

THE RED RAVEN LIBRARY

STIRRING TALES OF OLD BUCCANEER DAYS

DEFYING THE SEA WOLF OR THAD AT BAY IN THE POWDER MAGAZINE



BY AN 'OLD SALT'

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE: At some time or other the fascination of life at sea takes hold upon the imagination of the average lad who has healthy red blood in his veins. From the day he is able to read the stirring adventures of Robinson Crusoe, a yearning to travel and look upon strange sights the world over takes possession of him. Usually this gradually gives way to the less strenuous pleasures that surround him at home, but in innumerable instances it has led young fellows to go forth to seek their fortune. And next to Robinson Crusoe, boys have somehow loved to read of the bold buccaneers who harried the sea at the time Spain was sending the treasures stolen from Mexico and Peru across to the mother country. In this series we purpose giving thrilling stories of those notorious old sea tigers and what wonderful adventures three brave boys met among them. These stories will be found exciting enough to please everyone, but above reproach, since there is not the slightest design shown to glorify the life of a buccaneer or pirate, but rather the reverse. They are the very best tales that money can buy, and we believe will receive a rousing welcome from boys.



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Defying the Sea Wolf;

OR,

THAD AT BAY IN THE POWDER MAGAZINE.

By AN OLD SALT.

CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

Thad, Oliver and "Simple Simon," the three boy chums who set out to win renown and benefit humanity by capturing the notorious Captain Kidd, the most dreaded "scorcher of the seas," at the time New York was but a small town. Thad was the recognized leader of the valiant trio, and Simon very often proved to be not so very "simple" after all, since he possessed a bold heart, and was ready to risk much for the right.

Captain Kidd, the most notorious pirate of early days, whose name has always been associated with dark deeds along the Eastern coast, from Maine to the sunny shores of the West India tropic isles; and especially in connection with various deposits of treasure-trove which he is believed to have made in myriads of lonely spots during his warfare upon the commerce of the blue seas.

Dragon, the "right bower" of Kidd, a desperate fighter, as cruel and ruthless as he was fearless, and between whom and "Simple Simon" there seemed to spring up a bitter feeling of enmity from the very beginning of their acquaintance.

Governor Bellmont, whom the King of England sent out to govern his American colonies—a man of some little courage, and not wholly destitute of humor, yet who had good cause to fear the savage fury of the lawless marauders of the sea.

Hugo the Hunchback, a deformed outcast, who seeks the sneers he has received from the careless world by taking up the career of a free rover.

Salim, Capt. Kidd's valet, an unfortunate Moorish lad, once torn from his native land.

Misses Coral, daughter of the rich Dutch merchant, Herr Vost Von Pnyster, and who in a spirit of foolish banter has sought the presence of the pirate chieftain to beg for a present that she can show at her coming marriage.

Black Diamond, a grizzled sea monster, who forsook the robes of the church to assume the role of pirate.

CHAPTER I.

THE JEWELED HAND.

"What's the matter now, Mr. Dragon?"

"The young fellows are sulking again, and they need some pretty severe discipline, I'm thinking?"

Lieut. Dragon, of Capt. Kidd's vessel, crossed his legs and looked at the man who occupied a seat at the table in the luxurious main cabin.

"But what is the fracas?"

"It is this way: I told 'em that they would have to remain on board the ship for ten days as a punishment for their escapade on the island when they got lost in the Black Swamp, and Thad said he would see Capt. Kidd hanged first."

A frown gathered on Kidd's brow.

"They threaten trouble, do they?" he said, quietly.

but Dragon could see that the ire of the pirate chief was rising.

"Mr. Dragon," resumed Kidd, "we will see to this matter. Those young fellows can fight like tigers, and, if it wasn't for that, harry my soul! if we wouldn't string 'em up to the yard to teach them better manners."

Dragon grinned.

"We can't spare the youngsters, that's the reason I don't order you to give them a little rope at the yard. No, you needn't send them to me. I'll come up on deck in a few minutes."

Dragon bowed and left the cabin.

Capt. Kidd turned for a moment to the documents on the table, one of which was a map of New York, and fingered them for a few moments.

When he was through he tapped the silver bell, and Selim, his dark-faced servant, appeared.

"Selim, bring me the pistols from the berth; the chased ones, I mean."

The boy vanished, and, coming back in a few moments, laid two handsomely mounted pistols before his master.

They were indeed splendid specimens of workmanship.

The pirate had captured them from a Spanish vessel that was carrying the pair to the King of Spain as a gift from the Sultan of Morocco, and he had used them in more than one sea fight when he found himself in close quarters on the enemy's deck.

"They're pretty, eh, Selim, boy?" said Kidd, holding the weapons up in the light so that Selim might see them.

The youth nodded.

"The King of Spain has mourned for them ever since he heard of the loss of the sultan's vessel. They were intended, you know, to cement forever the friendship of the two monarchs. But the fortunes of the seas brought them to my treasure chest, and if the Spanish king ever sees them he will have to look at them in Capt. Kidd's hands."

At this Selim smiled and Kidd lowered his voice.

"My boy," he suddenly resumed. "You have been with me for a long time."

"Three years, captain."

"And you have never seen your native land during all that time?"

"Never, sir."

"But you have dreamed about it?"

The boy lowered his head and his voice quivered when he spoke again.

"I have dreamed about it, yes, captain," he said. "That is but natural, you see."

"Hang it all, yes," and Kidd watched the play of light and shadow on Selim's face for a moment. "If I were in your place I would dream, too, of the hills and valleys of

my native land and the fair damsels who live there, but most of all of the old home."

Selim uttered a quick cry and sprang to Capt. Kidd's side as if he would stop the flow of words which only brought back thoughts of home."

"Don't, my captain!" cried the handsome, dark-faced boy. "You make me feel bad. I have longed for home——"

"Then this life doesn't suit you."

"What else can I do while I am under you and your flag?"

"You have taken the oath with the rest."

"Yes, I have sworn by the Silver Cutlass to remain true to you, my captain."

"But you would like to break away and go home?"

Kidd's face suddenly became stern again.

"I would not like to break my oath," said Selim, after a long-drawn breath. "But you know the hills and valleys of my native shores are not the decks of a ship."

"That is true. But would you desert me, boy?"

"My captain, I am true to you."

"Selim, you shall go home, but not now. Ere long we will hoist sail from the old Sound—after we have paid off some outstanding debts—and the Jolly Roger will kiss the winds of other seas. We will cut the waters of the tropics and Capt. Kidd will once more be the king of the seas."

A smile of anticipation passed over Selim's face.

"As I have said, we have some old debts to pay before we sail from this place," continued Kidd. "We will settle some scores with Gov. Bellomont, and you shall help me, Selim."

"I may not be able."

"Ay, but you will be able. I have seen you fight, Selim. You can handle a cutlass almost equal to Dragon, my lieutenant. We will show this royal governor one of these days that he is powerless against Capt. Kidd and his jolly rovers of the high seas. But, Selim, come closer. I want to tell you something."

The boy drew nearer, and Capt. Kidd put his arm around his waist and looked up into his face.

"On two occasions you have saved my life," said Kidd. "You have been of great value to me, and I should hate to part with you. Indeed, my boy, it would be hard to get along without you. Now, will you please open the chest in yon corner?"

Selim disengaged himself from Kidd's arms and crossed the cabin to the designated chest.

It was a large affair, heavily bound in brass, and had stood in that same corner a long time.

It took the strength of the youth to raise the great lid of the chest, and, when he had done so, he turned and awaited his captain's further pleasure.

"Put your hand down into the southwest corner," said Capt. Kidd, who had been watching Selim all the time. "You will find a packet there if some rogue hasn't taken it."

It was evident that no one had robbed the robber, for Capt. Kidd kept his treasures under stout locks, and Selim's hand brought to light a little packet wrapped in oilskin and about six inches square.

With this in his hand he came back to Kidd.

"Open," said the pirate captain.

Selim untied the cords that held the packet together, and a velvet box was placed on the table.

"Now the little box," smiled the pirate with a wave of his hand.

It took Selim a few seconds to open the green velvet box, and when his eyes caught sight of the contents he started back from the table, and his eyes seemed to dart from their sockets.

In the green box lay a human hand—a woman's, richly jeweled and as natural as if embalmed but the day before.

It reposed softly on the velvet cushion of the box, and Selim's eyes stared at it as he held back while his breaths, short and quick, told how agitated he was.

"You have never seen the hand before?" smiled Capt. Kidd, looking up into the boy's face.

"I never have, my captain."

"No, of course not. I took it from the countess the year before we met."

Selim did not speak.

"She did not want to give up her jewels, and there was no other way of getting the fine rings save by taking the hand that sported them. That is the hand of Donna La Dozsie, Countess of Seville, of which city you may have heard, boy."

The youth nodded and Kidd proceeded.

"Lift the hand, Selim."

The youth approached the little box with a shudder and lifted the hand.

A profusion of loose jewels lay beneath it in a little hollow.

"Her jewels—her wedding jewels," said Capt. Kidd, answering the boy's unspoken question. "Of course, she didn't want to give them up, but force and persistence, my boy, did the business."

"And the countess?"

"Oh, she must now be with the mermaids."

The *sang-froid* with which Kidd answered Selim's question caused the boy to start.

"She was a tigress, but one of those beautiful ones," the pirate continued. "She did not want to act womanly on board ship, and so she lost fingers and jewels, and the mermaids got a one-handed queen."

It was a cold, cruel laugh that rippled over Kidd's lips at these words.

Selim dropped the hand and fell back.

"You have a sweetheart, my boy, who some day will wear the jewels of the countess," said Capt. Kidd.

"Sylvia would never wear them."

"What?" and the face of the pirate grew dark. "She would not wear jewels like these?"

"No, they are on the hand of the dead."

"Nonsense!" laughed Kidd. "The proudest dames of England would ask no questions; the princesses of France would be glad to wear the gems of the donna; but your sweetheart—she a poor girl——"

"Beware, my captain!" broke in Selim, and his dark eyes flashed.

"She is poor. She roams the hills and chases the wild goats, and she would go into ecstasies over those jewels."

"Sylvia would not wear them, my captain. She would not listen to the story of how the rich countess lost her gems——"

"And you would be fool enough to tell her before you poured the jewels into her lap?"

"How could I tell my Sylvia a lie?"

"You are thin-skinned!" cried Kidd. "By my life, almost too much so to sail with me."

"You can send me home, sir."

Selim's words were spoken in a haughtiness of tone that startled Capt. Kidd.

"When I am done with you you shall go home and not before," he said.

Selim dropped the lid of the jewel casket and stepped back.

"Then, sir," said Kidd, "I shall give the jewels to Mr. Dragon for his sweetheart."

"As you please, my captain."

"What, do you refuse the gift?"

"Selim cannot take the jewels of the dead for the bosom of his love."

"Thunder and furies!" exclaimed the pirate, as he leaped to his feet and seized the chased pistols. "For a feather I would scatter your brains on yon wall, you ungrateful dog."

Selim folded his arms and looked calmly into the face before him.

"Selim is in Capt. Kidd's power," he said, slowly. "The king of the seas stole Selim from his home. He lured him into the life he leads by a lie."

"This is unbearable," roared Kidd. "I have made you, boy. I have shown you the world; I have taken you to strange lands and enriched you far beyond your dearest dreams. You have been the valet of Capt. Kidd, the tiger of the Spanish main, and now you refuse a lot of

jewels because they are touched by the dead hand of one of the proud mistresses of Spain."

The youth recoiled a step further, but at the same time he did not lower his gaze.

"Go to your quarters," continued Kidd. "You have extended your term of service under the Jolly Roger, and you shall live and die with Capt. William Kidd! For I swear to you, young sir, that never again shall you look upon the mountains of your native coast, much less press the lips of the little goat chaser of your barren hills. Go back, sir!"

For a moment the boy seemed on the point of resenting these words, but he turned on his heel and walked slowly across the cabin.

Watched furtively by the buccaneer, Selim opened a little door curiously set in the wall and disappeared.

Kidd struck the table with his fist.

"I am master here," he cried. "I'll break them all in. Now what was that Mr. Dragon was telling me about those three youngsters? I'll break them in, too!" and he flung the jewel box back into the chest and locked it.

CHAPTER II.

THAD DEFIES PIRATIC AUTHORITY.

It was true as Dragon had told his captain that three members of the crew of the pirate galley, *Red Raven*, had refused to take their prescribed punishment with good grace.

Thad Fergus and his chums, Oliver and Simple Simon, had seen so much of life with the buccaneers that they did not know when this so-called disciplining would stop, therefore Thad had told Dragon he would not stand the infliction of the new punishment, which was that they should be cooped up in the ship for ten days and put to menial labor for their escapade on the island and their almost fatal adventure in the heart of the Black Swamp.

Dragon the Fearless wanted an opportunity to discipline the boys, and it was with a glad heart that he made his way to Kidd's cabin and informed him of the state of affairs on deck.

Shortly after his interview with Selim, Capt. Kidd made his appearance on the upper deck of the vessel.

The first man he encountered was his leading officer.

"Where are they?" asked Kidd.

"They've just darted down the companion," replied Dragon. "Foregad, sir, that young tiger, Thad, is determined to resist, and I told him that he would have but little skin on his back if he kept up his mutiny, for it amounts to that."

Kidd looked down the deck a moment and turned again to Dragon.

"What do you think has just happened below?" he asked.

The first officer shook his head.

"Selim my slave has shown more spirit than he ever displayed in my presence."

"Break him down, sir."

"But hang it all, I like the boy," smiled Kidd. "His back has never felt the 'cat.'"

"But the 'cat' would fit it neatly," exclaimed Dragon, who did not like Selim. "I have often noticed the curve of his spine, and by my life, captain, it is the sort that the 'cat' likes."

"But that would be cruel," said Kidd. "The boy has scruples."

"Scruples, eh?" laughed Dragon, falling back. "What in the name of the saints is anyone with scruples doing under the Jolly Roger?"

"I know we don't have much use for scruples on board this ship," smiled Kidd, "but Selim has them, all the same. He has just refused to accept the jewels I took from the Countess of Seville."

"The fool!" cried Dragon. "Just try your humble servant, captain, with an offer like that."

The pirate laughed and turned the conversation.

"You may call up the boys," he said.

As Dragon darted below, Capt. Kidd turned and looked over the bow of the vessel.

His face, which was quite handsome, was a study.

It changed color two or three times while he gazed in silence over the lapping waters of the Sound, with his arms folded and his lips closely wedged.

It was a day of days. The sun was declining in the west, and the ripples of the water were being painted all colors by the matchless brush of nature. A little breeze stole across the decks of the galley, and stirred lazily the half-furled sails and fluttered the flag that dangled at her peak.

Not far away—just across the Sound—rose the spires of old New York.

Ruled by Sir George Bellomont, whom we have already met, the city had become a mart for the commerce of the world. Ships of every nation rode in her waters, and strange-looking soilers promenaded her streets and drank and caroused in her many tippling houses.

There was a good hatred between Kidd and Sir George, for the king had outlawed the captain of the *Red Raven*, and Bellomont was desirous of carrying out his monarch's wishes by capturing the sea king, which, of course, was easier said than done.

The pirate vessel had put into the Sound for the purpose of ascertaining whether Kidd had really been outlawed, and, finding that it was only too true, the doughty scorcher of the sea had resolved to remain as long as he

pleased, a defiance and a menace to the king's merchandise in and about the city.

It was useless to attempt to drive Capt. Kidd to sea by threats.

He would remain as long as he desired, and he would also show Sir George Bellomont that it took more than one royal governor to catch the despoiler of the Spanish main.

Thoughts of this kind filled Capt. Kidd's mind while he waited for Dragon.

He would not be driven from his moorings, and he laughed when he thought of the proclamations and messages he had already received from the king's servant in New York.

His reverie was at last broken by heavy footsteps and a voice behind him.

Kidd turned and faced his brawny lieutenant.

"Well, Mr. Dragon?"

"I cannot bring him up, sir," said Dragon. "What do you think the young rascal has done?"

Kidd impatiently shook his head.

"He is in the magazine."

A cry of astonishment parted Capt. Kidd's lips.

"In the magazine you say, Mr. Dragon?" he roared.

"Yes, captain."

"And the others?"

"I didn't look for them as yet; they may be with Thad, but he is in the magazine."

"And you told him that I wanted him on deck?"

"I did, sir."

"And he—what did the young rascal say, Mr. Dragon?"

"He pushed the door half shut, and, pursing his mouth, said that he would not come out till he got ready."

Capt. Kidd stamped on the deck in his anger.

"Mr. Dragon, you will have to discipline this fool," he said.

"And I'll do it!" cried the big fellow. "I wonder if he thinks he can defy the whole ship's crew?"

"See that he does not, sir—that's all. In the magazine, hey? Well, this nearly causes me to come around to your way of thinking, Dragon."

Kidd was about to turn when he seemed to think of an important matter.

"Has he possession of a tinder box, Mr. Dragon?" he suddenly asked.

"It is likely, sir."

"The devil you say, Mr. Dragon."

"And with a tinder box he could blow every one of us to Davy Jones' locker."

"You are right, sir, but the boy won't carry things that far."

"I hope not," and Dragon showed his teeth in a grin.

"Come with me, Mr. Dragon," said Kidd. "We will go and see this young rebel."

Both men went below, and Kidd turned down the passageway leading to the powder magazine of the *Red Raven*.

The door seemed to be closed, but he saw that it was not locked.

Capt. Kidd went close to the portal and struck it with the butt of one of his pistols.

For a moment not a word came from within, and then both men heard the shuffling of feet.

"Ho! there?" cried the pirate captain.

The next moment the heavy sheet-ironed portal opened and Kidd leaned forward, for there was not much light around him.

Just within the magazine stood the figure of the young rebel against piratical authority—Thad Fergus, the young New Yorker.

He looked at Kidd, and the pirate returned the look with interest.

"This borders on mutiny, sir," said Kidd.

"I cannot help it, captain."

"You refuse to submit to the rules of the ship?"

"I refuse to take orders from Lieut. Dragon, who wishes to keep me and my chums captives on board this hot vessel, allowing us no privileges whatever."

"Mr. Dragon only carries out the law of the sea."

"Then, sir, it is an unjust law," said Thad. "We did some good service when the galley was attacked a few nights ago by Capt. Marmont and his Sound robbers, and now, because we were lost in the Black Swamp, we are to be cooped up in the ship for ten dreary days."

Dragon watched Kidd closely during Thad's speech.

"You must learn to obey the laws of the sea," said Kidd. "If you refuse in one instance you will refuse in others."

"That is not all. Dragon threatened us with the 'cat' at the end of our imprisonment."

"Did you do that, Mr. Dragon?" asked Kidd, as he turned upon his first officer.

"Yes, captain; a forced stay on the ship is not what these young fellows need. They need a few lickings of the 'cat.'"

"I approve of what Mr. Dragon does," said Kidd, looking again at Thad. "You will come out of the magazine and take your punishment like a man."

"The 'cat' also, Capt. Kidd?"

"Whatever Mr. Dragon sees fit to inflict."

Thad did not look toward the big lieutenant of the pirate craft.

"Then, sir," he said, addressing Capt. Kidd, "then I remain where I am."

Kidd's face assumed an ashy color.

It was the sign of rage.

He laid his hand on the cutlass at his side and drew it halfway from its sheath.

"No! we will get the young rat out," said he, smiling at his first officer. "We will see to that, sir. Don't pester him now, sir, but come with me."

Thad saw the two men walk away and fell back into the gloom of the magazine, where was stored the powder and balls of the ship.

It was a large place, amply protected from the fire of vessels from without, but all knew that a spark of fire inside would blow the vessel to atoms.

"Not a word to the men as yet," whispered Capt. Kidd to Dragon. "We must get the boy out of the magazine. If he should take a crazy notion——"

"Merciful heavens, captain, you don't think he will?"

"I don't think he will if that relieves you, Mr. Dragon."

"I am not afraid, captain. Give me orders and I will rush the magazine forthwith and drag the young fellow out at the risk of life. He may secure the door on the inside and defy us all, but I can break the door in with my body, for you once saw me break in the barred portal of the old castle we took once on the coast of France where the ladies had hidden."

"The door of the magazine is no stronger than was the portal of the castle," said Kidd. "You could break it down with your own strength, Mr. Dragon, and if it must come to this, to subdue this young fellow——"

"Just give the command and it shall be done!" broke in Dragon. "I don't fear him even if he is in the magazine, but I was thinking that if he were to strike a light there——"

"Go to! He'll not be fool enough to do that," exclaimed Kidd. "He knows what the consequences would be and——"

The two were now in Kidd's cabin, and the pirate captain had poured out two bumpers of rum, one of which he handed to his lieutenant.

Presently footsteps were heard at the door and Dragon opened it.

A strange-looking man, with a huge hump on his back, saluted the captain of the pirate craft.

"Come in, Mr. Hugo," said Kidd, and the hunchback entered the cabin.

"Who's in the magazine?" cried the strange-looking man, one of whose eyes was gray while the other was intensely black.

"We have a young rebel on board the ship," said Kidd. "Thad, the leader of the three lads whom we impressed into our service, has taken refuge there to escape punishment."

"It's a bad place for a bad boy," laughed Hugo the Hunchback.

"We're going to get him out, Mr. Hugo, never fear," put in Capt. Kidd.

"But if he should take a notion to drop a spark into the powder kegs——"

"We'd go to Davy Jones' locker, that's all," laughed the pirate king. "I have just given Mr. Dragon here orders to discipline the boy and to relieve us from the danger you speak of."

"I'm with you, Mr. Dragon," said Hugo, as he turned upon the first officer.

"I don't need you," was the reply. "I can do it myself. I'll rush the magazine as the captain himself shall see, and, by heavens! we'll discipline the boy as never a boy was disciplined."

"Yes," coolly said the hunchback, "and, from what I've noticed about Master Fergus since I became acquainted with him, we're all apt to go skyward in a bunch if you press him too hard."

CHAPTER III.

THE TERROR OF THE POWDER.

"Mr. Dragon, you will select twenty of our best men," said Capt. Kidd, when he had reflected a moment. "We must get this young rebel out of the magazine. While he is there the whole crew is in danger. The force will overawe the boy and we will get him out of the place. I never had a case like this on my hands."

"And no one but that young scamp would have thought of taking refuge among the powder."

"A boy like that is liable to think of anything," put in the hunchback. "He is fertile in imagination, and will resort to anything to escape punishment."

Dragon moved toward the door and Kidd called after him.

"Tell the men that I will lead them myself," he said. "I would not shirk a duty like this—not for the world, sir."

The burly figure of Dragon vanished.

"Now, Mr. Hugo, what is it? You have some other errand here. I can see that by your eye."

"Which one, captain?" grinned the strange-eyed pirate. "They don't look alike, you know."

"Marry me, they don't!" laughed Kidd. "It is hard to tell which is the prettiest."

"Some women take a fancy to the black one, others like the gray," was the jovial retort, at which the pirate chief laughed.

"I think if I were going to choose a mark on your face I'd shoot at the black," and Kidd leaned back in his chair and fingered the pistols on the table.

"Captain," said Hugo, "I have a mind to send my brother a letter."

"Do you think he would receive it?"

"Why not? He used to think a good deal of me before I concluded to live a merry life."

"You can write him if you wish, sir, but don't make overtures to him."

"I shall not."

"I don't want to lose you, Mr. Hugo. From what I have seen of you I think you will be just the man I want when we get down to the warm seas to tackle the galleys of the world with their golden treasure."

"Oh, I shan't make any overtures, for this life suits me," laughed Hugo. "I merely want to tell him not to destroy certain things that belong to me and which are now in his keeping."

"If that is all, write him what you please," said Kidd. "And, if you care, you may add the best wishes of Capt. Kidd of the Jolly Roger."

Hugo was about to withdraw when Dragon walked into the cabin.

"The men are ready," said the first officer.

"Armed are they, Mr. Dragon?"

"To the teeth, sir."

"Good!"

Kidd rose, placed the Silver Cutlass in his belt and took up the pistols.

"Now for a bout with this young rebel," he said. "We will see whether he will defy us all."

A minute later the three pirates found themselves at the head of twenty of the most savage of the crew—men who had swept many a deck with the ferocity of lions, and who were not in the habit of giving quarter.

Kidd looked them over and turned to Dragon.

"The cream of, the sea," said he.

Thus equipped for the ejection of the young rebel, the pirates moved toward the powder magazine.

They found the door tightly shut.

"The rat is in the hole," said Dragon, with a grin, and Hugo leaned forward and inspected the heavy portal.

Capt. Kidd stepped closer and struck the door with the hilt of his cutlass by way of introduction.

"Open in the name of Capt. Kidd!" he cried.

For a moment silence reigned beyond the door, but the next minute the well-known voice of Thad was heard.

"What is wanted?"

"We want you, sir," roared Kidd, as he colored in the light of the lanterns.

"I can't open the door unless the punishment is remitted."

"Who commands on this vessel?" cried the pirate chief. "Do you expect to defy Capt. Kidd?"

"I expect to defend this place to the best of my ability."

"Heavens, captain, there is now a light in the magazine! You can see the reflection of it under the door."

This was true; beyond the door lay a streak of red which told the pirates that there was really a light in the interior of the powder magazine.

The stalwart buccaneers behind Capt. Kidd looked at one another, but said nothing.

"You will not open the door?" cried Kidd.

"I will not!"

"Mr. Dragon," said the pirate chief, "can the door be fastened by anyone on the inside?"

"Yes, sir. You remember that we made it so in case of direct need."

"So we did, sir, so we did."

"There are places for iron barricades inside, and we left the irons in there."

"Then the young fellow has taken possession of them."

"Undoubtedly he has, sir."

Kidd remained silent for a moment.

"Bring a heavy plank," he said.

Dragon turned to the men behind him.

Three of them started off and soon returned with a formidable plank which could be used as a battering-ram.

It looked stout enough to batter down the wall of a castle, and as the men came up with it Kidd nodded approval.

"Now, sir," he said, with a glance at his first officer, "we will test the mettle of this door."

"Why not let me try it first?"

Dragon's eyes seemed to emit sparks of flame.

He was as strong as an ox and as wiry as a tiger cat, and was, moreover, proud of his Samsonian strength.

"Do you think you could have any effect on the magazine door, Mr. Dragon?" cried Kidd. "You know how it was built."

Dragon shrugged his shoulder and only grinned.

"You may try it," remarked Kidd, at which the men fell back and the powerful pirate retreated in turn.

Ten feet beyond the magazine door he stopped and seemed to summon all his strength.

Suddenly he launched himself toward the heavy portal and struck it with his huge shoulders like a battering-ram would have done.

It seemed impossible that a door of steel could have resisted such a terrific onslaught.

"It is firm," said Kidd.

"I heard it crack," said Dragon. "Another rush and I think we won't need the plank."

"But your shoulders, Mr. Dragon?"

"They are of iron."

"Jolly, I thought so," muttered Hugo. "I never saw a man with shoulders like that."

Dragon drew off again.

This time he rushed forward with great momentum and struck the door close to the lock.

Something yielded on the inside.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" cried the men behind Dragon.

Capt. Kidd, who on numerous occasions had seen the strength of his first officer tested, marveled at this display of power.

"The third time is the charm," smiled Hugo.

For the third time Dragon launched himself against the door and it broke inward.

He had knocked out the irons that held the inside barricade, and the door was tottering away.

"Now we have it!" shouted Kidd. "Forward, my good men, but be careful not to harm the young desperado unless he continues to resist."

The pirate of the high seas was in advance of all, his cutlass drawn and his face as white as the face of the dead.

His red coat looked redder than ever in the light of the lanthorns, and the fierce features of his followers were accentuated by the gravity of the situation.

A kick finished the work of Dragon's shoulders.

The door fell back, and, with a cry that animated all, Capt. Kidd leaped to the threshold.

"Back! back! if you value your lives!" cried a voice that rang over all. "I hold the key to the situation, as you may see."

Well might the pirates pause on the very threshold of the powder magazine.

Thad faced them, with a blazing torch in his hand, and seated astride a keg of cannon powder from which the black grains were oozing and forming a little heap on the floor.

The boy's teeth were clinched and his face showed a strange whiteness that drew from all who looked cries of horror.

It seemed to the pirates that at any moment a spark from the torch would drop into the powder and then——

They could not bring themselves to think of the terrible results, for the sight before them seemed to congeal their blood.

"Back!" repeated Thad. "Another step, Capt. Kidd, and the governor of Manhattan Isle will not have to hunt the pirate of the seas."

He swept the torch toward the powder and looked calmly at the buccaneers.

Dragon grated his teeth till they cracked.

He leaned toward Capt. Kidd and touched his arm.

"Let me seize him," he whispered.

"What, spring forward and throw him back among the powder? My God! no."

"I'll knock up the torch and imprison the hand that holds it," pleaded Dragon. "It will all be over in a moment."

"And we may be in the air. No! no!"

"Then you intend to yield to the youngster?"

"Not for a second," came in a hiss through Kidd's teeth. "Not for a moment, Mr. Dragon."

Thad looked on with the torch gripped tightly in his hand.

"He holds the best cards," smiled Hugo.

"Not better than we will hold in the end," answered the pirate captain.

Then he looked at Thad again.

"You behind me!" roared Kidd. "Cover him with your pistols."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Don't miss him," continued the pirate chief. "Send your bullets through the head of the young rascal."

"And I will fall into the powder with the fire," came from the interior of the magazine.

Capt. Kidd had not thought of this.

Nevertheless, he spoke again to the pirates whose pistols had already covered the boy among the powder.

"Ready," he said, glancing over his left shoulder at the buccaneers.

"Ay, ay, sir. Ready it is," was the answer.

Thad stepped a few inches nearer the powder.

He dropped the torch till it seemed to touch the iron rim of the fatal keg.

"We'll all go up together," came through his closed lips. "If Capt. Kidd has any desire to have his discharge written out by death it is here," and Thad looked at the powder as he finished.

Dragon trembled with illy suppressed rage.

He moved one foot forward, and Kidd saw him gathering for a desperate lunge.

"I can do it," came from Dragon's throat. "I can throw him and the torch against the wall, and hold them there till you can complete the work."

But Kidd dared not.

Meanwhile he saw the pistols that covered Thad, and knew that he would have to speak but one word to have the fatal triggers pressed.

No wonder he hesitated.

Thad held the torch so firmly that Kidd, blanched by the sight, drew back.

The horror of the situation seemed to have driven every sign of courage from his unshriven soul.

"Look! he is reaching for the powder with the torch," shouted Hugo the Hunchback. "May Heaven have mercy on our souls!"

"If you have any," answered Thad, and sure enough the torch seemed within a finger's breadth of the deadly compound.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH SIMPLE SIMON SHOWS HIS PLUCK.

It was a moment of awful danger to the pirates and to the ship as well.

The proximity of the torch to the powder was appalling, and the buccaneers behind Capt. Kidd feared that at any moment Thad might drop his fire into the open keg and blow everything to pieces.

Well might the determined tiger of the seas look on with blanched face, for never before had he faced a danger just like that.

Dragon glared at his chief and grated his teeth.

There was no fear at the heart of the robust scoundrel; he would have launched himself straight at the boy and taken the terrible chances, but Kidd did not give the signal.

A minute passed—a minute of anxiety—and Thad seemed to hold the fort against the whole lot.

Hugo drew back and looked in amazement at the boy's audacity.

"Back," suddenly cried Capt. Kidd. "We will conquer him another way."

Dragon sullenly held his ground.

"What," he cried. "Are you going to let the young imp conquer us all?"

"Back," repeated Kidd. "We cannot keep that torch from the powder, and one spark in it, Mr. Dragon, seals our doom."

The pirates were glad to get rid of the present danger, for they did not stay upon the order of their going, and made haste to obey their red-coated leader.

Thad was left in possession of the magazine, and he closed the heavy door as best he could, placing the torch out of reach of the explosives while he worked.

Capt. Kidd and Dragon repaired to the main cabin.

Once there, Kidd drank off two glasses of rum to steady his nerves, as he remarked with a smile, and Dragon took but one.

"Mr. Dragon," said the pirate chief, "we must get that boy out of the danger pot. He holds us in the hollow of his hand."

"You don't intend to call him out on promise of immunity?"

"Not for a moment. We might flood the magazine——"

"At the expense of the powder which we may need!" put in Dragon, always fertile in expedients. "It will never do, captain. We must take the boy otherwise, and give him the extent of the cat or something else."

Capt. Kidd reflected for a moment.

"Where are the others?" he asked.

"They must be somewhere on the ship. I did not catch sight of them in the magazine."

"Nor did I, sir. Find the other boys, and we will reach Thad through them."

Dragon saluted and left the room.

A search was made of the vessel, and Simple Simon was found among a lot of cordage in the hold whither he had gone to hide.

No further hunt was made, as it was believed that Oliver would soon turn up of his own accord since Simon had been taken into custody.

The Dutch boy was dragged into Capt. Kidd's presence.

The pirate chief at the table looked over it into Simon's eyes and studied his face for a moment.

"Master Simon," said Kidd, "you will aid us in getting Thad out of the magazine."

"Ho! ho!" broke out the boy. "Capt. Thad will not come out just because Simon asks him to."

"But he must come or it will go hard with you, sir."

Kidd's voice was stern, and he laid his hand on the table close to the butt of one of the silver-mounted pistols.

"Listen to me," he continued. "Mr. Dragon will take you to the place."

Simon looked over at the first officer and smiled.

"What if Mr. Dragon cannot take Simon there?"

"Cannot?" laughed Capt. Kidd. "Are you going to prove troublesome on our hands, too?"

Simon only showed his teeth in a grin, while Kidd turned again to his lieutenant.

"Mr. Dragon, you will take Master Simon to the magazine and see that he repeats to Thad what you tell him to say."

Simon drew back and glared at Dragon as that worthy advanced.

"Come, sir," cried the big pirate. "You've heard what the captain says, and you will go with me."

"Not with you, ho! ho!" cried the Dutch boy. "I don't go with Master Dragon."

Capt. Kidd was furious.

"Take him, Mr. Dragon," he said. "Peaceably if you can, forcibly if you must."

In an instant Simon leaped toward the table, and before Capt. Kidd could interpose a hand, he had caught up one of the pistols and fallen back.

There was danger in his eyes, and Dragon paused for a moment while he looked at the boy.

"Don't let the fellow scare you, Mr. Dragon," called out the captain of the galley. "See that he is robbed of his teeth."

Without another word the burly figure of Dragon shot across the cabin, and as he caught Simon the pistol exploded and the bullet buried itself in the wooden ceiling.

"A miss is as good as a mile," grinned Dragon, with a

glance at his commander. "This youngster can't harm a flea now."

He had caught Simon in his arms and was holding him above his head as he looked down at Capt. Kidd with eyes that glowed with savage triumph.

"Shall I flatten him against the wall first, captain?" asked Dragon.

But Simon had the strength of an ox, and he twisted in Dragon's grasp so that in a short time the big officer found that he had no child in his hands.

Kidd looked on with a half smile at the corners of his mouth.

"It seems to me, Mr. Dragon, that you've got your hands full," he observed. "That boy has the strength of a young tiger."

"But it will take only one throw to rob him of some of it," grinned the other. "Let me toss him against the wall yonder. It won't hurt the planks, but it will tame the boy."

Dragon was ready as his eyes showed to hurl Simple Simon against the wall beyond the table, and Kidd knew that it would not be a gentle throw either.

Kidd hesitated.

Simon had seized Dragon's long black locks and twined his eager fingers among them.

"You'll lose some of your hair if you do, Mr. Dragon," said the pirate chief.

"It'll grow out again, my captain," was the response. "But you will see that this is the only way to tame the lad."

Dragon as he finished seemed to call all his muscles into play, and the next moment he would have launched Simon toward the wall at the expense of his own locks had not a sign from Kidd told him to desist.

"Set him down, Mr. Dragon."

"Perdition! I cannot do that same, for his hands in my hair," laughed the big first officer, hoarsely.

Kidd leaned back and laughed at Dragon's predicament, and the lieutenant twisted as he drew back with his prisoner.

Suddenly Kidd came around the table with the second pistol in his hand.

Placing the cold muzzle of the weapon against Simon's temple he hissed:

"Open your hands, sir! I'll blow out your brains if you don't let Mr. Dragon's hair alone."

"Blow and be hanged! ho, ho!" laughed Simon, desisively. "What's a life to a few locks of Mr. Dragon's hair?"

Kidd dropped the weapon and seized Simon's wrists, and after tugging at them, which work elicited many wry faces from Dragon, the boy's hands were loosened, but at the expense of some good black pirate hair.

"He held on like an ape," grinned Dragon, as he eyed Simon with rage. "I shall have some of his hide in exchange for my hair."

"That you shall, sir," responded Kidd. "But now let us break the young savage in."

"With all my heart," and Dragon again sprang at Simon and delivered a blow that would have felled a giant, but the Dutch boy only recoiled before it and staggered against the table.

"Don't hurt him just yet," cried Kidd, who thought that Dragon would follow up his blow to the permanent disabling of the Dutch lad. "We will need him some of these days on the enemy's deck."

Dragon drew off against his will, but continued to glare at Simon, whose hands still retained some strands of his hair.

"Now, sir, come along," suddenly cried the big first officer. "We will go to the magazine."

But Simon did not stir.

"What, not going?" roared Kidd. "I tell you, Mr. Dragon, you will have to give him a little more discipline."

"Which is just what he needs."

Simon continued to hold his place at the table and was catching his second breath rapidly.

He looked at Dragon and sized that worthy up again, for he knew that the first officer was fearless and merciless.

All at once the Dutch boy bounded across the room and sprang upon the chest from which we have seen Capt. Kidd take the dead hand with its load of jewels.

Overhead swung a cutlass more for ornament than use—a cutlass captured in some desperate sea fight—and in another second it had been torn from its hangings and was in Simon's hands.

Both Kidd and Dragon looked amazed upon the boy's agility.

Simple Simon whirled the blade above his head, and its brightness reflected back the light that hung over the pirate's table.

Armed anew, Simon looked at his persecutors with a grin of supreme satisfaction, and waited for the next move on their part.

Capt. Kidd under other circumstances would have laughed at Simon's prowess, but now he felt like visiting condign punishment upon him for his obstinacy.

Capt. Kidd snatched up a pistol and leveled it at Simon's head.

"One minute, young sir," he cried. "Drop the cutlass or I will paint the wall behind you with your brains!"

"That will give it a better color than it has now, ho, ho!" was the answer.

"Listen to that, will you, Mr. Dragon?" was the retort.

"The young imp has all the audacity of the father of wickedness. Jolly me, if I ever saw his match."

"And if you ever intend to make a freebooter out of him you will have to keep him in chains six months, I say."

Simon continued to make passes with the cutlass, while Kidd in despair lowered the pistol and fell back again to the table.

"We shall have to call in the watch," said Kidd at last.

"To subdue one boy?" cried Dragon. "When Dragon is not equal to the emergency you may call in the watch, but not till then, sir."

With this the cutlass of the first officer flashed from its sheath, and he darted across the cabin like a wild beast.

Simon saw the movement and struck out with his weapon, which described a dangerous pass within an inch of Dragon's face.

Capt. Kidd held his breath.

This did not frighten the wild officer of the *Red Raven*, for he went at Simon with all the ferocity of his nature, and the next moment the cutlasses met in combat.

Simon was compelled to strike downward, which placed him at a disadvantage, for Dragon was a fine swordsman, and in less time than it takes us to record a line the Dutch boy was disarmed by a stroke he had not yet mastered, and the captured cutlass went spinning against the ceiling, where the point buried itself, and it hung there like the sword of Damocles.

Capt. Kidd burst out into a shout of approval at Dragon's swordsmanship.

Before Simon could snatch the weapon, which seemed still within his reach, the point of Dragon's cutlass was pressed against his stomach and he was called upon to surrender.

His reply was still his "Ho, ho!" of defiance, and the following second he dexterously avoided the point of Dragon's blade and, leaping from the chest, bounded across the cabin, and before either of the pirates could intercept him he had jerked the door open and was gone, leaving Capt. Kidd and his lieutenant to look at one another in utter amazement.

"The devil is in that boy," said Kidd.

"Yes, two of them, my captain," laughed the irrepressible Dragon.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN THE TIGER PLAYS.

Thad at bay in the powder magazine certainly had the whole ship's crew at his mercy.

The sun had gone down beneath the waters of the Sound, crimsoning them with his last rays, and the tall masts of the pirate ship stood out against the sky into which they seemed to lose themselves.

The night coming on was one of beauty.

A gentle swell was perceptible on the Sound, and over it came the musical swish of the waves, and the sides of the craft echoed back the sounds as they broke gently around her.

The anchor watch had been set, and quiet reigned on board the pirate galley.

But below deck it was not that quiet and contentment that usually reigns on board ship when everything has been made snug for the night.

There brooded over all the dreadful menace of the boy in the powder magazine.

All felt it from captain to the lowest pirate—from the poop to the forecabin—and it seemed to eat into the hearts of the stern men who had dashed over the blood-drenched decks of more than one vessel fighting like a lot of demons on the high seas.

Simon after his adventure in Kidd's cabin had not been molested.

The Dutch boy had crept back to his berth, where he had barricaded the door and, with the help of Oliver, who had turned up, had loaded all the weapons within reach, expecting an assault by Dragon at the instigation of Kidd himself.

Thad, could the reader have looked beyond the door of the magazine, would have seen the boy seated on a keg with a lanthorn hanging over him.

The torch was ready again for lighting, and he watched the door with an eager eye, for he did not doubt that the night would bring forth more trouble for him.

To give in to Capt. Kidd would, he knew, subject him to a punishment such as had never before been meted out to any offender on the vessel.

Kidd would not relent because he—Thad—had carried his resistance too far, and it would not be wise for the pirate to show mercy which would only weaken his hold on his desperate followers.

With thoughts like these in his mind Thad counted the minutes as they flitted over his head in the deadly and grewsome place.

Now and then he heard tramping overhead, but no one came down into the little corridor beyond the door, as if the fear he had instilled into the hearts of all under the black flag still held them in awe.

Thad fancied that the way to the powder was guarded by Kidd's seamen, lest Oliver or Simple Simon should undertake to communicate with him. He did not know what had taken place in Capt. Kidd's cabin, but if so he would have praised the bravery of Simon in his resistance.

Thad was not aware that there was coming forward a person who was destined to have a bearing on his present predicament, a young girl who had been stopped by the watch at the gangway that led to the rocks of the cove.

She did not look to be over sixteen, and the gruff pirate watch was for a moment inclined to force her back at the point of his cutlass; but, remembering that Capt. Kidd was at times partial to the fair sex, he allowed her to come on board while he called the bow watch and bade him summon the captain.

Kidd heard the news with a start and came up at once.

The lanterns that afforded light on the deck of the pirate galley enabled him to get a fair look at the nocturnal visitor, and without a word he led her down into the cabin.

There he motioned his visitor to a richly padded chair, and eyed her curiously for a moment.

"This is an odd hour for a visit," said Kidd. "I cannot conceive to whom I am indebted for it."

The girl threw up her head in youthful hauteur and pursed her lips with pride.

"I am Coral Von Puyster," she said. "I am from the city."

"From New York?" cried Kidd.

"Why not, sir? Is New York so far away that a young miss cannot visit you, sir?"

"It is not that, my young lady," cried Kidd, still looking at the fair girl in amazement. "I should think a young miss of your mien could cross the ocean alone."

"Which I hope to do some day," was the reply. "But crossing the Sound in a yawl is not a task."

"But you did not come quite alone?"

"No, I brought Jacob with me. Jacob is one of the best boatmen in this part of the world, and he knows all the twists and turns of this ragged coast."

Kidd could not refrain from saying to himself that Mistress Von Puyster was a beauty.

She had an oval face which disclosed her lineage, and her rich golden hair and deep liquid blue eyes would have captivated one less susceptible to female loveliness than the tiger of the sea.

"Since you have been so frank with me, Mistress Coral," said Kidd, making bold to call her by her first name, "would you object to telling me your mission on board this ship? You know, no doubt——"

"I know that I am on board the *Red Raven*, Capt. Kidd," put in the young miss. "I am aware that I am under the black flag——"

"The Jolly Roger, you mean," said Kidd, with a smile.

"We do not call our flag by the harsh name you have just given it."

"Just as you please, sir; any name will suit, I suppose. I have come to see you, Capt. Kidd."

"And why to see me, pray, my little lady?"

"I am going to be married next week—now, do not start, Capt. Kidd—and I laid a wager with my lover that I would wear on the occasion of our wedding a set of

jewels such as have not been seen in Manhattan since the first settlers came across the seas."

"Indeed?" laughed Kidd. "You are, to say the least, a little audacious."

"Am I? Then, Reuter will win the wager and I shall have to pay the forfeit."

"But the jewels, my little one? Pray, where did you expect to obtain them?"

"From Capt. Kidd."

At this the captain of the pirate ship fell back in his chair and laughed at the person on the other side of the table.

"What claims have you upon Capt. Kidd?" he suddenly asked.

"None whatever, sir—none that he should respect, at least. I simply laid the wager with my lover, and he dared me to produce the wedding jewels."

"And you have come to me for them, eh?"

"I am here for that purpose."

"Why, my little one, I sail the seas, 'tis true, but I often come to port as poor as the rat-infested lugger."

"And sometimes, if all reports are true, sir, you come back with jewels that could almost buy a throne. They say, Capt. Kidd, and one can believe it if he chooses, that you plunder the rich galleys of the world, making fair ladies walk the plank, stripping them first of their jewels."

"Do they tell that of me in New York?"

"The city is full of such stories."

"And you have believed?"

"Why not, when one hears nothing else of you?" cried Mistress Von Puyster. "Oh, Capt. Kidd, can't you open one of your treasure chests and let me win my wager with Reuter?"

Kidd continued to study the figure before him, and he caught the animation that filled the girl's eyes as she pleaded with him in all the simplicity of her nature.

"What, my dear," said the captain, "would you wear the treasures which, as you have heard, have been stripped from the neck of some fair princess who was compelled to walk the plank?"

"You have but to try me, Capt. Kidd. Perhaps, after all, all the horrid tales are not true."

"They call me a pirate, do they?"

"More than that, sir—a murderer of the high seas, one who spares not and who makes war upon the commerce of the world."

"Then I am no angel on shore," smiled Kidd. "I am really outlawed?"

"By royal proclamation," cried his visitor. "I have read the proclamation myself."

"Ah," and the pirate knitted his brows as he spoke. "I am the enemy of the king, and consequently of the royal governor. But, my dear Mistress Von Puyster, should

you go back to New York and show the wedding jewels it would only confirm my piracy in the minds of thousands."

"I think you cannot be made darker on that account than you are now."

"I see," laughed Kidd. "A black spot cannot be made blacker."

"That is it, sir."

Without replying Capt. Kidd rose and crossed the cabin to the brass-bound chest.

The eager eyes of the young girl followed him and she saw him throw back the lid.

With her heart in her throat through great expectation Coral Von Puyster waited for the return of the buccaneer, and when he deposited on the table a little box she nearly uttered a cry.

Kidd took from a little pocket in his red coat a tiny key which he fitted into the lock of the box and threw back the ivory lid.

The girl started to her feet and leaned over the table.

"Have a care," cried Kidd, as he looked up. "You will dissipate your dream, mayhap."

But the young lady did not take any notice of these words, but continued to gaze at the box, the contents of which now dazzled her eyes, depriving her of the power of utterance.

Before her lay a heap of jewels of every description, fashioned into elaborate necklaces, bracelets and rings. She saw sapphires, rubies, diamonds, topazes and emeralds in luxuriant profusion far beyond her wildest dreams of wedding gifts and riches.

Capt. Kidd seemed to delight in her consternation.

With her hands resting on the table and her eyes fixed on the wonderful heap, Coral Von Puyster looked nor uttered a word till the great buccaneer called her back to her forgotten self.

"Pretty, aren't they?" said Kidd, as he looked up into the girl's face.

"Are—they—yours?" she gasped.

"Would they be in my keeping if they were not?" he said. "This," and he separated a wonderful necklace from the heap, "this once graced the throat of the fairest donna in Portugal."

"And she——"

"She lost them," he answered, with a strange smile. "And to my knowledge, she never came back to claim them."

Coral reached out her hand and ventured to touch the necklace, but with youthful timidity.

"It is a wonderful piece of work," she said, admiringly. "I should fear to wear it, Capt. Kidd."

"But it would just fit your neck. See, little one," and the next moment the pirate had slipped the dazzling object

over Coral's golden curls, and it lay against her glowing skin with the ponderous jewel pendant on her palpitating bosom.

The girl fell back with a cry of delight and wonderment; her face changed color, and she looked at the pirate with her cheeks suffused with blushes.

"If I dared, sir——"

"A fair maid like you need not dare," broke in the tiger of the seas. "It is yours, my little lady."

Coral fell back with a startling cry.

"Mine?" rang from her throat. "Mine, do you say?—This regal thing?"

"It is yours. You have a fairer neck than had its other owner, and, by my soul! your eyes are prettier. I exact but one little thing in payment—one little thing, my dear."

"And that——"

"That is a kiss for Capt. Kidd?"

A deeper flush overspread the face of the young miss and heightened the color of the dazzling jewels on her bosom.

She looked again at the necklace; she turned to the table and saw the grinning face of the tiger of the ocean.

Coral was between the devil and the deep sea, but that moment something came to her relief, for the door of the cabin was flung open and Dragon burst in.

As his eyes alighted on the girl with the jewels he stopped as though a pistol had been thrust into his face, and a strange cry pealed from his throat.

CHAPTER VI.

CAPT. KIDD PLAYS ANOTHER CARD.

"Where did this angel come from?" cried Mr. Dragon, as he fell back and gazed in consternation and amazement upon the fair face and figure of the girl.

Kidd waved his hand toward Coral with a smile.

"This is our friend, Mistress Von Puyster, of New York."

"But why is she here?"

"She comes for a wedding present," answered Capt. Kidd, calling Dragon's attention to the necklace that coruscated upon Coral's bosom. "See how well it fits her."

"Heavens, it is the necklace of the Portuguese princess."

"The same, Mr. Dragon. It becomes Mistress Coral, does it not?"

"By my life, it does. And you have given it to her, captain?"

"Why not?"

"They will go wild over it in New York, and they will hate us more than ever."

"That for the hate of the governor and his people," and Kidd snapped his fingers in mid air. "What care we for their hate—we the free rovers of the sea?"

The girl stood looking no longer upon the necklace, but at the grotesque Dragon, who was a typical pirate in looks and garb with his cutlass and pistols.

"Who is that man?" she queried, glancing at Kidd.

"That is my first officer, Mr. Dragon."

"He is a big man."

"And not a beauty, my little one."

Coral, becoming bolder since she looked to Capt. Kidd for protection, burst into a musical laugh.

"Why, he would break all the mirrors in Manhattan," she exclaimed.

"That's a compliment, Mr. Dragon," roared Kidd, as he struck the table in his hilarity. "She thinks you would break all the mirrors over in New York."

A smile came to the hairy lips of Dragon, but his eyes did not soften.

"She's a jade, captain. What, is she going to get married?"

"So she says."

"I pity the man who claims her for his bride."

Coral pursed her pretty lips and came forward.

"You shan't be asked to the wedding, sir," she said, looking Dragon fairly in the face. "Do you think I would have such an ox like you there?"

"No one asked that Dragon might go."

She fell back frightened, as it seemed, by the baleful eyes of the pirate.

"What is it, Mr. Dragon? Any more news from the boy in the powder magazine?"

"Yes; he is working at something."

"Then, some of you have been at the door."

"Yes. He is working. We can hear him."

"And you haven't summoned him out?"

"No. We are waiting for orders. If he should drop a spark into the magazine——"

"That he will not readily do, for he would only blow himself along with us to Davy Jones' locker."

Coral seemed to catch the drift of these words, for her face suddenly paled and she looked searchingly at the captain of the *Red Raven*.

"What is that?" she exclaimed. "Who is in the powder magazine with fire?"

"A young fellow whom we've been trying to break in—Master Fergus, miss."

"Why does he not come out?"

"He is afraid of the 'cat' and some other little punishments, you see."

Dragon sprang over to where Capt. Kidd stood and whispered a few words at his ear.

The face of the pirate chief brightened and he looked again at Coral.

"Summon five men, Mr. Dragon—five will be enough," said Kidd, and the first officer went away.

"Why do you not omit the punishment and save the ship?" asked Coral.

"It would only give the young rascals excuse to get up some more devilment; we have three of them on board."

"But if the one in the magazine should drop fire among the powder——"

"You would never become the wife of Master Reuter," grinned Capt. Kidd.

Coral must have felt her cheeks grow white.

Just then the tramping of several men was heard beyond the door, and Dragon came in with five stalwart pirates at his heels.

"Are you ready, Master Dragon," asked Kidd.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Then come along, Mistress Von Puyster," and the pirate laid his hand on Coral's arm.

The young girl drew back and looked at him questioningly.

"We've hit upon a little plan to get the rogue out of the magazine and to save the ship as well," was the continuance. "You are just the person to help us out of the hole."

"What can I do? I know not the person who is in the magazine."

"Never mind that."

"But I don't want to go," and Coral held back while Capt. Kidd pulled her forward.

"This way, my angel," cried Dragon, as his great hand sank into Coral's flesh and made her wince. "Hang me for a gentleman, if you don't give us more trouble than you're worth. You can clear the magazine of its pest, so come along, and perchance you'll deserve the wedding present the captain's given you to-night."

Seeing that further resistance would do her no good the young girl went along, and the little party halted at the door of the magazine.

Capt. Kidd advanced to the portal and struck it with the hilt of his cutlass.

"Ho, there!" he cried. "Ho, you young rebel!"

"He is a rebel, then?" said Coral.

"Not a word from you yet," said Dragon, sharply. "You will get to use your tongue pretty soon."

In response to Kidd's words a sound was heard beyond the magazine door.

"What is it, sir?" asked the boy at bay.

"We've come with a proposition," said Kidd, still speaking with his lips close to the portal. "You would like to save the life of a young lady, would you not?"

"What trick is that?" cried Thad through the door. "What sort of scheme have you worked up to get me into your net?"

"As fair a proposal as ever you saw," was the reply. "There is no trick to it, in reality. We have with us Mistress Von Puyster of New York, as fair a damsel as ever crossed the Sound. She is about to be married and, in fact, wears on her bosom now her wedding present worth the ransom of a kingdom."

"What is all that to me?"

"More than you think—life itself."

Thad was silent for a little while.

"I do not know Mistress Von Puyster," he said at last.

"Perhaps not, but she is a beauty and no mistake. Perhaps you think she is not with us. The young lady will now speak for herself."

Then the boy at bay heard the lowered voice of Kidd as he addressed some one else.

"Call to the young rat in there and tell him that you are really with us."

Thad of course could not see Coral as she stepped forward.

"I am out here with Capt. Kidd and his men," she said, raising her voice to the pitch just used by the pirate in speaking to the prisoner of the powder room. "I am Mistress Coral Von Puyster, and I came over from the city to-night with Jacob, our trusty man. It is true that I am to be married in a few days, and I have made bold to come to Capt. Kidd and to ask at his hands a present for that day, since rumor has connected him with some daring exploits on the ocean."

"That's pretty good," grinned Dragon, as he looked at Kidd. "She must come from one of the best families in Manhattan."

"I do, sir rogue!" exclaimed Coral as she whirled upon the pirate, her cheeks reddening. "I belong to a better family than you ever saw. My grandfather, sir, fought in the armies of Holland and——"

"Save that pedigree till some other time," broke in Dragon, as he laid his hand on the girl's arm. "You may need it then."

"What say you now?" asked Capt. Kidd, addressing Thad. "You have heard the voice of the girl and know that she is with us."

"I doubt it not," came through the door of the magazine. "But what is the proposition?"

"You will open the door and walk out, surrendering unconditionally, or there will be no wedding at the appointed time."

A wild shriek from Coral grated upon Thad's ears.

"Silence," he heard Kidd thunder. "Hold her there, Mr. Dragon."

"What do you mean?" cried Coral, as she struggled in

the grip of the first officer. "What have I to do with the prisoner of the magazine?"

"You shall see in a moment."

Kidd turned again to the door of the powder room.

"You are listening, Master Fergus?" he said. "You heard what I said a moment ago?"

"I heard you."

"Well and good. You will walk out without further resistance, or we will run the damsel through with our cutlass and pin her to the door of the magazine."

Another despairing shriek reverberated far and wide and chilled the blood of Thad, who leaned against the door of the magazine, pistol in hand.

"Miserable sea wolves! you would not do that," he cried, in horror.

"You have but to try us," roared Capt. Kidd. "What is the life of a Dutch damsel to the existence of one hundred men and a good ship? Do you doubt me, Master Fergus? Ready there, Mr. Dragon. See that your cutlass has a good point——"

"Mercy! mercy!" cried Coral at the top of her voice, and while Thad could not see through the heavy door he could imagine the scene that was taking place there.

"The inhuman devils!" he grated. "They have no souls. Better blow up the ship and rid the world forever of those sea wolves—the heartless marauders of the wave."

But as he drew back and looked at the lanthorn hanging from one of the beams of the magazine he thought of the girl in the pirates' power and his heart failed him.

"He will not surrender," cried Capt. Kidd's voice. "He cares little for the life of a fair girl. Now ready with your cutlass, Mr. Dragon. Let the men stand off to give your arm full swing."

Again the same cry of despair pealed from Coral's throat, and it seemed to drive Thad's blood in a quick current of ice through every vein.

He sprang to the door of the magazine and laid his hand on the barricade.

"Don't hold back, Mr. Dragon!" cried Kidd, as sternly as ever. "The life of the young girl is nothing to the rat in the powder hole. Let her have it straight through the heart!"

Thad gave the iron bar an upward wrench.

At the same time with the other hand he jerked the lanthorn from its nail and tore it open.

The flame poked out its forked tongue, and he then seized the great iron catch of the door.

In another moment he had jerked it open.

"Aha! he yields!" cried Capt. Kidd, as he fell back from the living apparition in the magazine door. "He is willing to save the life of the girl."

Coral saw Thad and put out her arms beseechingly.

She was in the grip of Dragon, whose eyes seemed to emit sparks of fire, and his cutlass was naked in his dark hand.

"Come out and give up!" continued Kidd to our hero. "You have a heart after all. Look to the girl, Mr. Dragon. If he refuses, give her the cutlass and spare not."

"If you dare, monster!" rang from Thad's throat, as he flitted a pace to the left, where the sprinkled powder lay dark and pebble-like on the floor. "Touch the girl with your cutlass and the lanthorn which you see is open will be dashed upon the powder! Better all of us than only one."

The pirates recoiled.

The brows of Kidd grew dark as a thunder cloud; his hand fell off from the half-drawn cutlass, and the men back of Dragon retreated as if the lanthorn was already falling into the powder.

Thad still held the fort, and he was master of the situation.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEVIL'S POWDER.

No wonder the pirates fell back when they saw Thad once more in the magazine with the danger light in his hand.

They felt that their lives were in the direst peril, for there was something about the boy that aroused their fears.

As for Capt. Kidd and his ally, Dragon, they could only see the open lanthorn within reach of the powder, and they stood like people with their blood suddenly congealed.

"What shall it be?" asked Thad, in an apparently cool tone, though doubtless his nerves were also on edge.

Kidd looked at the first officer and then at the boy who held the ship's crew in the hollow of his hand.

"Hang it all," said Kidd under his breath. "The youngster might drop a light into the powder, and then we would be in another climate in a jiffy."

Dragon snarled his displeasure like a wolf—history was repeating itself.

"Let me have a dash," he said as before in whispered tones to his master. "I can catch him before he can drop the fire and—"

Kidd shook his head and hesitated.

"Back!" he said, sullenly. "There may be another way to reach this audacious young rebel."

Dragon evidently did not know how, for he stubbornly stood his ground.

"What cares he for the wench? She is strange to him," voiced Kidd. "Bring up one of his comrades—both of them, Mr. Dragon."

Coral was pulled from the scene by the first officer, who darted down the passageway with her, leaving Capt. Kidd and his underlings at the door of the magazine.

In less than two minutes Dragon came back with Oliver and Simple Simon, forced before him at the muzzles of his pistols.

"Here they are, captain," said the robust pirate.

The boys exchanged quick glances with Thad, and were held from the door by the menace of the buccaneers' weapons.

"Now, sir," said Kidd, sternly. "Here are your comrades. You will not let them be hanged at the yard, I hope?"

The two boys took in the situation at once.

"Let them hang us there, but hold the fort, Thad," cried Oliver, as he was jerked back with the last word. "Let them do their worst, but never knuckle to Capt. Kidd."

It was the unexpected.

"Hades and furies!" roared the pirate. "They're all alike, Mr. Dragon."

"Whelped in the same kennel," was the answer. "By my soul, you young rascal, I'll show you a trick or two," and he seized Simon and lifted him from the floor.

"Now, sir," he cried to Thad, "if you lower that lanthorn another time I'll put out your light with the body of this young fool."

Simon, though possessed of the strength of a bullock, could not prevent Dragon from lifting him to a level of his head, and he caught the terrible glitter of the first officer's eyes.

It was a moment of the greatest suspense.

All saw that the crisis was at hand.

Capt. Kidd trembled for the safety of all concerned, for he saw that, should Dragon throw Simon upon Thad, the lanthorn might be knocked from the youth's hand and fall among the powder oozing from the keg.

All at once Dragon moved forward.

Utterly devoid of fear, the big pirate straightened in the face of death, and the next moment hurled Simple Simon into the magazine.

There was a crash and a cry, the pirates fell back with blanched cheeks, and even Kidd recoiled.

"He's throwing the lanthorn into the powder," cried some one, and there was a scampering down the corridor, but Dragon, with his face like that of a lion, stood his ground and waited for the real result of his action.

Thad, with the dexterity of an animal, had dodged Simple Simon.

The Dutch boy had crashed over his head, knocking down some kegs which had caused nearly all the noise while he—Thad—had not been touched.

Dragon grated his teeth when he saw the result of his throw.

"Missed him, did I?" he cried. "Ho! here's another human missile, captain," and he turned upon Oliver who at the words laid a threatening hand on his cutlass.

"Back, sir, back!" cried Oliver.

But as well might he have talked to a stone wall, for Dragon seized him by pushing the blade aside, and the next moment had turned with Oliver in his grip upon the boy in the magazine.

"I'll not miss this time!" he exclaimed, but the next instant the door of the powder room was closed and all heard the barricade go up.

"Barred out!" cried Kidd, as he heard the sound. "They've got the magazine yet."

Dragon dropped Oliver and drew back.

He was about to launch himself against the door as he had done before, and Kidd, seeing this, laid his hand on his lieutenant's arm.

"No, not now," he said. "The boy is reinforced, but that is nothing. Come, Mr. Dragon. Where are the others?"

"They ran, sir," grinned Dragon. "Ah, here is our friend, Hugo."

Hugo alone of the others had stood his ground and his mismatched optics sparkled with devilment.

"Would the captain let me try to get the dangerous rats out?" asked Hugo.

"If you can, sir, without endangering the ship."

"I can try."

The hunchback surveyed the scene a moment and then drew off a space of ten feet.

He opened his jacket and took from an inner pocket a small packet carefully wrapped in oiled skin.

Capt. Kidd and Dragon looked on without speaking.

Inside the oiled skin was a bit of folded paper which, when open, revealed a black substance of the consistency of soap.

A part of this the pirate took in his hand and laid it on a beam near by.

Then he glanced again at the bottom of the door leading to the magazine.

"What would you do?" said Kidd, who had witnessed these strange proceedings without a word.

"Smoke 'em out," smiled Hugo. "No person can stand the fumes of this stuff very long."

"But he would have time to drop the light into the powder."

"Nay! The fumes are so subtle that he will be overpowered before he can collect his thoughts."

"Let him try it," said Dragon.

Kidd gave permission and Hugo stooped at the door and forced some of the dark substance underneath it.

Then he lighted a bit of paper at the flame of the lantern and touched the stuff with it.

There was no explosion, just a little bluish flame that seemed to creep into the magazine.

"If your fire reaches the powder——"

"It will not," said Hugo, looking up at Kidd. "Look! it is doing its work now."

It did not take long for the strange stuff to burn itself out, and those who stood beyond the door of the magazine inhaled a singular odor which was not unpleasant.

Silence reigned on the spot where recently hot words were passed.

Not a sound of any kind came through the door of the powder room, and Hugo the Hunchback looked triumphantly at the captain of the *Red Raven* galley.

"It is done," he said.

Dragon was inclined to shake his head in doubt.

"What think you, Mr. Dragon?" said Hugo, turning upon the first officer.

"I used to smoke hares out when I was a boy," said he, "and when I thought my work was done and took away the blocking at the foot of the tree out would come the sly beast and I would lose him."

"Then you don't think my drug potent?"

"Surely I could not just say as to that."

"Have you heard any noise in there since I lighted it?"

"Not a sound, neither would I hear any noise in the rabbit burrow while my fire burned, but when I took it away——"

Hugo was inclined to show his teeth at this, but wisely did not; he merely turned to Capt. Kidd and waved his hand toward the door of the magazine.

"They are at your mercy, captain," he said with an air of confidence. "You can open the door and take out——"

"The dead, Hugo?"

"No, the stupefied."

"Your drug does not kill, then?"

"It only destroys liberty of action and thought for the time being," was the reply.

"What do you call it?"

"The Devil's Powder."

"By my life, a good name!" laughed Capt. Kidd. "Now, Mr. Dragon, we will take possession of the fort."

Dragon went to the door and pushed, but it did not yield.

Then he drew off again and braced himself for a lunge. No light came from underneath the door of the place. It seemed as dark as Egypt in the place of terror and death.

"Make sure of it," said Kidd to his first officer. "The barricade cannot be as strong as at first when you broke the door in."

In another moment the great body of Dragon went through the air like a huge stone hurled from a catapult.

It landed against the door with a tremendous crash, but the portal held, though it quivered visibly.

"Another time, Mr. Dragon."

The pirate lunged again, and this time the door broke inward.

"We've got them!" shouted Capt. Kidd.

"I told you so," vociferated Hugo.

"By my soul, I believe the Devil's Powder has done the work," ejaculated the first officer, as he rubbed one of his shoulders.

"Forward there!" rang out Capt. Kidd's voice. "Bring the young rats out, Mr. Dragon——"

"If you can, sirs," broke a voice, and Kidd holding up his lanthorn before his face looked amazed.

Before him stood Thad and Simple Simon as large as life, each with a pistol in his hand.

"Dragon looked at Hugo and smiled, while upon that worthy's face appeared a look of dismay and disappointment.

Capt. Kidd fell back a pace and turned suddenly on his heel.

"Come," he said to his companions. "The devil protects his own for the present."

Then as suddenly he turned to the open door of the magazine and thrust forward the Silver Cutlass.

"By this blade you shall yet yield to me," he shouted. "You hold the vantage ground just now, but the power of Capt. Kidd will yet secure you, and then——"

A wild shriek came at that moment to the ears of all from another part of the vessel, and Capt. Kidd, with a commanding "Come!" darted away.

He was followed at once by Dragon and Hugo, and all three rushed upon deck.

"Help! help!" rang out clearly on the night air.

"It is the maid," shouted Kidd, as he unsheathed the Silver Cutlass and darted aft.

Coral was struggling in the hands of two ruffians, and the moment Capt. Kidd took in the situation he darted straight at them, striking the first a terrible blow across the face with the flat of the blade, so that he went reeling toward the bulwarks with a yell.

"What means this?" demanded the pirate chief, when he had torn Coral loose from the grip of the other.

"She wanted to escape, my captain," growled the fellow.

"They caught me, sir, and would have robbed me of the necklace," cried the girl. "'Tis true I wanted to leave the vessel. I would go back to the city——"

"Which you shall, but when I give the orders," put in Capt. Kidd. "Where is your faithful Jacob?"

Coral pointed over the side of the ship and looked again at the pirate.

Capt. Kidd leaned over the taffrail and saw something dark rising and falling with the tide at the side of the *Red Raven*.

"Avast there!" he cried. "Is that you, Master Jacob?"

"'Tis I, your worship," came up from below.

"Well, go back and tell the father of Mistress Von Puyster that she will remain Capt. Kidd's guest for a while."

At this the young girl uttered a loud cry and sprang toward the bulwarks, but the hand of Kidd held her back.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT DRAGON GOT ACROSS HIS FACE.

"We must temporize with the young rebel," said Capt. Kidd to Dragon a few minutes after the scene just recorded.

"And let him off without any punishment?"

"Not that exactly, though by my soul I can only admire the youngster's pluck. We must get him out of the magazine."

"Not with Hugo's powder. That was a gigantic failure, and I shall laugh at him the first chance I get."

"You will draw all his blood to his head and then I may lose one of my men."

"It will not be Dragon, I assure you, captain," grinned the first officer.

"The girl has the grit of a man," continued Kidd. "She might be made to decoy the boy out of the magazine, but she would not want to act treacherously."

"Break her!" exclaimed Dragon. "Break this haughty wench of Manhattan."

"She's pretty."

"So is the snake that stings you," cried Dragon. "You remember the donna we captured on the *Quedah Merchant*—the stately one with auburn ringlets which captivated you, my captain?"

Kidd nodded ungraciously, and looked away as if the memory might not be a pleasant one.

"She was pretty, too," continued Dragon. "She had all the graces of a court beauty, and her voice was like the passing of the summer winds among the glens of tropic lands."

"Marry me! but you're growing poetical, Mr. Dragon," sneered the buccaneer.

"She—I cannot help thinking of that regal lady—was all that man could desire; yet, when I caught her to bear her to the plank, she turned on me and her pearly teeth went into my arm as you may see yet, captain."

As he finished Dragon dashed up his sleeve and leaned toward the light on the table at which Kidd sat.

There was a strange crescent white scar on the dark skin at which Kidd looked for a moment and then turned to the wine that stood at his elbow.

"Do you think Mistress Von Puyster has in her veins the blood of that Spanish lady?" he asked.

"She has—I can see that much in her eye."

"But she is gentle of bearing."

"So was the other till you roused every drop of her tigerish nature."

Kidd toyed with the chased goblet for a moment, and then looked up at Dragon once more.

"The Von Puysters are wealthy, I believe," he said. "They belong to the best families over there," and he nodded toward the city across the Sound.

"Doubtless," replied Dragon. "Here's a chance for us, captain; we might replenish our coffers with a little Von Puyster gold."

"I've been thinking of that, and how fortunate it is that the guileless fly has come into the web of the spider."

"You remember, captain, during the last voyage you said you would find a wife for Selim——"

"That is it! that is it!" cried Kidd, striking the table with his fist. "The boy has refused the jewels of the dead donna and showed his teeth in my presence and I would like to humble him a little."

"By giving him a bride, ha, ha!" and Dragon showed his teeth back of his beard with a hyena-like grin.

"By mating him with this Dutch angel from Manhattan," was the reply.

"Just the thing," laughed Dragon, louder than ever. "If we only had on board the priest we took with the *Quedah Merchant*——"

"Black Diamond is priest enough for us. You know he took orders once and gave them up for life under the Jolly Roger."

"So he did."

Kidd emptied his glass and poured out another.

"I'll send for Selim."

He struck the silver bell with his hand and almost immediately the door behind him opened, and the dark-faced boy presented himself and stood at "attention."

Dragon, who had never taken kindly to Kidd's valet, looked at him from beneath his dark lashes, while the captain of the *Red Raven* watched him as well.

"Selim, I have a great scheme for your comfort," said the pirate of the seas. "I can make you happy for life, and that without much ceremony."

"My captain knows what would make Selim the happiest person on the face of the globe."

"The voyage homeward?"

"My captain is right," smiled the youth. "If Selim could roam once more the hills and dales of his native land——"

"With a pretty wife, eh, Selim?"

"That is it, and if Selim could go back he would roam those sacred places with a wife."

"Well, that can be easily adjusted," and Capt. Kidd shot Dragon a sly glance. "You can be married within an hour——"

"But Sylvia is not here, captain——"

"To perdition with Sylvia!" interrupted Capt. Kidd. "She is not the only woman in the world. There are others this side the old shores of orange and palms."

"But not for Selim."

Kidd turned to Dragon and waved his hand toward the door.

"Bring in the damsel," he said, and Dragon glided out.

Selim's eyes glowed with unwonted fire at this, but he did not unseal his lips.

He stood aloof from Capt. Kidd and watched that

worthy, who played with the stems of the wine glasses before him, and now and then lifted one of the gold-rimmed fragile things to his lips.

Not another word was spoken till a heavy tramping was heard in the passage and the door opened.

Selim opened his mouth to let out a little cry of surprise when he caught sight of Coral in the grip of Dragon, the merciless.

Kidd broke out in a laugh.

"Look at this seraph, Selim, my boy," cried the pirate of the summer seas. "Say you not that she is not as fair as the damsel through whose hair blow the winds of your own shores?"

Coral looked across the room at the handsome boy whom she now saw for the first time, and studied him with her searching eyes.

"Come hither, Mistress Von Puyster," said Kidd, beckoning Coral forward.

The girl, evidently wondering what the pirate had in store for her, broke from Dragon and approached the table.

"Look at this young fellow," and Kidd waved his hand toward Selim. "He has been my valet for a year, and a more faithful one man never had. I can bestow upon his bride a dowry such as seldom graced the person of any bride. I can load his wife with jewels from all the lands underneath the sun and from the seas of the globe. I can make the young couple the richest that ever stood before a priest, and their future will be jewel-rimmed from the marriage altar to the tomb. What think you of this, Mistress Von Puyster?"

The girl listened to these words with a strange look on her oval face.

She did not seem to understand the purport of them, for she turned to Dragon as if for an explanation.

"It's all true, miss," said the black-hearted ruffian. "The captain has the treasure, and you've seen some of it already."

"I want a wife for Selim," continued Kidd, "a winsome lady who can make him the happiest mortal in the world, and by doing so I pay in part the debt I owe him."

The truth—the real meaning of Kidd's words—seemed to flash through the young girl's brain in a moment.

"But Capt. Kidd, you know——"

"I have heard your story of the approaching wedding," broke in the tiger of the sea. "That is nothing. What is it to you, fair one, if another husband is found—one with whom comes to you the jewels of other lands—the treasures of thrones?"

Coral fell back with a pronounced gesture of aversion.

"You would be just as happy with Selim yonder as with the one you have chosen over yonder in the city," continued the pirate chief. "He has not the wealth that will be heaped upon Selim."

"But I love him."

"Love?" and Kidd leaned back and playfully hammered the table. "I did not know the thing existed longer. There was a time when, according to old stories, love was in the world, but now——"

The girl flushed and stepped forward till she could touch the table at which the buccaneer sat.

"I love none but Reuter," she cried. "I spurn the offer you have made. I will not become the bride of any but the one I have chosen across the Sound in New Amsterdam."

"Marry me, but this smacks of rebellion," cried Kidd, with a swift glance at Dragon. "You will not take the jewels with a husband on board my ship?"

"I cannot, sir."

"Oho! this will be easy," laughed the pirate. "Mr. Dragon, do you go for Black Diamond. I believe he brought his old vestments on board when he joined us. Tell him that there is to be a marriage ceremony to-night in this cabin——"

"Nay, my captain," broke in the voice of Selim so sharp and stern that Kidd whirled upon him as if it were the hiss of a hidden serpent.

"What, do you put in your oar?" he went on, glaring at Selim, who had come forward three paces.

"I must speak, my captain. You forget the Sylvia of my childhood. You overlook the love we pledged one another among the hills of my native land."

"Thunder and great guns!" roared Capt. Kidd, as his brow grew dark. "I allow no one to oppose my authority on board this ship. I am master here—supreme master!"

"No one disputes that, my captain," said Selim. "But I cannot wed the fair one yonder."

"And I will not become the wife of your slave, Capt. Kidd."

Both Dragon and Kidd looked in consternation at the beautiful girl who stood erect in the middle of the cabin, her eyes afire and her face suffused with blushes that rendered it crimson and doubly fair.

"What's this?" cried the pirate, sending his glance from Selim to Coral Von Puyster. "You oppose my authority? I will bring both of you to terms. The priest, quick, Mr. Dragon."

Dragon laid his hand on the latch of the cabin door.

"It shall not be," exclaimed Coral, as she struck her bosom with her white hand and found there the necklace with which Capt. Kidd had invested her but a short time before. "I spurn your jewels, monster of the sea. You shall not purchase my love for your slave with such baubles as these, which you have torn from the bleeding necks of the donnas of Spain. I spurn your gifts, and here is the necklace of one of your victims!"

Her hand closed above the glittering pendant, and she wrenched at the strand till it parted with a snap and the string of jewels flashed above her head.

Capt. Kidd sprang up with a loud cry.

"The jewels! the jewels! Dragon," he shouted.

As his hand went out the figure of the first officer shot toward Coral Von Puyster, but that moment the Dutch girl turned and the jewel rope, like a miniature cat o' nine tails, struck Dragon across the face, the stones laying bare the dark flesh in spite of his beard.

Dragon uttered an oath of pain as he fell back, but the next moment he had the girl in his grip, holding her as roughly as the eagle holds the voracious hawk he has just conquered.

Selim, seeing Coral's peril from the grip of the merciless Dragon, sprang forward, but the hand of Kidd threw him back.

"Stand where you are, sir!" roared the pirate king. "We'll tame this beauty for you. Never mind her," and he held Selim off. "Now, Mr. Dragon, throw her this way and go for Black Diamond."

Dragon obeyed and the Dutch girl fell forward into the grasp of Capt. Kidd, while the first officer darted toward the door.

The jewel rope still dangled from Coral's hand, but some of the jewels glittered on the floor of the cabin.

"We'll break you in, my fair one," laughed Kidd.

Coral replied with a look, then she wrenched herself back the length of Capt. Kidd's arm, and the next moment she held a dagger not at the pirate's breast, but at her own!

The stern rover of the main hissed out an oath and looked to Selim for help, but the dark-faced boy showed no signs of coming to the rescue.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MYSTERY OF THE OLD MAGAZINE.

"Since we hold the fort," said Thad to Simple Simon, after the last scene at the entrance to the powder magazine, "we may as well make the most of our time and see what is here."

"Ho!" laughed the Dutch boy. "Perhaps Capt. Kidd has hid here more than powder."

"He has queer places for hiding his treasures," was the reply, and Thad pulled down the lanthorn and, with Simon at his heels, proceeded to examine their strange prison.

The magazine was a large, well-built room, for the *Red Raven* carried a great amount of ammunition, and more than one ship of the enemy had contributed to its store.

The ceiling, which was a mass of heavy beams, was strong enough to bear the weight of the deck, while the walls were heavily ironed to protect the precious ammunition from fire as well as from cannon balls from without.

There seemed at first sight nothing in the magazine but ammunition in kegs and heavy canvas bags, but all at once Thad uttered a cry and thrust his hand toward something that glistened in the light from behind a rampart.

Simon craned his neck forward, his eyes filled with intense expectation.

"What is it?" he cried. "Have you found the jewels of some unfortunate princess, Thad?"

The other had already thrust his arm behind the kegs, and his fingers closed on something like a well-filled bag.

"Doubloons for the world!" he exclaimed, as he tugged at the object he had discovered.

"Pull 'em out, hurrah!" cried the Dutch boy.

In another moment Thad had dragged from concealment the bag and laid it at Simon's feet.

It was a heavy bag, fastened with a leathern string well knotted, and Simple Simon tugged at the tangle till the sweat stood out on his forehead in great drops.

Thad, tired of the boy's work, came to his rescue with a knife, the leather cord was speedily cut, and Simon ran his hand into the bag.

He uttered a cry as he drew it forth, clutching a lot of shining gold coins which he held up in the light.

"See! doubloons!" he exclaimed. "Look, Thad! This is some more of the sea wolf's treasure."

"Indeed it is, Simon," and Thad dropped upon his knees, and the two examined the contents of the bag, bringing up at each dip a lot of coin.

"No wonder the captain wanted you out of the magazine. He was afraid you would find the treasure," laughed Simon.

"I don't know about that. He feared, I think, that I would drop a spark among the powder——"

"And blow them all to Davy Jones' locker?"

"Exactly, Simon. A spark would have done it, but I was careful, for I thought of you and Oliver."

Simon again fell to playing with the doubloons which he weighed in the palms of his hands or tossed into the air, dexterously catching them as they came down, shining in the light of the lanthorn.

"If we could only get away with all this gold," he laughed, as he turned to Thad. "We could be rich boys in New York, and the governor would not turn up his royal nose at us."

"We will not think of the impossible," was the reply. "We have found but a little portion of the pirate's treasure. There may be more behind the powder."

"We will see, Master Thad."

Simon crept forward and edged his way behind the loosened kegs, and, presently, he called to Thad.

"Hole back here, Master Thad."

"Where, Simon?"

"Way back behind the kegs. Big enough for a man to creep through."

Thad uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Whither does it lead?"

"I know not, for, though I put my head through it, I see only blackness. Then I thrust my hand through and it touches—nothing."

Thad entered the place after Simon, and after edging his way among the powder kegs for some time, found himself at the Dutch boy's side.

"Here," said Simon, taking his hand. "Feel for yourself, Master Thad."

"It is true. There is a large opening here, made by man no doubt. But what does it mean? It is a rear entrance into the magazine."

"Why would the captain build it?"

"Evidently it is a secret even from Capt. Kidd," said Thad. "This is the work of others and contrary to the pirate's orders."

"Perchance some one after the doubloons?"

"Or the powder," suggested Thad.

The two boys searched the dark, cavernous opening as well as they could without the lanthorn which had been left behind them; but the investigation threw only a little light on the puzzle.

They could thrust forward as far as they were able, but nothing came in contact with their hands.

"It's a mystery," said Thad, at last. "This is one of the secrets of the ship."

The opening, while at the foot of the wall of the magazine, seemed to extend downward.

Where it ended they did not know, for all beneath them was as dark as a wolf's mouth.

"If we had the lanthorn here we might lower it into the hole," said the Dutch boy.

"That is it, and the lanthorn we shall have."

Thad went back to the magazine proper and brought back the light, which he thrust through the opening, looking downward with eager eyes.

"What do you see, comrade?" asked Simon.

"Nothing but darkness beneath the light, and something that glistens."

"It is not the water."

"No, Simon, not the water of the Sound."

"It must be the lower hold of the ship."

"Then we have a way out of the magazine whenever we want to use it."

Simon nodded, and his eyes seemed to glitter.

"We can play rat in earnest," he grinned. "In the darkness down there Capt. Kidd would not find us."

"I am going to carry on this investigation till we know what we have discovered," said Thad, earnestly.

"Simon is with you, Thad."

The boys knew of pieces of rope in the magazine, and by some little splicing a good long stretch of stout line was formed with which they returned to the mysterious opening.

Thad lowered the rope and found that ten feet below it touched something and rested.

"The bottom of the ship!" he said, looking up at Simon. "But I have never been there, and I have penetrated, as I thought, to every part of the craft."

"Going down, eh?"

"Certainly, I'm going down there."

The rope was made fast to one of the great beams, and Thad, telling Simon to guide him with the lanthorn, caught the rope in his hands and crept over the edge.

Foot by foot he went downward.

Simple Simon held the lanthorn over the edge of the pit, and Thad soon struck the hard planking of the galley.

The lanthorn gleamed above him as he put his hand to his mouth and spoke to Simon.

"Drop the light along the rope," he said. "Let it fall and I will catch it."

"Ay, ay, sir."

This did not prove a difficult feat, for Simon dropped the lanthorn accurately and Thad caught it.

The young sailor now took the light and turned to the right.

He soon explored that part of the dark hold, for it was not of any great dimensions; and having accomplished his purpose he came back.

Suddenly Thad brought up against a little door.

It was so small that one would have to force himself through on hands and knees—and it was fastened on the opposite side.

This puzzled the boy not a little, and, though he tried it with all his strength, it would not yield.

"That door was placed there for a purpose," said Thad

to himself. "Capt. Kidd evidently knows nothing of it. It looks like the work of a ship thief, if not several of them. Now if I could look beyond this door the mystery might be solved."

Resolved not to desist till he had probed the ship's mystery to the bottom, Thad Fergus drew back and again made the round of the pit.

It was a secret apartment in the lower hold of the *Red Raven*, and had been put there for some purpose some time during the building of the vessel—perhaps by those Moors who owned the vessel at some time in the past before Kidd captured the same.

He had sailed from New York with one galley called the *Adventure*, and came back with a larger vessel, also bearing the same name.

Now, this strange apartment was not quite square, being somewhat oblong, and the sides tapered a little to the roof.

If it had been built for a secret prison there were no signs that it had ever been used for that purpose.

No scraps of any kind were to be found in the place, and no iron rings in the walls for the securing of the unfortunate victims of a pirate's cruelty, or the vengeance of a dark-faced Moorish captain.

All at once the eye of Thad caught sight of something that at first suggested a tiny serpent crawling up the wall.

He laughed at the idea, and held his lanthorn close to the object thus discovered.

It then looked like a welt on the planks, but he soon found that it was a long fuse which reached from the bottom of the floor extended to the magazine overhead.

The discovery almost took Thad's breath, and, moreover, thrilled him to the marrow.

Some hand had placed the deadly fuse there, securing it along the wall with tiny iron staples which prevented it from dropping to the floor.

Thad ran his lanthorn up and down the fuse, examining it with eager eyes, and at last turned away.

He had discovered that at the foot of the wall the fuse ran through the partition where somewhere in the ship's hold the fuse could be lighted, while the master of this terrible scheme could take flight and await the results of his devilment.

"Hold the rope now," called Thad, to Simon. "I'm coming up."

"Ay, ay, sir," was the response, and the boy began the ascent.

"Quick, sir," said Simon, in accents of fright. "They're on the outside of the door again."

"With the drug, think you?"

"I can't say. I hear voices there."

This increased Thad's efforts, and in a little while he pulled himself over the edge of the hole and looked into the face of Simon in the magazine.

They crept back between the kegs and stood near the door, Thad, with the light in his hand and Simon holding a pistol in his grasp, both watching the barred portal.

"It's not the captain's voice," said Thad, after a moment's silence.

In another moment somebody struck the door a blow, and a voice was heard.

"Who's there?" asked Thad.

"'Tis I—Oliver!"

"Alone, my boy?"

"Alone!"

In an instant Thad's hand was at the bar and the door opened.

Oliver slipped in, and the door was shut and barred again.

"Where are the enemy?" asked Thad, as Oliver turned a white face to him.

"Scattered throughout the ship. The devil is to pay in the captain's cabin."

"What is happening there?"

"They are marrying the young girl they brought down here to the captain's slave, Selim—against the will of both."

"The wretches!" fell from Thad's tongue. "Will they never give up their scoundrelism?"

"Never, so long as they can fly the black flag of their profession."

"Then——"

A prolonged shriek reached the ears of the boys at this juncture.

"The girl uttered that cry," exclaimed Thad Fergus. "Capt. Kidd has lost the prisoner of the powder magazine! Come!"

He jerked the barricade from the door which he threw open, and, pistols in hand, bounded beyond the threshold followed by his chums.

CHAPTER X.

THE PASSION OF A PIRATE.

The scene which was taking place in the cabin of the *Red Raven* was enough to appall the heart of any young girl.

Capt. Kidd, determined to carry out the crazy whim that had taken possession of his scheming brain, was in his element.

Black Diamond had come at the call of his leader, and stood in the middle of the place, clad in some dark vestments which, while they suggested the priest, could not entirely conceal his dastardly calling.

Selim, retreating to the further side of the cabin, looked on like a person in a maze, his face white and ghastly, and his eyes riveted upon the beauty of the Dutch maid.

"This is the first wedding to take place under our Jolly Roger," said Kidd, with a wave of his hand and a glance at Selim. "My boy, you should be proud of this alliance. My mistress here belongs to one of the best families in New York, and there is good Holland blood in her veins."

Selim did not reply, but still held aloof, his swarthy hands clinched and his lips sealed.

"Come forward!" roared Capt. Kidd, irritated by Selim's silence. "Step up, my man, and become the husband of this rosy-cheeked maid from the mainland."

Selim did not stir.

"Harry my soul!" cried the freebooter. "This is rebellion in my own household. What, will you not marry the pretty angel from Manhattan? Bring the boy forward, Mr. Hugo."

The hunchback started toward Selim, who shrank

against the wall and looked at Hugo with the glare of a young wolf.

In another instant the hunchback had thrown himself upon the boy, and before Selim could use a hand he was being dragged forward toward the hated altar.

Kidd laughed his best.

"Stap me," he cried. "This is the first unwilling bridal I ever witnessed. How is it with the bride-elect—Mr. Dragon?"

"She's coming around nicely," grinned Dragon, through his beard. "She will grace a wedding fit for a princess."

"Oh, the jewels! I forgot them—the bride's jewels!" and Kidd sprang toward the brass-bound chest and threw back the lid.

All saw him dive his white hands into the depths of the heavy chest and pull them up with a lot of sparkling jewels almost covering them.

Coral turned her head away.

"Look, my dear," laughed Kidd, as he approached the girl, still holding the tiaras in his hands. "If you could have seen these precious baubles on the bosoms of the fair donnas of old Spain you would have cried with envy."

A groan was all that issued from the girl's throat.

"What, do you refuse them?" cried Kidd.

"Not all the jewels you can bestow, Capt. Kidd, will make me a willing bride on your ship," she exclaimed.

"Ho! ho! You do not know, my fair one, that I can load you down."

"They are tainted," she went on. "Those jewels mean the death of their poor owners. Unhappy girl that I am to have ever dreamed of accepting such from you."

"It is true that the lady is now among the mermaids," laughed the buccaner. "She would not wear them at a bridal we proposed, so she went to join the darlings of the deep."

Coral turned away with a shudder of aversion.

"Hold her there, Mr. Dragon!" resumed the pirate captain. "I will invest the bride myself."

Capt. Kidd stepped toward Coral and held the strands above her head.

She fell back the length of Dragon's arm, and the fingers of the first officer seemed to sink into her flesh.

"Mercy! mercy!" she exclaimed. "Is there none on this pirate bark?"

"None!" smiled Kidd. "There is joy here on account of the marriage of Mistress Von Puyster——"

Coral uttered a cry and suddenly jerked back.

The grip of Dragon, relaxed for a moment, gave her her opportunity, for she jerked from him and stood free.

Capt. Kidd shot the big pirate a look of rage.

Dragon started at Coral, but she leaped with a cry toward the table and jerked from it a cutlass lying there.

But she did not know its use, for she threw it clumsily above her head, and the pirates laughed at her unskillful hands.

"Will no one save me?" she exclaimed.

It was a scene calculated to draw sympathy from hearts of stone, but the rough and hardened spectators only laughed uproariously.

Coral put out her hands toward Selim.

"Will not you save me?" she cried. "Tell them that you abhor this ceremony."

"I do," shouted Selim, as his dark eyes flashed. "I do abhor it, and it is the work of demons."

"Silence!" thundered Kidd. "You are the happy man, and you must not cross the authority of your captain."

Selim in the grasp of Hugo writhed and twisted, but the hunchback held him fast.

Coral was disarmed by Dragon before she could use the cutlass, and was pushed forward.

She nearly gave up in despair.

Capt. Kidd leaned toward her, the strands of jewels in his hands, and he held them so that they would glow and sparkle in the light like the precious stones of a barbaric crown.

They were of all colors, and their glitter almost blinded the eyes of those who beheld them.

"Now, Mr. Diamond," said Kidd, turning to his minion, the would-be priest. "You will make this happy pair one forever."

"No! no!" cried Coral. "This is the work of demons. I cannot become a bride on this vessel."

"Cannot is not in Capt. Kidd's lexicon," roared the pirate with another chuckle. "Proceed!"

Hugo thrust Selim across the floor, and the dark-faced boy grated his teeth.

"Join their hands there," said Kidd. "We will be witnesses of this delightful ceremony."

Coral, with a wild shriek, fell back and would have covered her face with her hands if Dragon had not prevented.

"Fiends, have you no mercy!" she wailed. "Is there none on this ship to befriend a poor girl?"

Selim at this moment fell back the full length of Hugo's arm.

"I will not!" he hissed, through his teeth. "I will not sanction this infamy."

"Ha, my young kid, you will not?" grated Kidd. "You must remember that you belong to me."

"I have long been your slave, but now I refuse to do your will," panted the lad.

"And you are still my slave."

"You stole me from my native land——"

"And let you see the world. What sort of world had you, hemmed in by mountains?"

"The fairest under the sun."

"A world of wildness; a world of heat, for the sun beat down on you from its rise to its setting, and you found no pleasure——"

"But it was home," broke in the boy. "It was my home, the birthplace of my loved ones, the place of my own birth, and there I was happy."

"I have given you freedom from the wildness of your native land. I have loaded you with presents; I have made you what you are. I—I——"

"You have filled my life with wretchedness," cried Selim. "You have kept me from home, and to-night I am the most unhappy boy on the face of the globe."

"Pshaw! With a wife like this you will be happy."

"I have a love across the sea. I have a sweetheart over there, one who was the playmate of my childhood."

"And one whom you will never see again!"

The last vestige of color left the face of Selim.

"I will not!" he cried. "I will not blight the life of

Mistress Von Puyster at the bidding of Capt. Kidd. I refuse to wed her."

"A thousand thanks," exclaimed Coral, stretching out her hands toward Selim. "I shall never forget you, young sir."

"He has no say in this matter," coolly said Kidd. "The will of William Kidd is law on this vessel."

"Monster, then may the vengeance of Heaven speedily overtake you!"

"Oh," laughed the pirate, "I have heard those words before—many times, eh, Dragon?"

The first officer nodded.

"Now we will terminate all this," continued the buccaneer chieftain, roughly. "We will now proceed to solemnize the marriage of these young people so superbly fitted for one another. Stand over yonder, Mr. Diamond. We will sign the marriage bond afterward."

Black Diamond, with a grin on his dark countenance, obeyed Kidd and stepped aside.

Hugo forced Selim forward, while Dragon pushed the struggling Coral along the floor.

The young girl no longer cried for mercy.

She saw that she was in the toils, that she might as well save her voice, and when she found herself confronted by Selim in the grip of the hunchback, she turned her head away and bit her lip nearly through.

Capt. Kidd fell back to the table and filled a glass with wine.

"Here's to the bride and bridegroom," rang out his voice as he drank off the sparkling liquor. "This is the happiest hour of your existence, my young people, and may your wedded lives flow as smoothly as the waters of the tropic seas."

"Shame! shame!" fell from Selim's lips.

"What's that?" roared Kidd, as he whirled upon the boy. "Do you object to the toast to your own happiness?"

There was no reply; the face of the boy colored deeply, and the pirate set the goblet down.

He next made a sign to Black Diamond, and that worthy, fully in accord with his commander's designs, reached out for the hands of Selim and Coral.

"No! no!" cried the girl, refusing hers. "This is a marriage of sin. It is a wedding forced and not approved by Heaven——"

"Nay, but by Capt. Kidd," laughed the scourge of the sea. "It is a match fit for angels to look at——"

Coral gave a despairing shriek that must have echoed throughout the ship as she jerked back the length of Dragon's stalwart arm once more.

"Pull her to the altar, Mr. Dragon!"

It was the stern voice of the buccaneer chieftain.

The next moment the noise of tramping feet was heard beyond the door, and the pirates looked across the room.

"Hades and furies, what is that?" cried Kidd. "Has the crew——"

"It is not the crew," cried Hugo. "It is the rat of the magazine."

The door had been flung wide, and there in the sight of the startled pirates stood the three boys headed by Thad, all with weapons in their hands.

Capt. Kidd recoiled with an exclamation.

"Back!" he cried. "This scene is not for you. Ah! you have come out of the old trap, have you?"

"I am out of the magazine, and you must not wreck the life of the girl yonder!"

Kidd, flashing the Silver Cutlass, looked at Black Diamond, while he covered Thad with its glittering point.

"Proceed, Mr. Priest," he said. "These young fellows can be witnesses to the ceremony if they will."

"Never, sir!" cried Thad, as his pistols went upward. "This cruelty has gone far enough. You will release the young maid, Mr. Dragon, and you, Capt. Kidd, stand where you are."

"Harry my soul! but this is coolness," ejaculated the startled pirate. "This is the height of insolence. Hold your prey, Mr. Dragon. I will deal with these young scoundrels."

He came round the table, the cutlass in his hand, and his face aflame with rage.

"Halt! Another step, sir, and the *Red Raven* will need another captain."

Kidd stopped, biting his lip in the passion of the moment.

"Unhand the maid, Mr. Dragon," continued Thad. "You will hold her another minute at the peril of your life."

"And you, sir, will slay the maid if you fire at Dragon," and that minute Coral was whirled in front of the first officer, and his eyes seemed to emit flashes of fire, as with a bound he cleared the space in front of him and came down upon the three boy heroes with the velocity of a bounding lion.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TERRIBLE DEATH HEAD.

Shielded by the body of Coral Von Puyster, Dragon thought himself secure, and he would have been, but for an event which he had not taken into his calculations.

Eager to help his shipmate, Hugo the Hunchback released Selim, who quickly caught up a cutlass, and, springing forward, past Capt. Kidd, laid it across the neck of Dragon with the flat side, striking with all his might.

Dragon dropped the girl, who sprang toward Thad and his friends, while he wheeled upon the assailant in his rear.

There he found himself confronted by the dark-faced boy, who stood his ground, cutlass in hand.

Dragon would have cut him down, but for a command from Capt. Kidd, which caused him to forego his intentions.

Thad and his chums now stood between Coral and the pirate chief, and their pistols covered the buccaneers.

Kidd raved in his anger.

Never before had he been thus defied on board his own bark.

He had overcome mutineers, and he could deal with them, for he was a lion on the deck of his black flag rover; but now he was covered by his own weapons in the hands of determined youths, who had cause to press the triggers and put an end to his career.

It was a tableau that could not last long.

Suddenly Dragon turned and covered the boys with his finger as he looked over his shoulder at his chief.

"Say the word, captain, and they are ours!" he cried. Kidd hesitated.

Hugo also made ready for a tussle with the boys, but Capt. Kidd shook his head.

"Be off," he exclaimed. "To your cabin and remain there till ordered up for trial."

"Nay! Let us finish them, captain," roared the disappointed Dragon. "Let me show them that they are nothing in the hands of Dragon of the high seas."

"No!"

Kidd knew the stuff his first officer was made of. Never had he played the coward; he had charged across the deck of vessels almost alone, cutlass in hand, a lion of the sea and a conqueror.

And now he would have charged straight into the teeth of death directly upon the cold muzzles of the boys' pistols, but Kidd shook his head resolutely.

Dragon was compelled to swallow his rage, and he did it with ill grace.

"Be off, I say," he said again to Thad and his friends. "You can take the girl with you."

The boys fell back from the open door, and Coral, with a smile upon her white face, walked before them.

As Simple Simon closed the door of their cabin he turned upon Coral and held out his hand.

"Ho, ho, so they were going to mate you to the yellow tiger who waits on Capt. Kidd?"

"They were dragging me to an unwelcome altar," was the reply. "But for your coming I would by this time have been the bride of Selim."

"And a pretty pickle you would be in," grinned Simon. "It was the shortest courtship I ever heard of——"

"There was none at all," broke in Coral, solemnly. "Capt. Kidd was the monster at the head of it all."

"And the boy wanted you not, either?"

"He refused to blight my life by the proposed marriage."

"He's got some manners," cried Simon, and as he drew off behind Oliver he muttered: "Hang me, if I would have refused a girl like that. She's as pretty as a red apple and ten times sweeter. What's your name, miss?"

"Coral Von Puyster," said the maid, who had caught the question.

"What, the daughter of Yost Von Puyster, the rich ship merchant?" cried Simon.

"My father is a ship merchant."

"By my life! he could set your husband up in business," ejaculated Simple Simon. "Selim knows not what he missed, eh, Master Thad?"

"Hush, Simon, you worry the young lady," said Thad. "She has just escaped a terrible danger and——"

"Put me in Selim's place and I'll soon be the son-in-law of Yost Von Puyster."

Coral smiled at the Dutch boy's words, and in a few moments she was relating all that had taken place in Capt. Kidd's cabin.

The youths listened intently, while their indignation rose to the highest pitch.

It was a story calculated to revive their hatred of the man under whom they were compelled to serve.

"Do you think Jacob is still waiting for you?" asked Thad, addressing Coral.

"Capt. Kidd ordered him away, but Jacob is a faithful soul, and he may still be hanging around the ship."

"If so, he is apt to get into trouble should Capt. Kidd think of him. The night is not very far advanced, and we will see later on if Jacob is still here."

"I owe you much for your interference, and I will owe you more if you can get me off of this hated vessel. What a foolish girl I was to come hither, and presume on the liberality of the greatest monster that ever walked a vessel's deck. Oh! little did I think that all they said of him, yes, ten times over, was true. Yes, I was a silly thing to come here."

"It was a great presumption, miss," said Thad. "But now that you have met Capt. Kidd you can disabuse the minds of some of your people who continually find fault with Gov. Bellomont for wanting to bring his career to a close."

"All might have gone well if Selim had not been on board."

"Capt. Kidd is a man of whims. He sometimes takes them when one does not look for such, and then of late he has several times given Selim some cruel words. He forced the boy from home long ago, and whenever Selim talks about the mountains of his native land he gets a laugh for his pains."

"Capt. Kidd taunted him to-night in that manner."

"Just like him."

It was agreed between the boys that Coral should for the present occupy a corner of their cabin about which they managed to stretch a curtain so as to give her a show of privacy, and, at last, bidding them good-night, the girl, whose nerves were overstrung by what she had passed through, slipped behind the arras, and vanished.

Thad and his chums knew that they had not seen the last of Capt. Kidd's grim humor.

"If we could only make ourselves masters of this craft!"

It was Oliver who spoke.

"That is out of the question," responded Thad.

"We can blow it up," cried Simon. "Remember the fuse along the wall below the magazine."

"Yes, and blow up ourselves as well."

"If we could ignite the train and then make our escape——"

"Not to be thought of," interposed Thad. "Some one fixed the fuse in its place for a purpose. One of these days the ship will go up with all on board, but for the present, or as long as Capt. Kidd does not pull the lines too hard on the would-be mutineers, he is safe."

"If we could only discover who set the fuse."

"That may come out further along."

"We could make common cause with the discontented."

"Yes. I would like to know who set the fuse that is down there in the dark hold of the ship."

"It was not Dragon."

"No, no. That beast is the tool of his captain. He would not do such a thing as that. We must look elsewhere for the conspirator."

Simple Simon began to rub his hands gleefully.

"What is it, Simon?" asked Thad.

"I feel the doubloons in my hands yet," grinned the Dutch boy. "How bright they were, Thad, and how big."

"No larger than common."

"Why, they looked like cart wheels in my eyes."

"I doubt not that, boy. They were fine, fat fellows, and evidently the common crew do not know that they are there."

"No, Capt. Kidd has taken the old magazine for his treasure house. They were so heavy——"

"No heavier than common doubloons, Simon."

"And so pretty," cried the Dutch boy. "If I had a lot of them I could buy a wife as pretty as Mistress Von Puyster——"

Thad suddenly placed his hands over the boy's mouth.

"She'll hear you," he whispered. "The young lady has probably not fallen asleep yet."

"Never mind," persisted Simon. "Her father is rich, but he wouldn't refuse a boy with a bag of doubloons if he should ask for the hand of his daughter."

With this the half-witted boy turned toward the curtain and threw Coral a kiss.

"I don't see why they don't play another hand," said Thad to Oliver.

"They are only too glad that you are out of the magazine and away from the powder."

"It is not that. They are plotting some new devilment."

"Doubtless. While you held the fort there was the silence of death among the crew."

"Did they fear for once—these fearless fellows of cutlass and pistol—that I would blow them up?"

"The terror of the torch among the powder filled them with a nameless dread. They talked in whispers and crept about without noise as if a jar would cause the flame to touch the black death."

"Some men, though outwardly brave, are cowards at heart," remarked Thad.

"Capt. Kidd himself came sneaking between decks all alone while you were in the magazine, and his face was as white as the face of a dead man."

"He feared, too, did he? For once perhaps the fear of the death he has faced scores of times was over him."

"It must have been."

"Let us get back to our new acquaintance yonder," and Thad nodded toward Coral's little apartment. "She must not remain on the ship if we can help it. She is subject to indignity here all the time, and Capt. Kidd may even hold her for a ransom from her father."

"I have thought of that."

"He is shrewd enough to do it. Yost Von Puyster is very rich, and would give up much to save his child from any fate at the hands of the Rover."

"Kidd is fertile in schemes, and this one may have entered his head before now."

"If it has he will soon put it into execution."

In another moment Thad crossed the cabin and listened near the door.

"What did you hear?" asked Oliver, as he came back.

"I thought I caught a sound like the gnawing of a ship rat. It seemed to come from the other side of the planking."

"A rat probably. The ship is alive with them."

"I know, but this must have been a very large one."

Thad again investigated, while Oliver and Simon looked on with bated breaths.

All at once a wild scream came from behind the curtain that concealed the ship-owner's heiress, and the three boys sprang away in that direction.

It died away like a sudden cry as they reached the spot, and the boys hesitated.

"We must see what it meant!" exclaimed Thad, as he grasped the swaying curtain. "We must protect our guest, and if—look! Oliver, Simon. The nest is empty!"

It was so indeed.

The couch upon which Coral had reclined was without a tenant, and the little corner had lost its occupant.

The three boys gazed at the vacant spot for half a minute unable to utter a word.

Coral was gone and that so strangely and mysteriously as to fill them with a new horror.

Thad was the first to speak.

"We made a nest for her in the wrong place," he cried, angrily; "the corner must have a secret door."

He leaned over the couch and inspected the wall, ran his hand up and down the planking, and even tried the point of his cutlass in many places.

"Come, then," he cried, springing back. "If they have taken her again to the altar it is our duty to once more defy the sea wolf."

He reached the door and threw down the inner barricade.

As he opened it he fell back with a cry, for in the passage and within reach of his hand hung a human head—the head of Selim!

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH THAD WRITES A LETTER.

From the terrible thing that confronted them Thad and his chums recoiled with cries of horror.

It was undoubtedly the bleeding head of Selim, the buccaneer's faithful valet, and the three boys for a moment could hardly believe the evidence of sight.

Yet there it was, grinning horribly at them, swinging to and fro with the gentle motion of the ship, and in the light of the lanthorn in the cabin ghastly in its terror.

They looked at it a little while, and then their scattered senses came back.

"This is the culmination of horror and cruelty," cried Thad. "The death of Selim shall be avenged!"

"The fuse and then the escape!" exclaimed Oliver, horrified beyond measure.

As for Simple Simon, he had slipped behind Thad, his eyes bulging from their sockets while he stared at the apparition of demonism over the cabin door.

In another moment footsteps came down the darkened passage and the boys heard the sound of voices.

"They come for us," said Thad, looking at his companions.

This seemed to be the case for a moment, but the sounds died away, and they heard them no more.

By and by the three lads slipped from the cabin and went forward.

Everything was still in the direction of the captain's room.

What had become of Coral they did not know.

Certain they were, however, that she had been taken

from the corner by a secret door, and they guessed that she had fallen again into the hands of Capt. Kidd.

"The Dutch heiress must be rescued from the power of this demon, Kidd," Thad said with resolution. "She must be saved before harm comes to her on board this ship."

Oliver and Simon looked at him and echoed his words while they grasped their weapons, and at command of Thad followed him forward again.

Suddenly they heard a slight noise behind them, and as they turned a stern command rang in their ears.

"Stand where you are!"

Several lanthorns threw a light down the passage, and they saw dark forms behind them.

"We have you, rats," said the same voice, and then they made out the stalwart figure of Dragon, and saw that he was thrusting forward a brace of pistols.

The boys were trapped!

Back of Dragon were grouped a number of pirates, their swarthy faces revealed by the light, and Thad and his friends saw that they were hopelessly entangled.

"Down with your pistols," said Dragon. "You are at our mercy, and a shot means the death of all."

The boys were reluctant to surrender, but it seemed the only alternative left them.

Suddenly they fell back, but that was only getting deeper into the snare, for with each backward step they were nearing the captain's cabin.

"Ah!" cried Simon, "if we only had a match at the fuse!"

Thad echoed the boy's expressed wish, but it was too late now.

"Down with your weapons," repeated Dragon, and he slid along the passageway. "In another minute you will be riddled if you resist."

They had nothing to do but to give in.

They threw their weapons at their feet, and the exultant pirates bounded forward.

"You're not in the magazine now," Dragon said, as he gripped Thad's arm. "The captain wants to see you."

"To serve us as he has served Selim, no doubt."

Dragon showed his yellow teeth in a malicious grin.

"So you know?" he said. "We thought best to let Selim look at his friends."

"Monsters!" cried Oliver. "Is there no punishment on this earth for such as you?"

"None whatever, my hearties," laughed the first officer. "Come along. The captain is in a pleasant mood just now——"

"What have you done with Coral, the Dutch girl?"

"She awaits you, too."

Thus answered, the boys were dragged to the main cabin, the door of which was opened, and they were thrown into the room like so many beasts.

"The hunt is finished," said Dragon, to the men behind him. "You can go back."

The pirates went away, but the first officer entered the cabin and shut the door behind him.

The place was empty, but suddenly a door opened on the other side of the cabin and Capt. Kidd, dressed in his finest sea suit—the famous red coat and its gilt trimmings—entered.

His glance took in the situation.

"So you've got them, Mr. Dragon?" he said, as he caught his first officer's eye.

"Caught 'em napping, captain."

"For once at least."

Capt. Kidd turned again to the lads and looked them over critically.

"Did you take any of my powder?" he said to Thad.

"Go and see."

"Now, sirrah?" cried the pirate. "If you have removed anything from the magazine woe to your precious necks."

"Do you think we can carry off what is in the magazine?" asked Thad. "We are not thieves, though we serve under the black flag."

"By my life, you do not respect the emblem of my profession. You hate the Jolly Roger."

"What reason have we for liking it?"

"It is your flag as well as mine. It is the flag that owns the seas just now."

"And the flag that floats over as great a lot of cut-throats as ever sailed the main!"

"Ha! that is good," laughed Kidd. "Do you hear that, Mr. Dragon?"

Dragon nodded and laid his hand on the hilt of his cutlass.

"What have you done with the young maid?" asked Thad, as he looked Kidd squarely in the face.

"Ho! the Dutch girl!" cried the buccaneer. "You took her to your cabin."

"And your minions took her away by means of a secret door."

"What sharp eyes you young land hawks have," smiled Kidd. "So you think we have the fair maid of New York?"

"She is again in your power."

Kidd for a moment played with the hilt of the Silver Cutlass, and then, turning to Thad, said in his softest tones:

"My young, sir, seat yourself at the table here and write as I dictate. You will find pens and paper before you."

Thad for a moment drew back, but eager to know what card the pirate would play, took the chair at the table and looked to Kidd for instructions.

"Are you ready, young sir?"

"I am ready."

"You are a much better scribe than myself," began Capt. Kidd. "You will, therefore, write as follows: To Herr Yost Von Puyster: Having in my possession your winsome daughter, Mistress Coral, I deem it necessary to say that she will become my guest for an unlimited time unless you send me, within twenty-four hours, fifty thousand golden crowns——"

The pirate was interrupted by an upward glance from Thad as he took his pen from the paper.

"That, sir, is the basest robbery!" cried the boy.

"Never mind. It is Kidd's way. Proceed."

Thad shut his teeth hard and bent down again at his enforced task.

"Let me see: what have you there? Ah! yes. Fifty thousand golden crowns. If at the end of the allotted

time I do not receive the full amount of ransom I will remit to you one of the beautiful ears of your daughter, and ten hours after that, unless you open your purse, another ear, then her pretty nose—”

Thad flung down the pen and sprang to his feet.

“Monster!” he cried; “a thousand deaths must await you.”

“Doubtless,” complacently smiled Kidd. “It is the way of the world. My friend, Gov. Bellomont, is anxious to hang me in chains, but I want first a little cash from the coffers of some of his rich subjects. Sit down, Master Fergus. I am not quite through with my friend, Yost Von Puyster.”

Thad once more dropped into the chair and seized the pen.

“The devil take him,” he said, under his breath. “Never lived such a fiend.”

Capt. Kidd came closer and rested his hands on the edge of the table.

“We were at the maiden’s pretty nose, weren’t we?” he grinned. “Now say: ‘Having deprived your daughter of her nose, my dear Von Puyster, and finding you still stubborn, I will proceed to select the prettiest eye if there be a shade of difference between the two, and will delight in forwarding the same to you with the compliments of Capt. Kidd, of the Jolly Roger.’ Have you got that down?”

Thad nodded without looking up.

“Now, sir, you will leave a space for my name,” continued Kidd. “Ah! you’ve done that, I see. Don’t you think that letter will bring the fifty thousand crowns?”

“It ought to bring the vengeance of the world down upon you,” cried Thad, as he flushed.

“So bad as that?” and Kidd came round the table as Thad left the chair.

“Watch the young rats, Mr. Dragon,” he said, with a look at his first officer. “We are not through with them yet.”

The pirate seated himself in the chair and took up the quill.

“You write an excellent hand, Master Fergus,” he said. “I haven’t had your schooling, else I should have written this friendly letter myself.”

He dashed his name in a great scrawl across the paper at the bottom of the letter and threw the goose-quill pen away.

The boys watched him as he folded the sheet and sealed it with melted wax.

“We will see what it brings,” he said, with a smile. “I hardly think my friend, Von Puyster, will fail to open his heart as well as his treasury, but should he refuse, ha! ha! he shall surely see his daughter’s ears.”

Capt. Kidd now rose and looked across the table at the three lads.

“Take them back, Mr. Dragon,” he said. “We have done with them for to-night.”

The boys started.

“They will rest well, no doubt, guarded by the faithful Selim.”

Thad sprang forward and looked across the table into the face of the head pirate of the seas.

“There will come a time when you will cringe for

mercy at the feet of the merciless!” he cried. “You may revel in murder and piracy for a time, but the vengeance of Heaven will overtake you, and the vultures of some shore will tear your vitals as they have torn those of other men of your stamp. Inhuman monster! you have nearly had your day. Think not that you will always be the victor of the sea. The tide will turn. Capt. Kidd will suffer ten thousand torments ere death claims him, and the devil gets his due!”

“A fine prophecy, truly,” laughed the captain of the *Red Raven*. “When it is about to be fulfilled I will recall it. Mr. Dragon, take the young hawks back to their cage. We will call them hence again ere long.”

“Whenever you please,” and Thad covered the pirate with his outstretched hand. “We are now at your mercy, but, remember, there is beneath you a terror you know not of, and that at almost any moment the vengeance of the dead may overtake you, swift and terrible.”

Thad turned to the door with the last word on his lips.

“What is that, sir?” cried Kidd, as he dashed forward. “What mean those strange words?”

“Live on and see,” retorted Thad. “If it is a mystery make the most of it.”

But Kidd remained unsatisfied.

“What do you know?” he cried. “You have hidden some subtle meaning in your last words. There is nothing beneath me but the keel of this good ship.”

“Nothing?” laughed Thad, as he reached the door. “I bid you live and see, Capt. Kidd,” and, leaving the pirate with a look of perplexity on his face, he turned to his companions, and the three went back to their cabin under the watchful care of the brute Dragon, who glared at them like a wild beast.

After all, they felt that they were safer in Capt. Kidd’s hands than in Dragon’s.

CHAPTER XIII.

ROBBING THE PIRATE’S NEST.

Determined to rescue Coral from the base designs of Capt. Kidd, who seemed in one of his worst moods, the three lads waited for the hour when the ship would be quiet enough for their attempt.

Of course the usual watch would be set, and it was feared that the Rover would strengthen it, but they had to take chances.

Secure for the present at least in their cabin, guarded by the terrible apparition of the death’s head at the door, they planned in secret.

Dragon had parted with them, saying that they would be terribly punished for their part in the scenes of the last few hours, and they did not doubt that they would be subjected to something galling.

Thad suspected that Coral had been taken to a small cabin not far from Kidd’s, and that she was well guarded.

When everything was quiet on board the *Red Raven* the boys began an investigation, which left them certain that she was where Thad had conjectured.

“Now for the venture,” said Thad, to his companions. “The door of the little cabin seems to be locked, and in all probability Capt. Kidd himself carries the key. Jacob is hovering around in his boat, the faithful servant that

he is, and, with Coral once more in his charge, he will slip across the Sound with all the power he can command."

"But to get the girl away; that is the question."

"We must try it, Oliver. To-morrow Capt. Kidd will send his letter to her father, and, unless the ship merchant complies with the base request, his child will be mutilated for life."

"The monster!" cried Oliver. "We must do our best for Coral before dawn."

"That is it."

It was decided to make the attempt at once.

Thad and his chums stole from their own cabin, which was not fastened on the outside, and reached the door behind which they felt assured the fair object of their quest was.

No one was in sight.

A light burned in Capt. Kidd's den, but this was nothing unusual.

Thad tapped lightly on the door.

In a moment he heard a half-suppressed cry, and then footsteps came toward the portal.

He placed his lips close to the lock.

"Mistress Coral?" he whispered.

The one inside seemed to recognize his voice at once.

"I am awake," the girl said. "But you are imperiling yourself for one who is in the hands of fate."

"Never mind that," answered Thad. "We are here to liberate you. Jacob is prowling around the ship——"

"What, is he here yet in the place of danger?"

"He can be hailed in a moment."

"But the door is fastened. Capt. Kidd locked it himself."

"Ah! I feared as much," said Thad.

The youth drew back and acquainted his chums with the news.

"If we had the key——"

"We will get it!"

"Not from Capt. Kidd?"

"Why not? Since it is in his possession he is the person from whom to obtain the key. Come!"

He turned and led the way to the captain's cabin.

Thad laid his hand on the latch when Oliver touched his arm.

"To be discovered in there is death," he said.

"Yes, but Selim, poor boy, no longer sleeps at the couch of his master."

"Nay, but, perhaps, Dragon does."

"Or Hugo?"

"Yes, yes."

Thad did not hesitate, however, for he lifted the latch without noise and looked into the place.

The light burning over the captain's table revealed everything to be seen.

Capt. Kidd lay on a luxurious couch across the cabin in a deep sleep, his cutlass touching the floor.

Thad beckoned to the others to look.

"It is dangerous business," whispered Oliver.

"But think of Coral in his power."

"I cannot forget that," was the reply. "But if the sleeper should awaken——"

"We must take the chances," was the interruption spoken in determined tones. "If Capt. Kidd has tarried long at the wine his sleep is heavy——"

"Or it may be as light as that of a cat."

Thad made no reply to this, but, with another look at his chums, slipped across the threshold and approached the pirate.

His feet made no noise on the floor as he glided forward, and, presently, he stood over the tiger of the seas.

"Now for the attempt," he said to himself, and then he caught sight of something at the pirate's belt.

His heart leaped into his throat when he noticed that it was a bunch of keys of various sizes.

Thad stooped and began to manipulate the little things.

The heavy breathing of the fierce Rover showed that he was under the influence of his potations, and Thad took courage as he advanced at his work.

He selected three keys such as usually fitted doors on board ships at that date, and again crossed the cabin.

"Heavens! did you get the key?" asked Oliver, who had stood just inside the door all the time covering Capt. Kidd with a pistol.

Thad held out his hand without reply.

"Now for the girl," he said.

They crept back to Coral's prison after gently closing the door of the captain's cabin, and reached their goal.

"We are back," said Thad, as he called the Dutch beauty to the door.

"With the key?"

She was answered by a slight noise in the lock, and Thad pushed the door open.

Coral stood before them dressed and ready for flight.

"Now," said Thad, "we must pass or hoodwink the watch. If he is, as I suspect, my old friend, Button Black, we are safe."

Coral drew from her finger a costly ring and placed it in Thad's hand.

"For the watch, if necessary," she said. "It is my betrothal ring, but Reuter will sanction what I do with it."

They proceeded upon deck, where they found that the night was as dark as a wolf's mouth, just the sort of night for their adventure.

Thad looked down the deck and caught sight of a lantern hanging in the stern.

"The watch's light," he said in a whisper, to his companions.

Then he glided away and approached the dark figure on duty.

"It is Button," he said, joyfully, to himself.

His footsteps betrayed him, for all at once the pirate watch turned and looked straight into his face.

"Ho! my boy," cried Button. "So you are out of the magazine?"

"Yes."

Thad drew closer and laid his hand familiarly on the man's shoulder.

"You remember, Master Black, what I told the captain the night Marmont and his men stole a march on the ship?"

"Yes, yes, boy."

"I exonerated you. You were on watch that night, and I told the captain that the surprise wasn't your fault."

"I remember, and Button Black will do anything for you, boy."

"I thought as much, Button," said Thad. "Now, sir, say nothing and hear no sound."

"What's up? Are you going to desert the captain?"

"Not yet. We are going to save the Dutch girl?"

"Ah! the pretty one who came over for her wedding present, ha! ha!"

"The same. Now, sir, you hear nothing."

"I'm as deaf as a post, and I'll face the captain's anger."

Having settled the watch, Thad hurried back to his anxious friends, and then leaned over the bulwarks as he tried to scan the blackness beneath.

"What was to be the signal for Jacob?" he asked Coral Von Puyster.

The Dutch girl sprang to his side and leaned over the fringe of the vessel.

Making a trumpet of her fair white hands, she called softly, "Jacob!" twice.

A moment's silence followed, then the sound of a boat cutting the water struck the ears of all.

"He is down there," said Coral, as she turned to Thad. "Jacob is still on duty."

A rope with a noose at one end was hastily rigged, and Thad assisted the Dutch girl to place her feet firmly in it, after which the boys lifted her over the side of the *Red Raven*.

"Be careful now," were Thad's parting words. "Hold to the line, and see that you drop fairly into Jacob's boat."

"That I shall," was the reply, and the line was let down carrying the strong-willed Dutch girl.

Thad and his chums listened breathlessly for a few seconds, and then a little call came up to them.

Coral was safe in the boat with Jacob.

"Without the loss of an ear," grinned Thad, overjoyed at the success of the adventure. "She will have a thrilling story to tell in old Manhattan."

He turned back with his companions, and the next move was to replace the keys.

Stealing once more to the captain's cabin, he entered as before, and found Kidd in the same deep slumber.

He replaced the keys in the belt and then stole across the room.

As he paused at the door and looked back he caught sight of a letter on the table.

His curiosity got the better of him and he glided back.

It was not the letter he had been forced to write to Yost Von Puyster, but another addressed to Gov. Bellomont.

As it was unsealed Thad opened it and read as follows:

"TO MY DEAR FRIEND BELLOMONT: Since you wish to see me I have concluded to pay you a visit ere long. I have not been in New York for some time, and I deem it necessary for my health to visit the place and pay my respects to our Dutch majesty's servant. You need not make any preparations for my reception, as I cannot say just when I will have the honor of drinking at your table, my dear governor, but I will surely come.

With the highest regard, I am,

Yours Respectfully,

CAPT. WILLIAM KIDD,
of the *Red Raven*."

"Well," said Thad to himself, as he folded the letter and replaced it on the table, "this is impudence with a vengeance. But it is Kidd's way. I wonder if he really expects to pay a visit to Bellomont. I wouldn't put it past him, for he is just daring enough to do that very thing."

The lad turned again toward the door, when he saw Simon pointing excitedly at something on the floor.

The half-witted boy would have cried out if he had not been admonished by Oliver to the contrary.

Thad stopped and looked underneath the table.

Something was glittering there, and when he rolled it toward him with his foot and picked it up he held a large diamond in his hand.

"One of the jewels from the broken necklace with which Coral cut Dragon's face," he said to himself. "It is quite a treasure, and she may yet wear it at her wedding."

Dropping the gem into his pocket, he rejoined his chums, and the three moved toward their own cabin.

"What the morning will bring forth no one knows," he remarked to Oliver and Simon. "The lion will waken to his loss, and doubtless there will be something in the wind."

"Whatever it be we must face it."

"Yes, as we have before faced the rage of this sea tiger."

They were in the act of throwing themselves down for some needed rest when a heavy footfall sounded on the outside of the door.

They were on the *qui vive* in a moment.

"Dragon!" cried Oliver.

Simon sprang from his bunk and seized his pistols.

"Let me shoot through the door," he cried.

"No!" said Thad. "That will never do."

He went to the door himself and opened it.

Into the room sprang a man who was not Dragon, but a devil of the same make-up—Hugo the Hunchback.

"You!" cried Thad, as he fell back.

"Why not? Were you looking for angels?" and the strange man laughed till his sides shook.

CHAPTER XIV.

KIDD'S WAY.

Hugo crossed the room and made a sign for silence. His fierceness seemed to soften in the presence of the boys.

"It's not right for the captain to keep the bird in the cage," said the hunchback. "The girl is helpless, and she will be mutilated if Capt. Kidd carries out his intentions. She will lose her pretty ears and then her nice, little nose and——"

Thad interrupted Hugo with a look thrown hastily toward his companions.

"Coral will lose nothing of the sort," he said to the hunchback.

"Her father is as close as a turtle's mouth."

"He may not have to open his coffers to redeem his child from Capt. Kidd's hands."

"Why not? She is on board the ship, and she will remain here till Yost Von Puyster does something."

"Then," said Thad, looking straight at Hugo, "you want her to lose her ears?"

"No, no, not for a minute!" was the answer. "We must save the girl from the captain."

"But you were assisting at the wedding."

"That would have preserved her precious nose, you see."

"I do see, but the precious nose is not in peril just now."

"Why not?"

"The girl is now flying over the Sound to New York."

Hugo uttered a cry.

"What, out of the cage?" he cried.

"Yes, out of the cage. She is with Jacob, who waited for her, and in a short time will again be under the parental protection, never again to indulge in so wild and foolish adventure as this has proved to be."

"And you did it—you turned the trick on Capt. Kidd?"

"Perhaps," ventured Thad, with a glance at his chums.

Hugo held out his great hands, and what hands they were!

As large and as rough as a giant's, they almost crushed Thad's within their grasp, and the mismatched eyes of the distorted pirate twinkled mischievously.

"We could be friends, I think," he said. "But I'm a queer man. I make no more real friendships. I am liable to smile on you to-day and cutlass you to-morrow. I am a veritable devil ever since they outlawed me because I came into the world but half made up, as you see. My family hate me, my royal brother would hang me if he could lay hands on me, and I am a fiend, hated and hunted everywhere."

"Then you must, of necessity, link your fortunes with those of men like Capt. Kidd."

"I must," cried Hugo. "You don't know who I am, young sirs?"

"We do not."

Hugo cast another hasty glance toward the door and came closer to the three boys.

"It's a secret as yet shared by no one on board the ship but the captain. I startled him when I told him, and he would not believe at first. But I swore it on my cutlass, and then on the Silver Cutlass and he believed. Listen now, my young sirs. Hear who Hugo is; but first let me look down the passage."

He went to the door, and, opening it carefully, pistol in hand, looked along the corridor.

In a moment he came back and called the lads around him.

"I am the twin brother of Sir George Bellomont, the royal governor of New York," he said, in measured tones.

Then he straightened as if proud of his lineage, and looked down at the astonished lads.

"Does the revelation startle you?" he smiled. "I am that person on the oath of the cutlass. I am outlawed because I became the black sheep of the flock. I am a marked man, and, as they would not let me be good, I

turned devil, and some day I will knock at the door of my brother with the hilt of my blade! Look upon the hunchbacked Bellomont! Behold the deformed tiger of the Sound, and soon to outdo Capt. Kidd on the Spanish main."

Thad and his friends fell back, staring at the pirate, while Hugo seemed proud of his distinction.

"Now," cried he, "behold the scar of birth," and he rolled up the sleeve of his right arm and showed the boys a great cross over which was bent a crimson arrow.

"It is the crest of the house of Bellomont," he said, as he exhibited the tattoo. "It can never be washed out, but I fancy my proud brother would like to cut it out with his knife. They dared not thrust me out from society for years, but as my deformity increased and the black blood of my race gained the ascendancy, they ostracized me and I fled their accursed city. Now some day I will go back. I may not have the beauty of a seraph, but I have the hate of a tiger, though at times, as to-night, love enters my heart and sympathy finds a resting place there. Good-night, my hearties. To-morrow you will find Hugo, the servant and slave of Capt. Kidd, but you have seen him at his best—the hated scion of the house of Bellomont, and one who will repay them for all their insults at the point of his blade!"

The man was at the door as he finished.

With one hand on the latch he turned his bearded face toward the lads and showed his teeth in a tigerish grin.

"You have Hugo's secret. Keep it," he said. "Let it be yours and yours alone."

"You can trust us, sir," replied Thad, and with a courtly bow the hunchback vanished.

"A strange man," said Thad, when the door closed on the outlaw. "I would not have taken him for a Bellomont, but the mark on his arm seems to confirm his story, for it is the crest of the house. Now to bed."

The boys returned to their berths, nor wakened till the following morning when, bright and early, they were summoned to Capt. Kidd's cabin.

They knew what to expect, for Dragon, who escorted them thither, showed his teeth in a vicious snarl.

He opened the door and pushed them across the threshold, causing Simon to give back a look of rage.

"I'd like to bite you again," cried the Dutch boy.

"I'm going to pull all your white teeth one of these days," replied the scoundrel, with his usual grin.

Capt. Kidd at his table bowed almost courteously as he regarded the boys for a few moments.

"I see that you have worked while I slept," said the pirate.

"Sir?"

"You have played Capt. Kidd a pretty trick—one I hardly looked for."

Thad affected not to understand.

"To be plain, my young gentlemen, you robbed the ship of its angel."

There was no answer.

"Mistress Von Puyster ere this is in the arms of her father," and Capt. Kidd frowned. "The trick was so well done that I think of promoting all of you."

"At the yardarm," grated Dragon.

Kidd gave the giant an angry look, and he subsided into silence.

"How did you do it, sirs?" he asked Thad.

The youth stepped toward the table and looked fearlessly across it into the buccaneer's face.

"You slept soundly last night, sir," he said.

"Did I? So you robbed me of the keys?"

"Yes, we took the keys and set the bird free."

"Harry me! but that was impudence. What think you of that, Mr. Dragon?" chuckled the pirate, as though secretly amused at this novel experience.

"They deserve what the other one got," growled the big first officer.

But Kidd did not seem to take notice of Dragon's words, for he turned again toward Thad.

"You held us in fear while you were in the magazine," he continued. "A spark would have sent us all to Davy Jones' locker."

"That is true."

"Would you have fired the ship?"

"Why not? You did not press me quite hard enough."

"That is what saved us, eh? You would have ended the career of the *Red Raven*."

"You sail under a flag against which all the respectable world fights."

"That is true. It is the flag that carries fear into all the seas. It is my flag—the flag of Capt. Kidd, king of the seas."

"And it is the flag that will have no traitors under it!"

These words fell from Dragon's lips.

"Silence!" cried Kidd, as he looked at his lieutenant.

"I have the floor now, as the bigwigs say in Parliament. You found something in the magazine?"

"Yes."

"What did you do with it?"

"Left it where it was."

"I had a mind to fill my pockets," cried Simple Simon.

"They looked as big as cartwheels——"

"Or as big as your Dutch eyes, eh?" laughed Kidd.

"So you left them there?"

"Where we found them, sir."

"Good! Now, sirs, you can go back. Let them pass, Mr. Dragon."

"Without a sentence to the 'cat'?"

"Yes."

"It is too much! I wanted to scrape their backs. I wanted to see them squirm at the mast."

"They are free. It is Kidd's whim."

"To perdition with your whims!" roared Dragon.

Capt. Kidd came round the table with the Silver Cutlass naked in his hand.

"I command on board this ship," he cried, as he faced Dragon. "I command under the Jolly Roger."

"But they defied you. That young tiger," pointing to Thad, "had us all at his mercy in the magazine. He would have blown us sky high had we pressed him a little harder; and now you spare them all."

"It is Kidd's way. I shall need them soon in a bold venture that will add to the fame of Capt. Kidd. They are free!"

"Not from Dragon! I owe the Dutch boy a severe handling for the bite he once gave me."

As he spoke he sprang toward Simple Simon, who braced himself, but the next moment dodged between Dragon's somewhat bowed legs, and, springing to his feet behind him, leaped upon his back, emitting cries not unlike those of a maddened ape.

Dragon, cursing madly, staggered across the cabin, but Simon held on like grim death while he sank his teeth into the lieutenant's ear.

It took the combined strength of Thad and Oliver to pull the enraged lad from Dragon's shoulders, and the moment the pirate was free he rushed after Simple Simon with his cutlass, but the blade came in contact with Capt. Kidd's steel.

"Back!" cried Kidd. "You touch the lad on peril of your life, Mr. Dragon. I want him for further service. He will make a fine jolly rover, for he is as quick as a cat."

Dragon only glared at Simon, but did not repeat his attempts to reach him.

Three days later news came from the shore to the effect that the whole city was stirred by the indignities heaped upon the daughter of Yost Von Puyster, the wealthy ship merchant, and it was said that Bellomont would soon send out another and a more formidable expedition to clear the Sound of Capt. Kidd's hated presence.

"We'll see him at home," said the tiger of the sea, with a laugh, when he heard these reports. "We will call on Sir George and maybe we'll take along a member of his illustrious family to help do the honors of the governor's house. So Mistress Coral got home safely. She took her precious ears along, ha! ha! which is better than to go home with but one."

Dragon, the merciless, said nothing at these words, though he was still in a tiff because Capt. Kidd had spared the boys who had so boldly defied him, and he resolved secretly that he would take vengeance into his own hands, and impatiently bided his time.

Mistress Coral, soon after her adventure, became the bride of her Dutch lover, but she did not wear the stolen treasures of the sea at her wedding.

The remains of Selim were buried on the island at night, and for days Capt. Kidd seemed to be in the agony of remorse, as well he might be if he had a soul; the poor boy had served him well, but in a moment of madness he had killed his most faithful friend, one whose service he was sure to miss in the future—perhaps it was partly because of this softened spirit of remorse that led him to spare the three lads who had given him so much trouble.

Thad and his chums were again given the freedom of the ship despite their defiance of the sea wolf; and thus it came about that they were destined to see more of Capt. Kidd and his sea scourges.

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