, but we’re signed for some place in the South Atlantic or Pacific, and unless you’re going to cut and run, or make a pier-head jump, you’ll land in some of the South Sea Islands for certain,” said I. “Who got you to come aboard?”

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“ A little fellow youst like a fox, — Henry they called him; he hasn’t been on deck yet much. I t’ought he’d be a bit backward turnin’ out — There he is now, comin’ out on the main-deck. If you soak him one, I’ll stand by, for it would youst serve him right, or if you youst stand by, I’ll attend to it, hey? ”

“ No use, Bill,” I answered; “ there’ll be enough of real sure fracasas before we’re on the beach again. Let him alone. It will only make trouble aft, and then the whole after-guard will be for putting us through. I’ll look out he don’t put his face in the fore-castle, but he’s third mate, and he belongs aft. These vessels are not like American ships. A fellow don’t take rating by his hands, and if you whollop an officer it only means trouble. I like your style, Bill, and, if there’s trouble, I’ll stick close to you; but there won’t be any unless you make it.”

Bill held out his big fist again and squeezed mine. There was an honest look in his blue eyes I liked, albeit they were pretty well draped in black from the discipline of the early morning. We were friends from that moment, and I never had cause to regret that hand-shake.

Henry saw us looking at him and came forward. He was afraid of nothing on a ship’s deck, and, if he were a tricky little sea-wolf, he was as grim

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as any in the forests of the New England shores. He swung up his hand to his cap as he reached me, but took no notice of Bill. I kept on rubbing the breech of the gun and took no notice, for I was still a trifle sore at the way he had treated me.

“Mister Heywood, I saluted you, sir,” said Henry, stopping.

“So you did,” I answered, “and it does great credit to that mother of yours that your manners are proper. I always return the salute of an honest man, though it’s hardly necessary aboard ship, especially merchant vessels.”

“Now, see here, Heywood, what’s the use of keeping up a grudge? I got you into a good ship, didn’t I? And, if you ain’t mate, you’re gunner.”

“If I had a grudge, I would wring your neck, Henry,” I answered, calmly.

“No fear, Hi say,” he answered, smiling, and held out his hand. “Put ’er there and we’ll call it even, hey?”

I held out my hand, for there was really little use keeping up a bad feeling aboard. I might as well see the joke and bear a hand with the rest. I held out a greasy paw to signify all was well.

The next instant his long fingers, which I had at first noticed on the pier, closed upon mine like a steel vice, and I involuntarily cried out with the

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pain. Such a grip! There was nothing human about it, and I felt my bones cracking.

“Let go!” I roared, and Bill sprang upon him at the same instant.

But Henry grabbed his arm before he could strike, and there we stood like two boys for an instant, unable to move, with the keen-faced rascal between us. Before either could strike with the disengaged hand, Henry cast us loose with a laugh.

“Don’t you try it,” he grinned, as he passed forward.

CHAPTER VIII.

OUR BOS'N

THE bos'n of an English ship usually has eight hours or more below, and the best part of four watches on deck. This enables him to walk around after the men and take charge during the time they are at work and the navigator is unable to leave the poop or quarter-deck. Yankee bos'ns, or fourth mates, as we used to call them, were distinguished by a rough, strong voice made raucous by hard usage. Yelling and swearing at delinquent mariners, as the shore folk put it, was supposed to be their principal occupation, and to a certain extent the shore folk were right. But Richards was not noisy. Neither did he have the rough voice of the man-o'-war bos'n. He was as gentle as any shore-bred person, and even while he had served as second mate under me, he had never been anything but "Old" Richards, — old because he was so quiet.

When he took in hand the crew of that ship, it made me smile to think of him tackling men like

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Bill, Jones, or myself. Yet there he was over us, and it soon began to look like Hawkson knew what he was about when he put him in charge.

In the first place he had been used to discipline. He had served on a war-ship for so long that he seemed to know just what to do to get men to work without getting afoul of them.

There is an art in this. It is born in some, cultivated in others, but absolutely impossible to define in a way that might be useful to the great majority, for it is a mixture of so many qualities, so many different freaks and phases of temperament, and generally so dependent upon chance for its establishment, that it must be dealt with only as a peculiarity happening in human beings at remote intervals.

Richards had the one necessary quality to begin with, and that was a really kind disposition under his silent exterior. There was nothing offensive in him, and, while he never seemed to attract any one, he did not repel them. Magnetism he possessed in abundance, but this quality is of small use among men who have to be made to do things which often result in death and always in discomfort.

Often he would sit and listen to the arguments of the men, and they would sometimes appeal to

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him as judge, because he was so quiet and always gave them an answer they could understand.

“What makes ye sa keen fer carryin’ on discipline, friend Richards?” asked Martin, good-humouredly, one evening as the watch sat or lounged about the fore-castle scuttle waiting to be called.

“It’s not your country’s ship; why d’ye care? Now a war-ship an’ a patriot I kin understand. I was a patriot mysel’.”

“I fou’t for England,” said big Jones, “but that ware different.”

“You’d have fought for China just as quick,” said the bos’n, “if any men you knew were going out to fight. It’s the same aboard a fighting craft as it is here. I’ve seen clerks in the shipping-houses, that couldn’t tell a cutlass from a pike, go crazy to fight when the war broke out. They liked to be called ‘patriots,’ too. All men like to fight if the whole crowd go in. It’s excitement and vanity. You’ll be more of a patriot and less a fighting man after you get ashore to stay.”

“Ay, that he will,” said Tim, the American. “He’s too ready for fight, an’ a bit o’ discipline will do him good.”

“Ah, hark ye at the bit o’ a man,” sneered Martin. “One might think he feared a little fracas, hey?” and he leered at the small sailor, who looked

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him squarely in the eyes and swore at him, for a bullying Scot he was.

Somehow, Richards never made trouble between men. They rarely took offence at his answers, and he never struck one.

To him the striking of a man lowered him at once. If the man was an equal and had any self-respect, it was necessary to go further into the matter always, he explained. If he had not enough self-respect to fight his smiter to the last limit, then he was taking whatever chance the fellow had of ever becoming a man, for no man, he held, could be a person of spirit and courage and allow another to strike him. It might work well in religious congregations, where men were tricky and desperately low and mean, stooping to any vile revenge, but among men at sea upon a ship deck it was different. To assault a man weaker than himself was almost as bad in his eyes as assaulting a girl. In either case, the victim's self-respect was lost, and the person consequently liable to be ruined. It would require a nice adjustment, he claimed, to prevent murder. He very plainly stated that, if Martin, Jones, or any one of the heavy fellows who might be tempted to try accounts with him at some disliked order, should so far forget the discipline of the ship and make a fight with him, he would be bound by all law and precedent, as upon a man-

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of-war, to kill him. The turning of the smitten cheek to the offender was not to be taken literally. It meant a man should show due forbearance before entering into a fracas, which would certainly end fatally for one or the other.

This doctrine might not appeal to the landsman, and from a certain point of view it might appear unchristian. But, if there was ever a man who practised kindness toward his fellow men, that man was the bos'n of the old pirate barque. He was honest.

I had found that on former cruises to heathen islands and countries, the heathen were usually all right until some of the professed Christians appeared to convert them. Afterward the histories of these places were of a somewhat sinister character, and, if ever there was an exception to prove the rule, I had never heard tell of it. Every so-called Christian country had allowed and advanced all kinds of oppression among natives. Whether this was for their spiritual welfare or not, it is not necessary to inquire, the fact was always the same. Therefore, I was interested in our future course, but, from the steady discipline and forbearance of the officers, expected to see very little of the usual kind of conversion. Every ship full of canting religionists came home full of black murder and worse. There was much more to be expected from a vessel

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whose after-guard stood for easy ship in regard to these matters.

Sometimes, in the evening dog-watches, Richards would even take the liberty of coming into the fore-castle and joining in the talk, or sitting upon the fore-castle head in the warm wind and listening to a chanty roared out by Martin or some one who had served in the Eastern trade-ships. One of the favourite songs, made up from different snatches heard either upon the men-of-war or along the dock-ends of Liverpool, ran something like this:

“ We had come to anchor fine, sir,
In a vessel o’ the line, sir,
We had cruised for five years steady
Upon the Southern Seas —
When a boat from off the shore, sir,
Brought a lady out aboard, sir,
She was black as soot an’ mud, sir,
An’ she smelled o’ oil an’ grease — ”

Then all hands would roar out with will the refrain, pointing to the bos’n :

“ Then up jumped the bos’n, up jumped the crew,
The first mate, second mate, the cook and steward too —
But the captain swore he’d have her,
An’ the mate ’e tried to grab her,
She couldn’t have ’em all, sir —
What could the lady do? ”

Sometimes the gentlemen from aft would come forward and lend a hand with some new version

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of an old song, but more often they were content to listen from the sacred precincts of the quarter-deck.

Old Howard never interfered with hilarity, but rather encouraged it. I wondered at this, but remembered the cruise had only just begun. I had seen captains encourage men before. Sometimes it held a more sinister meaning than simple delight at their pleasure.

CHAPTER IX.

I MAKE ANOTHER FRIEND

DURING the next week's run we made a deal of westing, passing to the southward of the Azores and getting well into the western ocean. The north-east trade was picked up, and, as it was well to the eastward, it enabled us to carry on stun'sails fore and aft.

We were better acquainted in the fo'castle now, and I had learned to like several men of my watch. Bill was a warm friend. Martin proved a very entertaining fellow, but was absolutely without principle. Anderson was quiet and attended to his duties like the average Swede, being a good sailor and an excellent hand for sewing canvas and making chafing-gear. He went by the name of Goldy in the fore-castle on account of the colour of his hair, which was bushy and covered his face.

In the other watch was Jones, the giant Welshman, who was one of the best men that ever stood

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upon a ship's deck. He was as strong as a whale and as kind-hearted as a girl.

But the little fellow called Tim, who was in my watch, was the man I chummed with. He was not much to look at, being small, ugly, red-headed, and freckled. He was an American, however, and there was that something about him that drew me to him as the magnet draws iron. He had been pressed into the British navy before the war, and had served his time. When the fighting was over and he received his discharge, he shipped in an East-Indiaman, and made two voyages around the world. Why he never returned to his home in the States was the cause of some speculation on my part, but, as he never mentioned his people, I refrained from trespassing. It is bad form for a sailor to inquire too closely into his shipmate's past.

Tim was so insignificant looking among those picked men that I took little or no notice of him until one night when it was blowing a stiff gale and the barque was staggering along under topsails through an ugly cross-sea that made her old timbers groan with the wrench.

I had occasion to go to the fore-castle head, and, while I stood there, leaning over the life-line which did duty for a rail, I became absorbed for a few minutes watching the fine phosphorescent display in the bow wave. The night was very dark, and

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the deep, booming note of the taut fabric above and the rushing sound below drowned all minor noises.

Suddenly I heard my name called loudly, and something soft struck me in the back. I turned and saw no one, but, while I searched the darkness with my eyes, the door of the forward cabin opened, and I saw for an instant the tall, erect form of Watkins, the steward, against the light inside. I continued to look over the side until a hand was laid upon my shoulder, and the little man Tim, who was really hardly more than a boy, slewed me around none too gently.

“ ’Tain’t healthy,” said he, “ to be near the side o’ nights in a ship where things is queer. You came nearer your end a minute ago than you ever will again but once,” and he nodded aft.

“ The steward? ” I asked.

He nodded again, and looked so serious that my first inclination to laugh died away at once. “ He was within two fathoms of you when I hailed, and his knife was as long as that,” and he stuck forth his arm with his left hand placed midway to the shoulder.

“ So that’s his game, is it? ” I said. “ I’ll keep an eye on him hereafter. The whole outfit aft have something queer about them. I’m obliged to you

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for the warning. What was it that struck me in the back?"

"Pair o' my rolled-up socks, — the only ones I've got, too, — an' if they're gone overboard, I'll have to go barefooted, for I can't abide shoes without socks. Them ratlines do cut the bare feet of a feller most uncommon though, an' I'll have a job aloft in the morning sending down them t'gallant-stun'sail-booms."

He searched about the fore-castle deck for some minutes in the darkness, but failed to find them. The night being warm, we remained on deck, as the stiff wind was invigorating and the fore-castle somewhat close. Finally we sat upon the weather side of the windlass and leaned against it. There was a man on lookout forward, but we were pretty well out of the track of ships, and the only person liable to disturb us was the third mate, who might come forward to trim head-sail. The starboard watch were grouped upon the main-hatch, lounging and resting, and Hawkson walked fore and aft on the poop, his tall form showing dimly now and then as he passed the cabin skylights where the light from within flared up. We snuggled down comfortably to sleep, but the snore of the gale through the rigging and under the forestaysail kept us wakeful. I watched Tim alongside of me, and saw he was still chewing his tobacco.

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“How did you come to get into the hooker without clothes?” I asked, thinking he was tricked like myself.

“Signed all right. There’s money in her, if what I believe is correct. She’ll pay a feller like me. I’ve got no ties ashore. But they’re a tough crowd. That feller, Sir John Hicks, — you’ve heard of him, hey?”

“Never did. What’s he done?” I asked.

“He ain’t done nothin’ in particular, but he’s the wildest of the family. Got plenty o’ money, an’ that Lord George Renshaw, the old un, — well, say, Heywood, you’ve heard how he got chased out o’ London?”

I had heard nothing, being an American.

“I forgot,” he went on. “You see, I’m mighty nigh an Englishman,” and he spoke sadly and sighed, heaving his tobacco away.

“Why do you stick to English ships after they stuck you for three years? I should think you’d drop them by this time,” I said.

He turned upon me savagely, his eyes shining and his face drawn.

“Why do I?” he cried, hoarsely, his voice sounding above the snore overhead. “Why do I? What business is it of yours why I do it? Why would any man do the thing I’ve done — but to forget — not the British Navy, good God, no. It was

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bad enough, but you can forget it easy enough, and to forget — ”

“ A woman? ” I asked, boldly.

“ What else, ” he said, almost softly. “ I was a decent man once, Heywood, and not an outlaw — what you will be if you stay aboard here. Yes, I was married. Had as good girl as ever breathed. But I was poor. What crime can a feller commit equal to poverty, hey? You know the old, old yarn. I go to sea as mate of an Indiaman, and the owner saw the beauty of that angel. Do I blame her? Not a bit. What chance would a poor girl left alone for a few months have with a rich young feller like him, — an’ him a rich ship-owner standin’ for everything that’s good to the mind of a poor girl. She was lost if he went unchecked, an’ who would check the honourable gentleman? Not her friends. Oh, no! He took her out on a voyage with him — an’ left her without a cent — an’ now I’ll forget.”

“ What’s against the ship? ” I asked.

He seemed not to hear and was gazing aft, his head thrown back against the windlass barrel. I repeated the question.

“ Nothing I know of. But you can rest easy, Heywood, they are up to some expedition that won’t bear the light. If you take a fool’s advice, you’ll make the jump at Nassau.”

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“Are you going there?” I asked.

“I don’t say. Mebbe I will, an’ mebbe no. But you better.”

“I’m glad you take such an interest in my future,” I said, rather shortly.

He turned full upon me, and I saw his eyes shine in the light. “Look here, Heywood, I don’t deserve that. You’ve got a bad memory. I may have been a fool to let off about myself. I reckon I was, but I’ve liked you, and there’s not a damn thing aboard here I ever could like except you. I say again, it’ll be best for you if you jump her at Nassau.”

“Well,” I said, “Tim, I’m pretty mean to say you no after saving me from that Watkins’s carver, though I reckon I could take care of the old duffer even if he had forty knives. I didn’t mean to rough you, for it’s with you whether I go or not. I’d stay aboard to be with you, and that’s saying a bit more than I’ve said to any man for some time.”

He gazed steadily at me, and I thought his eyes had a wistful look. Then he spoke low in a voice I could hardly hear.

“I’m glad you like me, Heywood. Maybe we’ll go together. Yes, we might go together. Afterward — afterward — you won’t mind a feller being, so to say, a bit outside the law. There’ll be a line for my neck, you know, if — well, no matter. If

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you stay in the ship, there'll be one for all hands, if there's any faith to be placed in signs."

Then we remained silent for a long time. I thought of Watkins and his dastardly attempt upon me, and wondered if Tim was not a bit off in his mind. But when I remembered the lost socks, I knew he was not mistaken, for a sailor would hesitate a long time before throwing his last pair away. The danger must have been imminent. It was a queer ship. That was certain. Half her crew had been shipped by fraud, and her alleged owners were not above reproach. As to her captain, there was nothing he was not capable of, provided it was wrong, in spite of his years and mask-like face, withered and bare as a sun-scorched lemon. We must have been asleep when the watch was called, for I remember nothing of the bells, and suddenly found myself looking into the rising sun, which shone with unusual vigour over a windy sea.

Tim was just in the act of going below as I looked at the fore-castle scuttle. His face seemed pale and drawn, but he smiled as he dived down the companion-way.

"You can get those gun-covers laced fast before we start washing down decks," said Mr. Gull, coming to the edge of the fore-castle, and I was soon on the main-deck with my trousers up to my knees, enjoying the rushing warm sea water the watch

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were flinging along the gangway, following it aft with squeegee and swab until the planks were spotless.

How refreshing is that breeze of the early day at sea! The lines, all damp with the salt dew of the night, hum a note of gladness to welcome the rising disc of light. The brisk sea wind freshens, wrinkling the broad ridges rushing before it, and brushing their white crests into a wide spread of glittering jewels that flash, sparkle, and hiss in the growing light. The air braces the tired body, and the appetite grows keen. The men of the morning watch take on new life, and all eyes begin to cast looks at the galley stovepipe, watching for the increasing volume of smoke outpouring that tells of the preparation of the morning meal.

CHAPTER X.

YANKEE DAN AND HIS DAUGHTER

FOR the next three weeks we ran smoothly to the westward, with nothing occurring aboard *The Gentle Hand* to break the monotony of ship's duty. The stiff breeze, the edge of the northeast trade-wind, bore us steadily on over warm seas bright with sunlight and under blue skies flecked with the lumpy trade clouds that hung apparently motionless in the void above.

During this weather I had little to do, and had a better chance of seeing something of the after-guard while looking to the gear of the two long twelves we carried upon the quarter-deck for stern-chasers. We carried no metal on the fore-castle, and it appeared that these heavy guns aft were out of all proportion to the rest of the battery.

I spoke to Hawkson about it, but he explained that the natives of the Navigator, Society, and Fiji groups were somewhat dangerous, and that, as our

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mission was one of peaceful trading, we would always run when attacked rather than fight, and the heavy twelves were for keeping large canoes at a distance.

“It would be a rather large canoe,” I admitted, “that would face the fire of a long twelve-pounder as heavy as any used in vessels of the frigate class. The islands you speak of are not, however, in the South Atlantic.”

“You always were a clever lad, Heywood,” said he, with an ugly smile. “What a smart one you were to see the error of that! But we’ll have a try just to see what you can hit. Get a beef barrel and heave it overboard, an’ get the men of the gun-crew aft.”

After that we seldom let many days slip without practice. Tim begged me to take him in the gun-crew, and, as he was as active as a monkey, I always let him have a chance. He grew very quiet and sad as we drew near the Bahamas, and when we ran clear of the trade, within a hundred miles of the island, he seemed to be gazing over the sunlit ocean, watching for a coming breeze.

Sometimes I had him aft, polishing the brass of a gun-breech, and I noticed that he divided his attention mostly between the captain, Hicks, and Renshaw, and the southern horizon.

The great southern ocean is a lonely place, but

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its very loneliness and quietness on the edge of the great winds makes it appeal to a turbulent soul.

Tim and I sat a long time on the breech of the stern-chaser, rubbing the metal easily and gazing out over the calm ocean. It was quiet aboard, and the voices of the men on the main-deck sounded loud and discordant. The slatting of the canvas was the only sound aloft, the royals jerking at the clews first as the barque swung easily on the swell, and then the t'gallantsails followed by the topsails fore and aft, the taut canvas fanning the almost still air with the rolling swing, making the jerking of the tacks and clews sound rhythmically upon the ear. Below, the captain and his two passengers smoked and drank their ale under the cabin skylight, their jokes sounding particularly coarse in the sunlit quiet.

Tim suddenly stopped work and gazed to the southward. Far away, miles and miles to windward, the horizon darkened slightly where the deeper blue of the ocean stood out against the pale azure of the semitropical sky.

While he looked, there came a sound over the water. It was a long, plaintive cry of immense volume, but hardly distinct enough to be heard unless the listener gave his attention. It was like a wild minor chord of a harp, long continued and sustained, rising and falling over the dark blue

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heave of the swells where the light air darkened and streaked the ruffled surface. Farther away to windward, the ocean took on a deeper blue, and the air filled the sails more steadily for a few minutes.

Tim stood gazing into the distance, his eyes bright and his lips parted, but there was an expression of peace and tranquillity upon his freckled face that I had never noticed before.

“It’s the calling, Heywood, Heywood,” he whispered. “It’s the great calling of the millions who have gone before. Listen!”

I heard it. The sad, wailing notes coming from miles and miles away to windward over that smooth sea, with the freshening breeze, made an impression upon me I could not throw off. It vibrated through my whole being, and was like the voice of great loneliness calling from the vast world of sea and sky. It was not like the hum of the trade in the rigging or the snore of a gale under the foot of a topsail, nor like the thunderous roar of the hurricane through the rigging of a hove-to ship. The melancholy sadness of the long-sustained wail was musical to a degree. I sat there listening.

Of course, it must have been caused by the wind over the surface of the sea at a great distance, or by different currents of air in passing, but the effect upon the imagination was like that which might be caused by the prolonged cry of a distant host

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from the vastness of sunlit waste. It pervaded my whole being, and enforced listening to its call, seeming to draw my soul to it as if out in that sparkling world of rippling wavelets lay the end of all strife and the great eternal peace.

Tim stretched forth his arm. His eyes held a strange look in them, and he moved to the rail as though in a dream.

“I am coming, May, coming,” he whispered.

Before I realized what had happened, he had gone over the side. Then I jumped to my feet with a yell, and bawled out: “Man overboard!” at the same time heaving the end of a gun-tackle over the taffrail. The cry and noise of my rush brought the entire watch to the side, and the captain and Hawkson to the quarter-rail. The barque was barely moving, and Tim was alongside. But he refused to take the end of the line. There was an exclamation beside me at the taffrail, and Renshaw leaned his elbows upon the rail and looked over at the sinking sailor. Their eyes met for an instant, and Tim made a grab for the line. He was hauled up quickly, and went forward without a word of excuse to the captain and Hawkson’s inquiries as to how he happened overboard.

It was a strange occurrence, and I pondered over it that evening while the barque rolled slowly toward the islands under a bright moon, and our watch

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stretched themselves upon the main-hatch to smoke and spin yarns. Tim avoided me.

The next morning we found ourselves close to New Providence Harbour, the white water of the Great Bahama bank stretching away on all sides.

The skipper seemed to know the bank pretty well, for he sprung his luff and headed into the harbour without waiting for a pilot. We ran close in, clewing up the topsails as we went; then dropping the head-sails, let go the hook within pistol-shot of the town of Nassau. The town looked inviting enough. There it lay, and any kind of a swimmer could make the beach easily. In fact, before we had the sails rolled up there were niggers alongside, swimming out in utter disregard for sharks, and begging for a coin to be tossed overboard that they might dive for it and catch it before it reached the bottom. I was anxious about Tim. His strange action and talk made me expect some peculiar happening, and I watched him closely.

Martin came to me as I stood in the fore-rigging and spoke, looking longingly at the white coral beach, where the cocoanuts raised their bunchy, long-leaved tops into the hot air and rustled softly an invitation to the sailor.

“I say, Heywood, ye dare do it or no, hey?” he said.

“I’ll see,” I answered; “but isn’t the barky all

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right? We've been treated mighty well even if we were gulled in signing into her. I don't know the place, and we might be a great deal worse off ashore."

"Barky be sunk! What the devil care I for the barky, man? Didn't I sign on as mate?"

Bill came down from aloft and joined us, and then big Jones came forward with Tim. We made a pretence of coiling down running-gear on the pin-rail, while we gazed longingly at the shore.

While we looked, a whale-boat shot out from the landing. It was rowed by eight strapping blacks, the oars double-banked, and in the stern-sheets were two men in white linen, looking very cool and trim in the hot sunshine. As the craft drew nearer, we saw she was heading for us, and the two men were gazing at our quarter-deck, where Hawkson and Captain Howard were talking earnestly with Hicks and Renshaw. The one who was steering was a medium-sized man with a smooth, red face, his beard seeming to start just beneath his chin and fill his collar with its shaggy growth that shot upward from somewhere below.

Behind this man in the stern-sheets, I caught the flutter of a dress, and soon made out the figure of a young girl dressed in white muslin.

"Who is it?" asked Bill. "Looks youst like an admiral."

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“It’s Yankee Dan,” said Tim. “I thought so. That’s his daughter with him. He’s the biggest trader north o’ Cuba.”

“The deil run away with him,” said Martin. “If he’s backin’ this barque fer nothin’ but plain, honest trade, I’m no man fer him. She ware a pirit once, why not again? I slip before dark. Will ye be the mon to follow, ye giant Jones, or be ye nothin’ but a beefy lout like what ye look?”

The big fellow scowled at this.

“Ef you are the better man, show me to-night,” said he.

The boat had now drawn up alongside, and the bearded fellow in charge stood up and hailed the quarter-deck, where Howard, Hawkson, and the rest were leaning over the rail watching him. Hicks and Renshaw bowed and removed their hats in deference to the young lady, but Hawkson and the skipper stood stiff.

“Didn’t expect to see you, Howard,” cried the trader. “They haven’t hung you yet! How is it? Rope scarce? Lines give out? This is my daughter, — and you’ll be damn civil to her if you’ll do any business with me. Swing over your ladder, and don’t keep me waiting. I won’t wait for you or any other bull-necked Britisher.”

Hawkson had already had Mr. Gull swing out the accommodation ladder from the poop, and the

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second mate simply lowered it an inch or two as the whale-boat swept up.

“Take in them oak gales,” roared Yankee Dan, whacking the stroke oarsman over the knuckles with a light cane he carried. Then pulling savagely upon the port tiller-rope, the boat swung up alongside the ladder under full headway.

“Stop her,” he bellowed.

It looked as though she would go rasping along the whole length of the barque with the impetus, but the blacks were instantly at the rail, grasping and seizing anything in their powerful hands, while one man forward, who had banked the bow oar, stood up with a huge hook and rammed its point into our side to check her. She brought up so suddenly that the trader was almost thrown from his feet.

“Come aboard, Whiskers, an’ don’t tear all our paint off,” said Hawkson, swaying the man-ropes so they fell aboard.

The old trader glanced upward, the white hair of his beard sticking out aggressively over his collar and framing his otherwise hairless face in a sort of bristling halo. I saw the young girl flash a glance of disdain at the poop and then seize the man-ropes. She sprang lightly upon the ladder and mounted rapidly to the deck, followed by the younger man,

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who had replied to none of the salutations and had quietly awaited events.

Yankee Dan followed and seized Hawkson's hand, greeting him as an old friend. Then he slapped Captain Howard a rousing blow upon the back and introduced his daughter. Mr. Curtis shook hands all round, appearing to know every one, and we rightly surmised that he was the principal owner.

The vociferous trader kept talking in high good humour, being on familiar terms with Hicks, Renshaw, and the captain, and our men were anxious to hear his words, hoping to gather something in reference to our cruise. As for me, I found my attention drawn more toward the young lady, for never had I seen such perfection in womanly form or feature.

She was tall, and her figure, while not stout, had a supple fulness that spoke of great strength and grace. Her face was full and rosy, and her dark eyes were exquisitely bright, glancing quickly at a word or look. Her mouth, partly open, showed strong white teeth, and her smile was a revelation. There was nothing about her that spoke of her father save her apparent good humour and disdain for conventionalities. Her eyes were gentle, and had nothing of the fierce twinkle of the trader's. Altogether I was so entirely taken up noting her

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charms that I was not aware of Mr. Gull until he came close to us and bawled out:

“Clear away the long-boat. All loafers who are tired of the sea and want a run on the beach get ready to go ashore.”

CHAPTER XI.

WE MAKE A DAY OF IT

“DID you fellers hear me?” asked Mr. Gull, coming toward Martin and the rest of us.

“Harkee, Mr. Gull,” said the Scot, “d’ye mean we can clear ef the wessel don’t suit? Is that the lay o’ it? She’s a fine ship, Mr. Gull, an’ fer me ye can lay to it. I’d never leave her, unless it’s the wish o’ the matchless officers that commands her.”

“If you drunkards ain’t aboard again by eight bells to-night, it’ll be a sorry crowd that’ll come next day, — an’ ye can lay to that, ye fine Scotchman, an’ with just as much scope as ye may care for.”

Big Jones smiled as he unbent the boat tackle. It was evident our second mate was not as big a fool as he looked, but it seemed strange we should be allowed ashore unless the captain had good reason to believe we could be back aboard again. Only a few minutes before we were planning some desperate means of reaching the beach, and now the

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invitation was offered to all who cared to avail themselves of the captain's liberality.

In a very short time the boat was overboard, and a liberty crew, consisting of Martin, Tim, Big Jones, Bill, Anderson, a Norwegian of Gull's watch, a German called Ernest, the black cook, and myself, jumped into her and started off.

"If I come back again," said Jones, "they'll need a good, strong heavy man over there or a pair o' mules to drag me."

"Good-bye," said Bill. "Youst keep awake when we come alongside. 'Twould be a pity to rouse you," and he grinned knowingly at the men who leaned over the rail to see us depart.

I saw the old rascal Watkins come out in the waist and stand a moment gazing after us, and Ernest bawled out a taunt in German which none of us understood. Then we shot out of hearing and headed for the landing, as wild for the beach as so many apprentices.

The "Doctor," who was a most powerful nigger, grinned in anticipation of the joys on the shore. His clothes were nondescript and bore evidence of the galley, and his feet were big, black, and bare.

"Yah, yah, yah!" he laughed, "my feet is laughin' at my pore ole body, all rags and grease. Dey'll hab a time asho'. Ain't seen no green grass lately."

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The boat was run upon the coral, and all hands sprung out without waiting to shove her up. We splashed ashore through the shallow water, leaving the Doctor to haul the boat up and make her fast. It was evident he intended going back aboard, but we were a bit differently inclined.

The black soon joined us and led the way to the nearest rum-shop, the place all sailors steer for, and, without comment, we filed into the dirty hole for our first drink.

“I says, Thunderbo’, give us disha stuff they says do a nigger good,” said the Doctor, who acted as our pilot. “My feet is sure laffin at my belly, Thunderbo’, ’cause it’s as empty as yo’ haid.”

Thunderbore, who was a huge, nautical-looking pirate as black as the Doctor, showed a set of white teeth and a large jar of a vile fluid which fairly tore my throat to ribbons as I swallowed my “whack.” Big Jones took his with a grimace, and was followed by Martin and the rest until all had drunk.

The stuff was pure fire, but the Doctor gulped a full half-pint, and smacked his lips.

“Thunderbo’, yo’ sho’ ain’t gwine to make a po’ nigger drink sech holy water as disha. Give us somethin’ that’ll scratch, yo’ ape, or I’ll have to take charge here, — I sho’ will,” said the Doctor.

Thunderbore had a good temper, but was used to

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dealing with all classes of desperadoes. He passed the jar again, and drew a Spanish machete or corn-knife from his belt. He reached over and smote the Doctor playfully a blow with the flat of it that sounded with a loud clap through the dirty den.

Some of the men laughed in derision, but the Doctor showed his ugly teeth and glared at the den-keeper. He took another drink, and the fiery liquid began to show its effects. Even Martin's eyes looked queer after a second taste, and he edged toward the huge, smiling African who held the jar and knife.

“I weel ken ye a murderer by yer eye,” said he, “but dare ye lay aside the steel an’ stand forth, I’ll trim ye, ye black ape. I’ll trim ye for th’ sake o’ the good wittles the Doctor has cooked.”

The pernicious effect of the liquor was showing in the men's faces. Even I, temperate and peacefully disposed as I always am, began to feel a desire to assert myself in a manner not in keeping with my usual modesty. In fact, there were some there who were so drunk they actually accused me afterward of having precipitated trouble by driving my fist into the good-natured Thunderbore's anatomy and seizing his machete. If I did such a thing, it must have been in the same spirit of playfulness that he exhibited when smiting the Doctor, for I was that peacefully inclined that even after seeing

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a struggling pile of human forms upon the floor, with the jar beneath them, I tried to separate a few with all my strength. After exhausting this, I remember Tim cautioned me to leave the intemperate fellows, who still struggled, threatened, and swore at the black Thunderbore, who, with several friends who had rushed from an adjoining room to his aid, now held the sailors at bay with a boarding-pike. This he jabbed furiously at the Doctor, and, because Big Jones would not allow him to be impaled upon it, the sea cook took offence and turned upon his saviour, with Martin as an able ally.

The whole scene soon resolved itself into a sailors' brawl, which I feel ashamed to describe. I therefore withdrew with my companion Tim, who was almost as averse to a quarrel as I was myself.

We left the den, and he guided the way through the white streets of coral rock, which shone glaringly in the sunshine. They were dazzling, and the light made my head swim a bit, but we kept on until we ran into a shady lane, where an old negress had a small shanty, in front of which she displayed a litter of shaddocks, sour-sops, and sapodillas. Tim purchased some of the fruit, and then we struck into the bush until we reached a small inlet. Here, in the clear water into which one could see several fathoms, we plunged, leaving our clothing upon the bank.

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“That settles it for me,” I said. “I’ll not go back in that ship. Even Mr. Curtis, with all his money and influence, can’t get me back.”

“Mr. Curtis is closely related to the governor, and can get you easy enough if he wants you,” said Tim. “But I feel myself like making the jump right here. I’ve been here before. There ain’t nothin’ can get off the island without he knows it. That’s the only thing that keeps me from it.”

“I thought you were so keen for me to get out here,” I said, sourly.

“I didn’t suggest Nassau, did I?” said Tim.

“That’s the place,” I answered, “but I suppose you were a bit loony. What made you act bug-house and go over the side, hey?”

Tim looked at me strangely a moment.

“I didn’t mean you to jump right here. You can’t do it. They’ll have us back aboard to-morrow. Wait till we get to the s’uthard for wood. There’ll be a chance on the Caicos or Turk’s Island, and we go in there.”

I swam about, enjoying myself as much as possible with a rising temper at the thought of going back aboard. I began to study the question, and asked about the size of the island and the distances to the different points on the Bahama bank. Tim had been all over the bank, and knew it pretty well,

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and I became absorbed listening to him and forming my plans.

Suddenly it occurred to me I needed a smoke, and started for the shore to get my pipe out of my clothes. We could sit naked in the shade and enjoy life a bit while trying a scheme.

"Where the deuce did you put those clothes?" I asked Tim, who followed me.

"I never touched them. What's the matter?"

"I don't see them anywhere," I answered, suspiciously.

We were both on the bank, and stood there gazing about us. There was nothing in the shape of a garment near, not even a handkerchief. Tim's white, freckled body looked rather meagre, and I noticed several huge flies that lit upon him and made him jump with their bite. Then something got foul of my back and stung me madly.

"Devil nab me," I yelled, "what the mischief is it?"

"Nothin' but a fish-fly," said Tim, slapping me a rousing whack between the shoulders. "Our clothes are gone all right, and we've got to foot it back to the landing naked. What's the use growlin' about it?"

"Well, you are a —" but words failed me. That couldn't express what I felt. I had trusted to Tim's knowledge of the place, and here was a mess. There

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was no possible means of clearing out without a stitch of clothing, and the rascally thief who had taken ours gave me an idea how closely a deserter would be followed over the low island barren of heavy timber. I looked along the bank, and saw there was no use.

“You’re the biggest fool I ever knew,” I finally said, and we started slowly back to the town, with nothing to clothe us save an air of seeming chastity not at all in keeping with civilization.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW THE DAY ENDED

IMMODESTY is the principal vice I do not possess. When we started to get back to *The Gentle Hand* clothed in the odour of sanctity and villainous liquor, I must say my heart failed me at the sight of the town. We halted at the outskirts and tacked ship, standing for the house of a conch, as the Bahama bank men are called. The mosquitoes and flies had by this time made life almost unbearable, and something had to be done. I objected to stealing on principle, but in practice I expected to err, for, if a suit of clothes could be found not too dirty to wear, I felt it my duty to quell my scruples in the interest of the self-respecting citizens of Nassau.

"Tim," said I, "you little speckled leopard, you shall go in front. You have, at least, some large brown spots to cover your hide, while I'm as pure white as the coral road we're walking on."

Tim demurred at this.

"What's the matter with you? Put your hulk-

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ing carcass in front, and I'll walk behind. There's no use making fun of the thing. You strut about big enough on deck, glad enough to have any one notice you — Hi! there's an' ole nigger woman now," and he crouched down in the long grass.

I sank instantly and hailed the old lady.

"Hi, there! Mammy, have you a spare — er — er pair — I mean an apron or two you could lend?"

"Lawd sakes! How yo' scart me!" cried the old negress. "Where yo' is, honey?" and she looked about her.

"We're over here in the grass. Lost our clothes while swimming. Don't come over, but just fetch out a bit of dunnage and run away, that's a good ole gal," I said.

"Run away! Huh! Who is you toe tell me to run away. I'se Mr. Curtis' nigger, an' I doan' run fo' no one, I jest tell yo' dat," and she advanced toward us.

"Ah, trot along," growled Tim. "Get us some clothes, or we'll take some. We haven't time to fool with any blamed old nigger."

She advanced close to us, and I noticed she held a small black baby in her arms. Tim edged behind me, and I tried to shove him in front.

"Land sakes alive!" she cried. "He, he, he, yah, yah! Well, I nebber. Yo' is sho' nuff nakid. Jest as nakid as this little babe under his clothes.

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Yah, yah, he is sho' just as nakid as you is under his clothes. Well, I nebber — ”

But we waited no longer. The situation was too humiliating, and we sprang to our feet and dashed down the path into the scrub.

“What the deuce will we do?” I asked, when we were out of sight. “If she wasn't a woman, I'd rip her clothes off pretty quick and make shift of her skirt.”

“S'pose we lay for some man, then,” said Tim. “Seems to me you might turn your knowledge of scraffin' to some account.”

“I've a notion to practise a bit on you, you speckled beauty,” said I, angrily. “It's your foolishness that got us in this fix.”

“Here comes a feller your size. Try him.”

I turned and followed his gaze, and there, sure enough, loomed a huge black conch with a bucketful of sour-sops in either hand, striding up the path. Hung over his shoulder was a long blacksnake whip, such as overseers sometimes used upon refractory slaves.

“Hi, there, uncle,” I cried, “I would like to buy some sops,” and we both stepped forth into view.

The fellow's ugly visage wrinkled, and he set his buckets upon the ground.

“Who is yo'?” he asked, sourly.

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“We? Why, we are visitors, friends of Mr. Curtis,” I said. “We left our clothes over there at the inlet, and some son of a polecat ran off with them. Give us some sops and give us a shift. We’ll pay you well for it.”

“Whar’s yo’ munny?” he growled.

“In our clothes. Sink you for a fool nigger, you don’t suppose we have pockets in our skins, do you?”

“Who yo’ callin’ a fool nigger?” and he drew his whip over his shoulder. “Don’t yo’ call me no names, yo’ po’ white trash. I’ll cut yo’ toe ribbons, dat I will.”

Before either of us could spring aside, the lash flew out and caught first one and then the other of us on our naked bodies. The pain was awful. Tim dashed up the path instantly without waiting for a second dose, and the huge conch sprang after him, leaving me behind.

Away they went, the lash flying out like the tongue of a snake, landing every time upon that part of poor Tim’s anatomy which is said to be equally discourteous to present to either friend or enemy. And every time it landed, it brought forth a yell. I stood grinning for an instant, in spite of the pain I suffered, and then the sense of outraged decency getting the best of my risibilities, I launched myself full speed in pursuit.

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Away we went up that trail, Tim's speckled body leading the way, his red hair streaming in the wind, and close behind him rushed that big black conch with his cruel whip, his bare feet not heeding in the least a thousand things that pricked and pained the soles of mine, as I tore along in his wake.

"Hi, hi, go it, Jackson!" howled a black fellow who stood in the path and watched the race.

An upper cut with my left fist did much to abate his zeal, and left him lying upon his back, while with undiminished speed I went ahead. Soon the white coral street of the town showed a bit in front through the bushes, and in another minute we were fairly into the main street of Nassau.

I was now thoroughly aroused, and forgot entirely my predicament, so intent was I upon reaching that rascal's back. I called hoarsely for Tim to stop, but, either because I was a bit winded or our pace was too fast to allow the sound of my voice to reach him, he heeded it not at all, but held his pace under all sail.

White men now sprang from doorways to see what had happened, as the yells came flying down the thoroughfare, and many women immodestly halted to view the spectacle. I don't know how the matter would have ended had not Tim turned a corner suddenly, and plunged straight into the arms

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of Big Jones and Martin, who were rushing for the pavement at the sound of alarm.

The Scotchman, with rare presence of mind, made a grab at Tim's speckled body, thinking it some peculiar breed of ape that had escaped from its keeper, and in doing so lost his drunken balance, and plunged head foremost into the stomach of the pursuing conch, and together they rolled over into the street. Before they could disengage, I had a grip upon that conch that he will remember yet.

"Deil save us, ye cateran, what is it?" gasped the inebriated Scot, struggling to his feet. "What? You Heywood! Ye immodest heathen! Hold him, ye black feller, an' I'll lay the lash upon his unchaste hide."

Before he could come to the conch's assistance, a speckled form sprang upon him and bore him back again into the street, and I saw Tim change from a fugitive into a veritable leopard, striking fiercely and tearing at the blouse of the sailor until it had parted and come away in halves. Just then I had business with the giant conch that needed attention, and I saw nothing more of that fracas.

The black man was a powerful fellow, but he lacked skill. The blow in the stomach had winded him temporarily, and, before he had recovered, I was cutting him up scientifically with his own whip, while the crowd hooted and cheered in derision.

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When I desisted, he could hardly stand, much less walk, and then Big Jones, who was enjoying the spectacle, offered me his jumper. This I put on by running my legs through the sleeves, after splitting them, and buttoning it behind. Tim had by this time divested Martin of his spare raiment, and, dressed somewhat alike, we strode side by side with much dignity to the boat, followed by Big Jones, the Welshman, and an admiring throng of natives who cheered us lustily.

Martin and the well-thrashed overseer were left behind to compare notes, while, with the blue eagle upon my breast fairly red with mortification, we stepped aboard and shoved off.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SURPRISING SALUTE.

As we drew up alongside *The Gentle Hand*, our peculiar attire attracted more or less attention. Hawkson called vociferously for Hicks, Renshaw, and the rest to observe us. Captain Howard threw back his head and cackled away like an old hen, his bald poll turning red with exertion.

“Sink me!” he cried, “but you two men shall lay aft here.”

The Yankee trader shook with emotion, and insisted that Mr. Gull fetch us aft to parade the quarter-deck. This I had no intention of doing, so, springing quickly into the channels, I made a rush for the fore-castle, and got below before we were captured. But Tim was not so lucky. He was intercepted by Mr. Gull, and escaped below only after a vigorous chase, in which all hands joined, pelting him with rope’s-ends and whatever they could lay hands to. As the uproar of laughter on deck subsided, we changed our jumpers for clothes, both

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mad and disgusted thoroughly at the humiliating performance we had undergone. But, tired as we were, Mr. Gull turned us to with the men who had stayed aboard and were sent below into the 'tween deck, where the noise of hammering now became apparent. Richards took no notice of us while he was at work overhauling a pile of lumber brought from the shore. Evidently he was disgusted at our behaviour and took this way of showing it.

Jorg, the Finn, was working away with a gang of men, building a platform around the sides of the empty hold, and driving heavy staples into the barque's ceiling. He gave me a sour look as I passed him, and then Mr. Gull led the way aft to where Henry was at work cutting up planks.

"Better measure 'em off accurate, Heywood," he said, motioning to the pile of lumber that lay near. "Allow six feet six inches fer them long niggers, or they'll be lame from hanging their heavy feet over the edge."

Then he passed on, leaving me alone with the ferret-faced officer, who was sawing up a length of plank. The long lines of staples with chains attached began to have some meaning to me now, for the effects of the run had done much to clear my head. Henry saw my gaze following the line forward, and stopped to mop the perspiration from his dripping face.

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“What d’ye think, will she carry five hundred, hey?” he said.

The horror of the thing began to dawn upon me. The chains and staples were for human beings. The temperature of that hold, as it was, could not have been less than one hundred degrees. What would it be with a mass of filthy black humanity packed and wedged in as tight as they could be stowed!

“Is five hundred niggers her rating?” I asked, with unconcern.

Henry shot his fox-like glance at me.

“Don’t you really know no better’n that?” he said.

“Slaving and piracy hasn’t been my chief occupation, Henry,” I said. “My people have always been respectable, and I have been a man-o’-war’s man. Besides, my mother hasn’t been hung yet.”

“Well,” he said, wincing at this last part of my remark, “law an’ justice air two different things. It hain’t a penal hoffence to bring a fool into the world, but it should be, — an’ a capital one, too.”

“I’ll admit justice miscarried in the case of your parents, but let it go. Explain what’s wrong with me. I don’t know any better than ask if five hundred is this bark’s complement, cargo, or whatever you choose to call it.”

“Well, if ye’d ever been in a slaver before, Hi cudn’t hexcuse yer foolishness, Heywood, but, since

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ye ask me, ye may note that this here 'tween-decks will mighty nigh accommodate a trifle o' five hundred. What about the lower hold, hey?"

"Do you mean that they'll fill her up solid with human bodies?" I asked.

"Oh, no; they'll let in a bit o' air through the hatch-gratings in good weather. The voyage ain't a-goin' to last for ever. Say, d'ye think this is a slow ship? You seen her run. Honest now, how long d'ye calculate we be 'tween here an' the Guinea coast. A man, even a nigger, can stand bein' shut up a little while. An' then, stave you, Heywood, for a priest, don't ye think a bit o' sufferin' is worth goin' through to be a good Christian an' die in the faith, hey? Every black bloomin' son of a gun'll be as good Christian as you are afore he dies."

I said no more. When I saw Tim he showed no surprise.

"I expected at least that," he said. "It's Yankee Dan's principal business. I was with them once before, an' that's the reason I wanted you to clear."

"It's a strange Yankee that should be at the head of such a business," said I. "Now, if a Spaniard —"

"Stow it!" said Tim, angrily. "There never was any other real slaver than the Yankee, an' they're the ones makin' the most howl against it."

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Nearly every slave-ship that comes here has a Yankee shipper."

This I found later to be only too true. It was more than disgraceful for the fact that, even at that time, in the Northern States there had been angry discussions upon the question, the South being scored heavily for the slaves it held from necessity to work the plantations.

It was evident that the English governor winked at the trade, and that few, if any, of our crew had suspected before this time just what the barque's trade would be. As there seemed every prospect of many of them not coming aboard again, I would not worry myself about the matter when they would learn the truth. As for Martin, he would be glad to be in a slaver, and as for the morals of the rest of the liberty crew, they were not worth considering when pitted against a few English sovereigns or American dollars. I went aft that evening to lower the colours with a very disagreeable feeling at the prospect in store.

It was always the custom aboard *The Gentle Hand*, I learned, to lower the colours in man-o'-war style when the vessel was in soundings, so I repaired to the quarter-deck to load one of the after guns, and stand by to set the sun.

Tim went with me, acting as quartermaster, and I felt somewhat abashed at the presence of Miss

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Allen, Yankee Dan's daughter. I wondered if she had seen me come aboard, and the memory of that jumper put on upside down made my face wear a smile that was not lost on Hawkson.

"Glad to see you lookin' happy, Heywood. Yer see, this ain't sech a bad ship, after all. Put a good big charge in that twelve-pounder, and p'int her straight for the governor's house, and let him know there's some say t'us. It never hurts to put on a bit o' side to these lazy rulers," said he, as I began unlacing the gun-cover.

"Do you want a shot rammed in it, too?" I asked. "It might be just as well to stir him up with a handful of good iron. It would probably be small loss to his country if he happened to try and stop it."

"That's where you show a lot o' foolishness," he replied. "There's devilish few men like him, and, if his country can spare him, we can't. By no means let a shot get in that gun."

While we were talking, Miss Allen came up the companionway accompanied by Hicks, Renshaw, and Curtis. She looked magnificent as she stood there in the fading sunlight, her hair taking on a deep coppery-red colour, and her eyes sparkling with amusement.

"Will you let me fire it, Mr. Sailorman?" she

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asked, nodding toward the gun which I was loading.

“Indeed he will not,” said Mr. Curtis, whom I now observed to be a man of some presence, wearing a single eye-glass and a look such as I had imagined belonged to men much given to science and books.

“You have my permission,” laughed Sir John, winking awkwardly, “but, of course, you must not disobey.”

“I have not promised to obey yet,” said the girl, with a slight raising of the eyebrows. “Suppose, Sir John, you allow your wit to flow in different channels.”

“Wit!” growled Renshaw. “Don’t use the word, I beg you, in connection with his speech. One might really suppose there was such a quality in his nature, since you suggest it, Miss Allen, and much as I should like to —”

“Oh, stow it! Belay for the lady’s sake,” said Sir John. “There is such a thing as talking a person to death.”

“Between the two of you, she is in rather a dangerous situation,” said Mr. Curtis, sourly, “but I suppose there is some excuse for men who have been at sea over a month.”

Miss Allen had heard little or none of this last

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remark, for she was advancing to me as I stood at the breech of the fine brass gun.

“Do you give me the lock-spring. I see it does not need a port-fire like those ashore,” said she, coming to my side.

“It is not time to fire yet,” I said. “Mr. Hawkson will come from below and pass the word from the old man — I mean, Captain Howard.”

“Why, he and papa will never get through talking as long as there’s a bottle between them,” she said. “Let me have the cord. What care I for your Captain Howard?”

“Here, you fellow! Don’t give Miss Allen that lanyard,” said Mr. Curtis, in a tone such as he had probably been accustomed to use to his niggers. It rubbed me the wrong way. I was entitled to mister while on the poop.

I bowed and passed the string into her hand, and noticed how firm and round were the fingers that closed upon it.

“Fire whenever you are ready, Miss Allen,” said I. “Jerk hard upon the cord.”

The next instant there was a flash and roar. The blue powder smoke swirled over the harbour, and the echoes were loosened in the bay, while over all a slight, droning snore, rapidly dying away in the distance, told of a twelve-pound solid shot tearing

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its way through the quiet air between the ship and the governor's house.

I looked vainly to see the effect of the shot, wondering how on earth the ball came to get into the gun. Then the humming of the signal halyards called my attention, and I saw Tim lowering the ensign, with a peculiar glint in his eyes, while Hawkson, Yankee Dan, and the captain came bounding from below.

"What the devil has happened?" bawled Hawkson, emerging first. "Who told you to fire that gun?" and he glared at me.

"I just told the rascal not to," said Mr. Curtis, "and what does he do but deliberately do it."

Captain Howard turned his mask-like face to me.

"Did you have shot in that piece?" he asked.

"Not that I know of," I stammered, hesitatingly, for, though I had heard the shot as plainly as he, I knew nothing of how it came in the gun.

"You may put him in double irons until I want him," said Howard, dismissing the subject and turning to the trader.

"He did not fire that gun, and shall not go in irons," said Miss Allen, firmly, standing before her father and the captain. "I fired that gun. Now, what are you going to do about it?"

Howard looked straight at her for a moment. Then he broke forth into his cackling laugh.

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“ Nothing, of course. He, he, he, ho, ho! not a thing. If you fired that gun, it’s all right. Ho, ho, ho! Now, Dan, you’d better go ashore and explain to the governor how your daughter happened to send a twelve-pounder into his house. When you come back, maybe you’ll think ten thousand pounds is a big price to pay for the risk we run, and maybe you won’t. If he’s in a good humour, I doubt if he lets you land.”

CHAPTER XIV.

I DECIDE TO LEAVE THE BARQUE

I WAS allowed to go forward, followed by Tim, who gave me a queer look as he passed.

“What did you do it for?” I asked, when we were out of hearing.

But Tim only looked sullen and said nothing.

“I have half a notion to report you,” I said, angrily.

“Call away the shore boat!” came Hawkson’s hail, and, before we had a chance to say anything more, we were hustled into her by Mr. Gull, while the negro crew in Mr. Curtis’s gig dropped to the gangway.

Henry came in our boat, with orders to collect his men and bring them aboard, and we had just time to see the trader and his daughter embark with Mr. Curtis, followed by the jests of the gentlemen aboard who handed the young lady down the ladder. I felt very grateful to Miss Allen, and, as her laugh-

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ter fell upon our ears, Henry turned and gazed astern.

“If I know the governor, there’ll be trouble yet,” said he. “That Yankee ain’t too well liked.”

As we drew near the landing, we noticed a crowd gathering, and an official-looking person in a peculiar uniform or livery came to meet us.

“I have a message for your captain,” said he.

“Is it official?” asked Henry.

“It is, and both imperative and immediate,” said the man.

“I suppose, then, you want to deliver it?” asked Henry.

“Your discernment does you great credit,” said the man.

“Why! Wh-o-o-a! Say not so,” said Henry, with impressive gravity. “In a hurry, eh?”

“I am, and it’ll be the worse for you if you delay me any longer.”

“Now hark at that man!” cried Henry, as his little eyes glittered. “Delay him! Here I am a-goin’ right along about my business, an’ here this chap comes up sayin’ I delay him. I’ll see the gov’e’nor about this. Come along, bullies,” and he sprang ashore, ordering us to follow.

“It’s the governor who will see you, you fellow,” said the man.

“An’ him a-callin’ me names,” cried Henry.

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Then in a lower tone, as we drew away: "Hi reckon 'is 'ighness'll get along without us. We'll want to hustle that crew aboard 'fore there's trouble."

This seemed harder to me than it did to the third mate, and I smiled as I thought of Jones, Martin, and the fighting Doctor. We quickly left the vicinity of the landing, and hurried through the darkening streets in the direction of the den kept by the truculent Thunderbore.

They were not there, and we hurried on in the direction the big conch told us they had taken, Henry apparently confident that we would have them in hand shortly.

As the darkness fell, and objects could not be distinguished, the desire to desert the barque took strong hold of me. Her mission was apparent now, and I determined to make a dash for liberty at the first opportunity. Tim's peculiar behaviour troubled me, and I was somewhat backward in taking him into my confidence. However, when we struck into an extremely dark street, I thought his knowledge of the town would be of use, and I whispered my intention of clearing. The next instant we were plunging into the darkness, while Henry's voice bawled forth, dying away in the distance:

"Come back, ye blazin' fools! Come back!"

We ran wildly up the street until it ended in a

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thick thorn hedge, into which I foolishly plunged, getting badly scratched for my pains. The impetus of the run sent me through and into a ditch beyond, followed by Tim, who plunged through the opening my body had made. He landed heavily upon me, knocking the breath out of my body, and for awhile I lay there unable to rise. Then Mr. Henry's voice, cursing a couple of fools, sounded unpleasantly near, and I started up, resolved to make a fight if necessary.

The little mate, however, refused to seize us, even though he could easily have done so, as he reached the bank of the ditch before we could get clear. He tried to argue the question, preferring words to blows in the darkness, doubtless fearing the knife in such an encounter.

"What's the meanin' of it, anyways?" he asked. "What yer runnin' fer?"

"Go on, Henry," said I. "Go get the men, but don't try to get me back aboard the slaver, or there'll be trouble."

"Well, where ye a-goin'? What's the sense o' playin' the fool when you have to be a man, anyways. I ain't goin' to te'ch you, but I'll say right here you'll probably get irons for tryin' this fool trick."

"When I'm aboard, we'll discuss the irons. Now stand clear, or there'll be trouble."



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Tim and I started across the clearing, heading for a light we saw in the distance. Henry declined to follow, and we left him swearing at our stupidity. Going on, we came to a pathway which led toward the house, and we had hardly struck into it when there was a rush of feet on the coral, followed by a deep growling.

“Keep clear of the houses. Cut for the cover back of the town,” said Tim, hoarsely.

As I sheered off, a huge animal sprang upon me and knocked me down, fastening its teeth in my neck and shoulder. I heard Tim cry out, “Bloodhound,” and then he flung himself upon the beast, while I tried my best to pull out my knife and get the animal in front of me.

The dog let out a deep, baying cry as Tim struck, and this was answered by several animals near the house. I soon had my knife at work, and, in spite of a lacerated shoulder, plunged it again and again into the ferocious brute. Then he relaxed his hold, and I stood up. A lantern flashed in the path, and, before we could run, forms of men showed close to us.

“Who is it? What’s the matter?” said a strong voice I recognized as Yankee Dan’s. Behind him were Mr. Curtis, Miss Allen, and the two stalwart conchs who accompanied them from the landing.

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It was now or never. The dog was evidently done for, and we must run for it.

“Come on,” I said to Tim, and away we went.

“Halt!” came the deep voice of the trader.
“Halt, or I’ll fire!”

“It’s the sailors; don’t!” cried Miss Allen.

We were going pretty fast, and must have been out of sight in a few minutes. Perhaps the trader did not wish to hit us. At all events, his shot whistled past, and we were soon out of range. Had he known the loss of his dog, he might have taken better aim.

We were soon in the thick tropical jungle, and, as it was almost impenetrable, we were forced to halt. We waited a few minutes to try and get our bearings, and then worked out into the open again, keeping away from all lights. In this way we blundered along for an hour or two, Tim swearing noisily at the darkness and obstacles that came in our path.

“It’s all foolishness, anyhow, for you to clear here,” said he. “They’ve hounds that’ll catch us in half an hour, and there’s no way to leave this island, without going to sea, before they hunt for us.”

“Well, show me a boat,” said I, angrily. “Anything that’ll carry a sail across the Florida channel will do, and, if you think I’ll mind stealing it, you

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know mighty little how I want to clear. I'll face the savages of the Florida peninsula before going with that gang of nigger hunters."

We skirted the town, and finally came out on the shore near the harbour entrance. Here we could find some kind of craft, for there were numerous spongers and fishermen in the town.

Tim finally brought up on the beach and tried to get his bearings. There was nothing in sight that looked like a sailing craft, except a dim shadow out in the harbour which gave promise of being an able sloop, for the tapering line that went skyward seemed to describe a tall mast. We cast about to find some means of getting aboard without swimming, for the water looked black and forbidding, and the phosphorus flared weirdly in places, and gave rise to a belief in the presence of that ugly fish, the shark of the Bahama bank.

While we skirted the fringe of rippling waves, which flamed and sparkled as they rolled upon the beach, we heard the deep-mouthed baying of hounds.

"My God! I told you so," said Tim.

"They're a long way off yet," I answered, surlily.

"A sailor ain't much at running, ye know, an' we haven't all night to clear," he answered.

"Well, you've forgotten your gait mighty sudden, then," said I. "How about this morning?"

But Tim had struck into a quick trot, and I fol-

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lowed, for the deep, musical cry of those dogs was anything but nerve-steadying, sounding as it did through the darkness, when not a tree or house showed us a place of refuge. It was take to either a tree or water, and, as there were no trees, I made ready for a swim, willing to trust the hidden monsters below the surface rather than those of dry land.

After running for a few minutes toward the town, the cry of the hounds sounded louder. They were evidently upon our trail, and it would be but a few minutes before they would close with us, and then capture would be certain. It might be well if we were captured before the brutes seized us, for, judging from the size of the one we had killed, they would make things pretty hot if it came to a fight.

“Into the water!” panted Tim.

We struck into the edge of the surf, splashing through the water where it was but a few inches deep, hoping thus to put the dogs off the scent. In a little while, however, we found this failed to check them, for, while they stopped a few minutes at the spot we struck the water, they soon showed sagacity enough to burst into full cry and come tearing up the beach in our wake.

We were now nearing houses again, and in a moment bright lights shone ahead. A large build-

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ing on the edge of the town showed lights in many windows, and the sound of music and hoarse voices came forth. It was evidently a place for fishermen and traders to carouse, and we headed straight for it as the baying drew close to our heels. The door was open, and in we dashed, flinging it to in the faces of as ugly a pair of brutes as I ever saw.

The hounds were evidently well trained to hunt slaves, for they flung themselves against the panels until the lock burst and the door flew open, letting them into the room in full cry.

Our entrance into the company collected in that place naturally caused some commotion. The big Welshman, Jones, was in the act of footing a horn-pipe with a tall, yellow girl for a partner; Martin sat with a mug of ale on one hand and a stout blond woman on the other, and he fiercely squeezed and pulled an old accordion, while the black Doctor howled and patted time with his bare feet upon the prostrate form of Ernest, the German. The rest of the company were ranged about, looking at the big Welshman, roaring or screaming as the case happened to be.

For an instant the crowd stopped spellbound at our headlong entrance. Martin was in the act of hurling the accordion at us in his anger at being interrupted. The door crashed in, and the two black shapes leaped among them.

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The hounds, with their flaming eyes and lolling tongues, presented a hideous spectacle, and the effect of their headlong plunge was too much for the nerves of the drunken crew. There was a wild howl of terror and a general scramble. I knocked over one lamp, and Tim adroitly dowsed the other, causing total darkness, and then above the wild din I could hear Martin's voice, roaring:

"'Tis th' dev'l, man! 'Tis th' dev'l! Gawd save us, 'tis th' dev'l himsel'! Coom out an' fight like a man, ye coward! Coom in th' light, an' I'll whollop ye like a babe, ye sneakin' traitor! Coom out an' stan' to a true Christian sailor — ho-oo-t!"

The screams of the women and bawling of the men, coupled with the deep baying howls in the darkness, caused a disorder hard to describe.

There were several windows in the large room, but in the wild scramble these were overlooked by some, and, before the hounds could disengage themselves from the struggling crowd, Tim and I had leaped out and were running wildly into the streets of Nassau.

Windows were thrown open and heads peered out, looking in the direction of the uproar, and I distinctly heard several doubtful encomiums pronounced upon the habits of sailors by some of the more respectable residents of that not very pious

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town. Then we fell into a walk, somewhat amused at our sudden deliverance, and soon mingled with the loungers upon the broad street, which at this early hour was still full of people.

CHAPTER XV.

OTHERS DECIDE OTHERWISE

AFTER following the street for a time, we concluded that our presence would be noted by the natives, and we turned into a broad, poorly lighted avenue, whose pavement shone white in the darkness. Here the houses seemed of the better class, and, as the avenue stretched away back inland to the southward, we decided to get across to the other side of the island, and trust to getting a sponger or fisherman to take us to some of the deserted cays until we could make good our escape.

“If you didn’t leave such a confounded trail,” said Tim, “the dogs couldn’t follow us. But you must be mighty nigh as smelly as a nigger, for they never even slowed down after they hit it fair.”

I was about to make a rather warm retort to this remark, but at that instant the door of a large house across the street opened, and a boy appeared upon the threshold. He was joined instantly by a large

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woman, whose strong face in profile showed plainly against the light inside.

Tim halted and seized my arm. Then he swore softly, and stood gazing at them while they came out into the street. The door was closed with a bang by the woman, but not before I had time to note her figure. She was huge. Almost as tall as myself, and her shoulders were those of a prize-fighter.

“Georgie, you dear,” she said, “if you run off this time, you’ll be sorry.” And her voice was peculiarly gentle and soft, almost absurdly so for a person of her size. She locked the door, and they came toward us until we started to turn aside to pass.

“Mary!” said Tim, in a low tone.

The woman stopped as if turned to stone.

“Who is it?” she asked, sweetly, and I saw her face clearly as she looked full at me. She was handsome. It was dark, but her eyes shone, and I could see the firm sweep of her chin and the well-cut nose and lips. She was not young, but she had all the colour and vigour of a girl.

“It’s me,” said Tim, shortly.

The next instant the boy’s stick fell across his shoulders with a loud whack.

“Clear out, you rascal,” he said. “How dare you speak to a lady! Oh, it’s you, is it —”

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In an instant the boy's arms were around Tim's neck, and he was hugging him closely.

"Oh, papa, papa!" he was crying, while the woman looked on silently.

In a moment Tim put him aside and stood before his wife. The scene was strange, and, as I stood by, gazing at them, I thought of what the little sailor had told me.

Tim advanced and held out his hand. The woman sprang forward and seized it, pressing it to her lips and falling upon her knees.

"Forgive me," she said.

But the sailor could not or would not answer. He stood looking down at her a long time.

"Oh, Tim, Tim!" she pleaded, gazing up at him.

I was somewhat disturbed at the scene, for there were people abroad on the streets, and here was a fine, large woman, as good-looking as one would care to see, kneeling before a pitiful-looking sailor, who was as ragged and dirty looking as a forlorn slave. If we were to make good an escape from the barque, it was anything but the proper thing to make a scene in the town streets.

"He is aboard the barque," said Tim, slowly. "Will you give him up and come back to me if I get away?"

I knew he was speaking of Renshaw.

"Yes, yes," moaned the woman; "only say you'll

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forgive me, Tim. I'll try and help you get away. You know I can handle a boat, and can come up to you on the ship if you will let me — ”

He placed his hand upon her head and bade her rise. As he did so, two men came from the shadow of the houses across the street, and I immediately recognized Renshaw, followed by the bos'n, who came respectfully a few feet behind him. Old Richards drew up alongside his master, and stood ready for further orders.

“Get back to your boat, sir,” said Renshaw, addressing Tim.

The little sailor waited to see his wife upon her feet. Then he turned, and I expected to see him make a break for it, as he struck me as being pretty good at running. But I was mistaken.

With a sudden lunge, he struck Renshaw a terrific blow in the face. The next instant the bos'n sprang forward and tried to grab him, and would have succeeded but for the fact that my foot slid out between, and Richards went sprawling in the dust.

It looked as though things would take a more serious turn, for Tim had now been in open mutiny. Renshaw had fallen and struck his head on a piece of the flagging in front of the house, and lay quite insensible.

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“For the Lord’s sake, Richards, let us get away,” I said, as the bos’n arose angrily to his feet.

“Into the house, quick,” cried Tim’s wife, as she led the way toward the door.

“He isn’t hurt half as badly as he ought to be,” said Tim, pointing to the fallen man. “Take him away, bos’n, before some one sees him.”

Then we crowded to the door, which was flung open.

At that minute the deep baying of the hounds fell upon our ears, sounding weirdly musical in the night, and a few moments later human forms dashed up the street, with the leaping animals straining at the chains that held them, fairly pulling the men into their tremendous stride.

“Way there! way there!” bawled a voice I knew was Henry’s, and, before I could move, one of the animals, with a howl, leaped straight for my throat.

All thought of escape was gone in an instant, and I struggled desperately with the animal, while the black conch beat and pulled to drag him off.

Finally, after I had my hands badly torn with the brute’s teeth, they succeeded in quieting him, and Henry clapped irons upon my wrists. Then I saw Tim had also been taken, and was standing quietly with his hands ironed behind him and his head bowed forward, his thoughts evidently far away from the barque or her crew. Upon the white

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coral road lay a dark object, and, while I looked, men raised it and bore it into the house the woman had but left a few minutes before.

I stood gazing after them until Henry shoved me roughly ahead.

“Come, git a move on ye,” said he. And his fingers closed upon my arm like a vice.

We went some distance before reaching the landing where we had come ashore, and I was more astonished to find that, in spite of our wild run, the boat was not only waiting for our return, but had an uproarious crowd ironed in her. I could hear the voice of Martin raised in an argument with Bill, insisting the devil had taken charge and was afraid to stand to a true Christian like himself. And the big Norwegian would earnestly try to strike him, and then bewailed his inability, owing to his ironed hands. Above all, the deep roar of Jones floated over the quiet harbour, joined now and then by the thick tones of the Doctor bawling for ‘Thunderbo’ to bring him something that would “scratch.”

We were hustled into the boat without ceremony, and started for the barque.

As we drew alongside, Hawkson’s voice hailed us.

“Got ’em all?” said he.

“Hevery bloomin’ one, sur,” answered Henry.

“Knock off their irons, then, and let ’em turn

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in. We'll make a start early in the mornin' if things turn out all right."

"There's been a bit o' trouble ashore," said Henry, climbing up the chains, and then he evidently told Hawkson something of what had happened, for Tim's irons and mine were left on, and we were hustled below, where we were hitched to ring-bolts in the slave-deck.

Shortly afterward, the noise of the howling men ceased, and I knew that they had either obeyed orders and turned in, or had been gagged. It was dark below, and I could see nothing of Tim. I spoke his name softly, but received no answer. Then I heard a voice, agonized and full of great suffering, praying and pleading for some one to come back again.

CHAPTER XVI.

A TASTE OF COLD IRON

IT was hard to tell just when the morning dawned in that dark hold of the slaver. I was awakened by Henry coming below and leading us both on deck, where our usual mess of bread and coffee was served for breakfast. Then we were told to lay aft, and, following Hawkson, we entered the cabin to hear our sentence pronounced by Captain Howard.

As we entered, that strange old rascal was at the table with Hicks, engaged in a most peculiar game. The cloth was divided up into squares like a checker-board, and from opposite sides the two were hard at it, and paid no attention to Hawkson's entrance. In a short time I found that "beef was king," that is, a plate with meat upon it could jump a dish of bread or cup of coffee, as with checkers, the person losing not having any more of that victual for the meal. While they played, they ate from whatever dishes they could reach, and were so ab-

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sorbed that it was not until Hicks jumped the old man's plate of sliced pineapple with a chunk of salt beef that the old villain turned and noticed us. Then he surlily demanded what was wanted.

Whether it was the loss of his fruit or memory of the last night's occurrence that oppressed him, it was hard to tell, but his mask-like face showed no feeling. He bade Hawkson stand us against the cabin bulkhead, and called Watkins to hand him pistols.

The old steward obeyed with alacrity, for it was only too evident what he wanted them for. Hicks, however, burst forth into a laugh.

"Hold on, Captain Howard," said he. "You forget this isn't exactly a pirate ship. Bless your old heart, you would pistol them both."

"And I will," said the old villain, cocking back the flints of the weapons.

He had formerly had the playful habit of loosing off one or both of his pistols under the table, to suddenly emphasize an after-dinner argument, and the rough habits of his early days stuck to him, only now the weapons appeared above the board. The game of grub, I learned, was one he had practised with his mates in the old days when the gambling habit had taken so strong hold upon him he must play at something.

Hicks, however, would hear of no such thing

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as shooting us without trial. The captain's will, he admitted, was law, but we were in an English harbour and not on the high seas, and such action might cause endless trouble if the governor heard of it. Hawkson also urged the necessity of care for the sake of the voyage, and indeed he appeared somewhat worried about the matter until the pistols were finally laid aside and our case taken up.

Tim was asked if he had anything to say why the sentence of death should not be pronounced upon him. It would be fulfilled, with the governor's permission, sometime that day. He had admitted the testimony of two witnesses, who swore they had seen him wound Renshaw.

He was silent and hung his head. Then he raised it and stood straight before them.

"I don't mind the sentence," said he, "but I do mind it coming from such as you."

"You may gag and take him forward," said Howard. "He shall be blown from a gun."

He was led away, and they turned to me.

What had I to say? Well, I had considerable, and I told at some length how I had nothing whatever to do with Tim's case.

"You may drop him overboard with a shot to each foot," said Howard, as I finished. "Call away the gig, Mr. Hawkson. I'll go over to the governor's before he gets too warm to see any one."

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The whole scene, the entire lack of feeling, the disposing of our cases as though we were simply niggers, made an impression upon me that can hardly be described. Then the old pirate turned to his meal as though nothing had happened, and finished his coffee, while I was led forward.

“Keep a stiff neck, Heywood,” said the old privateersman, as we came on deck. “I believe you’re all right. I’ve heard something of this Renshaw before. He’s a feller of title, ye know, an’, if it wasn’t for that, I could save the little red-headed feller, too. But Sir John will insist on one o’ ye goin’. Blow the little chap from a gun? I’ll see he hears more o’ your story, an’, if worse comes from it, I’ll—well, never mind. There’s plenty o’ time between now and when the old man sees the governor. He won’t do anything without permission in port.”

“Don’t take any trouble on my account,” I said, angrily. “I’ve tried to clear fair enough, and would have gone but for Tim meeting his wife. I’d as soon stand in front as behind the guns of a slaver.”

“You’ll never have sense enough to stand anywhere, an’ that’s a fact,” growled Hawkson. “A good ship, a good crew, and plenty of profit in sight. D—n you, Heywood, I’ve a notion to take you at your word.”

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His fierce eyes held an evil light that I knew boded no good, and his ugly mouth worked convulsively, showing his teeth. I was aware my case was not one to trifle with too freely, and concluded I would hold my tongue. He left me with an ugly sneer, and I went below attended by Mr. Gull, who eyed me savagely, and hustled me with such energy that I turned upon him.

“You want to bear a hand and remember that a live sailor is worth a couple of fool slavers,” said I. “It’ll pay you to be a bit more careful, Mr. Gull.”

“Shut up!” he answered, and hitched my shackle to the ceiling. Then he turned and left me without another word, while I cursed freely and fluently, with as much bitterness as a man can express in language.

It was very dark, and I knew nothing of what was going on above, although I noticed as I crossed the deck that the fore and main topsails were hanging up by their clews, all ready to sheet home, and above them the royals were also hanging loose. From this I gathered that there would be a start made very soon, and even as I wondered at our probable destination, I heard the distant clank and rattle of the windlass. Then I recognized the Doctor’s voice bawling the old refrain:

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“Dey’s trouble ob-hyer, an’ dey’s trouble ober dar,
An’ I really do believe dat dey’s trouble ebbwhar —
Trouble — trouble —”

And I knew the mates were working the liquor out of his black hide.

Soon the anchor was short, and then silence reigned for a time, broken only by the scurrying of a ship’s rat across the empty hold.

How oppressive the bilge heat was, and how rank the stench of the hold! The barque had evidently been built at a time when salting ships had not come into fashion, and her old timbers stunk. I tried to think of the events of yesterday, and wondered what had become of poor Tim. I feared they would give him the full penalty, for, although Renshaw was a notorious adventurer, he was interested in the craft, and was a friend of Hicks.

His position, also, called for summary vengeance upon a common sailor, even though that sailor was an American.

In my case, however, the affair was different. I had done nothing to either aid or abet Tim in his assault. I was deserting, and had admitted that, but I knew nothing of the other affair that had ended so uncomfortably and caused our arrest. Hawkson knew this well enough, and it was with him my fate rested. He might save me from a hanging yet.

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I stood wondering when and how the case would be settled, and was very hot and tired, but the shackle would not allow me to either sit or lie down upon the deck. The pain caused by the strain upon my wrists was intense, and I swore loudly at the men who had forced me into the cursed ship.

Suddenly I thought I heard a laugh. I strained my eyes in the direction whence it came, and soon made out a shape sitting upon the lower step of the ladder leading on deck. It chuckled and grunted for some minutes, and I wondered what it was, when it rose, and I made out the figure of Watkins.

The old steward came over and stood looking with a hideous sneer upon his face. The light was enough to see each outline of his features, for my eyes were now accustomed to the gloom, and the hatch let in a small ray of sunshine through the crack of the slide.

“You seem devilishly well pleased, Noah,” said I, with as much composure as I could muster.

He made no reply, but came close to me, and, leaning forward, as if about to whisper something in my ear, he seized that member in his teeth and bit it slowly. The pain was intense, and I roared out, wiggling to free myself from the monster, but he held on for many minutes.

I was fairly sick with pain, but the old fellow failed to notice that my legs were not ironed. As

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I was unable to move, he had doubtless supposed they were shackled.

With what remaining strength I had left, I kicked him, and by excellent luck landed full upon his stomach. He gave a grunt and doubled up like a pocket-knife, falling away from me and lying motionless upon the deck.

I mentally prayed I had killed him, and bawled at the top of my voice for Hawkson and Gull to come below. I might just as well have saved my breath, for not a sound could reach the main-deck, where they would evidently be at that time of day. I tried to ease my ear a bit by pressing my shoulder against the wound.

After a time that seemed an age, the pain let up a little. I looked at the form upon the deck before me, and saw it move and then rise and again come toward me.

“You old cannibal,” I cried, “if ever I get clear of these irons, I’ll cut you to ribbons for this.”

“If ever you do, you may,” he hissed. “How would you like to shake hands on that.” And he seized my irons behind my back, keeping to one side from my kicks, and he twisted until I almost fainted with agony. I roared and bawled and struggled, but to no purpose. I could not shake the horrible old creature off. Just when I thought I could stand the pain no longer, and I verily believe

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the fiend intended to kill me, the hatch was opened, and the carpenter came down the ladder with an armful of chains.

Instantly Watkins sprang away and disappeared, leaving me calling for the fellow Jorg to lend me a hand and keep the rascal off.

Jorg came stolidly below, and began shackling his chains to the ring-bolts, paying no more attention to me than to a man raving in delirium. He looked at me curiously and shook his head.

“Youse’ll get over it, friend John, in a day or two,” he said, and went on deck.

CHAPTER XVII.

SIR JOHN AND MISS ALLEN

WHILE I stood there, sweating in the heat and pain below, expecting the reappearance of the old steward, I heard the windlass at work again, and faint cries as of men straining up the topsails.

Suddenly I recognized Hawkson's voice near the main-hatch, and a moment later the section was slid aside and he came below.

"Get me out of this!" I roared at him, as he came up. "Get me out, or there'll be murder aboard."

"Steady, steady! D'ye expect me to turn ye loose when ye talk of murder? Sink ye, Heywood! what's come over ye, anyways?"

"If you're the man you claim to be," I said, hotly, "turn my hands loose, and stand before me for ten minutes. Only ten minutes, Hawkson, and, if I don't kill you, you may eat me alive. You may choose any weapon, and I'll take my bare —"

"Tut, tut, what kind o' hysteria is this? What'd

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I want t'eat ye alive for? Sink ye for a crazy boy! who'd eat a tough youngster like you, boy? What — well — oh, ho!"

He had come close to me, and had noticed my ear. Then he chuckled in his quiet way, his ugly face working with amusement.

"Yes," I said, "that's the old steward's doings, and he'll probably come back to finish me."

"Well, well, oh, ho, ho!" he laughed. "Didn't I tell you the old fellow would try his hand on you? But it's a trifle; stand clear."

Here he loosened the irons, and I stood forth, rubbing my sore wrists that were now partly paralyzed by being held so long.

"It's all right. Go up on deck and lend a hand, as soon as you get your head cleared up. Mind ye, now, it was a rat that bit ye, understand? Don't make any more trouble. If ye want to kill the steward, do it some other time. I had hard work savin' ye, an' I don't want any more trouble."

I went forward, and, after bathing my sore ear, I went on deck in time to see the last of Nassau.

The sun was shining brightly and the air was hot, but the trade-wind was fresh, and we went to sea at a rapid rate under royals. Bill asked me where I had been, and Martin stopped me to make some remark of the wild day before, but neither appeared to know what had happened, save that

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every one had gotten very drunk. Tim was not aboard, and I never saw him again. He had disappeared, and nothing but his broken irons were left to tell of his departure. The bos'n, however, was on watch, and he spoke vaguely afterward about a small boat coming alongside with a woman in it. Just what part Richards had played in the game, it was, of course, impossible to find out, but before long I knew that Tim and his family had made a voyage across the Florida channel in a small boat, and had probably succeeded in evading pursuit. No further notice of the affair was taken by the officers aft for reasons better known to themselves, and Renshaw chose to remain ashore, taking no further interest in the enterprise.

It was now evident that we had started on our voyage for blacks, and that escape from the barque was impossible. I was angry enough, but remembered that desertion merited some roughness, and, upon the whole, I had been pretty well treated.

Henry gave me a furtive look from his ferret eyes as I passed him on deck. He had done no more than his duty in chasing me, and I, therefore, bore him no malice because he had been successful. It was several days before he would trust himself near me, however, and kept his eyes busy as we went about the vessel attending to our various occupations.

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The day was perfect for navigating the reef, and, as my hands were badly used up, I spent much time forward, watching the shoals and banks, that were distinctly visible under five or six fathoms of water. We could run in this, and at such a depth, with the sun shining, a very small object could be seen upon the coral bottom. Yankee Dan and his daughter were upon the poop with Hicks and Howard. The girl was to go with us as far as St. Helena on our voyage to Africa.

Mr. Gull had volunteered this much information, and the men were somewhat curious in their gaze aft.

The passengers took no notice of this, but spent the afternoon watching the reef or bank, the young girl being much entertained by the various sights upon the bottom.

In the afternoon I went upon the poop to clean the guns and otherwise attend them, and the young lady gave me a nod of recognition. She evidently remembered that shot, for I found out afterward it had cost her father a pretty sum, and for a time it looked as if there would be no slaver cleared at Nassau.

The governor, however, compromised on a handsome fee for damages, as the shot had plunged clear through his parlour, leaving only a small hole in both walls to mark its passage. How much of

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this fee found its way into Howard's pocket, it was hard to determine, but he evidently was not forgotten. The affair was not alluded to again except among the men.

Hicks scowled at me, but said nothing, and then I kept close watch upon him, as he appeared to still bear me some malice for having been present at Renshaw's mishap. He was a bold and unscrupulous rascal, and would have taken a lively interest in my jump over-side, had they insisted on it, with a shot to each foot. His manner toward the young girl irritated me also, for, while I'm far from being a priest, yet there is a certain respect for young women every honest sailor has, and which was apparently entirely absent in this man's manner. They were evidently talking of Renshaw, for I heard Hicks mention his name sadly in connection with the dishonourable affair at the card-table that had caused his abandonment by people of his own class.

"I see," said Miss Allen, "cheating over a game of cards is highly wrong, but cheating a man out of his wife's affections is highly commendable. A strange code of morals you Englishmen have. In your class, perhaps, the money is more valuable. Is that it?"

"Whatever his sins were, let us not judge them," said Hicks. "As for the class you speak of, I can

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only answer that a wife's affections are valued by most men according to the wife. Don't you think a woman has pretty much the same gauge to measure by?" And, as he spoke, he leaned toward her, looking her straight in the eyes until she flushed crimson.

"I have broken all of the ten commandments for women," said Hicks, slowly, still keeping his gaze fixed upon her, "and I would break them all gladly for the woman I love."

"A self-confessed saint!" she answered, somewhat uneasily.

"Well, slaving is not the least of my ambitions," said he, carelessly. "Perhaps you think there is nothing in running a cargo of blacks? It may be there's little, but, if we were overhauled with your father aboard and a crowd below, even 'trading' would not appear an innocent occupation."

"I know it, but what can I do? Do you suppose I think everything that papa does is right?"

"I would hardly accuse you of such lack of judgment," said Hicks, laughing and glancing at Howard and her father in conversation near the break of the poop.

"But because papa does strange things, you needn't think I believe they are good," she said, with some feeling. "As for slavery, it's only wrong in the abstract. How could the poor blacks look

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out for themselves? They must be taken care of. What on earth would we do without servants?"

"I was not trying to convince you that you were a desperate pirate," said Hicks, still laughing. "Only to show you what a saint had the pleasure of talking to you. When you have lived with me a time, you'll realize it better.—"

"When what?" she exclaimed.

"When we've been married a few seasons, you'll —"

"When is a good word," she said, angrily. "How dare you speak to me like that, Sir John!"

"I dare much more," he answered, quietly, his handsome face setting into an expression of grim determination, "but this is hardly the place to declare it."

I thought it was about time for me to leave that vicinity, and I strapped the vent-cover on the gun I was attending to ostentatiously, and started forward. Hicks never gave me even a passing glance, but, as I went forward, I heard steps sounding upon the companionway aft, and, turning for a moment, I beheld the head and shoulders of Mr. Curtis emerging from the cabin. He looked a moment at Hicks and the girl, and then went over to where they stood, near the taffrail, while I joined the watch on the main-deck.

As I went down the lee steps, I caught a glimpse

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of Watkins in the cabin, making a grimace I could hardly fail to understand. He was out of reach, and I could only stop and curse him, until Mr. Gull came out and asked me what was the matter. Then I turned and lent Bill and Martin a hand at the weather main-brace, for we had gotten well clear of the bank, and were running off to the westward on our course for the other side.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BARQUE HAS ILL LUCK

I NOW come to that part of the narrative which deals with the turning-point of our luck on this cruise:

Since Renshaw's leaving left much of the influence to be desired out of the enterprise, Mr. Curtis began to feel anxious about his responsibility in the matter. It is true the gentleman was an out-cast from his own people, but he was a nobleman, for all that, and the governor of New Providence would be much influenced by him. It might be necessary to have a friend at hand in case something unpleasant turned up, especially as the laws governing slaves were becoming more and more strict.

The bos'n was suspected in having aided Tim to escape from the barque. At any rate, he was responsible for him. He was an American also, and often when the seaman would come upon the poop, Curtis would find some harsh word to say to him. Afterward he would complain to Howard



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so bitterly at the bos'n's insolence that the old captain began to experience some of the landsman's bad temper.

The discipline of the ship had been good, save for the incidents of the run on the beach. Now the real cruise had begun and there was no more chance for desertion, the strictest laws of a warship were easy in comparison to those enforced.

This put much work upon Richards, and began to make unnecessary friction between him and the men. Between the hard feeling caused by Curtis aft, and the steady grumbling of such men as Martin and some of his followers forward, the bos'n began to have an unpleasant time of it, and a most desperate affray was averted on several occasions only by his steadiness and coolness of temper.

One day the bos'n was called to attend to some repairs on the wheel-ropes.

Mr. Curtis saw him, and either inadvertently or deliberately jostled him as he came along the poop. Hawkson saw the affair, and hastened to avert trouble, but was too late. Curtis very foolishly kicked the bos'n savagely and swore at him before all the men of the watch on deck. Richards, true to his creed, lashed out most vigorously, and knocked the landsman half-way across the deck before Hawkson caught him. It was only Hawkson's steadiness of purpose that prevented a general mix-up on

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board, for Curtis insisted upon the sailor being flogged. Richards swore he would kill the man who laid hands on him, and, as he had several friends forward, including myself, who would have stood by him, and as he had the chief officer aft, there was a deal of trouble before anything like order prevailed. When the outfly was patched up by Yankee Dan and Sir John, who saw the danger of such affairs, there was no longer anything like smoothness again. The bos'n never attempted to give an order, and went about his duties with a set smile, which I tried to fathom on several occasions and received a cold silence for my pains. Then I knew trouble was coming, and prepared for it, caring little, however, just when and in what shape it would appear.

For a day or two we dragged slowly over the blue water. The royals would pull a bit in the light air, but our wake was not a long one.

On the third day, I was cleaning the forward gun to windward, gazing over the beautiful calm water. To the southward the deepening blue of the sky seemed to show in peculiar contrast to the ocean, and, while I gazed over the vast distance, the water streaked and darkened under the light draughts. The royals came to the masts every now and then, when the breeze died almost entirely, and

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flapped gently, coming full again as the barque swung herself to windward on the swell.

Miss Allen was on the poop with Mr. Curtis, and that saturnine young man, Hicks, was standing aft gazing at them with an expression far from pleasant upon his handsome face.

I became aware of a low, vibrant, wailing murmur coming out of the sunlit void to the south'ard. It was like the cry I had heard before and had had such an effect upon poor Tim.

Yankee Dan's daughter evidently heard it, for she straightened up and listened, gazing steadily to windward. As the cry rose and fell, dying away as the breeze increased, it thrilled me through and through.

"What's the matter?" asked Henry, who had come up and noticed my intense look.

"Don't you hear it?" I asked.

"S'pose Hi do; it's nothin'. Have ye cooled off?"

It was the first time he had spoken directly to me since the affair with the hounds, and I took it for an overture of friendship.

"If you squeeze my hand, I'll brain you," I said, and held it out. He took it, smiling.

"What made ye bolt, anyways?" he asked. "Hi could git ye anywheres on that island. Hi had to pay fer that dog ye killed, too."

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He seated himself beside me, as it was nearly eight bells, and we talked a few minutes, he describing the amusement caused by the two hounds loosed into the room of Thunderbo's dance-hall.

" 'Twas a fine sight, Heywood, to see that bloodhound grab the conch by the heel. If Hi hadn't stopped there to laugh it out, Hi wud ha' bust wide open. There he was hanging out the window, with Jones a-pullin' one way an' the dog the other, while the Doctor whanged him over the buttocks as they stretched 'im over the sill."

I felt little like laughing, although the scene of confusion must have been amusing to an uninterested spectator. Had he taken us sooner, the other affair would not have followed.

" I cud 'a' taken ye, but Hi had to laugh at that conch," explained Henry. " What d'yer s'pose makes my fingers so big, anyways?"

" Poking them in other people's business," said I.

" An' that's a fact," he answered. " Poking them in other people's business. Man, I was chief garroter in Havana onct, an' I 'as strangled more men than there is in this ship. Hi 'av' been a detective an' a executioner both. That's how I know how to handle dogs. Save ye, Heywood, d'ye suppose Hawkson would 'a' let you fellows loose ashore ef he didn't know Hi'd bring ye back all standin', as the sayin' is?"

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Henry had never appeared prepossessing to me, and now his statement as to his vocation did little to draw him nearer. On the contrary, he noticed my look of disgust and wonder, as I scanned his huge fingers.

“Never mind,” he said, with a grin, “’tain’t likely they’ll be used on you, though Hi closed ’em onct on the old man’s neck when he was taken fer cuttin’ out them Spanish wood-hunters in the Isle o’ Pines. They let him go just in time. Now they use a screw, for there ain’t been a man there since as c’u’d do the trick wid his fingers,—an’ old Howard insisted that Hi must stick to him for a lucky boy.”

While he talked, I noticed the barque gave a sudden heave of much greater inclination than usual. She seemed to take a new motion, as though a swell from the westward had rolled up against the trade swell. I looked over the side, and noticed a long heave to the sea setting at a sharp angle to the slight rise and fall we had been riding. Henry saw it also, and gazed to the south’ard.

Far away on the horizon a dim haziness seemed forming in the otherwise cloudless sky. I looked aft in time to see Howard come up the companion and gaze around the horizon. Then he said something to Hawkson, who had also appeared, and the old mate came to the break of the poop.

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“Take in them royals,” he called to the watch on deck, and the men, who were expecting to hear eight bells struck and dinner announced, had a job. Henry sprang up and went aft.

“T’gallants’ls,” said Hawkson, laconically.

I pulled on the gun-cover, and had already gotten it fast when the order came to clew up the main-sail. Then, as I had to go aloft with the rest, I joined Bill and Ernest in the weather main-rigging.

“Fallin’ glass,” said Bill. “I youst heard the mate tell Henry. Ole Richards looks worried. Didn’t think he’d take that interest, hey?”

We rolled the sail up in short order, keeping an eye on the poop, where Howard was now squinting away at the sun with his sextant.

“Eight bells,” came his hoarse croak, and a Norwegian struck them off loudly.

“Roll up the spanker an’ foresail,” came the order, and, instead of getting dinner, the watch turned out with the rest, and all hands were kept busy. Then came the topsails, and finally we reefed the fore and main topsails, the barque rolling log-wise in a very uneasy roll that came quickly from the south’ard.

It was one bell before we were allowed on deck, and then, all tired and hot, we scattered for cool places to eat the deferred meal.

Hardly had we finished than a cool, clammy mist

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spread itself over the ocean, and a good breeze began blowing from the north'ard. The sun appeared like a copper ball, and as it dimmed the breeze increased. The swell now began running with a tremendous heave from the southwest, and the barque rolled her channels under. All hands were kept on deck.

The black Doctor had just gathered the last of the forecastle truck into the galley, where the little Dane, Johnson, was allowed to clean them up, when we heard a deep moaning to the south'ard. The bank of the mist seemed to grow thicker. Then, with a slow rising, droning roar, the hurricane struck the barque and laid her over on her side until her lee dead-eyes were a foot below the sea.

How Miss Allen and Curtis climbed down off the poop, I could never guess. The deep notes of the wind rushing through the rigging drowned all sound save the cries of Hawkson and Gull, who, hanging on to the poop-rail, bawled for the men to man the braces and get the ship hove to.

It struck us full upon the quarter, and nothing had carried away, although the straining strips of canvas aloft seemed marvellously strong to withstand that furious outfly. The sea was as white as a coral bank, looking as though covered with a finely drifting snow, as the wind swept the top of the ocean level and drove the foam before it.

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We were under the shortest canvas, and were trying to get her on the wind before the sea made, as it was sure to make, in a few minutes.

As we tailed on to the topsail-brace, I caught a glimpse of Richards and Yankee Dan rolling the wheel over, although the deck was as steep as the ship's sides. Slowly the old barque righted herself, as she headed up within four points of it, scooping her main-deck full of water, some of which found its way below, as the main-hatch had not been battened or caulked, and the flood rolled over it waist-deep. Had we been taken aback, the topmasts would surely have gone overboard in that blast, for it was impossible to realize its tremendous power.

I could hear the captain's hoarse croak from near the mizzen, sounding faintly in the roar about us, and I caught the look of Big Jones's face as he raised it over the rail and brought it back streaming with the flying drift and gasping for breath. Then we belayed the line, and started to get all yards sharp on the starboard tack.

It was desperate work, but it was finished at last, and, by the time we had a chance to breathe and look about us, the barque was riding into such a sea as seldom runs in the western ocean, her topsails hanging in short ribbons from the jack-stays, and a gale thundering through her rigging that bid fair

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to drive her under by the sheer weight of the wind in it.

There was no steady blow. Sometimes the roar aloft would die down for a few minutes, and it would seem as if the weight of it had passed. Then would come a squall, snoring and roaring, rising up into a wild chaos of sound that was almost deafening, and the barque would be laid upon her side for several minutes as it tore past.

Jorg, with the pluck and perseverance of his race, worked desperately at the hatches to get them battened down firmly. Henry and I managed to get a large timber over the canvas cover, and, lashing one end fast to the ring-bolt on one side, we hove down with it until we could get Richards, Bill, Jones, and the rest to pass a lashing, heaving the lever over as tight as our combined weight could make it go. I saw Hawkson waving his hand, and crawled to him along the pin-rail.

“Go aft to the wheel,” he roared in my ear, and I climbed the poop.

CHAPTER XIX.

AND STILL MORE ILL - LUCK

As I crawled up the lee steps of the poop of *The Gentle Hand*, I began to believe it was blowing. I could not possibly stand before that blast. Holding to the poop-rail, I worked aft and relieved Yankee Dan, who had helped the man already there by taking the spokes to windward.

All about the barque were the lowering banks of scud, darkening the ocean now almost to night, and flying with the rapidity of the wind. Above was the deep gray of the heavy pall of vapour.

I glanced into the binnacle and noticed that the wind had already shifted, although it had been blowing less than an hour. It had become more and more squally, and the blasts roared down upon the barque with incredible force. The sea was ugly, but instead of the great, rolling sea of the Cape, it was a short, quick mass of water that flung itself with appalling force. High as she was, *The Gentle Hand* took them now and again over the topgal-

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lant-rail, and flooded her main-deck waist-deep. Soon her lee bulwarks tore away, letting the flood have full sway across and overboard. This eased her a trifle, and we strove to nurse her closer to the wind, although, without canvas, the wheel would have been as well lashed hard down.

For three hours more she headed up beautifully, although sometimes the blasts would take her to leeward and whirl her head up into the sea. Then another would strike her full, and off she would swing almost into the trough, while Hawkson and the rest would struggle to get a cloth against the weather mizzen ratlines.

Suddenly, after one wild, snoring rush of warm wind, it fell dead calm. The sea was leaping wildly, bursting over our bow one moment, and then the next piling in amidships with a crash that tested the strength of the old hull. She would seem to settle under the load, and once there was nothing visible forward of the break of the poop save the end of her t'gallant forecastle. The men had to lay aft and keep alive.

While the calm moments lasted, the air was oppressively warm, and I noticed Hicks come from behind the shelter of the spanker-boom and coolly light his pipe, although the barque was rolling and plunging so heavily it was hard to see how he kept his feet without holding on. He made his way aft

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just as Mr. Curtis emerged from the companion, followed by Miss Allen.

The barque was plunging wildly, and I had all I could do to hold the wheel-spokes. Suddenly I heard a cry from forward. Captain Howard stood clear of the mizzen for a moment and pointed aft. Over the starboard quarter a huge sea rose like a wall, then topped into a snoring comber, and flung with the rush of an avalanche over the poop. The dull, thunderous crash drowned all sound, and the same instant I felt myself being torn from the wheel by the flood. Then I went under, still holding on with all my strength to the spokes, but feeling them dragged from my hands by the prodigious power washing me away.

When I came to my senses, I was lying against the rise of the poop, where I had brought up doubled over, my body on top and my legs hanging in the swirl that rolled over to leeward. There was no one at the wheel. The Norwegian had gone overboard, and, as he had probably struck heavily against the spokes, he was doubtless killed outright.

I crawled back, gasping and driving the brine from my face. Then I remembered Miss Allen and her lover, Mr. Curtis, and looked for them.

In the boiling foam of the side-wash a few fathoms from the side, the girl's head, with her hair

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floating in tangles, showed above the white. She was apparently swimming, though feebly, for she must have been hurled far below in the cataract that poured to leeward. Near her was Mr. Curtis, his eyes staring at the ship and his face expressing surprise and anxiety. He struck out for the barque, and did not help the girl near him, or, in fact, give her any attention until he had grasped the lee mizzen channels as the vessel rolled down. Here he drew himself up, and started to coil a line trailing overboard to throw to her. I started to the side, letting go the wheel, but before I reached the rail, I saw a form plunge from the mizzen sheer-pole, and in an instant Hicks rose to the surface almost alongside the young lady. It was boldly done, and I caught the expression in his eyes as he seized her by the shoulder and turned toward the ship.

Hawkson was bawling out something, and I turned in time to feel the first puff of a squall that came snoring down upon us with a rush that made every line sing to the strain. In an instant the barque was laying over to it, and as it struck her abaft the beam she started ahead.

Hicks was now alongside, and Curtis, aided by Yankee Dan, was helping the young girl on deck. It was a remarkable occurrence, happening as it did in the centre of that hurricane, when the barque was becalmed and without any headway. Other-

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wise it would have been a certain death for any one going over the side. In less than five minutes the gale was blowing as hard as ever from an almost opposite point of the compass, the squalls coming with appalling force, sending us a good fifteen knots an hour, with nothing but the bare yards aloft to receive the pressure.

Two men came aft to relieve the wheel, which I had rolled up with Mr. Gull's help, and I had a few minutes' breathing space. as we tore along, the men forward trimming in the braces and squaring the yards for a run before it.

Hicks stood upon the poop near the mizzen, where he had climbed up, and he gazed after Curtis, who, with Yankee Dan, half-dragged and half-carried Miss Allen below. There was a strange look in his eyes, and I saw him cursing in a sinister manner, though what he said was lost in the uproar. Then he joined the captain at the break of the poop, where the old man had remained, having escaped the flood by springing with the rest upon the spanker-boom.

Sir John Hicks was a thorough rascal, according to report, but somehow he showed up very well with Mr. Curtis, who had been a well-known churchman and piously inclined even to the time he had bought his interest in *The Gentle Hand*.

As for the grim old villain in command, he made

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no comment, but stood watching his ship without a trace of anxiety upon his mask-like countenance. Even as I watched him, he was calculating the time to swing her up on the port tack to keep afloat in that cross-sea, before which no vessel could run very long.

I could hardly help thinking then that so much nervous strength and control must have a limit sometime. The old fellow had been through a good deal, and certainly must have used up much of his giant energy in earlier trials. I wondered vaguely for a few moments when the time would come when his stoical indifference and cruelty would be used up and he become a debtor to nature. How would the old man die? Would he be inscrutable and implacable to the last? It would be a matter of physical force with him, and he appeared pretty tough yet, ready for many a rough fracas, and afraid of nothing.

Yet I doubted whether his courage was any finer than some others who were less reckless and held responsibility as something of value. He finally gave the order to Hawkson, and the deep voice of the mate sounded above the booming, sonorous roar overhead. A heavy tarpaulin was lashed in the mizzen-rigging on the outside, so that the shrouds might make a solid background to hold it against

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the blast. It was an old hatch-cover, but of heavier cloth than our topsail.

The wheel was rolled hard down just as a heavy squall showed signs of slacking, and a comparative smooth space showed to windward. The old barque came quickly into the trough, and, as she did so, the full force of the hurricane could be felt. Over and over she went until her lee rail disappeared beneath the foam, while above her towered a sea that bade fair to drive her under as it fell aboard. She lay perfectly on end for an instant, the deck being absolutely perpendicular, and her yard-arm beneath the swirl to leeward, and the weight of that rolling hill broke clear across, the larger part of it landing in the sea to starboard.

The shock was terrific. Both fore and main top-masts went out of her and trailed alongside in the smother. There was no sound save the thundering crash of the water, but as soon as the men who had saved themselves could move from their places, we tried to save the ship. Hawkson, Gull, Henry, Richards, Jones, Martin, and the rest made their way forward by holding to the pin-rail, and we cut to clear away the foretopmast alongside. All the time the barque was on end, her hatches under water, and the wild, booming snore of the hurricane roaring over her, sending cataracts of water over her t'gallant-rail. By desperate work we led the wreck-

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age forward, and towed it by a heavy line from the port cat-head. This finally had the effect, together with the tarpaulin aft, of pulling her head into the sea, and after a quarter of an hour, every minute of which I expected to see her go under, she began to right herself.

Too exhausted to speak and half-drowned by the seas, we hung on under the shelter of the forecandle until she once more rode safely into it. I looked into the streaming faces of the men, and wondered how many had gone to leeward that day, and then it seemed to me that slaving for wealth might not be any better than I had originally held it to be. Aloft in that gray pall the scud were whirling past, and I found myself thinking of Tim and the cry of the South Sea. A sailor is apt to get superstitious even without reason, and it struck me that there would be little luck aboard the old pirate on this cruise.

When we had a chance to leave, we found that one dago and the little Dane had disappeared from among us, and, as the gale wore down toward evening, there was a sorry picture of a black barque riding the quick sea of the western ocean, her rigging hanging and trailing to leeward from the stumps of her topmasts, and a half-drowned crew holding on to anything they could.

Before morning the hurricane had passed, and

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we were again heading off across the ocean, with a badly wrecked ship and an ugly, demoralized set of men, cursing their luck, the ship, and especially her officers in a manner that spoke of trouble ahead.

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT HAPPENED IN MADEIRA

THE days following that storm were full of labour for all on board the barque. Rigging a jury maintopmast, and securing the yards that had remained fast to the line ahead, and which had acted as a sea anchor or drag and thereby saved us, we made the best of our way to Madeira. The voyage was uneventful and long, owing to our wrecked condition, but it ended at last.

During the days of toil the temper of the men grew worse, and at one time Martin and Anderson began to talk pretty freely in the watch below. Howard tied the Scandinavian up in the rigging, and was about to use even more severe methods, but Hawkson and Hicks prevailed. He was apprised of the murmurings forward by his steward, Watkins, who took care he lost very little of what went on.

Hawkson and Hicks, backed by Mr. Gull and Henry, however, knew that to precipitate trouble

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would ruin whatever prospects the voyage still held, and they made it plain to the trader that his influence was also necessary to curb the captain's temper. Together they held him in check, and we made harbour without coming to desperate measures.

The behaviour of Mr. Curtis after the storm was most peculiar. He prayed very often, and seemed to develop a most pious disposition. This went to the extent of asking permission to have the men mustered on Sundays, so that by standing on the break of the poop he could address and harangue them upon religious matters.

The idea tickled Howard so keenly that he not only agreed to it, but insisted that it should happen twice a week until the men were in better temper. It was being enforced when the towering sides of Pico Ruivo rose above the eastern horizon.

Miss Allen had not been especially impressed by these harangues, and this day joined Hicks upon the poop, while the affair took place. Hicks had been below, but had appeared forward talking confidentially to Martin, and had passed a package which the brawny Scot had taken below very hurriedly just as all hands mustered. When Hicks reached the poop, coming up the cabin companion, we were already standing under the break, lounging in various attitudes of inattention.

I hardly remember what Mr. Curtis said on this

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occasion, but he pointed to the distant mountains and waxed very eloquent. We had seen this land before, but he had not.

“It is the prayers of us poor sinners,” said he, stretching forth his hand, “that has at last saved our barque from storm and calm. We are poor, weak mortals, and must ask for help.”

“Who calls er mon like me er weak mortil, hey?” came a voice from the crowd, and there stood Martin, the empty bottle in hand, his eyes shifty and dangerous.

“I’m a true Christian man, d’ye ken that, an’ if ye dare say I be ither, I’ll wallop ye like er babe.”

Curtis was off the poop in an instant, and there was a mix-up that promised much in the way of diversion, for whatever our preacher lacked, it was not a quick temper. He seized the tipsy Scot by the hair with both hands, and, in spite of the hoots and wallops he received, was making a very fair job of him when Jones and Henry separated them.

Howard stood on the poop and cackled away, enjoying the scene, refusing to do anything to Martin unless Curtis ordered it. This the younger man’s vanity would not permit, and upon the whole it was just as well, for it made the feeling a little less uncomfortable forward, which was a good thing for a vessel going into a harbour where crews might be scarce.

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There was some hesitancy on Hawkson's part about going in with such a large crew, for trading-vessels generally were not heavily manned. It might create enough comment to attract the attention of a man-of-war, and even though our papers might be fixed satisfactorily, a boarding of the barque would be hazardous to a slaving enterprise. At all events, it was decided that Mr. Gull should take a boat's crew and land upon the Desertas, the rocks about a dozen miles to the southward. Here they would kill as many wild goats and hogs as they could, and await the barque's signal before venturing in, bucaning the meat for the voyage back.

We soon anchored in the open roadstead not very far from the beach. The town of Funchal lay before us to the north'ard, its terraces and vineyards rising from the water up the steep sides of the mountains. A very pretty place it was, and in a short time the captain's gig was called away to take him ashore. Richards silently brought the boat to the ladder, and sat stiff and motionless, a regular man-o'-war cockswain. The whole after-guard, except Henry and Watkins, clambered into the boat, Yankee Dan and his daughter accompanied by Hicks and Curtis.

The old trader had been somewhat subdued in spirits during the latter part of the trip across, owing to our loss of gear and the leaky condition of the

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vessel. Now he spoke with his usual spirits, which rose as the distance between him and the shore lessened.

“Sink me!” said he, “if I don’t try to show these dagoes how to drive a trade for them top-masts.”

“I wouldn’t, if you intend staying ashore,” said Hicks.

“Will I stay ashore?” said Miss Allen.

“Until we can ship you to the Continent,” said her father. “It won’t be long before we put you and Curtis aboard some ship for Havre. Then you’ll both be safe.”

I had realized before this that Mr. Curtis was looked to as the fowl who was laying the golden egg for the enterprise, while Dan was to do the trading. His daughter was the principal tie between them, and she was, doubtless, the innocent lever the trader had used to get the younger man interested in slaving. It looked as if there would soon be a marriage.

The girl had nodded to me as I took the stroke oar, and I will admit I felt interested in her future. Whatever Sir John Hicks felt, he kept it well to himself, for he joined the conversation right merrily, although his behaviour toward Mr. Curtis was unnecessarily polite. We rowed swiftly over the swell of the blue roadstead, and ran the boat’s nose

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upon the sand, the light surf splashing into the stern-sheets just enough to cause some scrambling for dry places. Then the boat was surrounded by natives, who plunged into the water regardless of their white breeches, and offered to carry the passengers ashore.

Jones and myself, however, placed a short board for Miss Allen to sit upon, and then raised it to the height of our shoulders with her upon it, bearing her aloft, while she gave a bit of a scream and fastened her fingers in our hair for support. Then we strode ashore to the dry beach above high water, with small regard for the scowling dagoes who failed to earn their silver.

The rest were so busily engaged in getting ashore dry that they failed to note that I seized the little hand upon my head and kissed it fervently, much to Big Jones's delight and the young lady's embarrassment.

"You know what they'd do to you if they knew you were so rude," said she, flushing.

"I've risked death for less pleasure," said I, touching my forehead.

"Then the fool-killer surely was not in the neighbourhood. You forget your position," said she, haughtily.

"I was a mate once," I answered.

"Well, you're not now. If it were not that Sir

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John — I mean, Mr. Curtis would kill you, I should report your insolence.”

“ ’Tis a small deed to die for,” said I, “ and, if I must go, perhaps I had better make my end doubly certain — ”

At this moment Yankee Dan’s voice called, and I turned in time to see him approaching.

Jones, who had walked toward the boat, glanced back uneasily at me, but I touched my forelock, having no cap, and left Miss Allen. The big Welshman did not hear all of our conversation, but, lest he retail part of it to the men, I took the trouble to make it plain to him that such a trick would be reckoned as a great discourtesy to the lady and myself, and that a necessary settlement would therefore take place. Jones, in spite of his size, was a man of keen discernment and not without discretion. He was silent.

As the island was well wooded with fine large trees, it was but a short time before we had our topmasts on the beach ready to take aboard and set up. Jorg took charge of the spars, and we floated them alongside and hoisted them on deck, where he at once set to work upon them. Much of the ironwork from the wreck we had saved, and this shortened the job very considerably. Within a week from the day we dropped anchor, gant-lines were rigged and the new spars sent aloft.

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The backstays were then set up and the t'gallant-masts were sent up, one of these having been saved from the wreck and the other cut ashore.

The work of rigging kept all hands busy day and night, so we saw little of the town of Funchal. We went ashore once to buy a second-hand suit of t'gallantsails and royals, which were to be used as good weather canvas, and have an old maintop-sail recut, but there was little time even for sampling the wines I had heard so much about.

While we lay there, a large American brig came in and anchored near us.

She was evidently a trader by her look, and by her build and rig she appeared very fast and rakish. She flew the American ensign, and I was interested in her. As soon as we had a little respite from rigging, I asked permission to visit the stranger, and, to my surprise, it was granted. Neither Hawkson nor Howard appeared the least interested in the vessel, and had neither received a visit from her captain nor made a visit to him. When Bill, Ernest, Martin, and myself took the small boat that evening and started over to her, Hawkson called me aside.

“Take a peep below hatches if ye get the chance, and see what sort o' guns she carries. Maybe ye'll care to change ships,” said he, with his ugly smile.

As something of this nature had really been find-

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ing place in my mind, I suppose I flushed a bit. I had intended to desert, should the brig clear first, for slaving was no more to my taste now than formerly. From Richards's silent behaviour I felt that I would not have to go alone, and I intended to broach the subject to the bos'n that very night.

“All right,” I answered, with a sinking of spirits I tried to conceal. “I'll search her if I get the chance.”

What Hawkson meant was evident as soon as we came within a half-mile of her to leeward. A most horrible odour, peculiar and penetrating, seemed to come from her. I had never known it before, but Bill stopped rowing at once and turned toward her.

“Niggers,” said he, spitting in disgust.

“Aboard of her?” I asked.

“Not youst now, maybe, but she's been full of niggers more'n once. There's youst a smell left behind, and it never leaves.”

CHAPTER XXI.

THE STRANGE BRIG

WE reached the brig's side, and a surly voice hailed us. "Whatcher want?" it said, in the deep baritone of the typical Yankee bos'n.

"Hoot, ye Yankee," cried Martin, "we've come visitin', d'ye ken that? A-visitin', an', if ye be so hospitable as ye have no reason t' be, we're dommed welcome. If we ain't, I'll ask ye to show us cause why, an' maybe I ken prove ye're wrong by the strength o' logic," and he held up two brawny hands like the paws of a tiger.

"Well, I don't keer to have no drunken louts aboard this here vessel," said the fellow, leaning over the rail so that I could get a glimpse of him. "Ef yer got any money, sing out whatcher want. This here's a honest trading-brig, an' kin give ye all a good nip o' prime American whiskey for a mighty low price."

The man was quite uncommon-looking. He must have stood six feet six, and was as lean as a flag-

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staff. His face was lined and burned, as though used to a tropical sun, and his eyes were faded and yellow.

“Ye be a rare raskil, an’ that’s a fact,” said Martin. “Is there anything ye widna do for the coin? Bide a bit, and let us coom aboard. ’Tis liquor I crave for the sake of me system.”

We ran the dingey alongside and prepared to mount the channels to the deck, but, on looking up, we noticed the long man had not moved or spoken, but had drawn forth a huge horse-pistol, which he poked over the rail.

“Youst hold on a bit with that,” said Bill. “We know you’re a trader all right by the smell o’ yer. We ain’t no men-o’-war’s men, so what’s that got to do with us?”

The tall man looked thoughtfully along the barrel of the weapon, and then put it out of sight. “Wall, come up, then, if ye know the smell so well.”

Thus invited, we quickly made our way aboard, and lost no time in purchasing some of the “good American whiskey,” which turned out to be the worst stuff afloat.

All idea of changing ships left me as I stepped on deck. She was without doubt a slaver, bound out in the same rascally enterprise we were. But, as she carried the American flag, she was free from British men-of-war, and consequently less afraid

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of detection. For, although slaving was now a piracy, no British ship could take her without slaves aboard, and there were only two or three small American cruisers in the South Atlantic, and these were too slow to capture a very fast ship. I wondered why Hawkson allowed us aboard her, knowing well that we were almost sure to tell of our affairs. Then I remembered his request to note her armament and crew.

The latter we found just below the hatches, all armed to the teeth with pistols, cutlasses, and boarding-pikes, awaiting the word of their captain to spring on deck and defend their ship should occasion arise. Our boat was a suspicious object that the long skipper had been watching for some time, and believed there was some game behind our innocent call. The six little guns on each broadside were all loaded, and we found that she would clear just as soon as water could be brought aboard.

After the men — there were twenty-six in all — had put aside their arms and received us as companions, we had the usual sailors' orgy before starting back. Yarns were told, and, if ever there was a crew of unhung rascals, these self-confessed villains would have formed them.

Martin seemed pleased at last to find men who stopped at nothing, and before he left was talking piracy, and begging some of the hardiest to join

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him. He was very drunk, however, and his railings were counted as little, but I knew that he was really speaking, as drunken men often do, from their inmost hearts. One great hulking fellow, with red whiskers, took a little with the scheme, and another man, an Italian sailor, looked a bit queer about the eyes when the Scot talked of gold. The long skipper heard nothing of their ravings, for, after allowing us aboard the vessel, he retired to the cabin, where his mates were waiting to see the outcome of the visit. When they saw we were really only four able-bodied men of a strange barque, their interest appeared to fade away entirely. We finally shoved off, dizzy and sick with the poison imbibed, myself thoroughly disgusted with the slaver's crew, and Martin and Ernest inviting them to a meeting ashore.

Hawkson took me aside when we returned, and asked a few questions. My disgust for my countrymen was too apparent not to be noticed, and the mate evidently thought it safe to trust me now anywhere, for I was allowed ashore again that evening.

Our liberty crews were unique and grotesque. There was little care for desertion, evidently on account of Henry's ability to get the deserters without trouble from any island where access to the mainland could only be had by some large vessel that could be easily seen. And, as we were mongrel

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in the extreme, there was much to be expected from mixture.

Bill declared he should get very drunk at once on the wine he had heard so much about but never had tasted, and Martin declared he would do anything a true Christian sailor might be expected to do. His chum, Anderson, was surly and fierce, on account of his recent ill-treatment aboard, and talked openly of killing any one of our officers he might meet on the beach. Watkins had gone in the captain's gig to attend to getting fresh provisions for the after-guard, and the black Doctor came with us, for it was to be our last run ashore, as we would clear at once. The signal had been set and a gun fired for the crew on the *Desertas*, and all was ready again for our voyage. The goats' and hogs' meat would be ready to be pickled, and would be stowed at sea.

We landed on the beach, and a crowd of the strangely dressed natives offered to pilot us around to see the town of Funchal. The men wore tight knee-breeches, and their thin, bare legs sticking out of enormous boots looked remarkably queer. A pair of them insisted on joining us, in spite of Martin's threat and the Doctor's pugnacity, and, after a scuffle or two, we let them lead the way to town. Our other boats had rowed up.

Hawkson had detained only Jorg and a couple

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of Swedes aboard, and I wondered vaguely if it were well to be so short-handed should a British man-of-war rise above the horizon. I did not know whether or not we could be taken, for, although English built, we were evidently under Yankee Dan's charter. Still there must certainly be considerable treasure aboard, in order to do the trading, and, if searched and captured, there was a strong probability of losing it.

We finally reached the sailors' harbour, that is, a wine-shop, and because I had not forgotten the effects of the last carouse I had in Nassau, I refused to drink. The swinish crew insisted, and the Doctor wished to know why I would not drink with him.

"Disha nigger's as good as any white man, an', if I am a slave, I belong to er man wat's er m-a-an, an' he's done quit drinkin' milk. I never did think much of you nohow, an' I kin lick yo' fur tuppence, dat I kin," said he, advancing and showing his ugly, sharp teeth.

There was no earthly use of starting a fight, and there was little glory in handling a man who was bound by law to submit to the white man's will. I therefore left the crowd and went alone through the town, hoping to see something besides debauch.

I strolled through the quaint streets, attracting more or less attention, and somehow I found myself

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straying in the direction of the inn where Yankee Dan and his daughter were staying. Then I began to feel a bit ashamed of my appearance, for, although I rated a gunner, and therefore a petty officer, I was dressed but little better than an average sailor, and my linen, though put on fresh for the beach, was not what I wished it to be. I soon recognized the place, and looked to see Mr. Curtis around, but he was evidently with the captain and Dan, making a settlement for the spars we had shipped, and fixing the barque's papers.

I caught sight of the flutter of a dress on the broad loggia, and then saw Miss Allen sitting there in the breeze. An unaccountable impulse made me stop and head directly toward her, for she was the only thing that relieved the coarseness and roughness of the life I had led aboard the barque.

"Good evening, Miss Allen," I said, stopping just in front of her.

"Good evening, John," she answered, kindly, as if addressing an old servant, and she smiled and laid aside her book.

The tone disturbed me. Had she shown any interest besides that for a hopelessly familiar chat from a superior point of view, I might have passed on and nothing would have happened. As it was, my spirit rose a bit.

"I am as well as any man can be who is fastened

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to a ship he would like to get clear of," said I, and walked boldly upon the porch where she sat.

"I wonder you can get along anywhere with your amazing impudence," she answered. "Can you tell me what you would have me do to alleviate your suffering? If papa saw you here talking to me like this, I think you would even care less for a voyage with him in *The Gentle Hand*."

"Hang your — I was about to say your father," I answered, "but as this fate is liable to overtake all the men concerned, it would be unwise to tempt Providence. I didn't come here, however, to carry tales to his daughter."

"Will you kindly state just what brought you, then? You are an American, John, and I'm interested in you to that extent."

"That is most kind," I answered, "and I will make it perfectly plain before I leave." Here I drew up a chair, and sat quietly down at a respectful distance. Her eyebrows raised a trifle at this action, and her smile hardened a bit, but I was aroused now and I paid no further attention to mere details.

CHAPTER XXII.

“STAND TO IT!”

“I SUPPOSE,” I said, “that you believe me suffering from sponce swellus.”

“It must be an extraordinary disorder for a sailor,” she answered.

“Translated into nautical language, it means swelling of the frontal bone, producing an ecstatic degree of self-complacency in a hitherto irresponsible mind,” said I, “and it is more often found to exist among young persons, much younger even than I am. I wished to say that my exalted rank on the barque was not such as to produce the disease.”

“I see,” said Miss Allen, raising her eyebrows slightly.

“In that case, I’ll proceed to tell you that slaving is not my chosen vocation, and, if you are unfortunate enough to marry Mr. Curtis, and thus control the sinews of the enterprise, I would like to have the crew diminished by one or two hands, beginning with me.”

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“Did it ever occur to you that the captain might be the person to whom you should make the request,” she answered, smiling a little.

“It did occur to me that he might be the one, but, on considering his peculiar and hasty actions, it occurred later to me that he might not.”

“Well, if you intend to wait until the misfortune overtakes me that you suggest, I’m afraid there is little use of your sublime impudence.”

“If that is really true,” said I, without hardly knowing what I was saying, “I will be content to be slaver, or even pirate, for that matter. If you really don’t intend to —”

“That will do, sir! Be still!” she cried, now aroused. Then she arose from her chair, and, looking like an angry goddess, turned about to face Mr. Curtis, who had stepped out of the house, and who had evidently lost very little of the last part of our conversation.

“Good evening, Miss Allen,” said he. “When you get through talking to that sailor about your private affairs, we might take a little stroll before dark.”

“I hardly feel it necessary under the circumstances,” said the girl.

“You might later on,” said he. His voice was cold, but his eyes held smouldering fires that flashed ominously.

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“Is that a threat?” said she, haughtily, as steps sounded on the gravel walk around the corner of the house.

“No fear,” I snapped out without thinking, and, as I did so, Hicks and Captain Howard swung around the corner and were alongside.

The old pirate stopped and looked at me a moment. “What’s this fellow doing here?” he asked, noting my attitude, which was not of respect to Mr. Curtis.

“I don’t know,” said he; “but if you will kindly lend me your cutlass, I’ll see if he has blood in him.”

The old fellow instantly drew forth the hanger he always carried whenever going ashore, and passed the hilt to Mr. Curtis. Hicks stood near, smiling contemptuously.

The affair began to have a serious look. I could hardly run with honour, and Miss Allen would sooner have cut off her right hand than ask him to withhold the blade.

“Sir John,” she cried, turning to Hicks, “if that man is harmed, you will live to be sorry for it. Heywood,” she said, turning to me, “go about your business.”

“Not while he has that weapon in his hand,” said I, “but if he will lay it aside, and step down on the beach here —” Here he made a pass that would have given me a bad stab had not Hicks

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knocked the thrust aside with his heavy walking-stick, which he now held before him like a sword.

Like a flash, Curtis turned upon him. The cutlass rose and fell like rapid flashes of lightning in the gathering darkness, but each stroke found the thick cane in its path, and Hicks remained unhurt.

Howard burst into a loud guffaw. "Go it, bul-lies!" he cried. "Poke him in the ribs, Curtis! Whang him on the knuckles, Hicks! Stand to it! Stand to it! No flinching!"

Yankee Dan's daughter stood upon the porch, her hands clenched, and her breast heaving with excitement. "Stop them! Oh, do stop them, Heywood," she gasped.

"If he does, I'll stuff his hide for a figurehead," cried Howard, sitting down to fully enjoy the scene. "Any one who stops such pretty play, my dear child, will surely learn trouble. Look at that, an' that!"

Curtis had forced his adversary backward into the road, and several persons came running to see the scuffle. One of these had recklessly tried to seize the cutlass, and had received a couple of good slashes with the blade. The fellow screamed with pain. I started forward, but was instantly ordered back by Captain Howard.

The slight diversion gave Hicks a chance to recover himself from the suddenness of the attack,

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and land a blow upon Curtis's knuckles, which caused him to drop his weapon. Then, in spite of Howard's threats and the struggles of the combatants, they were separated just as Yankee Dan and the main official of the town appeared at the door of the inn, followed by a crowd of servants and sightseers.

"It's a shame your men interfere with such sport," said Captain Howard. "It's an outrage, sir."

Yankee Dan had evidently settled for the repairs on the barque, and the officer's good-will was not held so high as formerly.

"Are you addressing me, sir?" asked the officer.

"I am, sir, I am. It's a d——d outrage the way you allow these rogues to interfere with gentlemen. You owe me an apology for spoiling that sport."

"You'll get something entirely different if you entertain any such peculiar ideas regarding sport," said the official.

"Tut, tut, stow the row!" said Yankee Dan. "Come inside, Rose," he continued to his daughter, and she followed him out of sight.

Hicks came up at that moment and strode through the staring group, and I thought it about time to depart.

Curtis had disappeared, and a fellow handed Captain Howard his cutlass. The old sailor's face re-

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mained as unmarked by passion as a piece of iron, while he called the official names that would have made a dog wince, and he thrust his cutlass back in its scabbard with easy carelessness. Then he called for something to drink, and seated himself comfortably again to enjoy it. I slipped off down the road, and he evidently forgot all about the incident and the part I took in it before I was out of sight. As I reached the landing, where we had left the small boat, I noticed the big man, the skipper of the Yankee trader, directing two of his crew to lift a large box. He apparently did not see me in the gloom of the evening, for it was now getting quite dark, and he ordered his men about in rough tones.

“You, Sile, fling your end aboard, and don’t get them slops wet, whatever you do. That Cap’n Howard don’t want no wet slops a-comin’ aboard his ship. Says he’s paid nine shillin’ sixpence fer them jumpers wot’ll sell fer five shillin’ anywhere outside London docks.”

I approached and stood by, looking on. Suddenly he noticed me.

“Hello, mate,” said he, “be ye a-goin’ aboard yer ship?”

There seemed little use staying ashore.

“Yes, I reckon I will when I get a boat,” I answered.

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“ Well, hop right in there. I’ve got a bit o’ goods fer yer cap’n, and so long as I’ve got tew take ’em aboard, I’ll take ye along with ’em.”

I stepped into the boat, and was followed by four surly cutthroats, who sullenly took up the oars. The captain followed.

“ Shove off!” he growled, and the men sent her clear. Then two natives appeared and clamoured for some payment, following the boat into the water.

“ Get clear, you Guineas!” growled the tall man, giving one a rap over the head with the boat-hook, and the other a sharp crack on the knuckles, where he held the gunwale. This caused them to let go and retreat to the beach, spluttering a string of strange oaths, which the men heeded not the least, but let fall their oars, and in a moment had the boat heading out in the roadstead in the direction of *The Gentle Hand*.

“ I s’pose you uns ain’t goin’ out fer a day or two yet?” said the tall skipper, after he had seated himself in the stern-sheets.

“ I believe we’ll clear to-morrow,” I answered. “ Our crew out on the Desertas must have buccanned enough goat to last half the tribes of the Senegal six months.”

“ This feeding them blamed niggers is the very devil,” said he, seeming to be remarkably communicative for a captain who was talking to a strange

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sailor. "Them coons has ter be kept fat. Just as soon as they begin to pine, they goes almighty fast. Now there's ole Zack Richards, who's too mean to lay out anything except boiled rice. Why, he left a trail o' dead men clean acrost to Cuba, an' there warn't an hour between bodies a-followin' in his wake. You say you're well heeled with grub?"

I told him everything was first-class aboard *The Gentle Hand*.

"Got plenty o' rocks, hey? Plenty o' real money ter back the game, hey? I s'pose they keeps a safe aboard, with iron doors an' regular money lock, under the cabin. Never seen the cash outfit, hey?"

"No," said I; "I'm only the gunner aboard, although I shipped as mate. I never got a chance to see what's aft."

"You're most uncommon clever for a gunner, sink me! but I took ye for first officer, at least. 'Course you've been mate an' master, too, for that matter. I c'u'd see that easy. I was just a-tellin' Sile, when you came over to-day, what a crackin' mate they had on that barque." Here he looked hard at the surly man with the stroke oar, who nodded and spat abundantly over the side to emphasize his corroboration.

"Must be somethin' of a wessel when she has fellers like you below mate's ratin'. She is a good-

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lookin' barque, but I reckon she's pretty old. We'll swing up on the port quarter best, and you can hail the deck. Tell 'em here's a chest o' slops fer Captain Howard wot goes in his cabin. He sent 'em off in this boat, an' I won't charge him nuthin' fer freight."

I bawled for a line, and Hawkson's head appeared over the taffrail.

"Here's a chest for the captain," I said, "it has —"

"It goes in his cabin," said the long man, interrupting. "Them's his instructions."

"What's in it?" asked Hawkson.

"Just common slops," said the long skipper, "though he's paid a shillin' or two more'n them cheap goods is worth. As fer me, I wouldn't vally the whole contents o' that chest ekal to the powder an' lead to blow 'em ter Davy Jones, — an' I don't mind sayin' it loud enough to be heard. He's got a lock on it big an' strong enough ter hold solid gold, an' he's kept the key. Pass a line an' we'll heave it up. I must be goin'. Reckon I'll clear in a couple of hours."

A couple of men dropped a line, which was quickly bent to one of the handles of the chest, and in a few moments it was aboard the barque. The small boat hung alongside for some minutes, while the long skipper swore and cursed at Sile for not hav-

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ing been more careful about the barque's paint, as the chest scratched it a little. Then, hearing the men carrying the affair below, he waved his cigar, which shone in the darkness, and shoved off.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHAT THE CAPTAIN'S CHEST HELD

“You may lower down that signal, Heywood,” said Hawkson, after I had watched the long skipper disappear in the darkness.

Glancing aloft, it was too dark to see what signal he meant, so I hesitated, knowing all our bunting was generally hauled down at sunset.

“That pennant flying from the gaff,” said Hawkson, noting my slowness. “That’s been flying all afternoon for Mr. Gull on the Desertas. Signal agreed on to call him in. We’re bound out to-morrow, but didn’t have to tell the whole island about it.”

I went to the spanker-boom and sought the signal halyard. Then I hauled down the pennant, which I remembered noting during the day, but gave no particular thought. Rolling it up, I started forward to turn in when Hawkson stopped me.

“I wish you would keep a lookout aft there,” said he, “I’m going below and turn in a bit, and

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I want to be called when the old man comes aboard. Get your supper from Heligoland, and then lay aft until the gig comes alongside."

On reaching the forecastle, I noticed Heligoland eye me sharply, then he brought forth a piece of paper folded squarely and sealed on the corners in very fine style.

I wondered at this, for I had not received a note from any one for a long time. Looking askance at the Norwegian, I slowly tore it open, and spread it forth under the forecastle lamp. At first I could make little out of it, for it was a scrawl and somewhat blotted. Then I finally made out the name Richards at the bottom of it, and started in to read it afresh.

"My dear friend Heywood," it went, "when you get this note, I will be off the ship. There won't be any use looking for me until I choose to turn up, but you will see me again before long. I wanted you to go with me, but it couldn't be fixed. If you take care not to get killed, maybe I can help you live a bit longer. PETER RICHARDS."

The letter was somewhat ambiguous, but Richards was something of a scholar, having been a mate and an officer on a man-of-war, so I thought that it was perhaps simply a way he had of saying good-

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bye. I knew he intended to jump the ship, and supposed, of course, he would not think of such a thing without taking me in his confidence. Here he had gone, and he made no excuse, save that it could not be fixed. I swore at him for fully a minute, and then Heligoland asked what it was. As he could not read any language, let alone English, it was safe to tell him the first thing that happened not to bear in any way upon the case. He seemed satisfied.

At eight bells I had eaten a bad meal cooked by the Norwegian sailor left in charge, and betook myself aft to the quarter-deck. The night was quite dark, and the lights on the shore twinkled brightly, sending their reflection streaming seaward over the oily swell that rolled in gently upon the sand. There was little wind, barely enough to feel, and I lounged over the taffrail until I found myself dozing.

It was close to two bells when I was roused by a peculiar sound in the lazarette beneath me. There was a noise as of some one sawing gently, and this was followed by a scraping like that caused by dragging something heavy across the deck.

While I rested half upon the rail, with my eyes fixed upon the lazarette hatch, I became aware of the sound of voices in the water astern, coming from seaward. Soon I distinguished the gentle

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rippling of water from a boat's stem, and heard Mr. Gull's voice tell his men to take in their sail.

"Don't seem to be any one on deck," he growled, surlily, as the boat came under the counter directly beneath me.

"Give me your painter," I said, quietly, reaching over for it, and then, as it was tossed up, taking it forward to the mizzen lanyards, where I proceeded to make it fast.

While 'doing this, I became aware of two men standing on the taffrail, carrying a heavy chest, which they were balancing upon the rail while bending on a line to it. At first I thought they were from the boat alongside, but instantly remembered the height of our quarter above the rail of the small boat, and knew no one could have climbed up so quickly.

"Stand from under," growled one, whose voice sounded very like that of the red-headed villain Martin had taken into his drunken confidence aboard the brig. Then the chest disappeared over the rail, and the other man quickly caught a turn with the line about a belaying-pin, to ease it off. I was now close beside them, and had no difficulty in recognizing the silent one as the Guinea we had met in the brig that morning.

"Over with you!" growled the fellow who had first spoken. "Don't be all night about letting that

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go," and, suiting his action to his words, he sprang upon the rail and dropped over.

"What the blazes is this?" roared Mr. Gull from below, as the chest landed in his boat.

The fellow saw me as he slipped over the rail, and flung his knife at my face, the blade just grazing my cheek. Before I could recover myself, both the men had cleared the side and had dropped below. I rushed to the rail and peered over. Below there were fierce oaths and the sound of a desperate struggle, and in an instant several voices roared out for the watch on deck. Mr. Gull could be heard and dimly seen cursing and grappling with a man who strove to get over the boat's stern into the water, while a black mass of men struggled in the boat's bottom, yelling and cursing wildly in a strenuous combat.

The sudden uproar aroused Hawkson, who came bounding up the companion, with a cutlass in one hand and pistol in the other.

"What's the row?" he bawled, making to the side.

"You may search me," I answered. "Looks like a lot of lunatics below there."

"Shore grog, I reckon. I'll string that Martin up for this, an' give Jones a dozen — Break away there, you blackguards, an' come aboard, or I'll fire into ye," he bellowed, levelling his pistol.

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“Hold on!” I cried. “It’s Mr. Gull and his men.”

“Mr. — what?” he asked, peering over. “Sink me, if it ain’t! What’s the matter below there? D’ye want any help?”

At that moment a shadow shot out of the gloom, and we saw a boat swing quickly alongside of the one already fast to us.

“Now, then, cut loose there,” drawled the voice of the long skipper, and instantly the blackness was streaked with flashes, as the weapons rang out.

Then some of our men began clambering aboard by the painter in the mizzen, while Hawkson roared and fired his pistol at the new boat.

Bawling for men to follow, we slid down the lines still trailing over the stern, but, before we could reach the boat beneath, it was pulled from under us, and then we were left hanging over the black water. By the time Hawkson and I climbed back on deck, the scuffle below had ceased, and the long skipper was bawling out a hoarse farewell from the darkness seaward, and being answered by Mr. Gull from his boat in fitting terms.

When lanterns were brought out, it was seen that several of our men were seriously hurt, and lay upon the pile of provisions in the boat. The chest had disappeared, and was evidently in the possession of the skipper of the Yankee brig. At this,

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Hawkson plunged below, and came up a few minutes later with the news that the barque's treasure-chest was missing, and that she must consequently be made ready for sea at once.

The affair was now perfectly plain. Our men were nearly all ashore, and it was impossible to get them before morning. The long skipper had put a couple of men in the chest, sent them aboard, and they had worked the treasure-chest on deck, mistaking Mr. Gull's boat for their own, which they had evidently arranged to have on hand at the appointed time. But for the last part of the game, everything would have gone quietly. The empty slop-chest, with its large lock, was the only evidence, besides some wounded men, to show that we had been boarded and robbed in the most approved pirate fashion.

We stood about, gazing at the empty chest with its lock, which was put on to guard against inquisitive persons opening it before the men within desired to come out. Forgetting entirely that we were within the sacred precincts of the captain's cabin, Hawkson stood gazing at the affair lying open before him, swearing at the tricky skipper who had so easily hoodwinked him, and apparently lost as to the best method of regaining the chest.

Suddenly the sound of voices came down the companion, and the noise of a boat bumping along-

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side. He sprang to the poop, cutlass in hand, ready to repel boarders, and the rest followed in his wake, all armed now and in a temper for business.

We arrived just in time to meet Captain Howard and Hicks, who climbed up the ladder to starboard, and were on their way aft followed by Watkins, the steward.

Mr. Gull had already started to explain matters, and tell how he had been overpowered, but our formidable appearance caused the old fellow to draw his cutlass and stand on guard.

“What’s this mean? D’ye dare mutiny?” he roared, and it was some moments before Hawkson could explain that mutiny was our last thought, but that our principal desire was to meet the long trader and his crew. I was afraid I would suffer from suspicion in the affair, but Mr. Gull told how he sent me forward with his painter to make it fast in the mizzen, and nothing was said to me about the matter.

“Allen carried most of the specie ashore the day after we came in,” I heard Hicks say to Mr. Gull. “There was nothing of any value in that chest, but, as it’ll be dead calm all night, we’ll have a try at him to-morrow if he’s in sight. He won’t get far, and, if we only had all hands here, we could board him where he lays.”

Howard, after seeing that everything was all

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right aboard, and that Mr. Gull had brought a ton or more of goat meat, went below, while we rove a tackle and unloaded the stuff on deck, the men hurt in the fracas being allowed to turn in.

It was nearly midnight before the rest of us went into the fore-castle, which now somewhat resembled a hospital, and I stretched out in my pew, wondering what would become of Mr. Curtis and Miss Allen if the barque sailed in the morning with our trader aboard.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CAPTAIN SHOWS HIS METTLE

BEFORE the light of the early morning filtered below, we were aroused by the entrance of the liberty crew.

“Youst look at the mess,” cried Bill, staggering down the companion. “Jump below, friend Martin, an’ see the horsepittle they’ve made in this fo’c’sle.”

“Hoot, ye Scandinavian imp, is any one hurt? Mark ye, if there’s any fighting to be done, I’ll do it! Ye ken that? I’ll do it. I’ll do it.” And he followed Bill below, and after him trooped Big Jones, Ernest, and the rest. There was noise enough when we told our yarn of the evening before, and all except Anderson took a peep from the hatch seaward to try and raise the brig, which had cleared during the night. She was out of sight, however, and they came swarming below again, where the surly Swede was thanking the fates the barque had been robbed, and only mourned because none of her officers were killed or wounded.

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Jennings and Jorg, the Finn, were about the only men who had received no hurt from the fracas, except myself. Even Heligoland had received a bad scratch from a stray bullet, and all of Gull's crew were more or less bruised and banged about by the villains. One of the boat's crew took a crack over the head that had put him out for many minutes, and another a stab from a knife that rendered his hand useless for the time being. Owing to the darkness, no one had received a bullet from the long skipper's fire.

Before we had time to speculate upon what we would do, Hawkson's voice bawled out for all hands, and Henry appeared at the hatch.

We turned out and saw smoke flying from the galley-pipe, and heard the voice of the Doctor singing off the effects of shore grog while he hustled the breakfast. In a few minutes we had eaten, and were manning the windlass to heave short.

There was a gentle breeze blowing, and the top-sails were loosened, the canvas falling from the yards and hanging hauled up at the clews, ready to sheet home at the word. Far away seaward, the Desertas — the barren rocks infested only by wild goats — stood out sharply against the southern sky. Nothing white like a royal, however, broke the line of blue, and it was evident that our friend, the brig, had made a good offing during the night, in spite

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of the lack of wind. While Jim and Tom, our two Liverpool cockneys, squeaked out a song, to which Gus and Ernest added their guttural grunts, the starboard watch hove on the windlass brakes, and began to take the slack out of our cable. Before we had taken twenty feet, however, we noticed a boat coming from the shore, and soon recognized Yankee Dan, the trader. In a few minutes he was alongside bawling for Captain Howard. Then he climbed over the side, and, without stopping to pay his fare, started aft.

“It’s a nice mess he’s made ashore,” he said, as Hawkson appeared on the poop. “Don’t he know he’ll have to fight? What’s he afraid of, anyway?”

“Who?” asked the mate.

“The old man, of course. Who else? Hasn’t he insulted that Guinea officer ashore there? Don’t he know he’s playing mighty strange, not showin’ up when time’s called? Where is he?”

“Below,” said Hawkson, “but he’ll be on deck if he hears you, fast enough. What’s the trouble?”

I had reached the starboard quarter gun by this time, and saw a smooth poll, like the knob of a door, poked up the companion.

“Who’s making that racket?” growled a voice, and Howard’s face appeared over the coamings.

“Ain’t you goin’ to meet your man?” bawled the trader.

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“What man, you nigger-thief?” growled Howard.

“I’ll settle with you afterward,” said the trader, coming close to him. “You better attend to one quarrel at a time. Are you goin’ to fight or not? You know the man well enough, the officer you insulted yesterday.”

“Where is he?” growled the old villain.

“On the beach, waitin’ for you. Are ye blind?”

“That’ll do the anchor. Get the small boat ready,” said he to the mate. “I reckon we’ll wait a bit and see what’s up ashore.”

In a moment after, he had disappeared down the companion. Howard came stiffly on deck again, buckling on a cutlass. His face expressed nothing, and, as he went toward the gangway, he called for his steward to bring him a glass of grog. The effect of this was instantaneous.

He limbered up, and, as Holmberg, Bill, and myself brought the boat to the steps, he was pacing fore and aft, cursing at our delay.

“I’ll have my breakfast when I come back,” he growled to Watkins. “No fear, I’ll take the stiffness out of somebody.”

Then he climbed down the side ladder and sprang into the boat, followed by Yankee Dan.

“Shove off!” he growled. Then he turned to the trader. “Where’s this fracas to be, and what’s

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it about? What am I fighting for, you nigger-thief?" And he broke into a high, cackling laugh, while his face hardly changed in expression, his fishy eyes roving in their gaze toward the beach.

We gave way with a will, and were out of hailing distance of the barque before Hicks appeared on deck. I could see him waving, but, as the captain sat with his back facing aft steering, I thought it was little use to call his attention to the matter.

We were heading, under the trader's guidance, to a spot on the shore out of sight of the town, and in a little cove where there was no surf from the heave of the swell. Here the craft was beached, and we sprang out to drag her up. Then the trader and our skipper stepped ashore. Out from a thicket of laurel sprang a trio of men, all wearing the Portuguese uniform, and then I recognized one of them as the dago officer who had been talking to the trader the evening before, and whom our old captain had cursed so villainously. Under the arm of a younger man was a bunch of swords, such as were used at the time for fencing in the army, — little long, thin blades of the rapier pattern, and sharp as needles.

"Sorry to have kept you folks waitin' so long," said Yankee Dan, "but the old man had overslept himself. I reckon he'll fight fast enough. We're ready when you say the word."

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The younger officer passed him the hilts of a couple of rapiers, and politely begged that he try their temper and make a choice.

While he did so, our old skipper tossed aside his coat, and stood forth in a none too clean shirt and flowing trousers, held up by a broad leathern sword-belt. This he began to unbuckle unconcernedly, and, as he finished, he wrapped it around the scabbard of his hanger and drew forth the blade.

“I haven’t much time to waste on these Guineas,” said he, breaking into a sudden cackling laugh which ended abruptly. His face wore the same mahogany mask-like look it always presented, and his eyes were lustreless and fixed as those of a dead mackerel. “If there’s any game goin’, let it start, for we’ve a job in the offing to attend to.”

“Here,” said the trader, presenting him the hilt of a rapier he had chosen, “drop that meat-axe and bear a hand. We’ll settle our little affair later.”

“I’ll settle you, if you don’t sheer off,” growled Howard. “If the dago wants to fence, let him come in. This is the sword for me, and, if he’s finky about it, I’ll chase him clean up his chimney before he’ll get clear of it.”

Yankee Dan threw down his sword in disgust.

“Don’t let him worry on my account,” said the officer, in good English. “Let him keep whatever

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weapon he chooses. Perhaps he would like to have a pistol also."

It seemed strange that the officer, who was a high official not far below the governor himself, should want to fight a duel with a man like Howard. He evidently intended to kill him, for he took no pains to hinder his clearing with his ship, and appeared eager to come to a personal settlement.

A line was drawn across the sand, and the two combatants advanced to it, the officer not above middle age and graceful, his sword held in proper manner before him and his feet set at the right distance apart, while his left hand he held poised at a level with his shoulder in the rear.

Howard grasped his scabbard in his left hand, with its belt wrapped about it, and, holding it high above him, advanced his cutlass's point, and proceeded to work with no more concern than if he were prodding a lazy sailor.

The sun had risen, and the sea was a beautiful blue offshore, the gentle rippling along the beach sounding musically. The breeze just rustled the foliage overhead, and made a low, continuous clicking which blended with the sound of the steel. The air was warm, but fresh with the odour of the sea, and the two men facing each other felt its bracing influences, for they were hard at it in an instant,

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the old skipper breaking forth into a high, cackling laugh, as he swung his weapon with marvellous quickness. It was evidently great sport for him, and he was enjoying it.

The dago's glinting black eyes shone fiercely as he thrust and lunged, with the black lust of murder in his heart, determined to rid the world of a villain. He was an expert swordsman, and accounted Howard a dead rascal. But the ways of Providence are strange. It won't do to trust that the wicked will be punished and the good go unscathed. The ways of the Almighty Power are inscrutable, and to dictate a policy against crime, with oneself as the avenger, is a dangerous undertaking. The Almighty has a way of his own for dealing with all things, and the fallible human being is not consulted with a view to proving who or which is best.

The very confidence of the officer made me nervous. His fierce smile seemed to hold contempt and disdain for his antagonist, who, with his old scabbard held high in rear, ambled about the sandy shore like some old reptile, the perspiration starting out on the top of his bald poll and running down his expressionless face in little streams.

Once he was pricked sorely in the side, but the old fellow only laughed in his high, cackling voice, and swung his cutlass with renewed vigour.

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Four, five, ten minutes passed, and the conflict waxed hotter and the men began to breathe heavily. The officer's face was pale and calm with a fixed resolution. His breath came in sharp, rasping jerks, but his eye was bright and watchful, and he was much lighter and quicker on his feet.

Suddenly he lunged out and pressed the old man fiercely. Howard's scabbard sank lower and lower behind him until he let it trail upon the ground. He was getting tired, though his face showed nothing. The officer stabbed him badly in the arm, and there was a look in his eyes that told of the finish. With a movement quick as lightning, the sailor transferred his sword to his left hand, and came on with his fresh wrist, working with the precision of the trained fencer.

Then the old man stopped, stepped back a pace, evidently thoroughly blown with the exertion. It looked like the end now, and I began to feel sorry for him, standing there to be spitted by the implacable dago.

"To the death," hissed the officer in good English, and lunged out with a vigour that seemed to defy a parry.

It seemed to me his sword must go half a fathom beyond the old man's body, and I gave a little exclamation of sympathy. Then something strange happened. Howard dropped his point and jerked

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his sword backward. It sheered off the thrust to starboard, and, before the officer could recover, the cutlass rose and fell like a flash in the sunshine. The blade landed fairly on his antagonist's head, and down he went on the sand like a poleaxed bullock, while Howard broke forth into his cackling laugh, and wiped his forehead with his sleeve. Then he turned and strode toward the boat, where Bill held his coat and hat. The rest crowded around the wounded man, and cried out in excited tones.

"Shove her off," growled our captain; "he isn't hurt much, but it's too hot for this kind of play. He, he, he! I'd a good notion to break his head, Dan, he looked so wicked, hey! 'Twouldn't do to hurt one of those fellows if we want to come again. He'll be all right in a week. Hi, hi, hi! but he hated me right fairly, hey?"

"I'll call it quits," said Yankee Dan, smiling, as he climbed aboard. We shoved off, and were soon on our way to *The Gentle Hand*.

As we sent the craft sheering through the clear water, I had a chance to look shoreward, for I faced aft with the stroke oar. Upon the yellow sand several forms now moved in a body, and, as they opened a bit, I saw the wounded officer walking away leaning upon the arm of his young comrade.

"Hi, hi, hi!" cackled Howard, "what an appe-

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tite a little play gives one, hey? Would you like to try your hand, you man-eater, to-morrow?"

"I'm no butcher; the pistol is good enough for me," said Yankee Dan.

CHAPTER XXV.

WE HEAR OF LONG TOM

IN less than half an hour we were back again aboard, and as the trader clambered over the side, he was greeted by his daughter. He was evidently surprised, for he threw his head back until his beard, sticking upward from his throat beneath his collar, stood out straight in a most aggressive manner. It evidently had its effect on the young lady's spirits.

"You don't seem overpleased to have me here again," she said before he had spoken.

Yankee Dan gave a loud grunt of protest.

"Are you going clear to the coast, and be aboard when we take 'em on, hey?" said he, with a show of sarcasm in his harsh voice.

"I'm going with you, and you may put me ashore with Aunt Mary at St. Helena, or on board some vessel bound for New York, so I can get to Uncle Henry's. I'm not going to stay ashore here," she answered.

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Then the father turned away; the interview ended as Hawkson came up.

Fearing trouble for the vessel in her dismasted condition when she arrived, her treasure had been removed ashore, so that in case some prying man-of-war should happen to take charge on suspicion, it would be safe. This alone saved the enterprise from failure that morning, but, when the story of the brig's rascally skipper had been related to the trader, he instantly started ashore with Mr. Gull and a couple of men, to get the gold at once from Mr. Curtis, in order that there might be no delay in getting to sea and overhauling the brig, if only to give him a lesson in trading etiquette. At this time slave-traders were not overscrupulous in their dealing, and among themselves were little better than pirates, for they would seldom hesitate to overhaul or rob each other, knowing that the slaver robbed could get no redress without admitting guilt of similar transactions.

By the time he returned, the barque was hove short, and her sails ready to sheet home, and the young lady, who had already gone below to her cabin, was not given much thought by either her father or the old skipper. As the boat drew up alongside, I noticed Mr. Curtis aboard, but he took no thought of me as he came on deck. In an instant we had hooked the boat on and whisked her

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on deck, and in less than five minutes we were starting out to sea before a light westerly breeze that sent us along about five knots.

I cleared the guns and loaded them all, and then a man was sent aloft to keep a lookout for a sail, which we all hoped might be the Yankee brig. We were on our course for the African coast, but might alter it if occasion offered.

The old barque sailed well with her new topmasts, and, if anything, she showed a bit faster, as her main was now a foot higher and her new-cut topsail a little deeper. Much of her fine gear was gone, but what we had purchased in Funchal was of the best quality, and we had lines enough to rig another ship. Altogether she made a good showing, and even Mr. Gull's crew, who had eaten much goat meat, and in consequence were in prime condition, were not sorry to get back aboard her.

All day we held to the southward over an almost glassy ocean, ruffled here and there by the falling breeze, and by sunset we were rewarded by Big Jones's yell from the foretop: "Sail dead ahead, sir."

We were going too slow to tell just what the vessel might be before dark. Her royals were showing white on the clear blue line, and the sun went down before even her topsails rose above the horizon. The white of her cloth, however, gave us

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some hope, for Americans used white canvas, and the brig could not be very far ahead of us, and undoubtedly bound on the same course.

It was calm all night, but somehow the barque slid along, and by daylight the fellow ahead could be made out plainly not over three miles distant. It was the brig, and the long skipper was evidently not much disturbed at our approach, for he took in his after stunsails and wallowed along slowly over the smooth swell.

We were through breakfast before we knew anything of Howard's plans, although there had been much speculation among the men forward, some, who had suffered in the fracas the evening before, being especially anxious to try conclusions with the men who had inadvertently dropped the chest and themselves on top of them and their goat meat in the small boat.

Gus, a stout Swede, and Pat, a heavy-built little Irishman, showed bandaged arms which they wished avenged, and Jennings, a Dutchman, who was a good sailor, poked his swathed head over the rail and swore an unintelligible oath at the Yankee. Hawkson stood upon the poop and watched the brig steadily, until Hicks and Howard came from below.

"Will he fight?" asked Hicks, coming to the old mate's side.

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“Did you ever see a Yankee sailor that wouldn’t?” said Hawkson. “No fear! You’ll see all the fighting you want, if we come in range, — an’ we’re mighty near that now.”

“We’ll take him before eight bells,” said Howard, without interest, as though it were a thing he did every day. “Get the small arms ready, and stand by.”

We were nearing the brig, although only going about three knots an hour, and when within about a mile of her, a puff of white flew from her star-board quarter, and in a few moments later a six-pound shot landed with a loud bang against our side, and smashed through into the ’tween-decks, drowning the faint boom of the gun with its slamming around below.

“He, he, he!” laughed Howard, his ugly mouth showing barely a trace of amusement. “He means fight without any talk. That’s plain enough. Suppose you pop him one or two, just to try the range.”

Hawkson stepped down on the main-deck and went to a forward gun.

“Keep her off a couple of points,” he bawled to Henry, and, as the barque yawed a little, he fired.

We watched to see the shot strike, and saw a jet of water thrown against the brig’s side, telling plainly that the ball had struck at or below the water-line. Several men cheered, but behind me

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I heard a fierce oath. Turning, I saw Martin glaring savagely at Hawkson, while near him stood Anderson with a scowl on his face. Even as I looked in surprise, the wily Scot caught my eye, and his look changed.

“ ’Tis a pity it didn’t hit him and cut his mast out. Ye may ken it’s far better to knock out a spar in a chase,” said he to me, in a low voice that Hawkson could not hear. His tone was not natural, however, and I wondered at him for some time afterward, and thought of the possible ways the long skipper could have heard of the barque’s treasure-chest in the lazarette that he had run off with so handily. We were soon busy firing the guns of the port broadside as fast as we could serve them at the enemy, now well within range.

Shot were striking the barque often, for the Yankee was making excellent practice with his light guns, but no one had been injured aboard. This being cut up did not suit Howard. He valued the old vessel too highly to have her hurt badly, and knew also the difficulty of repairing old timbers.

“ Let her head up half a point,” said he, and we were soon dead astern of the brig and creeping up toward her, our own guns unable to fire, and receiving only the fire of one little six-pounder they brought on the poop. This single gun made havoc with our sails, hitting them time and again, and

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tearing our outer jib so badly that it was useless. We drew closer, and suddenly the Yankee ceased firing. We were very close to him now, and the long skipper could be easily seen leaning indolently upon the poop-rail, watching us with apparent unconcern.

Hawkson took up a speaking-trumpet and bawled out.

“Heave that vessel to, or we’ll sink you,” he roared.

The long captain put his hand to his ear, as if unable to understand, and the hail was repeated.

“I can’t heave her to,” drawled the fellow. “There’s too many men aboard her, an’ they won’t let me.”

Yankee Dan now came from below, where he had taken his daughter for protection, and gazed at the brig.

“It’s Long Tom Shannon,” said he, “and it would have been a lot better if we hadn’t come up with him. It’s strange you didn’t know him, the worst rascal on the coast.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

WE REPEL BOARDERS

THERE was no one in sight aboard the brig save the skipper and the man at the wheel, but we knew she had a full crew. The barque hauled up rapidly, even while the mate and skipper spoke, and we stood at the port guns, ready to let loose a broad-side that would finish our enemy.

“Hard aport,” came the order, and we expected to swing quickly to starboard, and thus bring each gun to bear at close range, our heavier battery of twelve-pounders being sufficient to cripple any vessel the size of the brig, who, with her little six-pounders, could hardly hope for escape.

Some one, I think it must have been Martin, let fly the jib-sheet as a little air filled it, and prevented our paying off rapidly, and, as we went, we had the satisfaction of seeing the brig port his helm also, and swing up ahead of us, while he opened again with his gun on the poop. Hawkson saw the mistake, or trick, whichever it was, with the head-sheet,

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and, roaring out orders to flatten it in, he sprang down upon the main-deck, followed by Gull and Henry, and rushed forward to the braces.

A shot from the brig's six-pounder struck Pete, a dago, and cut him almost in half, flinging him bodily upon Anderson, both going into the starboard scuppers in a heap. Then, before the long Yankee captain realized what we were about, we had braced sharp on the starboard tack forward, and he, thinking we would haul up to bring our battery to bear, came up into the wind, and, falling off, drifted down upon us until it was certain we would be alongside in a few minutes.

"Tumble up here, ye bullies," he cried, in his drawling tones, and, as he spoke, his men came bounding from below, rushing for the starboard fore-rigging, to come aboard us the instant the vessels fouled. Luckily the battery was loaded, and in an instant Hawkson was at the guns with Gull, Henry, and myself, bawling for men to leave the main-braces and lend a hand, while Howard himself rolled the wheel hard up again.

The brig fell off until her jib-boom came across the poop, where Hicks and a couple of men tried to bear it off astern. They only partly succeeded, but they managed to keep it clear of the backstays and prevent fouling, while the brig's crew fired several shot into us, getting in return our four heavy

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twelves, that did some execution among them, several men falling upon the deck at the discharge. Howard jumped forward on the poop, calling for men to repel boarders, and, after firing the last gun, we swarmed up the poop-ladder to check the piratical-looking crew that had now left everything on the brig's deck, and was climbing into her chains, armed with cutlass and pistol, for a spring aboard us.

The long skipper balanced himself on the fore sheer-pole, with his cutlass swinging in his hand and a belt stuck full of pistols. In an instant he gave a yell for his men to follow, and sprang with the ease of a cat upon our poop-rail, right among us. It was a long jump, and only possible for a man of great length of limb.

"Come on, Brannigan," he drawled out to his mate, making a slash at Howard's bare poll, but the old skipper warded off the blow, while we rushed in upon him. Then we were favoured by a most singular turn of fortune, aided by Hawkson's skill.

A lively little puff of wind filled our spreading canvas and shoved the barque ahead. Before the brig could quite reach us, we had drawn a couple of fathoms clear. One fellow threw a grappling-hook over our rail, but Bill cut the line. Hawkson jumped for the forebrace, calling for men to follow, and, before the brig's crew realized it, we had ex-

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tended the couple of fathoms into a dozen, and were slipping along before the light breeze very handsomely indeed.

In vain did the Yankee crew fire at us with their small arms. Not a soul was hit, and, while their helmsman rolled the wheel up to follow in our wake, I trained the heavy stern-chasers upon him, and sent a couple of shots through his foresail, which rendered that piece of canvas worse than useless. While these affairs were taking place, Shannon was having a lively time of it on our poop. He sprang away from the first rush upon him, but so covered our men that his own could not deliver an effective shot without danger of killing their leader. He bawled lustily for his mate, Brannigan, and, being so hard pressed, he could not turn to see what had happened, wondering why he had been so suddenly deserted.

Then he heard shouting recede astern, and, as he listened to Mr. Brannigan's tongue expressing the grossest possible encomiums upon us, he realized the game was up. He sprang backward a space and turned to clear the rail, preferring to take his chances swimming back to his vessel than to accept our hospitality. At this instant, however, Yankee Dan sprang upon him from behind and clasped him firmly around the legs, at the same time calling for some one to bring a lashing to make him fast. The

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plucky trader would have had a hard time of it but for Henry. Shannon tore him clear, and was about to heave him over the side also, when the ferret-faced man, with a bound like a monkey, fastened those terrible fingers of his into Shannon's throat. It was useless to try to shake him off, for well I knew the fatal strength of his grip. We let him hold on while we passed a line about the struggling man, hoping we would get him fast before the strangle would kill.

The long man's struggles were terrific. Twice he flung Gull and myself from him, giving Yankee Dan a kick that shot him clear across the deck, and landed him helpless to leeward. Big Jones alone managed to keep his hold beside Henry, and I heard the high, cackling laugh of old Howard enjoying the struggle. Up and down, sometimes all in a tangle, we rolled over and over that poop, Shannon gradually getting blue in the face and weakening under that horrible grip. But he was an American, and fought with the steadiness of a man who was used to taking trouble lightly. Finally we drew the line close about him, pinning his arms to his sides, and then passed a gasket over his ankles. Then Henry let go, but the want of air had done its work, and the long fellow lay limp as a rag. We stood up, gasping for breath from our exertions, and then Howard's high cackle sounded upon our ears.

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“Hi, hi, hi! don’t kill him. Throw a bucket of water over the fellow,” he cried. “We want that man. We need that long rascal.”

Ernest started to get a draw-bucket, but, before he left the poop, Watkins came from below with a bottle of spirits, and, running to the long skipper, raised his head and poured a little into his mouth. This nearly finished Henry’s work, but, instead of choking to death, Shannon gave a gasp and choke, blowing the liquor out of his mouth.

At this instant a shot from the brig struck the deck close to Watkins, ripping a great rent in the white planks, and driving a cloud of splinters among us. One of these long pieces of pine struck the old steward in the middle of the back. It drove clear through his body, and came out several inches in front, piercing him through and through. He gave a sharp scream, dropped the bottle, and rose to his feet with staring eyes. Then he drew forth a pistol and pointed it at my head. Before he could pull the trigger, he staggered and fell, the weapon exploding harmlessly, and when we reached him he was dead.

Howard came to where he lay, and gazed down upon him for an instant, while Gull, Hawkson, and the rest went at the long stern-chasers, and opened fire again upon the brig, which was still within close range. I stood but a moment gazing at the old

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steward, with somewhat mixed feelings in regard to him, and, as Howard ordered a couple of men to carry him below, I joined the rest at the guns.

We now delivered such a heavy and accurate fire upon the pirate slaver that it soon silenced him, and in half an hour we were well out of range, leaving him with his foremast over the side and several of his numerous crew killed and wounded.

We had lost two men, Pete, the dago, and Watkins, the steward, while a fellow named Guinea was badly wounded in the leg, and a German sailor, named Johns, had received a bullet through the arm. Altogether a heavy loss for a vessel without a fighting crew. We had had a narrow escape from being boarded by a stronger force, and, while I knew we would have given a good account of ourselves, our officers showed good judgment in not engaging too closely a force of Americans with our mongrel crowd. The brig was at our mercy before we finished, but there was nothing to be gained by taking her, and Howard seemed more than satisfied in having taken her skipper. I expected him to lay the barque across the brig's bow, and fire at her until she sank, but instead he kept straight away on his course, without thought of revenge further than the chastisement already administered.

As we loaded the guns for the last time, holding

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the fire in reserve, a voice broke upon our ears that had grown familiar of late.

“I wanter know! I wanter know! What the devil has happened around here, anyway?” it drawled. “Am I a soger, an’ this here a battle-field covered with blood and glory, or am I on a stinking slave-ship? That’s what’s worryin’ me.”

And then Shannon proceeded to pronounce the grossest possible things upon us.

CHAPTER XXVII.

OUR CAPTAIN

CAPTAIN SHANNON had recovered and had tried to rise into a sitting position, but the lines upon him were none too softly drawn, and he found himself stiff as a mummy, being lashed from above his able elbows to his long and pointed shoes.

Mr. Curtis, who had arrived on deck in time to take part in the fracas, now insisted that our captive be set free on the promise that he would not attempt to either make further disturbances or go overboard.

“Disturbance! I wanter know,” said Shannon, “who’s the one makin’ the ‘disturbance? Here I just politely hopped aboard your ole barque, an’ some gorilla in breeches nabs me by the mizzen and jest naturally stops my bazoo. Why didn’t ye finish the job instead o’ bringing me to again to swing me at your yard-arm.”

“We don’t intend to swing you,” said Curtis.

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“If you behave yourself, we’ll promise not to harm you until — until —”

“Until what, I want to know?” said Shannon.

It was evident that Mr. Curtis had meant to say that he would deliver him over to the authorities of law and order at the first port touched, but, upon consideration, this seemed manifestly absurd. *The Gentle Hand* was not hunting authorities for law and order just at the time, and the matter must necessarily be settled by the parties interested, which, after all, is considered not unfair by most human beings who do not care to bother their neighbours with their personal affairs.

While this was taking place, Miss Allen, who had remained below to escape injury during the engagement, now appeared on deck, and instantly noticed the captive. She gazed at him in astonishment, and asked how he came aboard.

He seemed as much surprised at seeing a woman aboard a slaver as if she had been a naval officer in uniform. As he solemnly swore that he would not fight any more, his lashings were cast adrift below his waist, and he was raised to his feet.

“Well, I want to know,” was his first comment, as he stood looking at the trader’s daughter. “Be you goin’ to make the middle passage, miss?”

The “middle passage” was that from the slave coast, with human freight, to the point of destina-

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tion of the slave, and the term was used to distinguish that part of the voyage from the one out and the return. The term was American, but applied as well to British ships, who, like ourselves, sailed first out of some English port. Miss Allen smiled at the long fellow and looked into his faded yellow eyes, but she disdained to answer him, and he was hustled forward by several men, while he broke forth afresh in a low tone, pouring a stream of the foulest invective upon them in the easy and indolent manner that was characteristic of his speech.

During the following fortnight we made good way to the southward, passing the high peak of Teneriffe the third day out of Funchal, leaving it a dark cloud upon the eastern horizon. We held our course now closer in toward the coast, but still distant enough to be offshore from any cruiser that might be watching for slave-ships.

Then we crossed the line and stood in through the Guinea Current for the Gulf, heading straight for the Bight of Benin.

Our captive had by this time given abundant evidence that he could be trusted about the decks without danger of his trying to escape. In fact, he appeared to take a fancy to *The Gentle Hand*.

Martin, who appeared drawn to the fellow, several times announced that it was a shame to keep his hands in irons, and, after repeating this to Henry

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and Mr. Gull for some days, it reached Hawkson and the captain.

We were now three men short in the crew, and an extra man, especially of Shannon's build and energy, was a matter to be considered. The mate held out strenuously for either putting the long fellow ashore or hanging him forthwith, but, as Curtis, Hicks, and the rest were absolutely set against such a measure as capital punishment, and the land was some distance off, the inevitable took place. That is, Shannon was practically shanghaied into the ship, but chose to sign articles of his own free will to become a member of her crew, and was regularly installed.

His great delight was to dwell humourously upon the adventure of the treasure-box in Funchal, telling at some length how Brannigan, his mate, who had come aboard in the chest, had dropped right upon Jennings, the Dutch sailor's back, when he went over the side. This accounted for the state of Jennings's head, for the skipper assured us that Mr. Brannigan was a man of parts, and could do up a whole ship full of square-heads. He explained how angry he had become at the mistake he had made in taking Mr. Gull's boat for the one meant for him, and how he had thrashed each member of the boat's crew for not pulling harder and getting under the stern half a minute sooner. The

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only thing that prevented our capture in the last encounter was the fact that Brannigan had failed to jump aboard, but if he had, the two of them could easily have taken the barque.

While we had some doubts about the last statement, we were entertained to a high degree, and Shannon became rapidly a favourite. More especially as we had already had some evidence of his prowess, and a look from his faded eyes following a drawling request for tobacco or other commodity had the usual effect of producing considerable attention from the person addressed. His arms, of course, had been delivered aft, but he had a way of gazing at one that made a person feel that his good-will was of the utmost value. Martin was his devoted companion, and Anderson, who had been badly bruised and stunned by the shot that had killed Pete, even forgave the damage and appeared much more friendly than we had reason to expect. Bill and I had several talks over the Scot's peculiar manner with the stranger, and we became more friendly and confidential over the subject. Big Jones kept his own counsel, and seemed to admire the long limbs of the Yankee skipper, yet did not care too much for his company.

Jorg, with a gang of helpers consisting of Tom and Tim, two Liverpool dock-rats of the other watch, and Ernest and Heligoland, kept hard at

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work repairing the damage done us by the brig's six-pounders, and were hardly finished by the time we sighted the low coast near Lagos.

The haze which hangs over the surf in the Guinea Gulf hides the land until a vessel is almost upon it. We were close in, and could hear the dull thunder of the swell falling upon the sand before we realized that the run was over, and the work of trading and capturing human beings would begin.

No time was lost after we came to soundings. The boats were made ready and the anchors gotten over the bows, while the topsails, though clewed up, were left hanging ready to sheet home at a moment's warning. A man was posted in the fore-top all day, and everything done to prevent a surprise of some prowling man-of-war. Even Hawkson showed signs of peculiar alertness, and his nervousness, though slight, was quickly transmitted to both Gull and Henry.

Only old Howard seemed impervious to the excitement, and ambled about the poop unconcernedly, watching the shore until we had reached the mouth of a low, marshy river.

The breeze was off the land, and the barque was hove to, while the small boat was manned and sent in with Yankee Dan and Hicks to see if there were any negroes to be procured.

I managed to pull stroke oar, and went more to

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see how the business was to be conducted than anything else. We had half a dozen muskets in the boat, with powder and lead, to use in defence, if necessary, or in trade if possible. Yankee Dan was so nervous that Hicks insisted on taking the tiller as we headed for the beach, and he picked up a loaded gun and laid it handy upon the stern-sheets in case of emergency.

The breeze being light and offshore, the heat of the equatorial sun was intense. It was about nine o'clock in the morning when the barque stood in, and it was nearly eight bells now, the sun being at its height, and the sky a brazen dome of heat above us.

It took quite half an hour to pull in, for the shore was really several miles distant, and by the time we neared the huge white combers rolling in upon the sand, we were so hot that under other conditions an upset in the breakers would have been welcomed by all hands.

As it was, we skirted the shore just outside the lift of the outer breaker, and soon found an opening over the bar at the river mouth. Hicks headed in through this opening, regardless of consequences, and we were soon carried by the current well in behind the southern point of sand. Here we found the marshy banks of the river stretching away inland, and upon one just behind a little rise covered

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with low trees, we saw the slave factory, as the pens were called where the unfortunates were corralled.

There was not a sign of life anywhere, and the only sound that broke the glaring stillness was the deep-toned roar of the surf outside.

Suddenly there was a sharp "ping," and a crack upon the boat's gunwale, followed by the report of a rifle.

"Way enough," said Hicks, calmly. And we rested on our oars, with our chins on our shoulders, trying to see who had welcomed us so cordially.

Yankee Dan stood up and waved his hat from side to side, in token of friendship, and almost instantly a man strode out from the palisade, now but fifty fathoms distant.

"Stop that firing and come aboard," bawled the trader.

"Give way together," said Hicks, and we sent the boat rapidly toward the beach, and ran her nose high and dry on the sand.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MY FIRST GLIMPSE OF SLAVERY

A HEAVY-BUILT, squat Guinea, as the Portuguese here are called, greeted us as we sprang ashore. He was a villainous-looking scoundrel, and his rifle and knife did little to improve his formidable appearance. His white teeth showed in an ugly smile, as he explained in broken English that we had been mistaken for the boat of a British cruiser that had been lately on the coast, and he had fired at us accordingly.

Hicks was not ready to believe his lie, and, had it not been for the trader, would undoubtedly have pistoled him where he stood, but Dan was used to the tricks of the pirates, and knew better than to show his feelings. Several rascally black men armed with rifles now came from the palisade, and we seized our rifles from the boat to be ready for any tricks. The Guinea, however, only grinned and shrugged his shoulders, and invited us to his place to consider business. His followers, dressed

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only in gee-strings and ammunition-belts, laid aside their arms in token of friendship, and thus reassured we filed into the enclosure.

If I had at any time doubted my distaste for the life I was leading, there could have been no chance for such a thing after entering that "factory" where slaves were made. Of all the horrible places on earth, save perhaps the hold of the overdue slaver at the end of the middle passage, that filthy den was the most awful. In the mire made by their own dung, like a lot of hogs, the cursed sons of Ham lay or stood in the fierce sunshine, awaiting the coming of some pirates like ourselves to take them to a foreign land, and sell them into comparative comfort and luxury to work for their white masters. Ugly they were in the extreme, their black, brutish faces having nothing more human about them than those of apes, but even monkeys should be shown some consideration if they would be made to live. Women with infants were kept in a separate pen, but the older ones were thrown in with the men, without a vestige of clothing, not even a clout or gee-string. The younger girls the Guinea kept in his own house, having over fifty that he formed into a seraglio for himself and guards.

Yankee Dan showed at once his familiarity with the business in hand, and instantly began negotiations by prodding a stalwart black in the ribs, and

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pinching his biceps, while the poor creature smiled and grinned, jabbering something unintelligible, but at the same time trying to show that he was a powerful fellow and should be taken away to work.

The hot stench of the pen made me sick, and for a time I was nauseated to a degree. Gradually I became used to it, but noticed that Gus and another man were upset. As for Hicks, he simply kept his handkerchief to his nose and gasped. I hardly think he realized what slaving was when he embarked in the enterprise, for the voyage was still a thing just begun, and, with a hold full of the filthy creatures, the smell can better be imagined than described. I can only say that it was more nauseating, penetrating, and more unlike any odour I ever before encountered.

In a short time, Yankee Dan, who could speak any language separately and fluently, and who could curse and swear in all combined, had, with some persuasion and some forceful epithets, convinced the Guinea that he meant business, and would take on the fifty-four human beings enclosed there at a certain figure. Three other white men now entered, and the wrangling became animated, the bargain, however, being finally closed with the understanding that we would leave the vicinity by noon the next day, and pay in gold and arms.

I was glad enough to get clear of the vile place,

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and, as we men were not invited to the slaver's house to take a drink to show good feeling, we missed the foulness it contained. Hicks accompanied Dan to the "palace," and I must give him credit that he did so with less grace than he usually showed upon occasions of invitation. The rest of us sought the shade of the river-bank, where some scrub-palms offered shelter from the terrible sunshine. Here we were joined by some of the slaver's guard, who now sought every opportunity to propitiate our good-will, telling yarns and explaining the interesting back country, where the curse of the bar and shackle had laid its grisly hand.

One of the guards, although a black, had been to London as a free man, having never been a slave, but belonging to a Congo tribe that held sway to the southward of St. Paul de Loando, and which, owing to its control of a part of the coast, had to be treated with respect by the villains that scoured the Bight.

This fellow spoke English fairly well, and he described at length how the slave-trade was being ruined by the men-of-war that hunted and cruised between the Congo and Senegal. These vessels were sometimes quite small, some being only brigs of ten to twelve guns, but most of them were very fast and heavily manned, quite able to overhaul and capture even the fast flyers that plied the trade

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against the law. One of these cruisers, an American, called the *Hornet*, was a sloop of war of the fastest type, having overhauled the *Bat*, a schooner of some two hundred tons, which had the record of being the fastest vessel that had ever sailed out of New Orleans.

This conversation was interesting, especially as the cruiser was last seen off Lagos only a month before, and I wished more than ever that I had taken more pains not to have joined the expedition. Then I thought of the young girl aboard, and wondered at her father bringing her into such scenes of danger and bloodshed, with the shadow of the hangman's noose from the yard-arm continually over the black barque and her crew.

Gus, the Swede, spoke uneasily of the future, but the great black pirate only showed his teeth and swore softly in Portuguese. For him life meant very little indeed, and if he could capture a nice young girl now and then and get ammunition for his rifle, it was all he desired. No man-of-war should take these small pleasures from him if desperate fighting could prevent it, and, as for danger, he lived on it. It was in the very air of the deadly swamps and forests, and he survived solely because he was fit.

Pointing to an indistinct object across the river, he broke forth fiercely:

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“That’s all left of a fine village. Plenty rum, plenty slaves, plenty powder. Now all gone. Why? Man-of-war fire it and destroy. Some day man-of-war try factory here. Want to be here den,” and he patted his rifle-stock affectionately. Part of the gang to which he belonged were now up the river hunting villages and scattered bands of negroes, but they were becoming scarce, and the death-rate being high, it hardly paid going up after them.

In a little while Hicks and Dan came back, accompanied by the half-dozen Portuguese and some black fellows, and we started to the ship to make ready for our cargo. Slaves were more plentiful to the eastward perhaps, but we would take what we could get and hurry along, trusting to evade a cruiser until the cargo was made up.

We took one of the Guinea fellows back with us to pilot us through the surf on the bar, and arrived alongside without accident.

A line of heads peered over the topgallant-rail, watching curiously our passenger, and, as the boat fell alongside, the drawling tones of Shannon broke forth.

“What’s niggers at now, stranger?” said he, addressing the Guinea.

“Way down, way down. Bucks runnin’ for ten to twenty. Fine gals thirty and forty,” cried the

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fellow from the boat, evidently thinking he was addressing our commander.

Shannon gave a great sigh, and looked wistfully at the shore.

“An’ here I am,” said he, “without a ship. It’s hard luck. I wanter know, I wanter know.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

WE LAY IN OUR CARGO

THE next day was a busy one aboard *The Gentle Hand*. All the boats were gotten out early, and the barque headed in shore again. We had stood off at night, for fear of a current setting us into the breakers, and we did not care to let go an anchor.

By two bells (nine o'clock) in the forenoon, we were close in to the bar at the river mouth, the breeze giving us way at the rate of about five knots, but, as we drew under the land, it became puffy and showed signs of dying out altogether. It was decided not to go in any closer, so the foreyards were left full, the main backed, and the forestaysail hauled amidship, heaving the barque to with a slight reach to the southward.

Pretty nearly all hands tumbled into the boats and rowed through the broiling sunshine for the beach, it being the captain's object to get all the cargo aboard at once, and stand off to work along to the eastward.

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By noon the first boat-load of the poor creatures arrived. There were fourteen of them closely packed and manacled in the bottom of the craft. As they drew nearer, they set up a chattering like a crowd of monkeys, and the Guinea in charge rapped them severely over the head with a stout stick, bidding them be quiet. Their white eyeballs and teeth shone in contrast to their skins, and the excitement they were undergoing made them show both eyes and teeth much more than usual, giving them a strange, wild look. Streaks of mud and filth showed upon their black bodies. The men had little kinky beards upon their chins and lips, and the women had huge bunches of wool on their heads, which were simply great nests of dirt and vermin. Poor creatures, they were hardly human, but for all that I felt sorry for them when I thought of the 'tween-decks of the barque under that torrid sun.

Henry hustled them on deck, and Jorg, with a couple of men, sent them below at once to get them out of the way. By eight bells, we had the crowd below, where they kept chattering until Gull went among them with a long whip, and touched them up lustily whenever they made a noise. Martin, Anderson, Bill, Shannon, and myself went in for the last boat-load.

The heat was terrible, and the breeze was almost imperceptible after the bar was crossed, making all

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hands quiet and sullen with the exertion. Inside the river mouth the same glaring quiet prevailed, broken only now and then by the sound of a gull's scream, the dull, heavy rumble of the swell only adding to the desolate stillness.

“ ’Tis a good coast for the business,” said Martin, in a low tone to the long sailor, who was rowing stroke oar. I held the tiller, and had charge, but Martin appeared to think my rating did not command silence, and I let him speak.

The fellow Shannon only looked over his shoulder up the turbid stream that flowed around the distant point of marsh in the direction of the heavy forest beyond.

“ What better place d’ye want? ’Twould be a good one to find ye in that glade,” continued the Scot.

“ There’s mighty little water on the bar, Scotty,” said Shannon. “ What the devil would become of yer ship, I wanter know? ”

“ Lighten her more, lighten her. Take out her guns and ballast. She’d be a floatin’ fort until ye were ready to go to sea full o’ niggers. Mon, mon, na mon-o’-war c’u’d come after ye, an’ as fer small boats — hoot! ” And he gave a cry of contempt at the idea.

“ Joust whin would ye do these things, friend Martin? ” asked Bill.

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“Shut up, ye square-head. Keep silence when men are speakin’, or I’ll be fer whollopin’ ye the minit we hit the beach,” growled Martin.

Then they rowed on in the heat without a word, the regular clank of the oar-locks sounding over the glassy surface of the stream with the regularity of the ticking of a clock.

We ran the boat up near the “factory,” and the villainous Guinea in charge brought down the last instalment of the slaves. Some of them were young girls barely in their teens, but all without any clothing whatever. The sun would have flayed a white man and cooked him to death in half an hour, but they appeared not to suffer with the heat. Some of the girls were made to spring into the river, with a line attached, in order that they might get a last bath before entering the hell in store for them. One tried to remain under water and drown herself; at least the Guinea feared that was her design, for he hauled her in hand over hand, and administered several whacks to brace her up, while I sat and tried to invent some new opprobrious epithet to call him, finally exhausting the English language without apparent effect.

One girl, who had left behind her brother and relatives, on account of their not coming up to Yankee Dan’s standard of fitness for a middle passage, was tearful and sad. This poor creature was

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flung into the water, and held by a strapping black buck, who used a bunch of grass to scrub her clean. Her piteous screams had no effect on him, so, when my patience was quite exhausted by the heat, I seized an oar. He was bending over, and wore nothing but a gee-string. The swing of the oar landed fair on his buttocks with all the weight and strength I could put into it, and he shot forward with a crack, making a very creditable dive into deep water. It was only because payment had not been complete that bloodshed was averted when he arose, for he made straight for his rifle, which had to be forced from him by half a dozen pirates as fierce and powerful as himself. Finally we had the crowd all aboard, and shoved off for the barque, meeting the boat with the Portuguese fellow, who had gone aboard for the pay, just as we cleared the breakers.

Arriving aboard, we soon had the blacks below, and, as payment had been made in gold for our cargo, we had nothing further to do with the scoundrels on the beach. The yards were swung, and we stood offshore to take advantage of the light breeze and work along the coast to the eastward, in the hope of picking up the rest of our cargo before some prying ship-of-war should overhaul us. For several days we worked along without any luck. One or two places Dan knew of had been deserted since the law against slaving had begun to be enforced, and

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we had to row in through a heavy surf to find this out. This caused the loss of one boat and the drowning of a sailor named Tom, an English cockney chap of little account. During this part of the cruise, I had much to do on the poop, keeping the battery in order and ready for instant action. I saw something of the life aft, and the feeling between Mr. Curtis and Hicks, which had shown itself that night in the town of Funchal. These two men, whose interests were identical, seldom spoke directly to each other now, and only when the trader's daughter appeared on deck did they show anything but polite hatred in their speech. Curtis was sarcastic, and Hicks was almost as savage by the time we reached Lagos and ran in to finish loading. Miss Allen seemed to avoid both as much as possible, although it was quite evident that she favoured the bolder of the two adventurers. Curtis was anything but a coward, but Hicks had a certain reckless gallantry about him that could hardly fail to attract.

Forward I had been entertained several times by Martin's brutal jests regarding affairs aft, and, as the girl had always been civil to me, it was all I could do not to chastise the rogue for his foul tongue. My apparent apathy, however, gave him cause to believe I favoured him, and soon he spoke of things that caused me to pay attention and watch him more closely.

CHAPTER XXX.

I SUSPECT TREACHERY

THE night we stood in for settlement, there was a bright moon nearly full. We could hear the snore of the surf before midnight, and we shortened the barque down to her topsails in order not to go too fast.

The breeze was fitful and squally off the land as usual, and bringing with it the thick haze of pollen from the rank vegetation on shore. The air being hot, the watch below stayed on deck and lay in the waterway or behind the deck-house, trying to catch the draught blown on the deck from the stretched canvas as it slid under the foot of the main and foresails.

Martin was lying in the shadow of the foremast to keep the moon out of his eyes, and he shifted his position every little while as the bright light followed him around the mast. Beside him lay Anderson, and near by, in the open moonlight, in total disregard for his eyes, was stretched the long skipper,

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Shannon, prone upon his back, with his shirt open to catch the breeze.

I sat near the fore-hatchway and watched the shadow of the fabric above swing to and fro upon the deck planks, the lines of the rigging standing out sharp and black on the white wood, the dark blots of the canvas moving slowly within a certain radius with each easy roll of the long swell. It was a bright tropic moon, and it was serenely beautiful. I lounged there, enjoying the silvery light, and hated to sleep lest I miss some of the rare beauty of the darker hours.

Gradually the men on watch settled themselves comfortably, and only the steady tramp of the man on lookout upon the forecastle head, and Hawkson's step upon the poop told of life aboard. Once or twice the mate's hoarse voice sounded gruffly, asking Holmberg, who was at the wheel, how she headed, and the answer came low and distinct through the quiet night. The musical hiss and twinkle of the side-wash sounded restful upon the ear after the day's toil and heat, and seemed to tell of cool sprays. I had the right to sleep, but only dozed, thinking of the disagreeable work in store for us. We would probably take on many blacks here, and nearly, if not quite, fill up with them. Those already aboard gave forth an odour that was far from reassuring, coming as it did up the open

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hatchway, and I dreaded several hundred more creatures jammed below there, where they must of necessity die like vermin in a box.

While I dozed, I became aware of a whispered conversation. Soon I recognized Martin's voice, though I could not quite hear his words. He seemed to be talking to Shannon, who had now rolled over in the shadow of the mast alongside of the Scot.

I listened again, for the fellow's voice was eager, as it was when he talked of any deviltry he expected to enjoy, and I noticed the same tone he used to me when we first made our acquaintance, and when we discussed the probability of the barque becoming a rover and preying upon any vessel of smaller size.

"D'ye ken that? I say, ye long man, d'ye ken that?" said he in answer to a question he had evidently asked. "'Tis as easy fer us as not. There's Anderson waiting to kill the mate, an' Jorg willin' to kill any one, and there's Pat, Gus, Gilbert, an' the Doctor willin' to follow. Hoot! we'd make a finish, na fear. Why, ye c'u'd whollop half the crew yerself, ye long cateran. Didn't ye nigh do it the day ye made yer jump into the hooker? Help ye? Now, now, c'u'd I have helped ye? Na, na, don't ask mericles. I let fly the jib, but 'twould have been murder an' sudden death to have gone aft then. All armed, an' with that gunner man fightin' like

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a sack o' wildcats, an' the little fox havin' a death-grip on yer pipe. Talk sense an' to the p'int."

"You air a loose-jawed hell-dog, I wanter know," said Shannon. "D'you suppose it's fear a-keepin' me, hey? What'd you know about the coast, any-ways? What'd you want to try an' tell me?" Then in a more friendly tone: "I know you air a navigator. Good sailor, all right, an' would stick to a job, but there is a right time for business. I'm a-runnin' this thing, an' all you've got to do is wait till I says the word. I think a whole lot o' ye, Martin, an' would hate to see you swing. There ain't no one I cares as much for, that's a fact. An' when a fellow like me cares for a man, — I say a man, Martin, for that's what you are, hey? When a fellow like me says that, that same thing, it stands fer something. If it don't, I wanter know."

This sort of flattery evidently pleased the Scot. He said something in a low tone, and I felt convinced that he was easily within the power of the long countryman of mine. It's strange, but immediately after hearing this, I must have lost consciousness, for when I awoke it was gray dawn and a chill filled the air. The watch was called, and I turned out by simply standing up and then sitting down again.

In a little while we washed down the damp decks, and I had a chance to get a look to the northeast,

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when the haze of the surf blotted out the shore-line. By the time the Doctor had his fire started and we had something warm, the sun rose and disclosed the ruinous settlement of Lagos.

The conversation I had heard disturbed me. There was something sinister in its meaning, and, while I had no love for the barque, I did not care to make a bad matter worse. However, I had no chance to talk the matter over until we had run in and dropped our anchor close to the settlement, and there Yankee Dan appeared on deck ready to go ashore for trading. Howard and Curtis also turned out, and Miss Allen appeared at the companion, very much interested in the distant shore, where the houses were just visible in the morning sunshine.

She smiled somewhat sadly at me as I went aft and loosed the covers from the stern guns, and saw that the priming was in good order. I had begun to think the poor girl out of place long before, and I now felt a sort of hatred for her father, who could expose her to such scenes without any apparent pity. But the trader had become callous from experience in the slaving business, and saw nothing unusual in cooping up a shipful of human beings. They were no more than so many cattle to him, and, as to his daughter's feelings, he had offered her a

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chance to stay ashore. If she preferred the scenes of violence, it was no concern of his.

Before I had a chance to see Hawkson, the shore boat was called away. Bill, Jones, Jennings, and myself manned the whale-boat, and we were soon heading in over the swell for the slave factory that was known to exist a short distance inland. Hicks and Gull accompanied the trader ashore, and the latter stood at the steering-oar to pilot us through the surf. In spite of the calm weather in the Bight of Benin, there is sometimes a heavy swell that sets in from many miles offshore, where some passing disturbance of the atmosphere has caused a heavy blow. The swell is long and heaving, and not so easily noticed until it begins to rise in the shoal water. Then its size develops, and it goes up in a wall until the top breaks and the whole mass goes roaring shoreward in a great smother of foam. From the sea side, the height of the breakers is hard to judge, and they are very apt to be underestimated on a calm day.

Mr. Gull stood up as we neared the first line of snoring water, and I could see by his face that he was a bit nervous. This had its effect on me, for no one with any nervousness should attempt to go through a heavy surf. The situation calls for absolute coolness.

“Easy now,” came the order, and we lay waiting

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for a smooth spell. By some strange freak of nature, seas always roll in sequences. That is, they will run in twos and three or sixes and nines, with a "smooth" between. A surfman will always watch to see how they are running before going in. Gull counted three heavy fellows that roared and thundered in a most appalling manner, and then, grasping the long steering-oar firmly, sung out to give way lively.

We went racing for the beach, and were doing well when, on looking over the stern, I saw an enormous sea rising and coming quickly after us. It rose like a wall astern and towered above the boat. Then instantly it broke with a roar and rush, and we were hurled before it. Gull tried to hold her true, keeping her stern to the surge, but she took a slew and the oar broke. Then she swung sideways and rolled over and over with the rush, and when I came to the surface of the foam, half-strangled by being so quickly rolled out of the boat, she lay bottom up some ten fathoms distant, floating in the smother.

No one was visible, and I struck out for the craft, as there was no bottom and the beach was fifty fathoms distant. Suddenly I saw Bill spattering and struggling, trying to reach the wreck, but showing plainly that he could not swim a stroke. Ernest suddenly appeared alongside of him, and, being

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able to swim after a fashion, he aided him to reach the gunwale, where both held on firmly, ducking the following seas that flowed over them.

Jennings managed to keep his grip on the boat, and was alongside, holding on, when I noticed a form floating face downward pass me.

I was a fairly good swimmer, although it is a strange fact that few real sailormen can swim at all. I grasped the body and lifted the head clear of the water with my hand just as another sea broke heavily over me, dragging and crushing me down with its weight.

My heart seemed bursting when I arose, still holding the insensible man, and my first intake of breath nearly strangled me. However, I was a powerful fellow, and in a few strokes managed to get started for the upturned boat that now floated some distance nearer shore.

In a few minutes I reached her, and Bill relieved me for a moment while I passed a line over the craft's bottom. On the other side I found Jones and Yankee Dan both safe and holding on. Together we managed to hold Hicks, whom I now recognized, clear of the water. He had been struck on the head by the boat or an oar and knocked insensible. Gull was nowhere about, and for some time we gave him up for lost, but he had swum in on a broken thwart.

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In a little while we heard shouting, and saw him standing on the sand with a couple of black fellows, who, at his direction, plunged in and came toward us. The negroes helped us ashore, and we hauled the boat up clear of the surf. It was a close call, and Hicks still appeared either dead or senseless. We carried him up the beach and laid him under a palm, and set to work chafing his wrists and ankles.

In a little while he opened his eyes and noticed me.

“What’s the matter?” he asked, faintly, trying to sit up. Bill caught his head and held it, while Gull passed his arm under him.

“Trying to quit the expedition,” said Yankee Dan, bluffly. “You were trying to leave us, my boy, but this fellow, Heywood, here, nabbed you in time, and swam in to the boat with you. Otherwise you’d ’a’ been drowned, an’ that’s a fact. You’d ’a’ been drowned sure.”

Hicks looked at me seriously for some moments and then spoke:

“It’s hard to owe one’s life to a fool, but here’s my hand, Heywood,” said he, with a faint smile.

“It’s as hard to acknowledge the favour from one, sir,” I answered, with some little feeling, but then I remembered the time at Funchal, and I smiled

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and held out my hand, which he grasped firmly, and rose to his feet.

Sir John Hicks was a man of rather unsavoury reputation, but he was not a man who would be gross enough to forget.

CHAPTER XXXI.

I MEET CORTELLI

WHILE the trader, Mr. Gull, and Hicks were ashore, there was no chance whatever of communicating any of my suspicions concerning Martin and Shannon. Just what these rascals intended to do was certainly a matter of doubt, and, after all, the talk had been so characteristic of the Scot that I feared I was taking it too seriously to give it a thought.

We tramped over the loose sand to the factory, a couple of miles inland, and the heat of the marsh was awful. Hicks, who had hardly recovered from the accident of the morning, had difficulty in keeping up, for his head was still giddy from the effects of the blow he had received upon it. The black fellows, who had sighted our barque before daylight, had thought nothing of a run to the beach, and they went ahead at a great rate along the jungle path, caring neither for briars, spines, or any of the various prickling things that make even a well-shod man hesitate before treading on them. They

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were a tall and powerful set of men, all armed with old flint-lock muskets of ancient pattern; doubtless some of them had been used in the first war between the States and England. We finally arrived and were ready for business. The compound, or slave corral, was an immense enclosure completely out of sight from the beach, and away from the prying eyes of any cruiser that might be prowling along the coast. Felado Cortelli, the half-breed Italian slaver, whose presence had cursed the West African coast for years, was in charge, and he came forth to meet us. Our lack of arms seemed to give him amusement, but when he heard how we had been rolled over in the surf, he laughed loudly.

Within two hours from the time we left the surf, our arrangements had been made, and we were leading between two and three hundred blacks to the beach, where payment was to be made, and they were to be shipped aboard, Cortelli's own guard of coast pirates making the escort for the unfortunates.

Our boat came alongside with its first load of human freight. Hicks and Curtis stood at the quarter-rail watching the creatures, and for the first time in many days seemed on speaking terms. They appeared to comment upon a girl who was crying and sobbing bitterly, and who was shackled to a huge buck, who sat stolidly gazing out to sea.

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The oily swell rocked the boat but little; the barque, however, rolled lazily like a huge log, swinging her long spars slowly from side to side, and the momentum of each swing hove her down until her channels brought up with a smacking jar upon the surface.

This made it necessary for the boatman to use some caution, for, if the small boat's gunwale caught anywhere upon the vessel's side while she was on her downward swing, it would instantly be forced under and the craft upset.

Cortelli stood at the break of the poop, talking to the trader, and, as the girl was told to make ready for a spring aboard, he looked over the side and grinned. The poor creature was frightened and shrank back, delaying the unloading.

"Stir her up," said the Guinea to one of his bullies.

A black pirate laid the lash, and she screamed.

"Hold on there!" cried Hicks, leaning over the side. "If you do that again, I'll pistol you."

His face was flushed, and his hand sought his broad leather belt, where hung his cutlass and long-barrelled pistol belonging to the barque's supply.

"Sho, man, what's the matter?" asked Yankee Dan, and the Guinea scowled savagely.

"Dis gal free," said the big buck, standing up, as he heard the conversation. "He no right to take

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her — nor me. I Begna Sam, no slave. Lib right ashore till you come. Den he cotch us both, an' say we slave 'cause long sailor, Shannon, he say he buy us."

Cortelli grinned. It was not the first time he had practised this trick, and, if the blacks had no friends strong enough to protest, they invariably went with the rest of the cargo.

"Where are the girl's people?" asked Hicks.

"What difference does it make?" asked Yankee Dan. "I see no difference whether they're ashore here or back in the timber, do you?"

Mr. Curtis nodded encouragingly. It was evident he had no scruples how or where the girl had been kidnapped.

The Guinea, Cortelli, shrugged his fat shoulders, and shot a venomous look at the Englishman.

"Shall I find out where each black resides when at home?" he asked, sarcastically. Then he turned away.

Hicks, instead of following him, leaned over the rail. A strange look of sadness came into his eyes. He was a hard man among hard men, and he had revolted at the squeal of a black woman. I watched him a moment, and looked to see something more happen.

He evidently saw that to send the girl ashore meant to doom her to Cortelli's will. There was

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only one way, and, as she stepped on deck with the big buck, Sam, he went to him and asked about the girl's people. She was being separated from her old mother and crippled sister, neither of whom were of any value as slaves. Begna Sam was hustled below with the rest, and Hicks went back on the poop.

“Bring her mother and sister aboard,” said he to Cortelli. “I'll give you full price for both.”

The little fat scoundrel glanced at him quickly to see if he were in earnest. Hicks looked him squarely in the eyes and repeated his request. Then the Guinea went to the rail and said something to the black bullies in the small boat that made them grin, and the next boat brought off the desired pair. Hicks had a separate place made for the three near the open hatchway, and afterward paid for them from his own pocket. Then he went aft, followed by the smiles and winks of half the starboard watch, and even Hawkson, who came to the edge of the poop, could scarce suppress amusement. An exhibition of human feeling appeared very strange to the men of *The Gentle Hand*.

All that day we made landings in the heavy surf, taking a few shackled blacks aboard at a time, being aided a little by the filthy and indolent denizens of the ruinous village, who came to the shore and squatted around under the trees to give comment

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upon the affair. They were good surfmen, and sometimes helped to run out the boats when promised a drink of rum. They were all half-breed Guineas and scum from the slaving-ships, but some had skins as black as the negro slaves they were watching. Cortelli appeared to be the chief among them, and it was said he sometimes seized upon some of the blackest and sold them. They gave him a wide berth as he strode among them, and jumped at each word he uttered, no despot creating greater awe among his subjects than this filthy little fat rascal, whose black eyes had pointed the way to death or worse to so many unfortunates of that inhospitable region.

It was dark before the last boat-load had been stowed below hatches, for several boats had capsized in the surf, and the delay of rescuing the shackled prisoners from drowning had taken much time. Only three were lost, the pirate guard, which had contracted to do most of the rowing, proving the best kind of boatmen, and the way they swam about in the breakers was a thing to wonder at. Sharks were swarming about the barque, and must have been also in the surf, but the black men gave them little thought.

The final payment was made in good yellow gold to Cortelli, and he passed over the side into his own boat, followed by the farewells of the trader, who

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appeared to feel that he had not been badly cheated in his purchase. The black bullies rowed the Italian rapidly shoreward, while that worthy squatted over his bag of money, which he made fast to a buoy, in case of accident, and, drawing a long pistol, cocked back the flint. It was evident that he would take no chances in that country, where a piece of yellow metal may be worth several human lives. The last I saw of him, he was explaining to his steersman that an accident meant certain death to him, the steersman, at least, and therefore the utmost caution should be exercised in going through the surf. The money could not sink, but he never had had accidents, and was not going to begin at this time.

Then the order came from our quarter-deck to heave short, and we were ready to make the desperate run for the other side. Hawkson had kept a boat going all day between the ship and shore, taking in fresh water, and our stores were in good condition. We had taken in enough for an army at Funchal.

“Lay forrads, all ye starbowlins,” bawled Henry, “an’ wake her up.” Then the feeling that we were indeed homeward bound over the middle passage took a strong hold of us, and we hove heavy on the windlass brakes.

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“ ‘Ole Stormy, ’e was a good ole man,’ ” piped a sailor.

“ ‘Yo, ho! Oh, we storm along,’ ” bellowed the watch in chorus, and, with the wild, crazy song, we walked the anchor in, while the rest sheeted home the topsails and romped up with the t’gallant-hal-yards.

In a few minutes the land-breeze bore us off, and we braced in the yards for a run off the land to the southward. We would try to go clear of everything, and then haul up and go across with every rag we could crack on her.

Bill, Ernest, and myself raced up the main-rat-lines to loose the royal and the topmast stun’sails. In the dim light of the early evening, I saw the low shore of the African continent for the last time. When I finished with the gaskets, I waited a few moments, watching it fade into the gloom of the tropic night, and thinking of the hell of sorrow and suffering the poor creatures bore who were cursed by birth upon its hot lowlands and stinking marshes. Even while I looked, the plaintive murmur from the wretches below hatches told plainly they knew their voyage to death and slavery had begun, and I thought I could make out the wild and sad refrain of some savage song. Over three hundred black creatures packed below! I thanked Heaven there had been no more to take, for I knew

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they would have packed another three hundred into her if they had been ready for sale. They would make the run with these without further risk, and trust to landing them in better condition, thus securing a much higher price.

I started down the ratlines, but, before going over the futtock-shrouds, I looked at the last bit of light on the western sky-line.

It seemed to me I saw a bit of a speck showing on the darkening horizon. Bill was opposite me, and I called to him to look. He gazed steady for a few seconds.

“Youst like a brig’s royals, them little dots,” said he, and went on down the ratlines to the deck.

I followed, and forgot to report the object in the hurry and hustle to get the anchor in on deck and everything shipshape for sea.

CHAPTER XXXII.

OPEN MUTINY

MY! How those blacks did smell! We had worked well into the night, only stopping to eat supper, and, when we did go below to turn in, all tired out, the odour was something to remember. The wind being aft, the cabin was clear, but the forecastle was pretty bad, and we had only just started.

“It makes a fellow feel like goin’ out an’ getting rid o’ some o’ his crimes,” said Big Jones, sniffing and spitting upon the deck.

“Hif dirt’s a crime, you’d been hung long ago,” observed Jim. “Better turn in with hit.”

“Too hot,” said Bill. “It’s youst a little too hot fer me. I’ve sweated all the water out of me working, an’ I don’t want to sweat sleepin’. I’ll take the deck an’ let her go.”

“A man’s ’bout one-third water, anyways, according to some o’ them doctors’ sayings,” drawled Shannon, who lounged in his bunk.

“What’s the rest, — likker?” asked Jim, wofully.

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And then the men split up, each seeking a spot for resting during his watch below, some on deck and some in the forecabin.

I followed Bill to the windlass, and we stretched out in my old favourite spot, with our heads upon a coil of the forestaysail-downhaul. Here we had the draught from under the foot of the sail blowing downward in our faces, and we instantly gave way to its soothing influence and fell asleep. Since Watkins had gone over the side, with a shot to each foot, sewed tightly in canvas, I had been a bit more free to sleep out on deck at night in the warm weather, and I now rested as only a tired and healthy sailor could. The barque held along steadily and the motion was slight, and there was silence on board save for the murmur coming from below. The first thing I knew of trouble was being suddenly aroused by a piercing scream. It was shrill and sharp and full of terror and pain.

Bill started up at the same time, and both of us asked each other what was the matter. I tried to put out my hand to steady myself from the roll of the barque and get to my feet, but something held it firmly to the other in front of me. The night was intensely black, as the moon had not yet risen, and for an instant I was blundering about, striving to free myself, until Bill blurted out that he was ironed. Then I realized that my hands were

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shackled fast in iron bracelets, and that there was little use to try to free them. Some one had slipped them upon our wrists while we slept, and we were as helpless as though paralyzed.

I tried to see the watch on deck, and strained my eyes through the gloom to catch sight of their forms in the waist, where they usually grouped to keep awake and tell yarns. There was not a soul in sight. Even the poop seemed vacant, but, while I looked, shadows appeared creeping up the gangways over the break, and in a moment a flash lit the darkness. Following the report, a perfect roar of voices burst forth, yelling and bawling, interspersed now and again with shouts and cries of wounded men. Then Martin's hoarse yell arose above the uproar aft, and I began to realize what was happening.

“Break loose, Bill, for God's sake,” I cried, tugging away at my irons. “Break loose, for that devil, Martin, is going amuck, and Shannon is in his wake.” Our legs were free, and I ran to the windlass-bitts, which were covered with metal. Raising my hands high above my head, I brought the bracelets down with all my force upon the iron tops.

The pain was awful. For some moments I could do nothing but gasp, for it seemed to me that I

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had broken both my wrists. They were numb and paralyzed with the shock.

“Let me try,” said Bill, and he brought his hands down with full force. The lock on his iron sprang open, and he gave a groan.

“Lay your wrists here,” he said, and I stretched the connecting link over the bitt-head. Bill seized a heavy chain-hook and smote again and again upon the chain link until it bent, buckled, and finally opened. I was free.

With my irons hanging to my wrists, we started aft, where the fracas was now in full sway. Forms were surging upon the break of the poop, and among them I recognized some of our men mixed with the naked black bodies of the Africans. We dived into the forward cabin door to get at the cutlass rack in the passage, where all the arms were hung. As we did so, Mr. Curtis thrust a pistol into my face and pulled the trigger. The damp, hot climate had evidently affected the priming of the weapon, for I heard the flint fall distinctly. Then I struck up the muzzle as it exploded, the charge going upward into the deck.

“Don’t shoot!” I bawled, as the report rang out. “Don’t shoot! can’t you see us? Give us the cutlasses, quick.”

Bill reached for the rack where they hung, and was about to take one, when a form swung out of

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the darkness, heaving some heavy weapon overhead. There was no time to explain matters, so I sprang upon the fellow and grasped him firmly before the blow fell upon Bill's head, and together we went to the deck.

Instantly I recognized Jorg, the carpenter, as his axe fell clattering across the cabin, and the rascal gripped my throat with both hands. Before I could disengage his hands, two more bodies fell over me, scrambling, cursing, and struggling. A foot — I think it was Bill's — gave Jorg a kick under the ear, and he slackened his hold on my throat.

“What the mischief are you doing?” I gasped. “Can't you see we ain't niggers? What's the matter with you?”

Just then a lantern flashed, as the cabin door was thrown open, and Mr. Gull stood before us, pike in hand, ready for business. He seemed to hesitate a moment, and looked inquiringly at me and then at Bill, who had Curtis under him on the cabin deck, calling upon him to let him get away, and trying to disengage the Englishman's hands, that had fastened themselves firmly around his neck. The noise overhead continued, and the rapid trampling of men and shuffling of feet told of a fierce encounter. Hawkson's hoarse cry could be distinguished cheering the men on about him, and Martin's wild yells and curses upon the ship, the crew, and every-

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thing about her. It was evident something worse than a rising of the blacks was taking place, and I hurriedly asked the second mate what had happened. He saw the manacles upon my wrists, where they still hung, and this showed him I had been a captive very recently. Then we knew the after-guard had taken no prisoners and would never give quarter.

“Put on in my sleep,” I said, quickly. “Bill and I both were ironed. Give us the weapons and let us help.”

“I believe you, Heywood. Take a cutlass and come along. The devil is loose to-night aboard here,” he said, and he grabbed Curtis’s hands at the same instant.

“Let him go,” he said to Curtis. “Let him go and get up. They’re all right.”

It was several moments before the Englishman realized what was wanted, and kept calling for Gull to run Bill through with his pike.

I grabbed a cutlass from the arm-rack just as Jorg sat up, dazed and dizzy. He evidently expected me to cut him down, and was much astonished when I helped raise him and handed him his axe.

“You’re youst a little bit too much in a hurry,” said Bill to Curtis, as they got up, the sailor red and angry at the choking he had received. But

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Gull pressed a cutlass into his hand, and called for us to follow, opening the door into the after-cabin. There was no time to lose. The incident had already cost us several minutes, and we might be too late.

“It’s Martin and the fellow Shannon,” said Gull, as we piled through. “They’ve got half the port watch an’ a dozen niggers with them. They’re the fighting devils of Cortelli’s guard shipped in, all ready to take a hand. Shannon and the Guinea stood in together to do the job. Come along, for God’s sake, come along!”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE FIGHT ON DECK

GULL led the way through the cabin, and, as we neared the companionway, a stateroom door was thrust open, and Miss Allen stood before us. She held a pistol in her hand, and her eyes were bright and sparkling. She seemed most beautiful to me, as she stood there confronting five armed men.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, “I’m glad it’s you. I thought —” But she left her sentence unfinished. We knew what she meant, and the pistol was not a weapon for offence. It was her last defence, and the thought of the girl waiting with it in her hand gave me a turn. We hurried up the ladder while she called after us, asking if her father was all right.

The blackness on the poop was lit up by Gull’s lantern, and we saw a sight that made us grip our weapons. A confused mass of men were closed in desperate combat, cutting, thrusting, hacking, and clutching at each other in the darkness. Guided by Hawkson’s voice, we soon made out the mate, surrounded by a crowd of the black devils from

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the beach and several of our own men. By his side was Hicks and the sailor, Ernest, all hewing away at the press about them. Several bodies lay beneath Hawkson's feet, telling of the old fighter's desperate sword-play.

A little farther on, with his back against the mizzen, stood Howard, his bare poll shining in the light of Gull's lantern, showing the perspiration pouring down over his face, his eyes steady and shining like glass beads, his cutlass dripping in his right hand, and an empty pistol in his left. He was hard at it with Martin and Shannon, both of whom pressed him sorely, in spite of Yankee Dan's help.

Henry was engaging Anderson and Gus at his side, and the forms of two men lying between the old captain and Martin told of the Scot's and Shannon's deadly work. Shannon had cut down one and Martin had put a man out of the way as we rushed up.

The fight now waxed hotter. The barque, being without any one at the wheel, luffed slowly into the breeze until her foreyards were aback and she gathered sternway. The cracking of the slatting canvas added to the noise of the yelling men, and for a time there was chaos on the poop.

Instinctively Gull and myself rushed to Howard's side. The old fellow was wary and quick, warding

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off the furious onslaughts of the long skipper with a skill and strength that was amazing. He had his old cutlass ahead of him, sword fashion, and he hopped about that deck like some horrible old monkey, laughing now and again in his high, cackling voice, as he lunged and stabbed with a cat-like quickness. Even the long skipper's giant strength was powerless to force his guard for a few moments, but, as we fell upon the long rascal, we were met by Martin, who came in furiously, yelling like a demon.

“Hoot, ye dogs! Stand out an' die! Stand out an' die like true Christian men!” he bawled, and as he did so he struck fiercely with a cutlass.

Jennings, Pat, and Holmberg had gone against us, and I caught a glimpse of them in the crush about Hawkson, as I circled about Shannon, trying to get within his guard, while he made long, full-arm sweeps as he advanced that kept us busy getting out of his way. Only Howard seemed to be able to stand and yet clear them.

Curtis, Jorg, and Bill had fallen upon the crowd pressing about the mate, and now some of the black pirates left the press there and came to Shannon's aid. One of these sprang within the guard of the trader and smote him heavily. Then he dodged back again as Gull pressed him, cutting him again and again with lightning-like strokes, his cutlass-

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blade glinting like a flash of flame in the light of the lantern set upon the companion slide.

Shannon came steadily on. Yankee Dan reeled and struck out wildly. A pistol flashed somewhere in the night, and he pitched forward under the long man's feet.

Everything now was mixed. A grinning black face showed before me, and I cut at it with all my power. A hoarse scream from the Doctor told me that the blow had hit hard, although there seemed little resistance to the blade. The rascally cook had evidently joined the mutiny, and had gotten his deserts. At the same time I did not stop to argue the question of right or wrong. I had been gulled into joining the ship, and had no reason to love her or her officers, yet, when it came to standing by her, there was no thought of shirking.

Had Martin been a different kind of a rascal, he might have approached me, but he had judged rightly that I had no use for him as a leader, and he had ironed me for future consideration, not wishing to part with any more men than necessary on the short-handed ship. He might have knifed me and tossed me over the side just as easily.

The death of Yankee Dan appeared to madden Martin. He roared and cursed and swung a vicious stroke at Gull. Then seeing me, his rage broke forth in a torrent of oaths. He made a cut at me

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and missed. I stabbed him savagely in the ribs, my point hitting him hard, for I had to jerk it clear. He roared and rushed in upon me, followed by Shannon, and I was beaten backward to the poop-rail. In vain did Howard and Gull cut and lunge at the long villain. Shannon beat their weapons down, and came upon me, with the wounded Scot at his side, now silent with pain and with the weakness of his hurt. I fought with despairing energy, but received a blow on my shoulder that almost made me drop my cutlass. The long villain took a stride nearer to me, and Martin stabbed me in the leg, as I frantically drove his point downward from my breast. I was hard pressed, and for an instant it seemed that I could not escape. The rail struck me in the small of the back, and I brought up against it. I had reached the limit. Then Bill did a thing that makes me believe in the honesty and nobility of men. It was not what might have been expected from a member of that crew, but it was more than even the duty of a friend, and we had once fought against each other.

Gull smote Jennings so sorely that he fell back and opened the way to Martin. Like a flash the second mate sprang in just as the wounded, but still wary, Scot stabbed me, and he struck him so savagely that he went staggering to one side. Pat and a black fellow pressed Howard, and Shannon

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whirled up his blade to make a finish of me when Bill sprang between and closed.

Howard thrust the Irishman through the body, and, as his cackling laugh broke out, the fellow fell heavily, striking Shannon's legs behind at the knee joints. The impact of Bill in front brought all three to the deck, where they rolled into a struggling, kicking mass in the darkness.

As quickly as possible, Gull and myself sprang in to finish the long skipper before Bill was done for, but it was too late. The tall scoundrel arose almost instantly to his feet and sprang clear of our thrusts, leaving Bill lying stark dead upon the deck. He had died to save me, poor sailorman though he was, and, as I stepped over his bleeding body, I could hardly repress a sob that rose in my throat. John, Gilbert, Anderson, and Heligoland, with six of Cortelli's black scoundrels, had by this time pressed Hawkson, Ernest, and Hicks so hard that even the aid of Curtis and Jorg availed them but little. In the general mix-up, the carpenter had received a blow over the head with a dull cutlass, which had rendered him insane for a time. I saw him rushing forward, screaming, but gave him no other thought, while I went for Shannon, determined to avenge poor Bill.

Nearly every one had received several wounds by this time, as the fighting had been close and

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furious, but Shannon appeared to brighten up and go in for a finish. He had fought silently up to the present moment, but now he began to draw out his oaths viciously at each stroke of his cutlass.

“I’ll have ye in a minute, ye long caterman,” cried Howard, pressing upon him.

“I wanter know, I wanter know, you bald-headed thief!” he roared in reply, and he mixed things up so fast that his blade shone like a thousand gems in the dim light of the lantern. Anderson came to Martin’s aid and supported him, while the badly wounded, thought still undaunted, Scot bawled feebly for his enemies to come on. He seized the rail with his left hand, and still showed the point of his cutlass ready for business.

During this last rally, I had noticed the uproar below sounding like the surf on the shore. I thought it was caused by the slaves in their fear, hearing the sounds of the desperate fight on the deck above.

Suddenly the uproar swelled louder, and distinct cries came from the main-deck. Forms flitted here and there and came bounding upon the poop.

I saw Hawkson make a desperate rally and cut down John and a black giant, and, as they fell, Henry rushed in and finished them. Curtis fell, badly wounded, but Hicks and Ernest drove the crowd back. Again and again did Gull, Howard,

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and myself press Shannon, but the long fellow, while not able to make any way against us, placed his back to the poop-rail, and kept us a sword-length away with ease.

Martin, Shannon, Anderson, and their followers now crowded aft along the rail, and we were unable to stop them. Hawkson swung clear of the press about him, and Hicks followed.

At that instant a surging crowd of black forms came pouring up the poop-ladders. They were naked and unarmed, save for whatever bars and belaying-pins they had found in the darkness.

“Good God, the cargo’s loose!” cried Henry. “Get aft, it’s the only chance.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CARGO BREAKS LOOSE

THE pouring torrent of black men flowed and swept between the mutineers and ourselves, and we were borne along before them like a chip on the crest of a wave. Their wild cries sounded above the curses and yells of the fighting men, blending into a wild, hoarse roar from three hundred deep chests. By sticking close together, we managed to make a retreat to the after-companionway, but it was desperate work.

The Africans hurled their naked bodies upon our weapons, regardless of cuts and thrusts that went home every time, and they struck at us savagely with the bars and staves they had collected.

Mr. Gull received a blow that stretched him senseless, and it was only after a desperate stand that we managed to haul him out from under the struggling men who pitched upon him. Curtis, being badly wounded, could not keep with us, and he was pulled back into the crowd and never seen again. Ernest, who bore himself so bravely, fell at the

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companion, and it was Hawkson who tore his way into a mass of mad blacks and hauled him over the ladder.

There were only a few of us left. Hawkson, Hicks, Henry, Howard, and myself could do duty, but we were all badly wounded.

The light from the cabin below shone in our faces, and we set our backs to the opening. I saw Howard's eyes shining from his mask-like face like two bright, black beads. Blood poured down Hawkson's cheeks from a cut on the forehead, and made him a grisly sight. Hicks was white as a sheet, but cool and steady. He had received a thrust in the breast that made him wheeze at each breath.

We made one desperate rally at the companion, and I looked below over my shoulder. As I did so, I saw a form staggering in from forward, and heard the clank of the heavy door in the bulkhead. I looked again, and saw Big Jones coming, with a pair of broken irons on each wrist, and a pistol in his left hand, while in his right he carried a shining cutlass.

"Stand clear, I'm a-comin'," he said, and we made way for him as he mounted the steps.

The light on the top of the companion, where Gull had placed it, still burned. The slaves swarmed everywhere, except on the glass skylight.

By the dim flare, I could see what was taking

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place. Shannon had been carried along the port rail to the after end of the poop, and Martin had thrust with all his remaining strength, hobbling along, aided by Anderson. Over the heads of the black crowd, I could make out Shannon's tall form, as he cut and slashed right and left, making a lane through the men, and leaving a pile of bodies to mark his course and ease the pressure upon him.

"Coom on, ye black divils!" cried Martin, faintly. "Coom on, an' take the sailormen."

A huge black towered above him, wielding a hand-spike, and several more pressed Anderson back.

The Scotchman rose to his full height, and, seizing his cutlass in both hands, smote the African a blow that sank the blade down to his nose. Before he could wrench it clear, the fellow went headlong to the deck, carrying the blade with him, snapping it free from the hilt, and leaving Martin helpless. The mob surged upon him and he disappeared. We saw him no more.

Anderson had a similar fate. A dozen giants in ebony grasped his cutlass in their hands, regardless of the blade. It was wrenched from him, and he went down, followed by a dago named Guinea and a couple of the blacks from the slave-pen. Gus, Gilbert, and the rest of the mutineers had disappeared already, leaving only one black and Shannon of the entire crowd.

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The African, fighting against his fellows, lasted but a few moments. He was crowded to the rail. Throwing his cutlass into the mob, he sprang clear of the side and was gone in the darkness, and Shannon was left alone at the taffrail, where he made his last stand.

A great black fellow made his way aft, calling out in a clear, deep bass voice. He was apparently entirely naked, and his skin shone and glistened in the lantern's light. He carried a cutlass in his hand, and thrust his followers aside, as he made his way to the long skipper, who fought gamely on.

"Ho! Benga Sam, I wanter know," cried the sailor. And the black giant called out something in his clear tones.

It was evident that there was a score to settle, for the black man hurled his kind right and left to get in. Some of the nearest drew back at the sound of his deep voice, and pressed back the heavy weight of the mob behind, clearing a small space in front of Shannon. Into this the black giant forced his way.

All this happened in an incredibly short time, but the solid bank of human flesh before us was pressing closer, in spite of Hawkson's desperate efforts.

Big Jones reached us, and, placing his pistol at the breast of the nearest African, fired. Then he

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whirled his blade into the thick of them, and all together we forced a space clear about the companion. Howard was nearly spent. I was desperately wounded, and leaned against the companion, panting for breath, while Hicks grasped the coaming to keep from falling.

In the breathing spell, while Jones held the way, I saw what was taking place a few feet distant.

In the open space cleared around the long skipper, the big black fellow stood and called upon the white man to pay the penalty of some past crime. Shannon had been on the coast before, and he certainly recognized the black. He had doubtless done him some wrong. He met him with a spirit worthy of a white man, and, in spite of his sins, he made a gallant stand to the end.

The black set upon him with terrific force, his blade rising and falling so fast that the eye could hardly follow it. Shannon, drawing himself to his full height, parried and returned stroke for stroke, his amazing vigour unimpaired by the action of the past half-hour. There was no retreating for either. The black wall of human bodies held them on all sides to the taffrail, and the nearest living men strained their utmost to keep clear of the whirling blades, while those behind pressed in and forced them closer.

Both men were desperately wounded in a few

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moments. Then Shannon, seeming to feel that his life was ebbing, rose to one mighty effort.

He slashed with great vigour for some moments, and then, without warning, sprang furiously forward, and, taking the black's blade through the body, he drove his own into his black chest until I saw the glint of the metal in the rear. They swayed for a few seconds, and then went down, while the mob surged over them and flowed around to where we were holding the stairs.

"Get below and shut the doors," said Jones. "I ken hold them fer a few minutes, that's all."

Hawkson looked at him, and I saw a ghost of an old smile flitting over his hard-lined face.

"You'll do for a big one, Jones," said he, and his teeth gleamed in the night.

"You stand on either side," said Howard. "I'll take the front."

Hawkson was about to remonstrate, but the old pirate shut him off harshly.

"Who's the captain here, me or you?" he cried.

"You, but you won't be within five minutes," said Hawkson.

"Get below, Hicks and Heywood; maybe you can bring Gull and Ernest back for short stand. There's liquor in the pantry."

We were too badly hurt to stand much longer,

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and were worthless in a rush, so we went down the companion and tried to tie up our hurts.

Miss Allen had already brought Gull around, and had partly revived Ernest. She smiled faintly at me, as I came down the companionway, limping and clutching the rail at the side. Hicks was behind me, and looked sadly at the girl as the noise of the rush sounded behind us.

She came to us and tied us up the best she could, stopping the bleeding, and, as she handed me a glass of spirits, spoke.

“Hicks,” said I, “you better take Miss Allen below into the lazarette and bar the door. They may overlook you there. It will only be a matter of a few minutes’ more fighting. The barque is doomed. Go while you can, for there is no other to take her. Gull and I must make our last stand on deck.”

“And a precious short one at that,” said the second mate, who was barely able to keep his feet.

The liquor was burning within me now like oil poured upon a dying flame, and under its influence I grasped my cutlass and placed my foot on the stair, to mount again and join the panting, struggling men, whose backs showed against the opening now and then, as they cut and lunged at the press before them. They could not last long, and I could already

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hear the high, rasping breathing of the old captain, who was making his last fight.

“You will come also,” said Miss Allen to me. “You must know of some way to hide in a ship.”

Her eyes held a mute appeal that was hard to resist. She was filled with horror, and the terror in her look made me hesitate. Yet, when I thought, I knew Hicks could find a place easier than I, and one would be less apt to be missed than two. Besides, the men on deck were fighting, and my place was there as long as I could stand. Sir John Hicks looked at me, but said nothing.

“I’ll come later,” I answered. “Some one must hold the stair. Hurry while there’s time.”

Then I mounted the companion, followed by Gull, and came out into the last fight on the quarter-deck.

CHAPTER XXXV.

OUR LAST CHANCE

THE big Welshman, Jones, had just swung into the press about him as we came up, and Hawkson had a breathing spell for a few moments. The old privateersman saw me behind him in the doorway, and the ghost of his old smile wrinkled the corners of his ugly mouth. He was covered with blood, and growing weak from exertion, but he held out a long, sinewy hand, and I grasped it. He said nothing, but looked at the surging crowd that was pressing closer and closer against the struggling Welshman and Howard. Henry clung to the companion coaming with one hand, and closed the gap between them. The black mass swung back toward us, and instantly we were fighting desperately to hold them in check.

A pile of black bodies in front impeded their movement, but they pressed us so close that we were jammed shoulder to shoulder, with Jones slightly in advance to the right, and the old captain

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in front. Gull ducked below my arm, and stabbed viciously upward at the Africans who came on.

There had been a short pause, caused by Jones's fierce fight, but, as he gradually slackened his efforts, and the men behind pressed forward, the gap began closing up. It would soon be over.

A huge black fellow reached out and grasped Captain Howard. The old pirate ran him through the body with marvellous quickness, but, before he could disengage his weapon, several more seized him and jerked him away from us. He disappeared in the blackness, and we saw him no more. He had gone to his account without a word, fighting desperately to the last, and with him went the last hope we had left.

Hawkson was tiring. A couple of men seized me and started to drag me out, but the old privateersman made a last desperate rally, and I tore myself free from dying clutches. But the fight could not last for ever. A black giant, who wore a gee-string, smote Hawkson's blade a terrific blow with a windlass-brake, knocking it out of his hand. Instantly several seized him, and, though I cut and stabbed frantically, they managed to pull him away, to be served as had been the others who had fallen into their hands.

Suddenly, while I cut wildly at the forms in front, some one pulled me backwards. I expected to find

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myself in the hands of the black tigers, thirsting for blood and revenge, and was about to make one last sweep, but my arm was seized, and I was pulled down the companionway, while Jones slammed the doors together and bolted them. The big sailor and myself were all the men left on deck of our after-guard, and he had pulled me back just in time. The door would stand a few minutes against the assault. Gull and Henry had both gone, the little ferret-faced fellow fastening his great fingers firmly in the throat of a man who drew him to his death. There was now no hope but to delay the inevitable for as many minutes as possible.

Jones and I had a short breathing spell, while bars and handspikes crashed through the heavy door panels. We took down several of the muskets from the racks, and, placing their muzzles against the rents in the wood, fired them one after the other, with the result of abating the zeal of the fellows who stood close against the other side. The room filled with the dense powder smoke, and the light from the swinging cabin lamps barely lit up the gloom enough to distinguish objects. Ernest, who had been left half-dead upon the cabin floor, now aroused himself enough to stagger to his feet.

“The lazarette,” he gasped; “it’s our only chance. Bring some muskets and ammunition. We can make a stand there.”

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Grasping an armful of the discharged weapons, I led the way through a small door in the after-bulkhead, as heavy blows crashed upon the door of the forward cabin. Jones followed with an armful of cartridges and a priming-flask, Ernest leaning heavily upon him. Then I hesitated.

“Put out the light. Let 'em think we're waitin' in the dark,” said the big sailor.

I turned back and took the lamp out of the bracket. It would serve to light the black hole we were entering, for Hicks had taken no lantern with him, being hardly able to walk, with weakness from wounds and exertion.

Jones went ahead with Ernest, and I looked quickly about the cabin for some means of preventing entrance through the small, low door into the stern of the boat. Nothing appeared handy, and I turned to follow.

At that same instant the attack upon the companion was resumed and the doors crashed in, letting several black forms come plunging down the steps.

There was no time to lose, so, quickly entering the hole, I closed it and set the lamp close by on the deck, where its dim rays would light the entrance when the door would be burst in. The bulkhead was not very thick, and it would take very few minutes to smash the small door, but, as the pas-

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sage was only about three feet wide, two able men with muskets and cutlasses could make it good from the inside, for no matter what the press beyond, the Africans would have to come in twos and threes through the opening. They would not think to cut a new way through, and, as long as they came in front, we could pile them up as fast as they could pull the dead and disabled away.

Jones had disappeared into the blackness farther aft under the cockpit as I entered, but the sound of the yelling blacks entering the cabin brought him back to my side, and I motioned him to stand to starboard, while I took the port side, our cutlass blades a little more than overlapping as we held them ready for the rush.

On all sides the ship's stores were piled and stored close up under the low deck. Spare canvas rolled and stopped in long bundles lined the passageway, placed near at hand that in case of emergency they could be brought out quickly and bent to stripped spars. We stood perfectly quiet, while the din below increased, but, as the savages had no light, they could not, at first, find the small door in the after-bulkhead.

While we waited, Hicks appeared, stooping and coming along under the low beams. He had a musket in each hand which he had loaded, and when he saw us he stopped. Laying down the guns, he

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began pulling at an old topsail, and Jones, seeing what he wanted, hastened to help. Together they rolled and dragged the canvas to the door, piling it up to close the opening as much as possible, and at the same time serve as a breastwork. Suddenly a savage voice howled close against the bulkhead, and instantly a rain of tremendous blows fell upon the door. It splintered, broke, and was torn away in an instant. Then the black bodies crowded in.

Jones on one side and myself on the other fell upon them with our cutlasses, and the first three lay groaning and blocking the way. Hicks crouched down behind the pile of topsail and rested his musket, with its muzzle about three feet from the opening, but held his fire. He would wait until one of us failed to stop our men.

The three bodies were whisked away, and a half-score of black faces, with white eyeballs and ivory teeth, filled the gap, each savage trying to get in at once, none flinching in the least from the sword cuts. Capstan-bars, muskets, and cutlasses were shoved through, and we had to keep alert to prevent being wounded. One huge negro, with a woolly beard on his black chin, pulled a couple of his fellows back from the opening, and thrust a long muscular arm inside, holding a cutlass. He swung it with marvellous quickness, and parried my stroke, giving me a bad cut in return, but Jones reached him

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with a short-arm thrust, and, before he could recover, I had him out of action. He was jerked back before we could get hold of his weapon, and others took his place.

It was a nightmare scene there in between the decks of the old pirate barque. I could sometimes catch a glimpse of Sir John Hicks lying in the bight of the old topsail, with his eyes looking steadily along the barrel of the musket and shining like beads in the dim light. He was good for one fellow, — the one we would miss. Opposite me the big sailor slashed and cut at everything that came through the opening, while just without the black bodies crowded, and hideous black faces grinned and yelled in savage fury.

Another rush, and then another, and Jones received a stab from a cutlass thrust suddenly in at the door. Three armed negroes tried to enter at once, and almost succeeded. I stopped one, but Jones's man came through, and another started to follow. Then the musket crashed in the passage, and we were choked with smoke. But Hicks had stopped the leader, and Jones then finished the other. We still held our own.

Suddenly the faces and forms drew back from the opening. A wild yelling was heard on deck, followed by a scrambling up the companion. Some

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noises sounded at the doors, pounding and hammering. We drew back and waited.

The minutes passed slowly. Hicks placed his spare gun in position, and coolly proceeded to load on the stores packed behind us. All was black and quiet now in the cabin, save for the hammering at the doors.

In a little while I began to get nervous. The yelling had begun to die away, and only now and then voices sounded forward.

“I reckon I’ll take a peep into the cabin,” I said. “Bring the lamp, and stand for a rush if there are any tricks played.”

Jones took the light, and, standing just inside the hole, let the rays fall upon the cabin-deck. It was apparently deserted. Poking my cutlass ahead of me, ready for a surprise, I made my way slowly through the opening, keeping my eyes on both sides as I came through. The cabin was empty.

I looked up at the companion entrance, and, as my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, I saw the doors were closed. The forward doors also had been put in place, and the hammering had now ceased. I distinctly heard the rattle of blocks with the tackle running rapidly.

“No one here,” I whispered, and Jones came through the bulkhead. Presently Hicks followed.

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“Better leave the light inside,” he suggested.
“They may have some trick to get us out.”

Jones sniffed the air loudly for a few moments.

“What’s the matter?” asked Sir John.

“Seems to me they’ve already played it,” said Jones, coolly. “I smell smoke, an’ I smell it strong.”

“Powder smoke, man; the place is thick with it,” I said, choking and coughing a little.

Jones turned his great face toward me.

“You may be the gunner, Mr. Heywood, you might know,” said he, “but I smells wood. There ain’t no mistake. The barque’s on fire, an’ they’ve nailed us below.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE END OF THE BLACK BARQUE

“FOR God’s sake bring the light,” said Hicks.

Jones did so, and, as its rays lit up the cabin, we saw that the smoke was thicker than when we first stopped firing. The peculiar pungent odour of burning tar and wood now became apparent.

The noise on deck had almost ceased entirely, but, as we listened, there broke upon our ears the dull boom of a heavy gun.

We looked at each other. Then it sounded again, and a loud crash above told of a shot tearing through our hull, while the dull report was repeated.

“Man-o’-war,” said Jones, significantly.

“Break down the door,” I cried. “We must get Miss Allen and Ernest.”

Hicks had already started for the light, and Jones bounded up the steps, cutting at the panels as he reached the top, while we hurried back to the lazarette.

Even as we went, the barque’s deck seemed to slant a trifle forward, and I wondered at it vaguely,

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as we made our way along the dark passage under the cockpit. In a few minutes we had made our way clear aft to the vessel's run. Here, behind boxes and barrels of stores, that Hicks had broken out and formed into a barricade, was Miss Allen. She greeted us calmly, but I could see the terror in the girl's eyes that the horror of the night had produced.

"I expected you," she said, her voice trembling.

Hicks looked at her sadly, and held out his hand.

"Come," he said, "we haven't a minute to spare. Where's Ernest?"

"Here, sir," said the sailor, rising from the deck. He was badly hurt, and could hardly stand.

"Take a grip of my shoulder," I said, "and hurry along. We must get out of this."

Even as we went, the deck began sloping forward. The incline was getting greater all the time, as though the barque was settling by the head. By the time we reached the cabin, she had listed to starboard, and Jones, who was cutting away at the shattered companion doors, broke through just as the steps or ladder, torn from its fastenings by the rush upon it when the savages came below, fell to one side and crashed down upon the floor, bringing the big sailor with it. We tried to place it back again in position, but, while we lifted it, the deck began to slant dangerously. A flickering light shone

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down through the opening Jones had made in the barricade, and, as he staggered to his feet, he called out that it was no use.

“She’s listed too much. It won’t stand. She’s all afire forrads, and goin’ down by the head. The devils have plugged her, too, an’ she’s fillin’ like a basket! Put it on the starboard side, an’ I’ll hold it while ye mount.”

We tried this method, but it wobbled so that Jones was sent up first to hold the top.

The barque was now sinking rapidly. The blacks had evidently cut a hole in her, besides setting her afire, to make sure of catching us below. She was to be our coffin,—a fitting end for men engaged in the foul trade. Jorg must have gone forward with his axe, mad with the blow he had received from Shannon’s men, and, after he had liberated some slaves by knocking the irons off, they had evidently overpowered him, taken his axe, and cut a hole in the vessel’s bottom, while the mass of them had surged aft for vengeance.

It took several precious moments to clear the barricade above sufficiently for a man to get out. Jones tore and pried at the shattered woodwork, but the negroes had piled a lot of gratings, lines, etc., over the opening, after fastening the doors by spiking some of their bunk-boards or slave-deck timber over the shattered panels.

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They had intended to make certain of us before leaving in the small boats.

Gradually Jones forced his way out, while the noise of the escaping air under the sinking deck grew into a deep snore, rushing as it did through every aperture, while the sea followed after.

Quickly we passed Miss Allen up, while we felt the ship settling. Then Ernest was lifted until Jones could reach his hand and get him out. Then the big sailor disappeared a moment from the opening, and we knew he had taken the girl to safety, if such a thing existed near. The listing motion increased rapidly. There was a loud roaring below.

Hicks seized the ladder, while I held the foot of it to keep it from sliding to starboard. Then he turned.

"After you, Heywood," he said, quickly. "Jump, there's no time to lose."

"Go!" I yelled; "go while you may. She's going down now."

But he turned his face to me, and for an instant I saw its expression in the dim light of the lamp still burning on the floor. There was no sign of fear in it. Only a deep sadness, as in one who has suffered a sudden great loss.

"After you," he said, calmly, and made a motion with his hand toward the sloping steps. There was something of an old-time courtesy in that gesture

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that told of men who had gone before. They who had borne the name he had disgraced. Bad man he may have been, but who shall judge him after that gallant end?

I saw that argument would be useless, even had there been time for it. Seizing the steps, I mounted as quickly as I could, while I felt them slide beneath me. I grasped the coamings as the steps left my feet and fell away to starboard, leaving me hanging.

In a moment I had thrown a leg over the edge of the opening, and drew myself panting and gasping to the poop. Jones was just in the act of disappearing over the rail, having lowered Miss Allen and Ernest overboard to a couple of planks and gratings he had hove in. I called to him for aid to help me get Hicks out, but it was just too late.

The barque was now almost perpendicular, pointing bow forward to the bottom. As I staggered to my feet, she gave a sudden lurch. Then straight as an arrow, she dived, and I found myself in the roaring, swirling vortex she left behind.

In the choking blackness beneath the ocean's surface, I seemed to stay. Down and down I went, in spite of frantic struggles. Then the suction ceased, and I began to mount. If I could only hold my breath a little longer!

A roaring was in my ears, and stars flashed in

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my eyes, and just when I was losing consciousness, my head came out into the air again.

How good was that first breath! I was back again in the world of air for another struggle. It seemed useless, and I swam slowly, wondering why I did so, yet my whole nature revolted against going under. It would only be a matter of minutes, and why not take the rest of a somewhat hard existence easy? My reason began to assert itself, and the uselessness of effort began to be manifest. Turning over on my back, I floated easily, only striking out now and then with a spasmodic kick.

Suddenly I heard voices. There were men near, and I quickly turned over again to try to gaze about me through the darkness.

Something made a rushing sound through the water, and, following the swish of the spray, I made out the regular stroke of oars. For an instant I thought of the slaves who had taken our boats, and I had no desire to call for aid. Then it struck me that the oar-stroke was very regular and could only come from trained men.

I called loudly, and soon had the satisfaction of getting an answer. The craft headed toward me, and in a moment I could make her out coming head on.

I grasped the gunwale as she came up, and was hauled inboard by a couple of men.

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“Here’s another rascal who’d rather hang than drown,” said one to the other. Then loudly to the man aft: “We’ve got him, sir.”

I was bundled aft, and made to sit in the bottom of the craft, which I now saw, by the aid of the lantern the helmsman had between his feet, to be a boat from a ship-of-war. The men were in uniform, and the man at the helm was an officer of the United States navy.

“How many of you got away in the boats?” he asked, sternly. “And how did you happen to be left behind?”

“I reckon I’m the only one left,” I said, sadly. “None of us escaped except me.”

“A likely yarn,” snapped the officer. “Who are you, anyway?”

“I’m an American, like yourself, and was gunner of the barque *The Gentle Hand*,” I answered.

I thought he would strike me when I said I was like himself, but he saw I meant no offence.

“Did all the slaves go down in her after you fired her, when you saw you couldn’t get away from us?” he asked again.

Then it suddenly dawned upon me that the cruiser had thought we had burned and scuttled the ship ourselves, after finding he was closing in and would soon have her under his guns.

“We didn’t fire her,” I answered. “The blacks

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did that, and there's no one left alive of her crew that I know of besides myself."

He gave a grunt of disgust, as if it were no use talking to a rascal, and headed for his vessel's side. I could see her lights now only half a mile away, and I wondered who and what she was, and what fate she had in store for me.

It looked as if I had made a mistake in leaving *The Gentle Hand*, and visions of a figure swaying at a yard-arm began flitting through my tired brain.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE LAST STRAND OF MY YARN

WHEN we came alongside the man-of-war, another small boat had already arrived. Lights were in the gangway, and forms showed along the rail. The vessel was a brig-rigged cruiser, not very large, but, judging from the heaviness of her spars that towered above in the darkness, she was very fast, capable of overhauling the majority of traders. She would not have caught *The Gentle Hand* in a breeze of any weight, and, as I gazed at her, I remembered the sail I had seen before dark, and to which I had called Bill's attention while aloft. This vessel was evidently the one seen but not reported, and she had probably crept up on us in the darkness without our knowing it. Then came the rising forward among the men, planned and led by Shannon and Martin, who had plotted with the slave-driver ashore for some of the profits. They had intended taking the barque in themselves, selling and landing the cargo somewhere on either the Cuban or American coast, and then making

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another trip, or sinking her before being overhauled and found out. It was a game easily played among dealers who asked few questions and who paid cost prices. Clearing would not be difficult to men who thought nothing of forging papers, and who would close the mouths of certain officials of the Spanish ports well known to them by handing over a small percentage of the profits. How it all ended is now known, and I seemed to be the sole survivor of the affair.

We ranged alongside the cruiser, and the order came to peak oars. How the accurate obedience of the men and quick, certain movements brought back memories of the days when I wore the blue uniform and served frigate's guns. Then we were fast, and I was ordered to stand up.

"Now then, up with you," snapped the officer aft. "Clap that fellow in irons as he comes aboard," he added to the quartermaster, who stood in the gangway, and who promptly laid a heavy paw upon my shoulder. I was seized by two sailors and hustled below without further ado, and when I arrived in the 'tween-decks, a fellow clapped the irons upon my wrists.

"Where'll we put him?" asked one of the sailors of the master-at-arms, who was superintending operations.

The light from the lanterns shone upon me, and

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I must have presented a pretty hard spectacle. Several wounds that I had received had begun to bleed afresh, and the salt water mixed with the blood, completely saturating my clothing.

“You look like you had a clip or two, my friend,” said the master-at-arms to me. “Had a bit of a fracas, hey?”

The tone was familiar, and I looked hard at the man. Then, in spite of his clean-shaved face and uniform, I had no difficulty in recognizing old Peter Richards, bos'n of *The Gentle Hand*.

“Well, how in thunder did you get here?” I asked.

“Didn't you get my note?” said Richards.

“I did, but am not the scholar you appear to be. Sink you, Peter, how did you play it on me so?”

Richards smiled grimly.

“You know,” he said, “when you first signed with old Watkins, I did not want to go in the barque. Your gaff set me on, John, and I thought you such a fool you would get in trouble. I knew what she was, well enough, but I would have stayed with her if they had treated me right. But folk in that business don't treat people right. The whole game is one of wrong and oppression, — an' you know it. When I left, I knew she was going out the next day, and tried to tell you, but you had just gone

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ashore, and when I found you had gone, I went as far as the place where you had the outfly with Curtis on account of the gal. I heard of the mess, an' got to the long skipper's boat in time to see him rowing you back to *The Gentle Hand*."

"Did you know what he had in the chest, too?" I asked.

"No, but I knew he was up to something. I knew he couldn't do much with the vessel he had, and I thought I would come along in your wake in this brig. We got here too late. Tell me how the trouble came about."

I told as much as I could of the rising, and before I was through, an officer called him aft to give instructions about me. I knew he would do what he could, and hoped to have him stand between me and the end of the gant-line.

While he was gone, a master's mate came up and took me in hand.

"What became of the rest of the crew?" he asked.

"They killed all hands," I answered, sullenly. "I'm the only one left."

"Not exactly," answered the sailor, kindly. "Not exactly, my boy. There's a pretty good lump of a Welshman and a fairly sized Dutchman already ahead of you."

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“What!” I cried. “Did you pick up Miss Allen and Big Jones?”

“I haven’t the honour of the gal’s acquaintance,” said the fellow, “but we’ve got her aboard all right, and the men with her. Who is the young lady, — the skipper’s daughter?”

“Daughter of the trader,” I answered, with a feeling of relief. “Her father was killed with the rest. So she’s aboard, is she?”

“All safe, but we don’t hang women for piracy, so I don’t know what the old man’ll do with her. No, Sam, we won’t put him in the brig,” he said, addressing one of the men. “It’s too hot, too much like the hold of a slaver to suit him. I’ve always noticed these fellows are mighty particular about themselves. You can stow yourself there in that hammock to-night, my friend, and here’s some togs for you,” he continued to me, “and here’s a nip of grog for you. Stand by for a call to come aft and be sentenced.”

His tone was kindly, but so cool withal, when discussing my probable end, that I hated the fellow. Hadn’t I gone through enough? Must I be goaded and hung, after all? I changed my dripping clothes, with the help of a couple of men who loosed my hands for a few minutes, and then the order was passed to bring me aft to the captain for examination.

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Tired and exhausted as I was, I was hustled aft between two sailors, and brought to the poop, where sat the captain of the cruiser in a chair. He was only partly dressed, on account of the heat, and he smoked a long cigar of the kind rolled in Cuba. Richards had passed a word for me, and he looked less dangerous than I expected.

He was an intelligent officer, and, as I told my story, beginning at the time I was tricked into signing into the barque, he became interested, and I could see he believed much I told. While I talked, Jones was brought up, and, without hearing what I had already said, corroborated me in all details. Then we were allowed to go below and turn in, and for twelve blessed hours I knew nothing. Ernest was too far gone to talk that night, but the next day his story was found to be in the main like ours.

As for Miss Allen, she was unable to leave her room for several days, but when she could tell of the affair, her testimony did much to save our lives.

We were paroled and given the liberty of the ship while she cruised to the eastward along the coast of the Guinea Gulf and Bight of Benin.

Soon I found the cruiser, which proved to be the *Hornet*, was looking for a brig commanded by a fellow named Shannon, who had made a reputation on the coast for being a most desperate pirate and slaver. When the bos'n came aboard, they imme-

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diately gave chase to the barque. Then I explained the affair that happened in Funchal, and the encounter with the brig to the southward of that place. It was evident from my description of the fellow that it was the same man they were hunting, and they finally had enough confidence in my testimony to bear away again to the westward and start up the coast.

After two weeks' cruising under the hot sun, we raised the topsails of a peculiar-looking craft that was heading down toward the slave coast. Her foretopmast was remarkably short, and, as we overhauled her, I had no difficulty in recognizing Captain Shannon's vessel.

She saw us and stood inshore close-hauled, and when within a mile of the beach, backed her foresail and waited for us to come up. The brig fired a shot or two across her, and then called away three of her boats, which were filled with armed men, to go in and take possession.

We were to leeward, and the odour that came down the wind told plainly her occupation. Had it been night, Brannigan would have dumped the blacks he had aboard into the sea, for he was capable of anything, but the sun was shining now, and it was no use, for he had failed to recognize the *Hornet* as a man-of-war until she was close enough to see any such manœuvre from her tops. There

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was nothing to do but either get rid of the cargo, or get out of his vessel, and, as we could now see her deck plainly, Brannigan chose the only course to keep clear of the hangman's noose. He lowered down his boats, and, as ours started in for him, he started for the beach, keeping up a rapid and well-directed fire from muskets until he struck the surf. His brig, which had been named the *Black Jewel*, after the manner customary among facetious slave-ship owners, was scuttled where she lay as soon as the blacks were taken out of her.

As the *Hornet* had been some time on the coast, just as soon as she put the slaves ashore, she stood away for home. We crossed the line, picked up the northeast trade, and made a straight course for the States.

I was allowed the freedom of the deck after I had made known my true rating, and had explained how I had once served in a war-ship and as first officer in several others. In this way I had a chance to meet Miss Allen.

"You are a rough sailorman, are you not, Mr. Heywood?" she asked one day, as we neared the Carolina coast.

"I suppose I may be classed as such," I assented, "but I've held a master's position once, and been mate of several ships."

"Well," she said, "I must confess that I like

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rough sailormen very much. You know I've been used to the society of gentlemen."

"Your discernment in choosing acquaintance does you immense credit, Miss Allen," I answered. "I'm sure I feel honoured."

"I have always associated with men who could read and write, you know, and who have been to school. But I do like rough sailormen. They have much that is interesting about them," she continued, calmly, without heeding my interruption.

"There are over a hundred on board this ship," I asserted, getting my breath. "Possibly some of them could sign their names, or, at least, make a cross-mark opposite them. As for me, I fear so much learning would be dangerous in so rough a sailor."

She flushed, and I saw at once that she had meant nothing disagreeable. Then she asked me straight-way about Sir John Hicks.

"How was it he did not follow us?" she asked.

"Because he held the ladder for me," I answered.

"And you let him stay below while you escaped," she cried, her eyes flooding scorn and contempt. "You, a sailor, let him die, and ran to save yourself?"

"Only after he refused to go. I did all I could to persuade him," I answered.

She looked long and steadily at me. Then she

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turned and went slowly below, and I saw her no more on board. We ran in between the Chesapeake Capes, and Jones, Ernest, and myself were soon given our liberty.

I took command of a coaster running general cargo to Havana, and before I sailed I received a letter from New York. I read it over and over many times on the run south, and finally decided to call on the writer at the end of the return voyage. But this matter has nothing further to do with the last voyage of *The Gentle Hand*.

Sometimes I wonder at the end of all those former shipmates of mine, all the strange, savage, and kindly crew of that old, ill-fated barque. Even Tim, the little American sailor, had a history. Where are all those faces, the strong, bad, saturnine, and jovial? They flit like phantoms through my memory, — men who have gone before. I have missed their voices often. In the deserted fore-castle of some large, home-arrived ship, I have more than once half-expected to meet one or more of that last crew I sailed with as a man before the mast.

Far away offshore, in the middle of the southern ocean, I have heard that strange voice of the sea again, the low, far-reaching, vibrating murmur that thrills the soul of the listener until each fibre of his being responds. It is then the sailor realizes

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the vast world of rest and peace of the countless crews who have gone before, and wonders as though the cry came from some mighty invisible host, calling through the void of air and sunshine. He thinks of the men he once knew, and wonders. They were good. They were bad. They were a mixture of the two. But they were all human. And who shall say where they have gone?

THE END.



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