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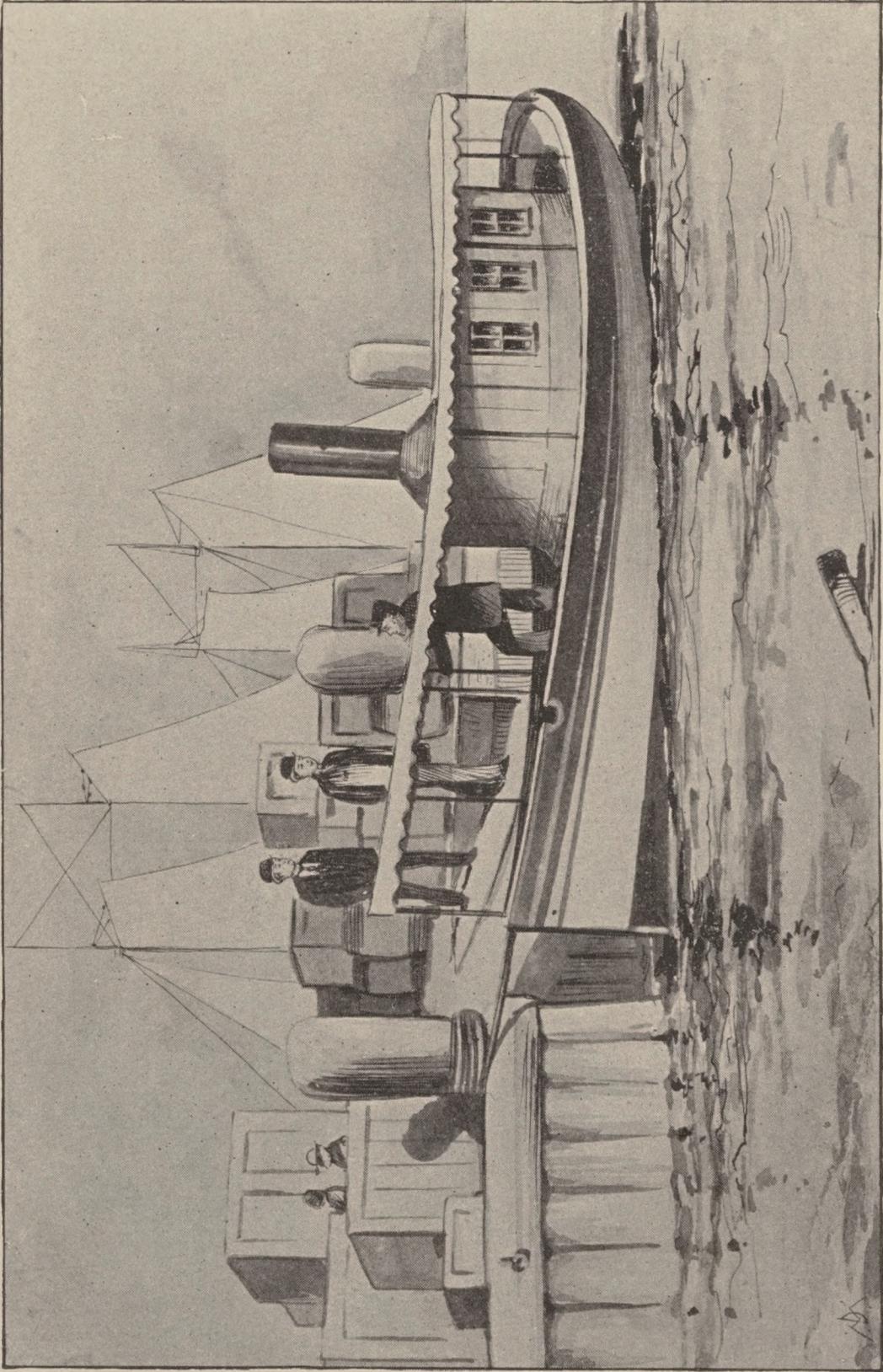
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STARTING ON THE CRUISE

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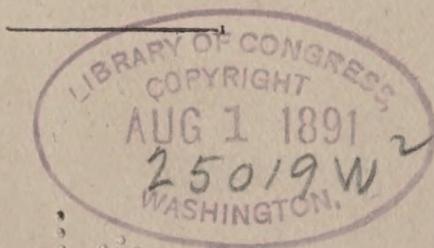
THE

Braganza Diamond

BY

JAMES OTIS

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1891

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THE BRAGANZA DIAMOND

CHAPTER I

AN EXCITING PROSPECT

VISITORS at Old Point Comfort remember well the little steam launch Midge, or yacht, as old Jake Berry, the owner, insisted on calling her. She was reasonably well adapted for a trip to Norfolk, or up the James River, although even in these sheltered waters the passengers might suffer some discomforts if a storm came up, owing to the lack of accommodations.

She was only thirty-five feet long, with an after cabin capable of holding four persons without any very great amount of crowding, an engine-room where two more might sleep or seek shelter from a storm, while forward, from amidships to the bow, there was no other protection than that afforded by a canvas awning.

A jaunty little craft she was, however, and among her numerous admirers the most ardent were probably Perry Sargent and Ernest Barnard, who, with their parents, were spending the winter at the big hotel where Northern people are wont to seek refuge from the frost king's rule.

Many times had these two been out with Captain Jake, when his craft was chartered by a small party, and never a morning passed without their visiting the dock in the hope of receiving an invitation for a short cruise.

On this particular day, when the Midge is thus formally introduced, the boys paid their regular visit to the captain, and were both surprised and disappointed that he was about to take quite a long voyage, for, during the past four weeks, the little steamer had returned to her dock every night.

“Yes; I reckon on bein' gone nigh on to two weeks,” Captain Jake said, “an' if so be you fellers can get away for that length of time, an' are willin' to stand your share of the grub bills, why

here's a chance for a right jolly lark. I'm goin' down through the old canal to the south'ard of Roanoke Island with the widder Houghton an' her daughter. I don't calculate there's much of any money in it for me, an' still there may be; leastways, I'm taking chances."

Neither of the boys was particularly interested as to what the "chances" might be which the owner of the Midge was taking; but they were literally wild with excitement at the prospect of a two weeks' cruise, and, without waiting for further explanations, started off to gain the necessary permission.

To the delight of both, they met Mr. Barnard a short distance from the dock, and, before replying to his son's earnest entreaties, the gentleman thought it advisable to consult with the owner of the Midge.

"Danger?" Captain Jake said, in reply to his questions. "Not a bit of it! We'll run through the old canal into the Pasquotank River, then across Albemarle Sound, an' there we are. We may find a little rough water off Roanoke, but

no more than the boys see every day they go out with me. I'll answer for it that they're back here in two weeks, if so be you're willin' they should go."

"When do you intend to start?" Mr. Barnard asked.

"I'm reckonin' on leavin' here in an hour, if nothin' happens."

After asking for more detailed explanations regarding the intended course and the object of the trip, Mr. Barnard accompanied the boys to the hotel.

Within the given time not only had they gained their parents' permission, but all arrangements were made for the voyage. Each had a well-filled valise, together with sufficient money to enable him to pay his share of the "grub bill," and when they stepped on board the Midge, Captain Jake said, as he pointed with his thumb toward the tiny cabin:

"The widow an' her daughter are there, an' I've waited ten minutes or more to find out if you're goin'."

“We got here as quickly as possible,” the elder of the boys answered, apologetically, and the old gentleman replied:

“Oh, my waiting don’t make any difference. A few minutes more or less won’t count on a two weeks’ cruise. Before we get back I’ll show you more fun between here an’ Roanoke than can be stacked up on the whole United States coast.”

In obedience to the captain’s orders, Ernest cast off the hawser, Perry seated himself on the port locker in the cockpit, and the cruise of the little steamer was begun.

As is common in small steam launches, the Midge was steered by a lever on the starboard side amidships, where the helmsman could also act as fireman and engineer, the boiler being only of ten horse-power capacity, and the machinery requiring but little attention.

During the first ten minutes the boys looked furtively toward the cabin every now and then, but without seeing either of the passengers; and noticing these glances, Captain Jake said:

“You’ll see ’em soon enough, I reckon, so there’s no need of frettin’. As I told you, it’s only the widder and little Mazie—though I don’t know why I call her that, for she’s as big as either of you. Now there’s a queer reason for this cruise, which I didn’t explain to your father, ’cause I hadn’t really a right to tell the secret; but since we’re shipmates, the thing has got to be understood, an’ you shall be posted now. Coil up that bow hawser a little neater, Ernest, and after Perry puts some coal on the fire I’ll spin a cur’ous yarn.”

When these orders had been obeyed, the captain lighted his pipe, glanced toward the cabin to make sure his passengers could not overhear him, and began his story.

“It’s nigh on to forty years since old Winslow Dorr—the widder’s uncle—was first put in command of the brig Terror; leastways, that’s what folks say, an’ it must have been as long ago as that, because Roanoke inlet was open then, and it has been closed ever since I can remember. There were plenty of people ’round these parts

whô said the captain wasn't an honest trader, as he claimed to be, an' more'n one will make his affidavit the Terror hoisted the black flag when she was off the Central American coast; but that's neither here nor there, so far as we're concerned.

"I was third mate of the ship Three Brothers when we heard as how old Winny had given up goin' to sea, an' settled down on what wasn't much more'n a sand spit near New Inlet. The Terror was still in commission, but nobody ever knew why he left her, an' I reckon he never explained, 'cause he wasn't much given to tellin' about his own business. Leastways, there he was, an' there he lived alone, an' there I reckon he is now, or we'll be makin' this trip for nothin'."

"So you are simply going down to see him, are you?" Ernest asked, disappointed because the story was not more thrilling.

"That ain't quite the size of it," the old man answered; and, leaning forward, he added in a whisper, "we're goin' down to get one of the biggest diamonds you ever saw."

“Diamonds!” Perry repeated in astonishment.

“Yes, an’ here’s the cur’ous part of the whole thing. Last week the widder got a letter from the old captain sayin’ he had ’em an’ wanted her to come before he died, ’cause there wasn’t much show in the nature of things for him to last a great while longer. Where the jewels came from I don’t say; but I’ve got my opinion, an’ you can have yours. I’ve seen the letter, so that part of it is straight; but still the old man may have been clean out of his head, an’ hasn’t so much as a piece of glass to show. The widder’s jest crazy to get there, ’cause her mother used to say that she’d seen the diamonds once, an’ the old captain told a story of how he was keepin’ ’em for somebody else.

“Now gettin’ down sou’east of Roanoke ain’t the easiest kind of travelin’ unless you own a boat, or charter one, an’ since the widder’s husband died I reckon her money is kinder slim, so she showed me the letter, an’ I agreed to take her down. It’s the same as a loss of sixty dollars a week if there’s nothin’ in the story, ’cause

I can get that much for the use of the yacht durin' pleasant weather. If the old captain is alive, if the diamonds are there, an' if he gives em' up, why I'll be paid for the cruise; but there are so many 'ifs' about the job that it's kinder risky as a speculation."

"But if he had what represented so much money, why would he live down there?" Ernest asked. "They wouldn't be any good to him."

"Well now by puttin' together the letter and what an old nigger who used to sail with Captain Dorr told me, I can make a pretty good guess. This darkey—he was bosun's mate on the Terror—says the captain got 'em from an East Indiaman what was ashore on the Florida reefs. I'll leave you to figger how the thing was done; but 'cordin' to the nigger's story, the men what owned 'em threatened the worst kind of revenge, an' swore to follow him till he died if they couldn't get the stones before. It wasn't so much the value, but 'cause they belonged to their outlandish gods, or somethin' of that kind, I don't rightly understand what; leastways, old

Winnny settled down where nobody would be likely to find him."

"Does Mrs. Houghton know about all this?" Perry asked.

"Well it stands to reason she's heard a good many things; but except for that letter I don't reckon she's posted any better'n I am—perhaps not so well."

"Then we are going to see a regular pirate," Perry said in a whisper, as if the very idea alarmed him.

"You needn't turn a hair on that account," Captain Jake replied calmly. "He must be nigh on to seventy years old, an', consequently, not very dangerous. Then ag'in, if we've turned to an' brought his niece, he's bound to be half-way civil, if nothin' more."

The boys were eager to learn all that was known regarding the ex-pirate, and had begun to ply the captain with questions when the little door leading from the cabin was opened as the widow and her daughter entered the cockpit.

CHAPTER II

A VISITOR

THE boys had fancied that the grand-niece of a retired pirate must necessarily be rather a disagreeable looking person, therefore their surprise was great when a very pretty, brown haired girl, about sixteen years of age, entered the cockpit, followed by a lady whose widow's cap framed a kindly, pleasing face.

"These are the young gentlemen I was speaking about, Mrs. Houghton," Captain Jake said, as he waved his hand toward the boys. "They have got a two weeks' furlough, an' are goin' down to Roanoke with us."

Mrs. Houghton bowed without speaking; but her daughter Mazie sat down by Ernest's side as she said gleefully:

"I'm so glad you are going. I was afraid it would be lonesome shut up on a little boat like this so long; but now I shall have an escort whenever I want to go on shore."

Neither Ernest nor Perry had sufficiently recovered from their surprise to make any fitting reply ; but Mazie continued talking without apparently noticing their embarrassment.

With all on board more or less excited by the singular purpose of the voyage, it is not to be wondered at that before half an hour passed they were conversing on this one subject, and after speaking about her uncle, very guardedly, as Ernest thought, Mrs. Houghton said, handing him a letter :

“ I presume Captain Berry has told you why we are making this trip, therefore it is no more than right you should see that which has caused it.”

The missive was written on a soiled piece of brown paper, and in such cramped, angular characters that the boys would, perhaps, have been unable to read it if Mazie had not assisted them. It was as follows :

NIECE HARRIET :—I have been waiting for the last six months to get an opportunity of sending you some word. Not because I am very anxious to see any members of my family, but the time

has come when I am likely to receive sailing orders at any moment. Even to write is taking big risks, for I know those black imps are still hunting me, and may, by some chance, get hold of this letter. If it reaches you, come at once to the second island or sand bar east by south from the southerly point of Roanoke. I *must* give the diamonds into your keeping, and explain how you may prevent them from falling into the clutches of the scoundrels who have pursued me so many years. They are mine, *mine*, and I'll outwit the wretches even after I'm dead if you don't get here in time to receive them. I have tried in vain to discover what virtue there is in the stones which makes the niggers so crazy. The whole lot might have gone to the bottom of the sea but for me, and if I can't dispose of them in my own way, no one else shall have the opportunity. Be careful whose craft you hire, and keep the trip a profound secret; but come at once before it is too late.

WINSLOW DORR.

When Ernest ceased reading, the occupants of the cockpit sat staring at each other until Captain Jake said gravely:

“Old Winny was a queer fish, so I’ve heard said, an’ it wouldn’t surprise me much to know that he’d lost his head, because it don’t stand to reason that anybody would chase up a lot of diamonds for twenty years or more, no matter how much they’re worth. I allow it’s his conscience that’s kinder threatenin’ him.”

“Do you think he is crazy?” Perry asked, addressing the widow.

“I don’t know,” she replied with a sigh. “As Captain Berry says, it doesn’t seem probable any one could be pursuing him, and yet I have heard this story of the diamonds several times.”

“If they were mine I would sell every one and use the money for my own pleasure rather than hide from the world all my life,” Mazie said, and then Ernest tried in vain to form some theory which would make Captain Dorr’s behavior seem less like that of a madman.

The trip from Hampton Roads to Norfolk occupied but little more than an hour, and nothing satisfactory had been decided upon by the

party save the fact that they were going to visit this island south of Roanoke, when the Midge was run alongside of Batchelor's lumber wharf, where the hawsers were made fast.

"I've got to stop here a while," the captain said, "an' if there's anything you women are likely to want within the next two weeks, it would be a good idea to get 'em now. The boys can keep ship while we're gone."

Then the captain jumped ashore and hurried toward the market place, after Mrs. Houghton decided that she also would do a little shopping.

"Who is coming with me?" Mazie asked, laughing, as her mother went on shore. "One big boy ought to be enough to take care of a little boat like this, and I'm going over to the cotton presses. It isn't often I get a chance to see the sights of Norfolk."

Both the ship keepers were eager to accompany her; but it was necessary one should remain, and Perry suggested that they draw lots to decide which could go. Mazie held two straws, and Ernest drew the longer, which entitled him to the position of escort.

Five minutes later Perry was alone in the cockpit, trying unsuccessfully to amuse himself by watching a party of negroes who were unloading a lumber barge.

This was not very exciting sport, and grew monotonous in a short time. Then he went on the dock, and while sitting on a pile of boards, wondering what sort of a cruise they would have through the swamp, he was accosted by one who at first sight appeared to be a negro.

The new comer, who had walked briskly down the wharf as if bent on some particular errand, looked to be at least sixty years of age. He had white but straight hair, and an almost black skin; but the nose was aquiline, while the lips were unusually thin.

Perry had time to notice these peculiarities before the man spoke, and instead of using the negro dialect, the stranger's language was similar to that of a Spaniard or Frenchman who has but imperfectly learned English.

"This boat of yours, is it not rather small for so long a journey?" he asked, waving his hand toward the Midge.

“She has been out in some pretty bad weather,” Perry replied, “and I guess we shan’t find much of a sea in the swamp.”

“Do you not travel further than through the canal?” the old man asked.

“Oh, yes; we’re going down south of Roanoke; but there will be no need of running in heavy weather.”

“It would please me to travel to Beaufort, if your captain is willing to take a passenger.”

“I don’t believe you could fix it. There are two already, and besides, we are not going very far.”

“Then you stop at Roanoke?”

“Just a little south of the island. I don’t know exactly where,” Perry replied, and then the arrival of Captain Jake put an end to any further questioning.

The black man turned to the owner of the Midge, and in a courteous, but yet nervous manner, repeated his desire to visit Beaufort, concluding by offering to pay well for a passage to Roanoke.

“Couldn’t do it nohow. Chartered by another party. Besides, we haven’t room on board for any more,” was the curt reply, and, after looking steadily at the Midge as if to impress her general appearance upon his memory, the man walked rapidly up the pier to the street.

“Well, that’s the rummest kind of a nigger I ever saw!” Captain Jake exclaimed, as he watched until the stranger turned in the direction of the post-office. “He don’t belong around these parts, that’s certain, an’ if he reckons on findin’ a chance to get to Beaufort by water, I’m afraid he’ll hang ’round here a long while.”

“It seems to me that he is more of a Spaniard than an African,” Perry said, musingly. “When he asked me where we were going——”

“Did he want to know that?” Captain Jake interrupted quickly. “Now if old Winny has reason to be afraid of anybody, as he says, the black fellow would be just about the kind of a chap I should think might be tryin’ to get hold of the diamonds.”

“Gracious! I never thought of that, an’ I’ve told him where we were goin’! But of course there can’t be people running around after Captain Dorr,” Perry added, as if to shake off the fears which suddenly beset him, “and, besides, unless that man has got a steamer, we can go down there and back before he’ll get through the swamp.”

“There are cur’ous things in this world,” Captain Jake said, half to himself, “an’ the most cur’ous of all are them what pop right up sudden like. Howsomever, we won’t borrow trouble, an’ I guess we’d better not say anything about the Frenchified nigger, ’cause it’s no use to set the widder a frettin’.”

The arrival of the stores caused the captain to think of business, and both he and Perry were soon actively engaged stowing the provisions away, completing the job but a few minutes before the remainder of the party came on board.

The fire had been banked, therefore it required only a few moments to raise steam again,

and the Midge was soon running up the Elizabeth River.

After steaming six miles the dark waters of the Dismal Swamp Canal were entered, and here the speed was reduced to four miles per hour in accordance with the rules governing this passage.

It was yet early in the afternoon when the feeder from Lake Drummond was reached, and here Mazie begged that a halt be made.

“Oh, Captain Berry,” she said, “I have wanted so much to see the lake of the swamp, and perhaps this will be my only opportunity. Why can’t we stop here to-night?”

“Well,” the captain replied, thoughtfully, “I don’t know as it makes much difference. We wouldn’t be very likely to go through the lock before morning, and we might as well lay here as at South Mills. It’s a pretty stiffish pull up the feeder in the small boat; but if the boys want to tackle the job, it’s their lookout, not mine.”

Both Ernest and Perry were willing to row

the little craft up the narrow water way if it was to please Mazie, and the Midge was made fast to the right bank of the canal, half hidden by the overhanging bushes, where she would be out of the track of the steamers from Elizabeth City.

The boys made ready the tender, and, yielding to her daughter's entreaties, Mrs. Houghton entered the cockle shell of a boat, after which the remainder of the party took their places, pulling up the feeder as rapidly as the sluggish current would permit.

Captain Berry, knowing that the passengers and guests would be absent a reasonably long while, filled his pipe and made of the cockpit cushions a bed where he could enjoy a smoke in what he considered perfect comfort.

One, two, three hours passed, and it was time the visitors to Lake Drummond returned, when the sound of oars was heard some distance down the canal.

The captain roused himself, crossed to the other side of the yacht, and parted the over-

hanging bushes that he might see who the new comers were.

In a small sloop-rigged boat about twenty feet long were three black men, with white hair, one of whom he had spoken with at Norfolk. There was no air stirring, and the voyagers were making their way through the canal by the aid of oars.

“I’m blest if it ain’t that very same French nigger,” the captain muttered to himself in accents very like fear, “an’ the other two are jest about as gray and queer lookin’. It begins to seem as if old Winny wasn’t very crazy when he wrote about bein’ afraid of losin’ his diamonds.” Then dropping the branches to conceal himself from view, he added: “I declare, I’m gettin’ to be a reg’lar old woman! It don’t stand to reason that these men have got anything to do with him, or with us; but at the same time I’ll let ’em go by without showing myself.”

Captain Jake watched eagerly as the strangers passed without discovering the Midge, and when

the sloop was lost to view in the distance, he said to himself:

“I wouldn’t be surprised if Mazie’s idea of stayin’ here all night might turn out a good one. If they keep on after finding that we haven’t gone through the lock, I’ll know we ain’t being chased; but if they come back, or stay over in South Mills, I’ll begin to grow mighty suspicious.”

CHAPTER III

A WEIRD SCENE

CAPTAIN JAKE was still speculating upon the probable mission of these strangers when his passengers came down the feeder, and, despite his efforts to appear unconcerned, it was apparent to all that something had occurred to disturb him.

“Are you angry because we didn’t come back sooner?” Mazie asked. “It was lovely up there, and we forgot all about everything connected with the outer world.”

“Bless your heart, child, I couldn’t be angry with you, no matter what you did. It would have been as well if you had stayed a couple of hours longer, seein’ that we’re goin’ to stay here all night.”

“Then what makes you look as if something unpleasant had happened?”

“I didn’t allow that my old face was any

different from what it usually is. Perhaps I got to thinkin' about some business at home; I've had time to conjure up most anything."

Then, to avoid further questioning, the captain brought into the cockpit a little oil stove that Mrs. Houghton might prepare supper, and amid the confusion attending the culinary operations in such a limited space his apparent perturbation was forgotten.

Night came before the meal had been eaten, and when Mazie and her mother went into the tiny cabin to retire, the captain called the boys forward, where, after telling them of the sloop and her crew, he said:

"Now I don't want to put any old woman's fancy into your heads; but at the same time it won't do any harm if we kinder sneak 'round to find out where them black fellers have gone. It's only a couple of miles from here to South Mills, an' if you will keep ship, Perry, Ernest an' I'll run ahead an' find out whether they went through the lock, or stayed at the village."

The long pull to the lake and back had tired

Ernest very much; but while thinking that Captain Jake was taking a useless precaution, he made no protest against the plan.

Clambering into the boat softly, that the occupants of the cabin might not know of the departure, the two set out, Captain Jake using the oars so deftly that not the slightest sound disturbed the almost perfect silence, while Ernest did his best at the rudder to keep the little craft in the middle of the canal, a task which was by no means simple owing to the profound darkness.

In this manner, speaking not a word, and trying to peer through the gloom for any signs of the sloop, the boat was propelled toward the settlement until an odd, crooning sound, which could hardly have been made by bird or beast, caused the captain to cease rowing as he turned in the direction of the noise.

The craft had sufficient headway to move quite a distance on the still waters, and before this onward motion had entirely ceased a most weird spectacle met the watchers' gaze.

On the bank of the canal, opposite the low path amid a tangle of cypress and juniper trees, whose roots formed a sort of island in the swamp, was a camp fire, and around it, only half clad, were the three black men who had passed the Midge a few hours previous.

Instead of being engaged in ordinary pursuits the men were dancing about the flames while they made the peculiar, droning noise which was possibly intended for music. Now and then one would spin around and around like a top during several seconds; but always keeping in a circle with his companions, and as each dancer whirled, the other two made the most horrible contortions of body and face, while every movement marked accurate time with the subdued song.

These maneuvers were continued five minutes—perhaps very much longer, for neither of the spectators was able to form any idea of the lapse of time, and then the dancers stood motionless, side by side, in front of the fire.

The song was hushed, and, after a series of

most fantastic gestures, the eldest of the three threw on the embers something which caused red, blue, and green flames to spring up like serpents, reaching high among the branches. His companions chanted softly, but not un-musically, in a language unintelligible to those in the boat, until the brilliant fire died away, when the dancing was continued as before.

The maneuvers were kept up until each had copied the movements of the first, and when the brilliant flames died away for the third time the men stood with hands crossed above the fire, while all sang in hoarse, guttural notes what Ernest fancied might be an oath or compact binding them to some common purpose.

This finished, the men resumed their clothing, and seated themselves on the trunk of a fallen tree, where they indulged in serious conversation as if discussing some plan. A short distance above, made fast to the shore, could be seen the sloop's mast; but nothing on board of her betokened the presence of any addition to the party.

It was evident that the ceremony, or incantation, whichever it might be, had been brought to a close, and Captain Jake aroused himself with a start. The boat's bow was turned in the direction of the yacht, and, pulling swiftly, yet noiselessly, the two returned, not venturing to speak until they stood once more in the cockpit of the Midge, when the captain exclaimed, as he gave vent to a long-drawn breath of relief:

“Well, I'm jiggered!”

“Where have you been so long?” Perry asked, eagerly.

“It hasn't been more than half an hour since we left,” Ernest replied, “and that's not long for a four-mile pull.”

“You went away at five minutes past eight, and it is now exactly ten o'clock. I thought you had lost the way, and that we shouldn't see you until morning.”

“I couldn't have told whether we was gone five minutes or all night,” the captain replied. “It's enough to make anybody forget what he's about.”

Then Ernest told his friend of the singular scene he and the captain had witnessed, and the three sat looking at each other in wonderment, waiting for some one to venture an opinion as to what the black men's movements betokened.

"They ain't niggers, that's a fact," Captain Jake said in a low tone; "but what they were doin' back there beats me. I'm beginnin' to think it would be better if we turned 'round and went home. I don't feel so much love for old Winny as to run my nose into trouble on his account, even if he has plenty of diamonds."

"But what we saw doesn't prove that these men have anything to do with him," Ernest said. "Perhaps they didn't go to South Mills at all, and so haven't any idea whether we're out of the lock or not."

"That's true," the captain replied, musingly; "but it's kinder sing'lar we should a struck such a gang jest at this time, an' I've been cruisin' 'round here nigh on to twenty years, but never seen anything like it before. We can't prove that they're huntin' for the old pirate; but it

looks queer for 'em to start through the swamp the very day we begun the voyage to Captain Winny's island."

Neither of the boys was willing to bring the journey to such an abrupt termination simply because of what had been seen, and both did their best to convince Captain Jake that his fears were groundless.

"I don't want you to think I'm scared," the old man said decidedly. "I'm only tryin' to make up my mind whether it wouldn't be well to wait till we find out more about this craft. Howsomever, we'll keep on if you say the word, an' won't conjure up trouble. Turn in now so's we'll get an early start to-morrow mornin'."

Absolutely refusing to say another word, the captain rolled himself in a blanket and lay down in the cockpit, leaving the boys to make their beds on the engine-room lockers.

When the first rays of the rising sun were seen next morning, Captain Jake was building a fire in the furnace, and, half an hour later, while Mrs. Houghton was yet cooking breakfast, the

Midge had started for the island south of Roanoke once more.

“Keep a sharp lookout for the sloop,” the captain said, and both boys stood in the bow, seeing the embers on the shore where the incantations had been held during the previous evening; but nothing more.

As they entered the Pasquotank River the lock-keeper reported that a boat with three negroes on board went through an hour before, and Ernest said in a tone of relief:

“That’s enough to show they’re not following us, and I don’t fancy we shall see them again.”

“All that red fire wasn’t for nothing,” Captain Jake replied, with an air of exceeding wisdom. “Perry told ’em where we was bound, an’ we’ll wait awhile before doin’ much crow-in’.”

At Elizabeth City a stop was made for the purpose of taking in more coal, as this was the last point where fuel could be procured, and that night the little craft came to anchor off Croatan Light.

“There’s one thing about it,” Captain Jake said, in a tone of satisfaction, after Mazie and her mother had retired, “them black fellers have had a fair wind to-day, an’ I reckon we needn’t trouble ourselves much more about ’em. Most likely they did really want to go to Beaufort, an’ are well down the Sound by this time. The mummary we saw don’t amount to anything, an’ when you come to think the matter over it’s no worse than what the darkies in the swamp do in their voodoo business.”

Perry stood watch from eleven o’clock until one in the morning, and during this time there was a decided change in the weather. Dense masses of clouds came from the west and obscured the stars. The wind swept over the waters with a moaning sound which foretold an immediate increase in strength and volume. The little yacht danced about on the waves like a cork, until Captain Jake was awakened by these evidences of the warring elements.

When he leaped to his feet it needed but one glance to tell that a heavy storm was close at hand, and he said, in a tone of anxiety :

“You’d better call Ernest, and I’ll get up steam. We’ve got to move out of here right lively; but whether we should turn about for Elizabeth City, or try to make harbor at Roanoke, is what puzzles me.”

“It would be too bad to lose a whole day’s run,” Perry said, as he started toward the engine room, and the captain replied, in a tone of perplexity:

“More especially since we’ll be another twelve hours making up the loss. Perhaps it will be better to keep on for Roanoke; the water is decently good, and there won’t be so very much risk.”

The fires had been banked, and in fifteen minutes there was half a head of steam on. The boys weighed anchor, and the Midge started out over the troubled waves directly into the teeth of the wind, which had increased in violence so rapidly that showers of spray were flung over the occupants of the cockpit with every downward plunge.

Captain Jake sat in silence at the helm, and, if the tossing of the boat had not told the boys

they were in a dangerous position, the old man's anxious manner would have revealed the truth.

"Keep a bright lookout, lads," he shouted, from time to time, for, in obedience to his orders, the boys had stationed themselves in the very bow of the yacht.

Under favoring circumstances, the *Midge* would have run across the Sound in a few hours; but now it was nearly as much as the light engine could do to overcome the force of the wind; and when day broke, gray and forbidding, she was midway between Croatan and Roanoke.

Captain Jake would have turned about at once and run for Elizabeth City, regardless of everything; but such a maneuver was now impossible. To swing the little craft into the trough of the sea, even for a single moment, was too dangerous an experiment, and there was no other course left but to ride out the gale if possible.

Mrs. Houghton and Mazie had come into the cockpit before dawn, but were sent back to the cabin immediately, in order to prevent them

from being drenched; and after daylight the boys were allowed to enter the engine room, from which place a lookout could now be kept as well as at the bow.

Before nine o'clock it became apparent to the anxious ones that to make harbor on Roanoke was an impossibility, and the captain said, as he altered the course until the wind struck them on the port quarter:

“We shall have to run for old Winny's island, or dance about here until the gale dies away.”

Now it was possible for the little craft to forge ahead slowly, although she made considerable leeway, and at about three o'clock in the afternoon they were within a mile of the island whereon the old pirate dwelt; but no harbor could be seen.

To land anywhere on the western shore was out of the question, for the surf would soon have made a wreck of the Midge and the captain replied grimly, when Ernset asked what they were to do:

“We'll have to run entirely around the is-

land. Then, if we can't find a landin' place, it's a case of puttin' about, with big chances of bein' swamped."

"There comes a vessel!" Perry shouted, as he pointed from the starboard window, and, looking out, Captain Jake recognized the sloop-rigged boat which had passed the Midge in the swamp, with the three black men on board.

CHAPTER IV

THE WRECK

ONE glimpse of the sloop standing toward the island told Captain Jake beyond a question that there had been good foundation for his previous suspicion. Only very weighty reasons could have induced these men to cross the Sound in such a gale, and this fact gave evidence of what manner of enemies the old pirate had.

The Midge was in a dangerous position, unable to make harbor on either shore; but yet her owner paid more attention to the little craft which was trying to beat dead to windward than to the safety of himself and his passengers.

“We’ve got to find something in the way of a shelter before long,” he said to Ernest; “but if there was any livin’ chance of bein’ able to run across the Sound I’d try it rather than trust myself on the island with them black fellers.”

Twenty minutes later, when the Midge was within half a mile of the shore and standing to windward of the old pirate's home, Perry uttered a cry of dismay as he pointed astern, and for one instant all hands believed the sloop had gone down.

During these few seconds nothing could be seen of the little craft, and then, struggling desperately against the mighty wind, the mast-head appeared above a huge wave, as she scudded before the gale in the direction of Sandy Point.

Captain Jake said: "They've given it up, and put about; but it shows us what chance we should have in tryin' the same maneuver. The Midge would go down like a stone if we jammed her into the trough of the sea, as they did the sloop."

"Well, we needn't worry about them any longer, although it doesn't seem to me that they tried very hard to get at Captain Dorr," Ernest said in a tone of relief.

"If there had been a sailor man aboard he'd

have known how foolish it was to beat dead into the teeth of the gale, and given up the job an hour ago," Captain Jake replied as he turned his attention to the Midge once more. She was now so near the island and in such shoal water that all his skill at the helm was needed.

Perry looked after the sloop, but she remained in view only a few moments.

At this point the wind from the ocean had full sweep, and as the little steamer rose on the crest of each succeeding wave it seemed as if she was held motionless several seconds before taking the downward plunge. At each leap she divided the water with her sharp bows, sending flood after flood into the cockpit, until it was necessary to work the siphon at full head to relieve her of the load, despite the danger of lessening the steam power.

"I'd give half the money I shall earn this season to know what the soundings are here," Captain Jake said anxiously, as he held the Midge midway between the island and the bar which separated the land-locked waters from the

ocean. "One solid thump just now, and our cruise would come to an end mighty quick."

Another hour passed, and yet not the slightest indentation could be seen on the shore. The old pirate did not show himself to pilot them in, and this last fact disturbed the owner of the tiny steamer quite as much as the first.

"If he's expectin' the widder, it only stands to reason he oughter be on the lookout to show us a landin' place."

"Perhaps he has moved since writing the letter," Ernest suggested, and Captain Jake replied between his teeth as he dashed the salt spray from his eyes:

"I wish the old heathen had moved before writin' it, and then we shouldn't be in this box."

When the gloom of night began to settle over the angry waters the little steamer was off the northernmost point of the island, and being forced by the wind nearer the shore each moment. The working of the siphon decreased the power, until the screw hardly held her steady against the gale, and Captain Jake,

who had been silent fully fifteen minutes, said hoarsely :

“ We’ve got to pretty nigh the end of our rope, boys. There ain’t more’n one chance in a hundred of gettin’ across the Sound without swampin’ ; but we’ve got to try for it, or go ashore here, where the little craft would be stove to pieces in five minutes.”

“ Why can’t we run up under the lee of the bar, and anchor ?” Perry asked in a trembling voice.

“ Because in the first place there’s no lee to that sandspit, an’ then again the water’s so shallow we should strike before gettin’ within three hundred yards of the shore. There’s no holdin’ ground hereabouts, an’ I’m goin’ to come around now, so in case she swamped there’ll be a chance of reaching the point. Get the women out of the cabin ; buckle on the life preservers, an’ we’ll take the risk of wreckin’ the handsomest little yacht ever seen on Hampton Roads.”

The boys knew with what affection Captain Jake regarded the Midge, and, understanding

perfectly well that he would not voluntarily put her in jeopardy, made no further suggestions.

Although Mrs. Houghton and Mazie had been shut up in the cabin all day, they fully realized the desperate condition of affairs, and when Perry assisted them into the cockpit both struggled bravely to conceal their fears.

In few words Captain Jake explained what was to be done, and when a life preserver had been fastened on each one, the steamer was brought around into the trough of the sea.

Down, down in the abyss of waters the Midge plunged broadside on, and for several seconds it seemed as if she would never rise again. The port rail was submerged; the fires were extinguished with an angry hiss of steam, and when she finally floated on the next wave, the wind held her down on her beam ends. The screw, raised above the surface, was useless, and consequently all command of the little craft was at an end.

“Stand by!” Captain Jake shouted hoarsely.

“Unless she rights mighty soon we’ll feel the bottom!”

Then, clearing away the raffle of ropes from the bow, he stood with his arms around Mrs. Houghton, and the boys did their best to protect Mazie, while the Midge was tossed about like a chip, half submerged, until with a crash which shook every timber, she struck full fifty yards from the shore.

There was no possibility of carrying into effect any plan which may have been formed. All were thrown into the sea by the first shock, and each struck out instinctively in the effort to save his or her life.

The boys had intended to swim ashore on either side of Mazie; but the violence of the waves tore them asunder. They were tossed to and fro until all three lost consciousness, after many ineffectual attempts to withstand the strength of the undertow.

When Ernest recovered his senses he was lying high up on the beach, with Perry chafing his hands and calling upon him to speak, while but

a few paces away Captain Jake and Mrs. Houghton were performing the same office for Mazie.

“How did I get ashore?” Ernest asked, and Perry replied:

“The captain and I pulled out first Mrs. Houghton, then you, and afterwards Mazie. I must have been taken charge of by a big wave, for I found myself quite a distance up the beach when the old man landed.”

Mazie's recovery was none the less rapid than Ernest's. Even before Perry finished his explanation she was on her feet, and the captain said hurriedly:

“We must find old Winny's hut before it grows so dark that we can't see our way.”

“Are you sure this is his island?” Mrs. Houghton asked. “It doesn't seem probable, or we should have seen him before this.”

“It's the second one east by south from the southerly point of Roanoke,” Captain Jake replied; “but I'm inclined to think the old man has gone away. Howsomever, he couldn't have

taken his hut with him, an' we must get Mazie there as quick as possible."

Setting out at random across the island, which was covered with a sparse growth of pines, the little party walked at full speed for ten minutes before they succeeded in finding a small building, half buried in the sand, near the western shore.

"Wait here a moment," the captain said, as a sudden thought came to him. "I reckon I'd better go ahead, for there's no knowin' how the old man might cut up if all of us suddenly stepped in on him."

As he went on alone, the others heard first a knock, and, a moment later, the creaking of a door on its hinges.

Five minutes passed, and then the feeble rays of a lamp could be seen through one tiny window.

"Captain Dorr is at home," Ernest said in a tone of relief. "He must have been asleep. Let's hurry on and get out of this wind, for it makes a fellow chilly when his clothes are wet through."

The little party advanced without hesitation ; but before they reached the building the owner of the ill-fated Midge emerged, and, although they could not see his face owing to the darkness, the tone of his voice betrayed great agitation.

“I don't know whether it's best for you to go in there or not,” he said, hesitatingly, to Mrs. Houghton ; “and yet all hands need a shelter.”

“What is the matter ? Isn't my uncle there ?”

“The old captain has made his last cruise,” was the reply, in a reverential tone.

“Dead ?” Mrs. Houghton cried.

“From appearances I should say he died within the past twenty-four hours ; and the question is whether you'll go in, or shall we try to make a shelter ?”

“It is necessary some one perform the last offices for him, and I see no reason why we should hesitate about entering,” Mrs. Houghton replied calmly, and then without further remark she led the way into the house.

Neither of the younger members of the party paid very much attention to the interior of this

hut, wherein the old pirate had lived so many years, because of the inanimate form which lay upon the rude bed in one corner. However stormy the old captain's life may have been, his end was evidently peaceful. It seemed as if he had lain down for a nap, and the dread messenger found him asleep.

Captain Jake drew the coarse woolen blanket over the body, and then set about building a roaring fire, while the others gathered around it, enjoying the grateful warmth.

It was some time before any of the party cared to move around, the shrouded form on the couch seeming to hold all in awe, and then the captain called Ernest to assist him in gathering wood.

To reach the door from the fireplace it was necessary to pass a table, which also served as a writing desk, and as Ernest glanced involuntarily toward it he saw a folded paper, bearing the inscription :

FOR MY NIECE, MRS. HARRIET HOUGHTON.

“He must have just been writing you a letter,” the boy said, as he handed the document to the widow.

“It’s the story of the diamonds, and probably explains what he wishes done with them,” Mrs. Houghton said, after a hasty glance at the manuscript, and Captain Jake, remembering the sloop with her crew of black men, added hurriedly :

“You had better read it now, for we may not be alone very long, after this wind fines down so a sailin’ craft can get here from Sandy Point. Ernest an’ I’ll bring in wood enough to last through the night, an’ then we’ll hear the yarn.”

CHAPTER V

THE OLD PIRATE'S STORY

WITH her companions sitting close beside her, and looking fixedly at the fire as if not daring to let their gaze wander toward that portion of the room where lay the pirate's body, Mrs. Houghton read the following:

“ When I was in command of the *Terror*—I have forgotten the date, and it is not necessary—we sighted a ship ashore on the Florida reefs, and at once bore down upon her, for in those days a wreck in that locality usually meant a good haul in the way of salvage. She proved to be the *Don Felix*, from Brazil to New York with coffee and spices. It was a singular situation for a vessel on such a cruise; but I afterwards learned she was to make port at Hayti, being blown out of her course by stress of weather. This portion of the story is of but

little consequence, save as it shows that the attempt to land these passengers caused the wreck.

“When we reached her there were on board the third mate, cook (the remainder of the crew having been lost during the gale), and three passengers, who were black as the ace of spades, but not showing any other trace of African blood.

“After taking what we needed from the cargo, and promising to land the mate and cook at Key West, I was approached by the oldest of the blacks, a man about my own age, with a proposition to take them to their destination, but the price offered was so great as to excite my suspicions. Although we had overhauled the cabin without finding any valuables, I determined on another search, this time obliging the passengers to remove their clothing, when we discovered Brazilian paper money to the value of about five thousand dollars, and six large diamonds which had the appearance of having formed one enormous stone.

“As a matter of course we took possession of this property. The money was divided among

our crew, but the stones I retained as my share. The black men paid very little attention to the loss of the money, but were wild with fury when the diamonds were taken. Through the mate who understood something of their lingo, they begged and entreated me to return the stones, and when refused, cursed and raved like madmen. They vowed that the jewels should never benefit a single human being, save in the especial direction to which they had been consecrated, and swore by all the saints in the calendar to devote their lives to my death and the recovery of the treasure. Their curses troubled me as little as did their prayers. I offered to set them ashore with the other survivors; but this service was refused with more vows against my life.

“The three were still howling when we left the wreck, and I had no doubt but that the sea would quiet their noise in a very short time. There was every prospect of a gale from the west, and the Don Felix would go to pieces before nightfall, consequently their threats to kill me seemed idle.

“We landed the men as agreed, and started on a cruise to the Caribbean Sea. In two months we made harbor at St. Domingo. I still had the diamonds. There was no opportunity to dispose of them, and, intending soon to resign command of the Terror, I believed they would make a very comfortable nest-egg for life on shore. While here I chanced to hear from the natives that it had been predicted by one of the voodoo priests that the negroes would be successful in overcoming the rule of the whites only when the largest diamond in the world, riven into six pieces, should be sent to as many different sections of the island. I now had a clew to the behavior of the men whom we found on the wreck, and before leaving port got a reasonably good idea of what I had in my possession.

“Jose Gomez, the trader, to whom we consigned our cargoes, and who did not let any scruples stand in the way of making a penny, told me of the voodoo's prediction, and added that interwoven with the history of his family was an account of the largest diamond ever found. The yarn ran something like this :

“An ancestor of his, bearing the same name, with two other Brazilians of the Sousa family, were convicted of murder in the year 1790, and sentenced to be executed. This was commuted to banishment from every town and city in the country—a form of punishment common in those days. For six years they wandered in the vicinity of the river Abaité, searching for gold, and one day had the good fortune to find a diamond weighing nearly an ounce. Believing it might be the means of obtaining for them a pardon, they consulted a priest, who accompanied them to Villa Rica, and succeeded in gaining an audience with the governor. The stone was sent to Rio Janeiro in charge of the priest, who returned with the documents which made the discoverers free men.

“The diamond was named the Braganza. It was taken to Portugal and Don John II had it pierced that it might be suspended from his neck. The jewel was afterwards pledged in Brazil in order to obtain money with which to carry on a war against the French, and there it

mysteriously disappeared, no traces of it ever having been found.

“That stone, Gomez tells me, was probably the largest ever seen, and to carry out the prediction of the Haytien voodooos, it would be necessary for them to gain possession of it. It was then rumored that some members of the heathen faith living in Rio had stolen the jewel, and were waiting until it could safely be brought to light, the negroes of the island believing the time was near at hand.

“On receiving this information I resolved to trust a certain merchant who had never been false to my interests. Upon inspecting the stones he unhesitatingly pronounced them to be the fragments of the Braganza, but refused to buy them.

“‘My life would not be worth a penny if those were in my possession,’ he said. ‘To let it be known you have those jewels will not only cause you no end of trouble from the Brazilian government, but every negro on the island would follow you to death. Take my advice; do not try

to sell them, but throw the entire lot overboard without delay. While I do not believe in the prediction that the diamond will never benefit any human being save when used by those who would make of Hayti the chief place for the practice of their inhuman rites, you could not hire me to take charge of one of the fragments.'

"This story disturbed me, yet I had no idea of throwing away six gems whose value was undoubtedly enormous; but I took the precaution of concealing them on board the brig. One evening, forty-eight hours later, when going to pay Gomez a visit, the three black men, whom we had left on board the wreck, suddenly appeared. There was but little opportunity for resistance, and in a few seconds I had a knife thrust through my arm, while nothing but the thickness of a leathern waistcoat prevented a second. I had participated in too many broils to be a passive victim. With my back against a wall I used my pistols to such effect that the residents in the immediate vicinity rushed to the rescue, while my assailants fled to avoid capture.

“How they escaped from the wreck in the face of the gale which sprang up in less than four hours after we left, I am unable to say. There was good proof of their being alive, however, and during the next two years there was hardly a port into which we sailed where I did not meet either these three black men, or some of their emissaries. A twelve months' cruise under the black flag would not be productive of so many hand-to-hand conflicts as I had until resigning command of the Terror. These blacks seemed to have some supernatural means of discovering my whereabouts, and I am willing now to confess that they did finally succeed in frightening me. Two more attempts to sell the jewels prevented a third; but, however alarmed I might be, there was no intention on my part to hand the stones over to those who had first stolen them.

“One day in Havana, after a desperate fight with two burly negroes, I gave out that we were about to sail for Trinidad, and left port in accordance with such intention, steering well toward

the Leeward Islands before hauling around for Hampton Roads. In order to avoid leaving any traces regarding the movements of the Terror, I took to the gig when we were two miles off the coast, and made my way to this island, where for twenty years I have lived without daring to visit the mainland oftener than once or twice each year.

“Three months ago, while in Beaufort, I saw the same men from whom I took the diamonds. Their hair was white and their forms bent with age; but every one looked strong enough to outlive me, and I have resolved to give these stones, which have been a source of unhappiness rather than pleasure, into the keeping of some member of my family. That they shall not fall into the clutches of those black imps, I am determined, for after a twenty years’ fight I will hold the secret of their whereabouts until I am dead, unless before then I succeed in speaking with some of my own flesh and blood.”

At this point there was a blank space, as if the writer had finished his story, and then were

added, in more irregular penmanship, these lines :

“ Last night a trader from Norfolk anchored off the island, and by him I have sent a letter to my niece, Harriet Houghton. If she arrives in time all will be well ; but I feel that my end is near at hand. During the past week I have been sick, although still able to move about as usual ; but there is within me that sensation of a general breaking up and decay which tells of the final hour.

“ In case she does not arrive until after I am dead, it is possible those who have followed me so long will discover my hiding-place, and make another attempt to regain the diamonds. In which event they will fail, for the jewels can only be found by reading correctly——”

Here the manuscript ended abruptly. It was as if the old pirate had been stricken down by the grim messenger even before the sentence could be completed.

Without, the wind howled and whistled around the rude dwelling ; the waves beat against the

shore with a booming sound like distant thunder; but within nothing save the crackling of the flames could be heard. The living occupants of the room sat gazing at each other as if affrighted by what had been read, while on the couch lay the cold form of him who in life had defied all the laws of God and man; but who in death seemed calm and peaceful, disturbed neither by the warring elements nor the passion of his fellows.

CHAPTER VI

AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL

THE captain was the first to break the painful silence which had come upon the little party, and his exclamation was not calculated to reassure them.

“We’ve got ourselves into a nice fix an’ all for nothin’. The Midge has gone to pieces by this time; I’m out about two thousand dollars, an’ we may have to stay here a month before a craft passes near enough to be hailed, for traders are not likely to visit this place unless driven in by stress of weather.”

“Perhaps the tender has not been stove, and with her we could cross the Sound on a calm day,” Ernest suggested; but the captain replied, gloomily:

“It isn’t much of a chance, my boy. Listen to the pounding of the surf, and then fancy how

long that cockle-shell of a boat could withstand such blows.”

“Didn’t my uncle have a craft?” Mrs. Houghton asked. “He was obliged to visit some town to purchase food, and must have had the means of leaving the island. We could find that boat and thus provide ourselves with the means of getting away.”

“Well, now, I hadn’t thought of that,” and Captain Jake’s face brightened decidedly. “We’ll have a look around in the mornin’, after we give him a Christian burial.”

“But suppose we can’t find a boat?” Perry asked, determined to know the exact position of affairs. “Won’t it be possible to build something on which we can cross the Sound?”

“I reckon there are trees enough to make a raft; but we’d be a deal worse off floatin’ round, than here;” and the captain’s face grew gloomy once more. “There’s no use to figger on anything like that; we’ll have to stay till some craft puts in. Now about them diamonds: he says they can only be found by readin’ correctly,

an' there the story stops. What is it we've got to read? There's all night before us to figger it out in, for I don't reckon any of this crowd feel very much like goin' to sleep with that in the room," and Captain Jake glanced toward the shrouded figure on the bed.

The hut was but sparsely furnished. One chair, a long bench, a sea-chest half filled with provisions, and a table which served as a desk, made up the list of furniture. On the wall, directly over the fireplace, hung an ancient fowling-piece, a rusty cutlass, and a pair of horse pistols. Above the table was a small mirror, and standing upon a shelf in one corner were several nautical instruments, deeply corroded by time. At the side of the room on a similar shelf was an old book, minus its binding, but otherwise showing no signs of having been very much used.

This was the only article of reading matter, save the manuscript, to be seen, and exactly the reverse in character of what might be expected in the dwelling of a retired pirate.

Mazie took it down, and read aloud the following title page :

PHISICKE
AGAINST FAMINE.EXPOUNDED IN CERTAIN SERMONS BY
WILLIAM ATTERSOLL.PRINTED IN LONDON FOR MICHAEL SPARKE,
THE YOUNGER, DWELLING AT THE BLUE
BIBLE IN GREENE ARBOR.

1632.

“Let us hope that he read it often,” Mrs. Houghton said, fervently; but Captain Jake, who had very little respect for the dead pirate, replied bluntly:

“It doesn’t look as if there’d been much studyin’ done, or else he was a mighty careful man with books.”

Mazie glanced over the pages; but the quaint orthography made reading difficult, and after a few moments she replaced the ancient volume on the shelf as the others turned their attention to the table.

In the one drawer were found a number of papers, but a hasty glance failed to reveal anything concerning the diamonds. A brief search of the room was attended with the same vain re-

sults. It seemed positive that the Braganza, after having been hidden from the world so long, was finally lost, and with varying emotions the little party seated themselves by the fire to await the coming of day.

Mazie, however, devoted the remainder of the night to the study of the manuscript left by Captain Dorr, trying to discover some clew therein which would enable her to find the hidden jewels, for the concluding words of the story caused her to believe that, if one could "read correctly," somewhere within the written lines would be found the secret.

With the first faint light of day, Captain Jake, accompanied by the two boys, set out for the beach, and there, at the point where she had been driven ashore, lay all that remained of the Midge. A half submerged hull, a few floating timbers, a fragment of the tender, thrown high up on the shore, told the story.

"Well, boys, she's gone, an' there's no use cryin' over spilt milk," the old man said, in a lugubrious tone. "Let's turn to and pull up

the wreckage, for everything will come in handy if we have to stay here long."

The three set to work in good earnest. Timbers were dragged ashore, and, after half an hour's labor, they found a tub of butter, two boxes of biscuit, the water breakers, and a small store of provisions which the waves could not destroy.

"I'm thinkin' we shall be on short allowance before a week goes by," the captain said, with a sigh, as they ceased their toil because there was nothing more to be done. "It ain't likely Captain Winny had any too much grub on hand, an' everything we find now will count. Let's go back to the house, finish the job there, and then have a look on the other side of the island. Some of the stuff may have drifted ashore there."

On arriving at the hut, Mrs. Houghton and Mazie were found busily engaged overhauling the kitchen utensils and the sea-chest which had served the old pirate as a pantry.

Captain Jake held a whispered consultation with the widow, and when it was concluded he

left the house once more, beckoning the boys to follow. When they were outside, he whispered:

“We’ve got to bury him, an’ the sooner it’s done the better.”

It was a mournful task, but one that could not be evaded. After searching in vain for a shovel the three scooped out a grave at the southernmost point of the island, using fragments of the wreck as tools.

There, where he had lived so many years in constant fear, the former commander of the Terror was buried with simple but Christian rites. Mrs. Houghton repeated such of the service for the dead as she remembered, while the boys and Captain Jake covered from view forever in this world the one who had lived in defiance of all the laws of God and man.

“Now it stands us in hand to fix up this shanty, so we can live here comfortable like, for nobody knows how long we’re likely to stay,” Captain Jake said, when they returned to the hut. “It may be that we can hit upon some scheme for finding the diamonds.”

Then all hands set about the task, but when the work of cleaning the interior was finished, nothing had been found. Mazie now fancied the secret might be discovered in the ancient book, and she and Ernest sat down to study it while Mrs. Houghton began to prepare breakfast. Perry occupied himself by carefully examining the woodwork of the building, as if fancying some secret hiding place would be found in the timbers.

The morning meal was served at a very late hour in the forenoon, and before it was concluded Perry sprang up from the table, as he cried excitedly :

“Say ! People always tell about hiding things under the stones of the hearth, and I’m going to see if there is anything here.”

Pulling the old cutlass from the wooden pegs which supported it, he began to pry up the flat rocks immediately in front of the fireplace ; and before the others had even thought of joining him, a loud cry of triumph burst from his lips :

“We’ve found it at last !” he shouted. “If

Captain Dorr wanted to keep those black men from getting at these things, or anybody else, for that matter, he should have hunted for a better hiding place than this has turned out to be.”

Trembling with excitement, the remainder of the party gathered around Perry as he lifted from an iron pot which was deeply imbedded in the earth, half a dozen antique watches, twice as many necklaces set with precious stones, and a handful of rings—some of plain gold, others fashioned in curious shapes, and not a few incrustated with jewels. Then came chains of gold and silver, small bars of the same precious metal, and perhaps fifty coins of various denominations; but when the pot had been emptied, the fragments of the all-important Braganza were still missing.

It was a veritable pirate's hoard, as any one who might have found it would say, and the look of melancholy on Captain Jake's face was immediately dispelled; for, in this pile of precious metal, probably gathered by the commission of many crimes, he saw enough to repay him for the loss of the Midge several times over.

“Here’s what makes it worth while comin’,” he said, joyously ; “an’ seein’ as how your’re old Winny’s only heir, I don’t suppose there’s any question about who owns this stuff, for most likely the original holders gave up all claims when they had to walk the plank.”

“If there is enough to pay for the Midge I am satisfied,” Mrs. Houghton said, in a tone of thankfulness, but making no attempt to gather up the valuable collection. It seemed to both her and Mazie as if they could see blood on the jewels, and almost hear the cries of those from whom they were taken.

Ernest, Perry, and Captain Jake had no such scruples. They carried the horde to the table in order to make an inventory, as the latter suggested, and the last piece of jewelry had but just been picked up, when the door was flung open violently, disclosing three white-haired black men, who stood on the threshold with drawn revolvers.

Mrs. Houghton screamed. Captain Jake raised his arm before his face as if to ward off an expected bullet, and the boys made all haste to

shelter themselves behind the sea-chest. Mazie was the only one who did not appear to be frightened.

“What do you want here?” she asked, boldly.

“We have come to see Captain Winslow Dorr,” the oldest replied; and Mrs Houghton, recovering somewhat from her fear, said, solemnly :

“We also came for the same purpose, but found him dead, and have just buried him.”

The men seemed disconcerted for a moment, and, without lowering their weapons, consulted in whispers, after which the spokesman said sternly :

“During many years we have sought for him, to recover that of which he robbed us. His death, however, can have no other effect than to render our mission more easy of accomplishment.”

CHAPTER VII

THE SEARCH

WHILE the black man was speaking, Captain Jake's glance fell upon the jewelry and coins which were spread on the table, and the fear that these might be seized by the intruders gave him unusual courage.

Regardless of the weapons, he moved toward the fire as if bent on assuming a more comfortable position, and while the black men were trying to decide how their search should be begun, he seized one of the rusty horse pistols from the wall. Aiming it point-blank at the nearest stranger, he pulled the trigger.

It is possible that serious injury might have been inflicted upon some person in the room if the ancient weapon had been discharged. Fortunately it was an old flint-lock, and inasmuch as there was no priming in the pan, the hammer fell harmlessly upon the stone.

Before the old man could so much as raise his hand again, the intruders were upon him. In an instant two were holding him by either arm, while the third stood near by with drawn revolver to prevent the boys from attempting a rescue.

“It is our purpose to recover that for which we have sought so long,” the eldest of the party said, while he dexterously lashed the captain to the chair with a thin but strong piece of whipcord. “In order to prevent any interference with our work, it is necessary that we make prisoners of you all for a short time.”

Captain Jake gave vent to a deep groan. The pirate’s hoard, from which he expected to be paid for the loss of the Midge, had already attracted the attention of the new-comers, and the belief that all this would be taken from him had caused the outburst of sorrow.

“Do the cords bind too tightly?” one of the strangers asked solicitously, and the old man shook his head despondently, as he replied:

“It ain’t the hurt to my flesh that I’m thinkin’ about.”

Then two of the men went toward Ernest, and he, recognizing the uselessness of resistance, said, before they could lay their hands on him :

“Simply tell me what is wanted, and I’ll do all I can toward forwarding matters, in order that your business may be finished as soon as possible.”

“You are very wise,” the leader said, affably. “It is not our intention to be unnecessarily harsh; but we have come for our own property, and do not intend to run any risk of failure. If you and the other young gentleman will take a seat on the bench, we will try not to inflict pain while preventing you from meddling with us.”

Obedying this order, the boys seated themselves, and in a few moments their hands and feet were bound together, the cords passing directly beneath the bench, but in such a manner as to allow them some little freedom of movement.

“I beg your pardon,” the man then said to Mrs. Houghton and Mazie, “but if you were fully aware of our position, it would be possible

to understand why we should neglect no precautions.”

Even while speaking, he began to tie their hands, and when this had been done, led them to the bench beside the boys, as he added, “If you give us your word not to rise without our permission, there will be no necessity of fastening you as securely as the others.”

“Are three of you afraid of two women whose hands are tied behind their backs?” Mazie asked angrily, and Mrs. Houghton, after a warning glance at her daughter, said quietly :

“We will do as you command, since there is no alternative.”

Bowing politely, the man rejoined his companions, who had already begun to search the hut.

One careless glance at the treasure set out on the table appeared to be sufficient for the intruders, and they paid no further attention to it, save to observe the place where it had been found. Here, using the cutlass as Perry had done, the stones of the hearth were quickly overturned.

Nothing could be seen save the earth, and this they dug to the depth of three or four feet, but without being rewarded for their labor.

One of the men then spoke a few words in a language which none of the prisoners understood, and the interior of the cabin was immediately subjected to the most careful scrutiny. Beginning at the fireplace, they sounded or hacked into every joist or plank, and after becoming satisfied that no cavity existed in the wood, their attention was turned toward the desk.

The papers were taken out and examined one by one, each in turn being thrown on the floor as the men mastered its contents or were convinced that it did not relate to the diamond.

Among these documents was a single sheet of brown paper, covered with several lines of figures, which, fluttering as it fell, dropped directly in front of Mazie, attracting her attention because the characters were placed one after the other without apparent aim or purpose. It seemed the work of a child rather than of a man, and, interested in it simply because it appeared

to be a foolish thing for the old pirate to have preserved so carefully, she studied each line.

Not very interesting reading, surely, nor one that would enchain the attention, save for its oddity, as will be seen by the following, which is an exact copy of the original document:

97 64 84 68 84 72 95 95 54 75 22 76 67 45 69 23 56 55 85 87 75 87
 43 75 75 95 55 103 85 62 46 26 93 67 85 75 36 62 67 85 45 95 85 83
 63 58 53 53 63 84 66 33 36 74 76 85 59 63 35 54 53 66 75 104 43 83
 78 74 73 86 76 53 35 24 76 84 65 98 36 62 76 66 75 106 104 66 86
 45 75 72 94 84 52 65 54 66 76 46 76 66 55 35 53 64 93 86 54 76 77
 96 75 84 62 55 75 35 93 64 76 78 63 24 68 75 76 94 86 83 77 78 66
 82 75 102 64 65 53 75 77 77 56 46 43 34 83 76 76 84 43 76 78 63 76
 85 102 22 46 62 76 77 87 86 45 62 35 84 57 85 97 53 93 45 66 73 85
 73 55 54 62 75 64 85 85 66 62 74 53 67 95 97 57 93 67 86 76 64 102
 62 66 45 85 87 78 76 55 44 74 74 87 84 94 56 93 75.

While Mazie was thus engaged the strangers not only emptied the drawers of the table, after throwing the treasure carelessly on the floor, but splintered every portion of the woodwork, as if expecting to find some secret recess.

Here, as at the fireplace, they were disappointed, and then the sea-chest was subjected to the same treatment. The cutlass served admirably as a hatchet, and in a few moments this

second piece of furniture was converted into kindlings. The rude bedstead shared the same fate, and Captain Jake muttered grimly to the boys :

“If they’re goin’ to search like this much longer, there won’t be a roof over our heads by nightfall.”

The old book upon the shelf was next examined, between the leaves of which Mazie had placed the manuscript relating to the diamond, and this the intruders discovered as a matter of course. Each in turn read it carefully, despite the time thus necessarily consumed, and when this had been done they were evidently non-plused.

Until this moment Mazie had considered the paper at her feet as a curiosity rather than anything valuable; but now that the men were studying the manuscript so intensely, she remembered the conclusion of the story as well as if the words were yet before her eyes. “They can only be found by reading correctly.” Surely that could not refer to the story itself, unless

within the lines were some intricate cryptogram, she argued, and this last thought was sufficient to invest the figures with a new significance.

It was difficult to repress a cry of delight at having solved what she fancied might be the beginning of the mystery, and then, struggling to regain her composure, with her feet she drew the paper under the bench where it would not attract attention.

Ernest saw the movement, and leaning forward, was about to ask some questions when she checked him by a decided shake of the head, motioning him to pay strict attention to the movements of the men.

They were yet discussing that which had been read, giving no heed to the prisoners until the oldest of the three evidently made some suggestion to his companions, after which he approached Captain Jake and asked :

“Did you read the story of the Braganza as written by the pirate?”

“Yes; an’ that’s all I got out of it. If there

are any diamonds around here we can't find 'em."

"How can I tell that you have not secreted them about your person?"

"You'll find out mighty quick by searchin', though I don't know what right you've got to overhaul us."

"It is but just that we should recover our own by any means."

"Are you the men he tells about in that paper?" Captain Jake asked curiously; and the stranger replied gravely:

"We are. The robbery was committed exactly as he relates it, and during all these years have we searched for him. Nearly half the time was spent before we learned that he had left the Terror, and only within a few months did we gain a clew to his whereabouts. Having devoted our lives to this task, it is not reasonable to suppose that anything will be allowed to stand in our way, therefore you will excuse us if we act upon your suggestion."

"Considerin' that I'm trussed up here like a

chicken ready for roastin', it ain't likely I'll make much of a kick, so go ahead. If I had the diamonds I'd willingly give 'em up in exchange for that stuff on the floor."

"It is yours already, if you are the pirate's heir. We don't intend to take away anything which is not our own."

This assertion, made in such a tone as to convince him of the speaker's sincerity, was sufficient to raise Captain Jake from the depth of despair into which he had fallen. He was now perfectly willing to be searched, and in five minutes the strangers were convinced that neither of the male prisoners was hiding the valuable stones.

Mrs. Houghton and Mazie were called upon to swear that they had not seen the gems, and then the question was asked:

"Did you examine the clothing of the pirate before burying him?"

"We never thought of it," Captain Jake replied quickly; "but it isn't too late now."

"Where shall we find him?"

“At the southernmost point of the island. It won't cost much hunting to see where we were at work.”

The men left the hut without delay, and the prisoners were at liberty to discuss the situation of affairs.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CRYPTOGRAM

“WHAT was it you were trying to kick under the bench?” Ernest asked, when the men were so far away that there was no danger of their words being overheard.

“I believe it is what will reveal the secret of the diamonds, providing, as the manuscript states, it can be read correctly,” Mazie replied.

“What do you mean, Mazie?” Mrs. Houghton asked.

“The paper under my feet is covered with figures, and, as it doesn’t seem probable that my grand-uncle would care to scribble such things for amusement, I believe it is some form of secret writing.”

“If that is the case, then the last line of the manuscript is explained,” Ernest added, excitedly.

Captain Jake was bewildered. He hardly understood the meaning of "secret writing," and on being informed that Mazie's agitation was caused simply by a paper on which figures were written apparently at random, he was disposed to consider it a foolish joke.

"Did you ever try to read a cipher?" Ernest asked.

"Yes; but not with very good success," Mazie replied. "I know two or three rules for solving them, and if this is a simple one it seems as if, between us all, we might read it."

"Ernest was always famous for those things," Perry said, "and if you can help him it will only be a question of time before the document is read."

"Yes," Mazie added, "provide those black men go away pretty soon. Really, though, ought we not tell them what we think has been discovered? They were robbed of the jewels, and have the best right to them."

"But you forget that they stole them originally from the Brazilian government, according

to the old man's story," Perry said, decidedly. "Therefore they've got no more rights than we have."

"I don't reckon you need figger about who's goin' to have 'em," Captain Jake said, impatiently. "If that paper is all you've got to go on it'll be a long time before the hidin' place is found."

"And we haven't as much as got the cryptogram in our possession yet," Mazie added. "It's under my feet; but I can't pick it up until this rope is untied."

"If them black fellers don't change their minds about taking what we've found, I'll be satisfied to get home without botherin' my head over a diamond that, accordin' to all accounts, has never brought anything but trouble to them who had it," Captain Jake said, moodily. "There's no such good luck for us, though. We shall sit here trussed up till them men get ugly because the stones can't be found, an' then they'll scoop in everything valuable."

After this outbreak the captain relapsed into

silence, with his eyes fixed upon the jewelry which had been thrown so carelessly on the floor, and the remainder of the party discussed the situation, but were not able to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion before their captors returned.

It was not necessary to ask if the men had been successful. Without speaking they began a second investigation of the interior, this time tearing up the loose board flooring, and digging deep into the earth.

The afternoon was well-nigh spent when they ceased their useless labor, and the leader of the party untied the cords which bound Mrs. Houghton and Mazie, as he said :

“There is no reason why you should suffer further discomfort. Promise not to make any search for that which we are so anxious to find, and you shall at least have the liberty of the house.”

The promise was readily given ; but before either of the late prisoners could rise to their feet, Captain Jake cried :

“If you’re reckonin’ on lettin’ the widder have

the stuff what's been found, there's no reason why she shouldn't take possession; for if it's kicked around the floor much longer more'n half will be lost."

"She may do as she pleases. It is not ours," the man replied; and, obeying the captain's imploring look, Mrs. Houghton collected the valuable articles, wrapping them carefully in the papers thrown from the desk, among which was the one Mazie had kept hidden beneath her feet.

Ernest and Perry exchanged glances of satisfaction as they saw the supposed cryptogram thus secured.

Until nightfall the men continued the vain search, while Mrs. Houghton and Mazie prepared supper; and, as there was no disposition on the part of their captors to release the prisoners, the cooks were forced to feed them.

After this had been done, the widow proposed to serve a repast for the black men, but before accepting, the leader of the party said, gravely:

"Madam, we know, from the story left by the captain of the Terror, that the fragments of the

Braganza are somewhere in this vicinity. I now insist that both you and your daughter shall take a solemn oath of your total ignorance concerning them. Once we are convinced of that fact it is our purpose to tear this building apart plank by plank, and I assure you that not one person at present on the island shall leave until we have been successful, or proven to our satisfaction that it is beyond the power of man to find the mystic stones."

"I am willing to take any form of oath you may desire to the effect that I have not seen the diamonds, and know nothing of their whereabouts."

"Will you also swear that you have no suspicion, as to how they might be found?" the man asked, earnestly; and Mrs. Houghton was on the point of answering very decidedly in the affirmative, when Mazie's remark as to the possibility of the figures being a cipher came into her mind, and she hesitated.

"Then you do suspect something of the secret," the man cried, eagerly.

The good lady had no intention of equivocating.

ing. While it might be true that she really had no belief in Mazie's supposition, she could hardly say absolutely it was not correct. She replied:

"I can swear that it is impossible for me even to guess where Captain Dorr has hidden the stones; but at the same time I am not willing to do so in view of what has been said while you were away."

"Tell us all," the man said, sharply.

Mazie looked at the boys, as if asking whether she should take any part in this conversation, and Captain Jake shook his head vigorously. This movement was seen by one of the blacks, who, stepping quickly toward the old man, threatened him with his revolver, as he said to the leader;

"If the woman doesn't know anything, here's one who does."

"I am willing to tell all that is known by any of us," Mrs. Houghton continued. "My daughter saw lying on the floor, after you finished examining the documents in the desk, a

paper covered with figures, which she fancies may be some sort of secret writing.”

“Where is that paper?” the leader of the blacks demanded.

For reply, Mrs. Houghton took from her pocket the jewelry and coins, unwrapping package after package, until the desired document was found, and handing it to the man she said :

“This is all which has caused us to believe it might be possible to find the jewel spoken of in the story. I assure you we had no idea of such a thing until it was thrown upon the floor with the other papers, and even now I think my daughter is mistaken in attaching to it any value.”

As the man took the paper eagerly, his companions standing one on either side to read the apparently meaningless figures, Mazie approached the boys and whispered :

“I think mamma is right in telling all she knew, for none of us could take a solemn oath that we had no idea whatever regarding the diamonds. Besides, if they were going to tear this

house down and afterwards keep us on the island, it is better the stones were found quickly."

"I've nothing to say about it," Ernest replied despondently. "Of course it doesn't concern Perry or me; but it seems too bad to tell these men anything after they made us sit here tied up all day unable to do more than wink."

The men paid no heed to their prisoners. All three were deeply engrossed in the figures, but without understanding them in the slightest, as was shown when the eldest said to Mazie:

"Do you know anything about this kind of writing?"

"I have tried to solve a cipher several times, simply for my own amusement."

"Do you think it will be possible to read this?"

"I can't say; but it would take, perhaps, a very long time, and even then we might be working over what does not really amount to anything."

The three men consulted together a few moments, then the eldest said:

“We have this proposition to make. If you will do your best to learn the meaning of these lines your companions shall be set free, and all treated with every consideration while we are forced to remain here. In case your efforts are successful, you will receive a generous reward.”

“And if I refuse?” Mazie asked without the slightest show of fear.

“In that case matters will remain in the same condition as they now are until we have not only examined each board and timber in the building, but upturned every inch of soil on the island. In fact your stay will be indefinite, for we shall remain until there is no longer a possibility of finding the diamonds.”

Mazie hesitated for an instant, and then said, gravely :

“I will try ; but remember, I am doubtful of my own ability, and also uncertain whether these figures really form a cryptogram.”

CHAPTER IX

JOINING FORCES

THE demeanor of the men underwent a decided change after Mazie promised to do all in her power toward reading the cipher. That it was expected she would begin at once could be seen by the arrangements they began to make immediately for her convenience. Having reduced the table to kindlings, it was necessary something should be contrived to serve as a desk, and two of the men went in search of materials, while the other said to Captain Jake in a reasonably friendly tone:

“It is probable all must remain here several days, therefore I would like to make such terms as will be conducive to your comfort.”

“You got the upper hand,” the old man replied, “an’ can be pretty sure we’ll agree to

anything that'll keep us from bein' tied up in this fashion."

"It is not our purpose to give you pain, but at the same time we must take every precaution. I will release you providing all swear to make no attempt at leaving the island. You can move about the house; but only one is to be allowed out of doors at a time."

"That's easy enough done, though I can't see how we'd be any better off on the beach than here, for there's no chance to give you the slip."

"Our boat lies there, and it would be necessary one of us remained on board of her, and another here, which would require too much sentinel duty. Now are you willing to swear?"

Each of the prisoners in turn made the required promise, and to the great relief of all the tightly-drawn cords were removed. They had remained so long in one position that considerable time elapsed before either could move freely.

In a short time the two black men returned, bearing several timbers which had formerly belonged to the Midge, and, with the cabin illumi-

nated by a number of candles, they set about making a rude table.

Mazie had already begun to study the secret writing, and when, after having had sufficient exercise, the boys approached her, she said in a low tone:

“I want you to help me on this, for three can do more than one.”

“You seem to be terribly anxious to find the diamonds for these villains,” Ernest replied petulantly.

“And so ought you. They can hold us prisoners here any length of time, for there’s no chance to get away except with their permission. Now since it is not probable we could keep the diamonds for ourselves, our best plan certainly is to solve the problem if possible. The sooner that’s done, the sooner we’ll be at home again.”

“I guess we could stick it out as long as they’d be willing to stay,” Perry said confidently.

“Yes, I suppose we should live; but think of how much your parents would suffer if you did not return for a month, perhaps two.”

Hitherto the boys had considered only the prospective loss of the Braganza ; but now they realized the force of Mazie's argument, and before many minutes had passed both were as eager as she to accomplish the task.

“ How shall we begin ?” Ernest asked.

“ We must follow the rule. If the words were spaced there would not be much trouble, for where a single character occurred we could assume it was ‘ a,’ or ‘ i,’ and in case three characters were repeated several times in the same sequence, that would most likely represent ‘ the.’ Such a course would be very simple. Now we will find which figures are used most frequently. Instead of reading 9 and 7 at the beginning, suppose we call it 97, for, except in seven instances—here, and here,” she said, pointing to the paper, “ where 103 and 106 are used once, 104 twice, and 102 three times, the numbers are evidently doubled to represent one letter. That couple which is written most often will be ‘ e,’ providing this is a single cipher.”

Unobserved by the young students, the leader

of the black men stood where he could overhear this conversation, and being thus assured that they were deeply engrossed in the work, he joined the others, who had finished making the table.

After some conversation one of the men left the hut, and returned ten minutes later with what was evidently a spare sail belonging to the sloop. This was nailed against a corner of the room in such a manner as to inclose a small, triangular space.

“It is the best we can do toward giving you and your daughter a separate apartment,” the leader said to Mrs. Houghton.

This was a degree of delicacy which the widow had not fancied the men capable of showing, and her acknowledgment of their kindness was much more hearty than it would otherwise have been.

It was time for Mazie to retire, but so interested had both she and the boys become in the solution of the puzzle, that they were really un-

willing to postpone the work even in order to gain needed rest.

When the two ladies had disappeared behind their canvas screen, the leader of the black men informed Captain Jake that he and the boys could make their beds anywhere inside the building; and in a short time all, save one of the strangers who remained on guard, were sleeping, or trying to do so, on the hard floor in front of the fire.

These resting places were not so comfortable but that all hands were awake at an early hour next morning, and Captain Jake said to Ernest, when it was possible to speak without being overheard by their captors:

“Seein’ that only one of us can go out at a time, I want to make the first trip, so’s to learn if the old pirate owned a boat. There’s no knowin’ when somethin’ of the kind might be needed, even if we have sworn not to leave the island.”

Then, announcing his intention to one of the men, Captain Jake left the hut, returning before

Mrs. Houghton had prepared breakfast, and with so grave an expression on his face that at the first opportunity Mazie asked him what had occurred.

“Well, it ain’t much more’n I ought to have expected,” the old man said, bitterly. “It seems that Captain Dorr had a pretty fine canoe here, an’ these black scoundrels have chopped her to pieces, so we can’t get away. When I saw that I’d a’ been tempted to break my oath, an’ leave in their sloop if she hadn’t been too heavy for one man to handle, to say nothin’ of the fact that they’ve unbent all the canvas.”

“Don’t let that make you feel badly,” Mazie said, hopefully. “We’ll soon find the diamond if there is anything about it in the cipher, and then we shall be at liberty to go away.”

“Was there any wreckage on the shore?” Ernest asked, in a loud tone, for it was immaterial whether the black men overheard such conversation or not.

“Yes; I found a good bit near the south point, an’ after breakfast, if nobody makes any

objection, I'll go down an' haul up a lot. You boys can spell me when you are tired of working with Mazie."

Neither of the black men made any objection to this plan, and immediately after the meal was served Captain Jake set out to save the remnants of the little craft in whose beautiful proportions he had formerly taken so much pride. Two of the strangers went down to the beach, leaving the third, and Mazie and the boys resumed their study of the mystical figures.

By noon the young students had accomplished little more than to convince themselves that the present method of working was incorrect. Mazie's carefully prepared memorandum showed fourteen of the figures as occurring but once in a message which, according to her theory, contained two hundred and fourteen letters.

Six of the characters appeared twice; seven were repeated three times; three could be found four times, and, assuming the remainder to be letters in most frequent use, she arranged them as follows:

Of the figures	76	there are 17
“ “ “	75	“ “ 15
“ “ “	85	“ “ 12
“ “ “	66	“ “ 10
“ “ “	69 and 84	“ “ 9 each
“ “ “	53	“ “ 8
“ “ “	{ 45, 55, 64. 86 and 93 }	“ “ 6 “

35, 54, 63, 67, 74, 77, 78, 87, and 95
are repeated five times each.

“ Now,” Mazie said, when this table was prepared, “ in the English language ‘ e ’ occurs so often that it is generally the prevailing character in every sentence ; therefore we should assume 76 to represent that letter. Let’s find out how many times it is shown double in such words as ‘ meet,’ ‘ speed,’ ‘ seen,’ ‘ been.’ ”

To her surprise and disappointment, the figures 77, 76, 85, 74, 95, 75, 53 were all doubled, but only once ; and this in itself was sufficient to prove the incorrectness of the theory.

“ That would make seven double letters occurring with the same frequency, whereas ‘ ee ’ and ‘ oo ’ should be seen very much oftener than the others. According to our method, each ap-

pears once, and that we know positively to be incorrect."

"But this might be an exceptionally queer cipher," Perry suggested.

Mazie shook her head decidedly, as she replied:

"We will prove ourselves wrong by another method. The word 'Braganza' must be here if this refers to the diamond. Now, according to our rule; 'a' is the next letter most frequently used, which would be represented by 75. Let us see if it can be found in any place repeated three times in a series of six characters."

Ernest called out the figures in regular order, but, as the reader knows, no such arrangement could be found. Again and again did Mazie endeavor to prove by the ordinary rules that they were on the right track, and it was nearly nightfall before the task was given up in despair.

Captain Jake's head fairly buzzed with the monotonous repetition of figures, and even the black man on guard was apparently made so nervous that, before a recess was taken, he went out of the hut, leaving the prisoners alone.

“It’s no use, I can’t work over this thing any longer,” Ernest said, at length. “Suppose we go out for a walk, Mazie.”

“I would like to, for my head aches terribly. Do you suppose our black guardians will be angry if we go together?” she asked, turning to Captain Jake.

“I don’t understand there’s any rule about the women’s leavin’,” he replied. “It’s only to prevent more’n one of us dangerous characters bein’ outside at a time that we’re to be kept housed. So go ahead, my girl, and enjoy yourself, if such a thing is possible, for you’ve earned a rest.”

The two went out, and the others busied themselves preparing supper, believing the absent ones would remain away at least an hour; but to the surprise of all they returned in less than ten minutes, Ernest exclaiming, as he burst into the house:

“The black men have left the island! There isn’t one to be seen, and the sloop is no longer at her moorings.”

“Gone?” Captain Jake repeated in astonish-

ment. "Do you mean to tell me that they've left us here an' sneaked away?"

"It is positive that they are no longer on the island," Mazie said. "We have searched all over it; besides, the absence of the boat tells that they must have sailed away in her."

"Then by the great horn spoon there's no reason why we should stay here. We'll let them 'ere figgers an' the diamonds take care of themselves, an' mosey along towards the Dismal Swamp as fast as we know how."

In his excitement Captain Jake entirely lost sight of the fact that, since the destruction of the old pirate's canoe, there was no possible means of carrying this threat into execution.

CHAPTER X

A SECOND FAILURE

THE occupants of the cabin were so amazed by the departure of the black men that no attention was paid to the prohibition against more than one leaving the house at a time, and Captain Jake led the way out of doors.

The sloop, which had been moored on the western shore, could no longer be seen, and as they stood looking out across the waters Perry said, in a tone of perplexity :

“I don’t understand how they had time to bend on the sails. Were there any signs of leaving when you came in, captain?”

“One was on board, an’ another doin’ something close by the beach. I’ll have to take back what I said about strikin’ out for the Dismal Swamp. It kinder confused me knowin’ they’d

left, an' I forgot that there was no way of goin' except by a raft."

"But why not try even that?" Perry asked. "If they come back and keep us here until Mazie and Ernest read the cipher our chance of getting home seems slim."

"It's so near dark that we can't do much to-night," Captain Jake said, thoughtfully. "Perhaps by mornin' things will be changed. Let's pull up more wreckage, an' if the men ain't here before daylight we'll trust to luck on a raft."

There was plenty to be done, for a number of timbers had floated in since the old man ceased work, and all hands set about saving the lumber. So engrossed were they with this occupation that no one thought of bringing the labor to a close until the gloom of night hid surrounding objects from view, and then, acting upon Mrs. Houghton's suggestion, they started for the cabin.

In so doing the sand-bar, or island, which lay between them and Roanoke was brought into view, and from the centre of it could be seen

vivid red and green flames darting high in the air.

“That settles the question of our building a raft,” Captain Jake said. “Them black fellers have just gone over there to play the same game they did in the Swamp, an’ we needn’t worry about bein’ left alone very long. They’ve most likely got more faith in dancin’ an’ singin’ than in Mazie’s bein’ able to read the figgers, an’ are goin’ it mighty strong, I reckon.”

The joy caused by the supposed departure of the black men being thus suddenly dashed, all were more than ever depressed as they re-entered the partially dismantled cabin and set about making preparations for the night.

The principal portion of the old pirate’s stores consisted of bacon, and when several slices of this had been fried they ate the not very tempting supper in silence.

Some time during the night, no one knew exactly when, the black men returned, and as Captain Jake went out of the hut shortly after sunrise to make his limited toilet in the sea, the

searchers for the Braganza were scanning the horizon eagerly.

“We kinder reckoned you’d given us the slip,” he said to the eldest of the party. “You went away so sudden like it looked as if the job had been given up.”

“That will not be done until the diamond is found,” the man answered gravely, and Captain Jake muttered to himself as he walked away :

“I’m afraid you’ll stay here a mighty long while. ‘Cordin’ to the looks of things, old Winny has taken better care of the stones after death than he ever did while livin’.”

When breakfast had been eaten the two younger black men went out, as on the previous day, leaving their companion to act as guard, and he asked Mazie in an unusually friendly tone :

“How have you progressed with the secret writing?”

“Not at all,” and she spoke almost petulantly, “except to learn that my way of working was wrong—if indeed the figures mean anything.”

“There is no question but that they refer to

the Braganza, otherwise the pirate would not have preserved the paper so carefully. Tell me how you tried to read it."

Mazie explained the rule upon which she had worked, showing the fragments of paper containing the result of her labor, and after examining them carefully he said encouragingly :

"I am certain you will succeed very soon. Is there no other rule by which it might be read?"

"Possibly each of the numerals may be a character, although it does not seem reasonable."

"Use every known method. There is no necessity of hurrying, except that the sooner the task is accomplished the sooner you can return home."

"But suppose they signify nothing?" Mazie asked.

"It will not take very long to learn that fact," the man replied, and, walking toward the door, left her to resume the apparently fruitless labor.

As before, Ernest did his best to aid Mazie, and Captain Jake whispered to Perry :

"I reckon there ain't a man in the world who

can say that Jake Berry ever went back on his word ; but now I'm beginnin' to have suspicions of my own truthfulness. A week of this life, an' I'll have to break my oath or die. It don't stand to reason that an old man like me can be kept cooped up here at the beck and call of these black fellers."

"How will you be able to break it without some means of leaving the island?" Perry asked. "These men are not away long enough at a time to allow any chance of raft building."

"I don't say I'd deliberately do it," the old man continued thoughtfully ; "but nobody can tell till he's tempted. Howsomever, I'm goin' to figger out some plan, if for nothin' else than to keep my mind occupied."

Then he strolled once more to the beach, while Perry assisted Mazie and Ernest in their task.

The labor in this direction was not long continued, however. Before all the characters had been counted, Mazie exclaimed :

"This is useless, for now we have but ten signs, and very many more letters would be required to write a manuscript of this length."

“That settles it without argument,” Ernest said. “Strange we didn’t think of it before and save half an hour’s work. I don’t believe the figures mean anything.”

Mazie was already half convinced that such was the fact; but she continued to pore over the lines in the hope that by some lucky chance she might strike upon the key, until Captain Jake entered and reported with an air of excitement:

“Two of them black fellers have just left the island to go for provisions; an’ now that there’s no chance of our runnin’ away, the other one says we can move about as we please till his chums get back.”

With one accord the entire party went out of doors, where the wreck of the Midge could be seen.

“It’s a pity to let the little craft go to pieces,” the old man said, with a sigh. “Most likely the hull is sound, and if we had the means of workin’ her up on the beach, at least the machinery might be saved. There are hawsers enough—”

The captain ceased speaking abruptly, and walked rapidly toward the house, returning a few

minutes later with a look of satisfaction on his face.

“There’s no reason why we shouldn’t try it,” he cried, joyfully. “That black feller says it’s nothin’ to him what we do while the others are away, except that he expects Mazie to keep on working out the figgers. If we can haul the little craft up in the course of three or four tides, till her deck is out of water, I won’t give up the hope of seein’ her afloat ag’in. Leastways, it’s better to have some work on hand, even if it does come to nothin’, than loaf ’round here suckin’ our thumbs.”

“Then I had better go back to the house, and try once more to solve the cipher.”

“Don’t go yet, Mazie,” Ernest cried. “You have worked long enough to be entitled to a short vacation, and we’ll see how Captain Jake proposes to save the yacht.”

Although she consented to remain, there was very little to be seen during the next hour, for the old man was busily engaged making calculations and planning how the task might be accomplished.

CHAPTER XI

THE WRECKERS

BEFORE sunset considerable work in the way of wrecking had been done. There was little or no surf between the island and the bar, and to swim out to the wreck was not a difficult task for Captain Jake.

The steamer lay heeled to port with her starboard rail above water, the force of the waves having driven her some distance inshore. Both hawsers were yet aboard, one in the forepeak and the other made fast to the bitt.

The boys waded half way to the wreck, and aided the captain in bringing the cables ashore, after which they returned in search of spare ropes, with such success that before darkness put an end to the labor two hawsers were stretched from the bow of the Midge to a pine tree.

“I don't reckon we can put much strain on

yet awhile," the old man said when this portion of the labor was ended and they were on the point of starting for the cabin. "To-morrow we'll sink a timber in the sand to strengthen the pine, an' then it's a matter of workin' her along by sheer muscle."

When the wreckers returned to the house supper was ready. The black man sat watching Mazie as she arranged the figures in different combinations, and the fire crackled merrily, giving to the partially dismantled cabin quite a home-like air.

Whether the sentinel indulged in sleep that night neither of the prisoners knew. The labor on the wreck had so thoroughly tired Captain Jake and the boys that, despite their hard bed, all slept soundly; but with the first light of dawn they were on the beach again, working there until Mrs. Houghton summoned them to breakfast.

"We have cut down a tree and sunk it in the sand at an angle with the one to which the hawsers are made fast," Ernest said in reply to

Mazie's questions. "The captain is going to rig a purchase, and at high tide we count on pulling her in a good bit. How do you get on with the cipher?"

"I haven't started yet. I begin to believe, if it really is a cryptogram, it's written in a foreign language, which would account for our inability to read it."

A summons to breakfast interrupted this conversation, and when the meal was finished the wreckers went out again, followed by the black man, while Mazie was left to resume her apparently impossible task.

The sentinel rose very decidedly in the estimation of the boys when he proposed to aid in the work of saving the Midge, and proved to be of no slight assistance during the forenoon.

Two small blocks had been found in the shattered canoe, and by binding them with ropes they were made to withstand so much strain that when the tide was at its height the wreck was pulled seven feet inshore, after having been turned half around so that in case of

another storm the waves could do but little damage.

“When do you expect your friends back?” Captain Jake asked the black man, as they ceased work in answer to Mrs. Houghton’s summons to dinner.

“They should return this afternoon, providing there was no difficulty in getting provisions at Roanoke.”

“Are they pretty good sailors?” and the old man looked apprehensively at the sky.

“They were able to take care of the sloop in the storm which wrecked your steamer.”

“That might be, an’ yet they could easily come to grief on a day like this. A man needs to have his wits about him while the wind puffs as it does now, an’ I’m lookin’ for a nasty night.”

Captain Jake’s croaking did not cause the black man to show any signs of alarm; but it was noticed that after dinner he scanned the sky and surrounding waters very often, as if trying to convince himself there was no danger.

The wreckers were not able to work during

the afternoon. At one o'clock rain began to fall, and the prisoners were well content to remain within the hut, where a roaring fire afforded pleasing contrast to the storm outside.

"We didn't get them hawsers on any too soon," Captain Jake said, in a tone of satisfaction. "This 'ere gale, comin' out of the west as it does, would soon have swung the wreck into deep water, where we couldn't save her."

"The surf may break her up," Ernest suggested.

"I don't count on its doin' very much damage. She's to leeward of the island, an' head on, besides the waves won't kick up much of a bobbery between here an' the bar."

"I wonder if the sloop will come to-night?" Perry asked, and the black man looked quickly toward Captain Jake, as if eager to hear his reply.

"Not a bit of it. They'll have too much sense to leave Roanoke."

During the next two hours the little party amused themselves in an almost jolly fashion,

listening to the old man's stories, or discussing the probabilities of soon being able to go home ; but never a word was spoken regarding the cryptogram.

Once, as the wind lulled, Captain Jake ventured out to make certain the Midge was not receiving further injury, and when he returned the anxiety of the boys regarding her was set at rest.

"She's quiet as a duck. There are trees enough to break the wind, an' bein' so near the shore, the swell won't have any effect."

Another hour passed, and Mazie, who was standing by the window which overlooked the Sound, asked as she wiped the long accumulation of dirt from the glass :

"Isn't that a vessel coming this way?"

Captain Jake was by her side in an instant, and, after gazing in the direction pointed out, he said in a low tone :

"It looks mightily like the sloop ; but yet it don't seem possible that they'd venture down the reach with this wind."

The black man and the boys were soon where a view of the Sound could be had, and far away in the distance was seen what appeared to be a tiny boat, rising now on the crest of a wave, and again completely hidden by the towering waters.

In half an hour there was no longer any question regarding the identity of the approaching craft. All recognized her as the sloop, and, regardless of the pouring rain, the men and boys ran to the edge of the beach as they watched the struggling vessel.

Although the wind blew furiously at times, her progress was not rapid, owing to the fact that her jib and mainsail were closed reefed, and what headway she might gain under this limited canvas was checked each time she sank into the hollow of the waves.

One could well imagine how she alternately lurched ahead, and then stood almost stationary with her sails fluttering until the wind drove her on once more; and although the captain had every reason to look upon her crew as

enemies, his face wore an expression of deepest anxiety as he watched the laboring craft.

“It ain’t the easiest matter in the world to land on these sand islands at the best of times,” Ernest heard him mutter between his teeth; “an’ they’re mighty handy sailors if she gets in here all right.”

The sloop was now rounding the point of the sandspit which lay between the old pirate’s home and Roanoke, where the wind swept as if through a tunnel, with nothing to break its force, and her crew were evidently steering straight for the wreck of the Midge. The main sheet was hauled in until the canvas set nearly flat, and Captain Jake said, half to himself:

“They want to look out when them ropes are made fast, for if I ain’t mistaken it’ll soon be a question of lettin’ everything go by the run.”

Even as he spoke, and before those on board had trimmed the jib, the wind came in a yet more furious gust and struck the little craft.

The most skillful sailor could not have let go

a single rope before it seemed as if she was literally blown clear from the water, disappearing a second later in the trough of the sea.

The black man stood motionless with fear; Perry and Ernest covered their faces that they might not see the struggling wretches in the water, and Captain Jake muttered:

“She has gone down like a stone.”

In another moment the sloop could be seen bottom up as she rose on the crest of a wave; but strain their eyes as they might, the watchers could perceive no signs of the crew.

CHAPTER XII

THE RESCUE

TO the anxious watchers on the beach every second seemed a minute, and when all hope of seeing the sloop's crew again had expired, Captain Jake shouted :

“ There's one of 'em. See! on the top of that wave! As nigh as I can make out, he's swimmin', an' in such case can't be hurt very much.”

“ Where's the other?” the black man shouted wildly, clutching Captain Jake by the arm. “ Can you see only one?”

“ That's all. Most likely, while tryin' to let go the sheet, the second feller got caught in the rope an' is underneath the hull.”

“ Why don't you help them? Shall they drown before our eyes?” the man shrieked savagely, shaking Captain Jake by the arm, and thereby betraying an amount of strength

such as would not have been suspected in so slight a frame.

“There’s nothin’ mortal can do for ’em,” was the solemn reply. “Even if we had a boat, it would only be possible to pick up the swimmer, for the other one is dead by this time.”

For an instant the black man gazed at the speaker as if trying to understand the words, and then rushed into the surf, wringing his hands and shouting wildly.

“He’s crazy!” Ernest exclaimed in a low tone, and Captain Jake added:

“I reckon his head is turned a bit; but we can’t spend much time on him if we want to save the other one. He’s doin’ his best at swimmin’, an’ will most likely manage to reach the shore; but it’s a case of standin’ by to pull him out, for there won’t be strength enough left in his body to come through the surf.”

The man who was battling for his life had already approached so near that the boys could plainly distinguish the agonized expression of his face, and it was apparent to all that his strength was very nearly spent.

“Follow me!” Captain Jake shouted, as he ran into the water breast deep, just in time to catch the almost exhausted swimmer, as a huge wave lifted him on high.

During five minutes the rescuers had a most desperate struggle. More than once did it seem certain the entire party would be washed away by the angry waters; but they finally succeeded, and the apparently lifeless man was dragged ashore without assistance from his friend, who continued to shout and gesticulate as if fancying he could still the tempest.

Without paying any attention to the half-crazed black, Captain Jake and the boys carried the unconscious man to the hut, and upon arriving there the rescuers were nearly as exhausted as the rescued.

Among the old pirate's stores Mrs. Houghton had found several bottles of brandy, and this stimulant was a most potent medicine at such a time.

After giving a strong dose to the captain, and homeopathic ones to the boys, she and Mazie

set about trying to resuscitate the black man, working with such good effect that at the end of ten minutes he opened his eyes.

Before this was accomplished, however, Captain Jake said to the boys :

“ You’d better go out and fetch that lunatic in, or he’ll do himself some mischief. I don’t allow we’re called on very strong to save them who are keepin’ us prisoners ; but we don’t want to think that a human life was lost through our neglect.”

Awed by the catastrophe, neither Ernest nor Perry had looked upon the blacks as enemies. Their only thought was to render assistance in a time of need, and at this suggestion they ran out into the storm toward the beach, where the man stood in the same position as when his comrade had been dragged ashore.

It was some time before the boys could persuade him to accompany them. To all their entreaties he answered wildly in an unknown tongue, and could not be induced to move until Ernest said firmly :

“You *must* come with us. Your friend wants to see you at once.”

The man passed his hand across his eyes as one who is awakened suddenly from a profound sleep, and, turning, went toward the hut so rapidly that the boys were unable to keep pace with him.

When Ernest and Perry entered the house the two men were talking together in what was probably their native tongue, and neither paid any attention to the other inmates.

“I have found some old clothes which belonged to Captain Dorr, and you must put them on,” Mazie said to the boys. “Go behind the canvas, and be quick about it or you’ll catch a terrible cold.”

This command was obeyed without protest, and when they emerged from the tiny apartments even Captain Jake could not repress a smile. The old pirate’s garments were large enough to wrap around the boys twice, and when these defects had been partially remedied by the aid of pins, they presented a most comical appearance.

Strange as it may seem, none of the white party realized that by the loss of the sloop their term of imprisonment was even more indefinite than before, until Mazie asked whether there would be any possibility of finding the little craft after the gale abated.

“If we don’t, there’ll be a good chance of our starving to death,” Ernest cried, leaping to his feet and going toward the door.

“Come back!” Captain Jake said, imperatively. “It’s so dark you can’t see an inch before your nose, an’ if the sloop was within a dozen feet of the shore it wouldn’t do us any good just now. Don’t get another soakin’ for nothin’.”

Ernest obeyed, and thus suddenly brought face to face with the true position of affairs, it can readily be understood that the little party talked of nothing save how it would be possible to leave the island.

Each had some plan to propose, and when Captain Jake stated as his belief that the canoe could be made seaworthy at the expense only of

time, the black man who had been saved from the waves said, in a sharp tone :

“It is not a question of leaving the island. The diamonds are to be found, and until that has been done no boat will be needed.”

“Do you mean to stay now that your friend is dead?” Captain Jake asked, in surprise.

“If another of our number should die, the survivor would continue the search,” the man replied, and then resumed the conversation with his friend.

After this interruption, the little party ceased to discuss the situation, but sat in moody silence around the fire, listening to the roar of the surf, or watching the peculiar movements of the two men, until Mrs. Houghton and Mazie retired. Then, one by one, the others followed this example, leaving the searchers for the Braganza conversing in low, earnest tones.

Next morning the storm had abated, but the wind was yet strong, and Captain Jake, paying not the slightest attention to the men, who sat

silent and motionless near the fire, said to the boys :

“It stands us in hand to have a look for the sloop. Perhaps she came ashore during the night.”

Ernest hesitated a moment, to learn whether the men would make any objection to this plan ; but neither spoke, therefore he followed his friends, and the three walked nearly around the island.

The overturned craft could not be seen in either direction, and the inference was that she had drifted between the islands, or been stove to pieces on the shore.

The first evidence of the disaster was seen when they reached the southernmost point of land. There, high up on the sand, his nerveless fingers almost touching the old pirate's grave, lay the body of the drowned man, and the position was so peculiar that even Captain Jake felt a trifle nervous.

“It does seem as if there was somethin' unnatural about them diamonds. I'd a called the

man a fool who'd say even so much as a piece of wood could drift down here with the wind from the east'ard; but yet look at this. The feller what's been chasin' the old captain for the last twenty years comes ag'in wind an' current to his grave at the last, as if he couldn't rest easy anywhere else."

"Don't try to imagine horrible things when the reality is about as bad as it can be," Perry said, with a shudder. "Something must be done with his body before Mazie and her mother see it."

"Run up to the house an' tell the men what we've found," Captain Jake replied. "Ernest an' I'll stay here till you get back."

Perry obeyed without loss of time, for the idea of remaining there was by no means pleasant, and in a few moments the dead man's companions arrived.

"Leave us alone," the elder of the two said gravely. "Go into the house, and do not venture out under any pretext without our permission."

Captain Jake stood motionless an instant, as if hesitating whether to obey this harshly spoken command, and then, beckoning to the boys, he walked toward the cabin, saying when they were beyond hearing of the men :

“The way they boss us around is a leetle more’n I can stand. In about another day I’ll tell ’em that my oath don’t hold any longer. There are only two now, an’ if we three can’t get the best of them, it’ll be mighty queer.”

“It wouldn’t do any good to get the best of them while there are no means of leaving the island,” Ernest said, thoughtfully ; “but if we do see a chance of leaving, I go in for asserting our rights. Just now, however, we had better steer clear of a row.”

“You’re correct, my boy ; but at the same time it goes mightily ag’in the grain to obey their orders,” and the old man entered the house with the air of one who finds it difficult to control his temper.

• It can well be imagined that the little party spent the hours of their enforced seclusion dis-

cussing Captain Jake's threat to assert his rights, and all, even including Mazie and her mother, believed they would be warranted in first giving notice that the oaths were no longer binding, after which decisive steps should be taken.

“In a few days we shall be absolutely without food,” the widow said, “and something must be done very soon.”

“We can manage to make the grub last quite a while by catchin' a few fish,” Captain Jake replied, as if he considered Mrs. Houghton's view of the case trifling. “If we only had ammunition for them old flintlocks it wouldn't take us long to settle the affair.”

“You might as well say if we were home they couldn't trouble us,” Mazie replied, with a laugh. “When is this revolution to take place?”

“We'll begin work on the wreck of the Midge to-morrow mornin', an' if any objection is made I'll have it out with 'em then an' there.”

In such conversation the day was spent. Although the prisoners looked out through the windows many times it was impossible to learn what the black men were doing.

At noon both came into the cabin, took several of the floor boards, together with the splintered pieces of the table, and went out again without speaking.

Late in the afternoon the eldest entered and asked Mrs. Houghton for the brandy bottle, departing again immediately after she had given it to him, and from that time until dark noises could be heard as if the men were felling trees.

After the prisoners had eaten supper, and while they were yet sitting around the rude table built for Mazie's convenience, a sudden glare was seen from the outside. Like a flash the island was illuminated as if by a mighty conflagration, and Captain Jake shouted as he leaped to his feet :

“Some craft is off the shore making a flame to attract our attention! Most likely the folks

from Roanoke have found out what a fix we're in, an' have come to help us!"

The thought that friends were in the vicinity caused the entire party to rush in frantic haste to the door; but a single glance toward the southern point of the island was sufficient to change their joy into something very nearly approaching awe.

CHAPTER XIII

CREMATION

IT was a strange, almost revolting spectacle which the occupants of the cabin witnessed as they stood gazing toward the south.

A platform about six feet high had been built of the trunks and branches of trees, as children make a cob house, the upper portion or layer consisting of the light wood taken from the cabin during the afternoon. On the top of this could be seen dimly through the flames the body of the drowned man.

From the peculiar glare the spectators readily understood for what purpose the brandy had been procured, and as the combustible liquid was consumed, the flames of the wood completely hid the sinister object from view.

Encircling the pile, the two black men marched with slow and measured steps, each

bearing on his forehead three bright red lines of paint, as they chanted in their native tongue a wild, peculiar strain which could be heard high above the moaning of the wind. Now and then one would stop to throw on more wood, while the other besprinkled the logs with the powder which caused parti-colored flames to arise. On each of these occasions the funeral dirge was increased in volume until, to those in the cabin, it seemed as if they were witnessing a ceremony performed by demons.

The flames cast in startling relief against the background of gloom, silhouettes of the men, causing them to appear of gigantic stature, and as the little knot of spectators realized what was in the centre of that brilliant flame, a feeling of repulsion forced them to withdraw from the open door. Seated around the honest glow of the fireplace, they tried in vain to banish from their minds the knowledge of what was being done outside.

That a human body should be reduced to ashes instead of returning to the dust, would not

have seemed horrible, perhaps, save for their isolated position and the thought that they were in the power of these men who brought their fantastic rights even to the threshold of the grave.

If anything had been needed to strengthen the resolutions formed in the afternoon, this was sufficient, and after a long silence, Captain Jake said with an emphasis which caused his hearers to start almost in alarm :

“ Well, this settles me ! . There is no reason why we should keep our word to these heathenish creatures ; but at the same time I reckon it'll make us feel better to give fair warnin'. Before three days go by things will be fixed so's we'll be at liberty to hail any passing craft.”

This announcement, in itself, was not calculated to cheer the others very much, for the simple reason that thus far no craft save the sloop had been sighted, and all knew how slim were the chances of any vessel or steamer approaching the forbidding shores of the island.

As the sighing of the wind and the now hor-

rible chant of the men could be heard from time to time, the little group sat closer together, fixing their eyes steadily upon the embers in the fireplace to shut out from view the glare of the flames reflected on the windows, and it was nearly morning before any of them was sufficiently composed to think of retiring.

After daylight came, and Captain Jake had aroused the inmates of the cabin, the black men were still absent.

Ernest peered through the window and saw the two sitting either side the pile of ashes with bowed heads; but whether they were asleep or still engaged in devotion, was impossible to determine.

“What shall we do about venturing out?” Perry asked. “Our orders were to stay here; but there is no water, and I feel like going to the spring to wash my face and hands.”

“Do just as you would if they were not here,” Captain Jake replied. “It’s time we begun to show them that we’ve got some little spunk left, an’ the sooner we begin the better.”

He set the example by taking the bucket and marching boldly forth, followed by both the boys; but as the spring was in an opposite direction from the scene of the previous night's ceremonies, they were not noticed by the black men.

The morning's work was done as if no restrictions had been placed upon their movements.

After breakfast had been eaten, the captain and the boys went out to ascertain the condition of the wreck.

Mazie should have busied herself with the cipher; but it was impossible to fix her mind upon the figures, and after attempting to do so several times in vain, she threw down the paper, joining the party at the beach as if believing that nothing save the clear morning air could drive from her mind the recollection of the horrible ceremonies she had witnessed.

"I'm glad you've come," Ernest said, as she joined the group, who were making preparations to haul in on the hawser. "Studying over that puzzle is enough to set a person crazy, and it will do you good to exercise here awhile."

“Did the surf do any damage to the yacht?” Mazie asked, and Captain Jake replied in a cheery tone :

“Not a bit, my girl. If anything it has helped matters, for by layin’ here under the lee she has righted considerably, an’ we can get in a fathom or so of the cable, which is more’n could have been done last night.”

During the next hour all four worked with a will, Mazie accomplishing quite as much as any member of the party save the captain, and at the end of that time the Midge was five or six feet nearer high-water mark than before.

Both rails were now above the surface, and, unless the hull had been stove there was no reason why she could not be floated. As a matter of course the upper works had been torn away ; but that would be of little consequence so far as her sailing qualities were concerned.

“Once her deck is above water she can be pumped out,” Ernest said gleefully, “and knowing the engine as Captain Jake does, it ought not to be a great while before we can get up steam.”

While they were congratulating themselves upon the amount of work done, and the probability that the Midge would soon be able to bear them over the water as buoyantly as before the wreck, the elder of the black men approached.

During a single moment he surveyed the evidences of their work, and then, turning to Mazie, asked sternly :

“Has the secret of the writing been found, that you thus make preparations for leaving?”

“I haven’t discovered it, and don’t believe I ever shall,” the girl replied, and Captain Jake added, his face wearing a look of determination :

“See here, mister! If old Winny had any diamonds of yours, they are here, an’ we don’t count on interferin’ with ’em. The figgers you reckon so much on are in the house, an’ nobody’s goin’ to say a word ag’in your takin’ them away. We’ve stayed on this ’ere island jest about as long as we care to, and now, by the great horn spoon, we’re goin’ to leave if we get the chance. Remember, all hands give fair warnin’ that we

don't hold any longer to what was promised. It's a question of takin' care of ourselves before it comes to starvin', for the grub is about gone, and in two or three days at the latest somebody will be hungry."

The black man listened until Captain Jake had finished, and then, without the slightest show of anger, he said, in a calm tone:

"No person will leave this island until the Braganza has been found. You are at liberty to save the steamer, if possible, provided the oaths are to be respected. After one hour, if you still persist in disobeying our commands, we will destroy what is left of the boat."

While speaking the man had drawn a revolver from his pocket, and, after waiting a few seconds as if for a reply, he added: "Return to the house. Consider well what I have said, and decide upon your course of action."

To disobey when the black man was in a condition to enforce his demands would have been worse than folly, and the little party walked slowly toward the cabin, their captor watching

until they were within a dozen yards of the building, when he turned and went rapidly in the direction of the funeral pile.

“It goes mightily ag’in the grain to be drove ’round here like a flock of sheep by a nigger,” Captain Jake said, as he halted a few paces from the door, and shook his fist in impotent rage. “I wonder how much longer we’ve got to stand it?”

“If he had that pistol in his pocket when the sloop was wrecked, it couldn’t have been very dangerous,” Perry suggested, “and in about two minutes we might have gotten the upper hand of him.”

“Yes,” the old man said, in a tone of quiet sarcasm; “but it’s a leetle too ticklish a thing to find out by experimentin’. If that wasn’t the one that went overboard, he’d likely got the upper hand of us mighty quick, an’ I ain’t achin’ for a bullet jest yet awhile.”

“Then you take back what you said last night about defying them?” Mazie asked, with a quizical smile.

“Not a bit of it,” the old man replied, stoutly; “but at the same time, I don’t intend to run my nose into danger till I’m pretty sure of gettin’ the best of the squabble. We must watch our chance, an’ then——”

While Captain Jake was speaking he had stepped to the left of the doorway, turning to look in the direction where their captors were supposed to be, and just at that instant the apparently solid earth gave way beneath his feet, precipitating him into what at first looked like an abandoned well, about six feet in depth.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HIDDEN STORES

AS the old man seemingly sank through the sand an involuntary cry of surprise burst from his lips, and the others sprang forward to assist him.

The descent was rapid but not long continued.

When Ernest reached the spot Captain Jake's head was above the surface, and he raised his hands as if asking to be assisted from the uncomfortable position; but before the boys were ready to respond he disappeared from view, and Perry called, in alarm :

“Where are you, Captain Jake? Where are you?”

There was no answer for several seconds, and then came the reply, in a muffled but excited tone :

“I’ve struck one of old Winny’s hiding places. There’s a lot of stuff here, an’ perhaps the diamonds are among it. Keep a lookout for them black fellers while I overhaul things.”

The self-appointed guardians of the Braganza were at the southernmost point of the island, apparently paying no heed to their prisoners, and Perry whispered :

“They ain’t so much as looking this way. Shall I bring a candle so you can see better?”

“No, no,” replied the old man, sharply ; “there’s a keg of powder here, an’ I don’t hanker after makin’ a skyrocket of myself. Stand by while I pass some of these things out.”

There was no necessity for this last command. The boys and Mazie were at the very edge of the excavation, trying to gain a view of the interior, and in rapid succession the captain handed up three flint-lock guns, two horse pistols, two cutlasses, and a bag of flints.

“There’s a keg of powder and plenty of bullets down here ; but that seems to wind up the lot,” the old man reported. “Help me out,



IN RAPID SUCCESSION CAPTAIN JAKE HANDED UP THE ARTICLES

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boys, and we'll cover up the hole so them black fellers won't know what we've found."

"Are you sure the diamonds are not there?" Ernest asked as, after some difficulty, the captain was brought to the surface once more.

"They may be with the bullets, or stowed away in the keg; but I don't reckon that's likely. Old Winny dug this hole for a magazine, not darin' to keep the powder where fire might reach it; an' it ain't probable he put any valuables there, otherwise the jewelry wouldn't have been found under the hearth. What we've got now is worth a dozen diamonds, for we can hold our own against them two heathen."

Captain Jake did not spend much time in conversation. To preserve the secret of this fortunate discovery it was necessary the excavation should be covered before the black men came toward the house, and he immediately began to throw across the top the supply of firewood which was stacked near by.

Then the articles which had been found so opportunely were carried into the hut, and hidden under the bed behind the canvas screen.

“I reckon they’ll be safe there for a while,” he said, in a tone of satisfaction; “and now it’s time for us to decide what we’ll do. At the end of an hour them villains threaten to destroy what little is left of the Midge, an’ I reckon they won’t hesitate about doin’ it.”

This remark caused Mrs. Houghton to ask for an explanation, and on being informed of this latest phase of the situation of affairs, she made a decided and emphatic protest against any resort to force.

“It would be better for us to remain here three months than that any should run the risk of being killed,” she said. “If you succeeded in overpowering them, how much better off would we be? It will take some time to repair the Midge, even after you have hauled her out of the water, and there’ll be no opportunity of leaving the island.”

“But a vessel may put in,” Ernest suggested; “and the way things are now we couldn’t even signal one.”

“If you saw a craft approaching, there would

be time to resort to violence," Mrs. Houghton replied. "At present nothing can be accomplished, and I think it would be very foolish to do other than as they have commanded."

"It wouldn't do us any harm to get into condition for fightin'," Captain Jake said, grimly. "Now we can't move so much as an eyelid without their permission."

The widow was decidedly opposed to anything of the kind, and a hot discussion ensued between the old man and her, which had hardly been brought to a close when the elder of the black men entered the cabin.

That he was prepared for any emergency could be seen by the way in which he moved from the door to the fireplace, taking care that none of the party should be behind him, and keeping one hand in his pocket, evidently clutching a weapon.

Standing where he could have a watchful eye over each occupant of the room, he said, gravely:

"I have come to learn your decision. It is

needless for me to repeat that we are firmly determined to remain here until our mission has been accomplished; and in order to guard against possible treachery, it is necessary none of you be allowed to depart. We do not wish to resort to harsh measures, but at the same time we intend to carry out our plans at any hazard."

"But what has my tryin' to save the yacht got to do with your findin' the diamonds?" Captain Jake asked sulkily.

"Nothing whatever, providing you are willing to respect the oaths already taken, and the girl continues to work on the cipher. If we allow you to thus prepare a means of leaving the island, it must only be with the understanding that you do not attempt to go away until we are willing. The fact that you have not been deprived of the pirate's valuables shows our intention of treating you fairly."

If the arms and ammunition had not been found, Captain Jake would most certainly have entered into another compact then and there, for the simple reason that the black men could force

him into any bargain they saw fit to make. As it was, the knowledge that he would soon be in a condition to at least hold his own against them, rendered him more than usually obstinate, and instead of replying, he walked sullenly toward the window.

“I do not intend to argue or urge,” the black man said, after a short pause. “We can command, and you must obey; but I much prefer that we work together harmoniously. What is your answer?”

Ernest, who was watching Captain Jake intently, saw his face brighten suddenly as he gazed from the window. Stepping quickly to his side, the boy looked out, and it was with difficulty he repressed a cry of joy as he saw approaching the island, with the evident intention of stopping there, a trim-looking yacht, or topsail schooner, of about one hundred tons burden.

This welcome sight caused the old man to decide upon his course of action immediately, and turning quickly he said :

“Your attempt to hold us prisoners is a crime, and shall be punished by the law. If you destroy one timber of my steamer, wreck though she is, you shall suffer the full penalty. We do not intend to be bound any longer by the oaths we were virtually forced to take.”

“No, no, Captain Berry, you must not say that,” Mrs. Houghton cried, and turning to the man she added: “I might echo his words except for our defenseless position; but as it is, the only alternative is to accede to your demands, however unjust they may be. I am sure the captain will think as I do if you will allow him a little more time. He will——”

“He will do exactly as he pleases,” the old man shouted as the rattle of chains was heard running through a hawse pipe, telling that the schooner had come to an anchor. “It is now possible, not only to leave the island, but to teach you a much needed lesson. With a craft off shore, I reckon we can afford to hold up our heads like white men once more.”

At this unexpected announcement every oc-

cupant of the room ran to the window, and to the surprise of Ernest, the black man appeared more delighted than any one else.

He stood on the threshold for an instant scanning the schooner, and then ran out of the hut, shouting for his friend, while Captain Jake cried excitedly :

“Come, boys, we’ll get the powder from old Winny’s magazine, an’ load these ’ere guns. Them niggers may try to make out that they’re the only people on the island, and we must be ready to fight our way to the beach.”

“But will the vessel stay long enough?” Mazie asked breathlessly.

“She won’t leave for some time,” Perry replied. “The crew are furling the sails, and it looks as if they intended to stay.”

To bring the powder into the hut required but a few moments, and, to the surprise of all, their captors did not interfere with the work.

The captain fitted the flints carefully, and after loading two of the ancient muskets, handed one to Ernest as he said :

“Take this, lad, an’ use it if necessary, for perhaps we shan’t have another chance of leavin’ this blessed island.”

“A boat is being rowed ashore,” Mazie cried from her post at the window.

“Then all the more reason why we should get to the beach in short order,” the old man said hurriedly, and he was on the point of leaving the hut when Mazie spoke again, this time in a tone of dismay :

“The boat has landed. It is filled with black men, and two of them are embracing those who have held us prisoners.”

CHAPTER XV

SEPARATED

THE scene which followed Mazie's announcement would have been almost comical but for the gravity of the situation.

Captain Jake and Ernest dropped their guns as they ran to the window toward which the others were hurriedly making their way, and all thought of resistance was apparently forgotten in the eagerness to see the new-comers.

Curiosity, however, soon gave way to fear and dismay as the moments passed.

Instead of being a peaceful trader, to whom they could appeal for aid, the schooner had a full crew of black men and negroes, the former similar in feature to the guardians of the Braganza, and it could plainly be seen that her coming was the result of a pre-arranged plan rather than chance.

The two who had just landed were younger than those on the shore, but appeared to be on terms of intimacy with them, while the others treated the old men with profound respect, bordering on homage. One after another stepped ashore, bowed until their heads nearly touched the sand, and then, moving a short distance away, waited for the consultation among the leaders to come to an end.

“Well!” Captain Jake said with great emphasis after he had watched these proceedings several minutes in silence, “the little jig I started didn’t last very long, an’ for our bit of dancin’ I reckon we’ll have to pay the piper a pretty high figger. If I’d held my tongue ten minutes more we’d still have a chance to agree to their terms.”

“That can be done now,” Mrs. Houghton replied.

“I’m not so certain about it. They didn’t have force enough before to guard us properly, an’ now there are so many that playin’ the part of jailers will only keep them out of mischief. I reckon it’s only a question of tryin’ to hold

our own here, or answerin' to the beck and call of every nigger aboard the schooner."

"Surely you are not thinking now of resisting?" Mrs. Houghton asked quickly and with every symptom of alarm.

"I declare I don't know what to think," the old man replied in a tone of perplexity, and then he gazed out of the window again as if believing a solution to the question could be read in the scene on the beach.

The two men were holding a long conversation with those who had landed, and the watchers could well fancy they were relating the story of the supposed cipher.

"I only hope there is some one on the yacht who understands secret writing," Mazie whispered to Ernest, "for I'm sure I shall never succeed in reading it."

Up to this time Perry had remained with his eyes fixed on the new-comers; but as the men turned to come toward the cabin, he realized that some preparation should be made to receive them.

“It will never do to let that crowd see these guns and ammunition no matter what we intend to do,” he cried, and this remark aroused Captain Jake into activity.

“I declare I’d forgotten that we’d found ’em. Take hold, Ernest, an’ help shove this stuff under the bed. They’re comin’ here for a talk, I s’pose, an’ when it’s ended we’ll know what we’d best do.”

Even Mrs. Houghton assisted in hiding the evidences of their short-lived revolt, and when the men opened the door of the hut the interior presented its usual appearance.

“Will you show us the document you have been trying to read?” the eldest of the party—he who had been rescued from drowning—said to Mazie, and when she handed it to him the others gathered around with every show of excitement.

During what seemed to the prisoners a very long while the men examined the figures, conversing in their native tongue, and then the newcomers looked critically at every portion of the hut, after which the leader said to Mrs. Houghton :

“I have made such preparations for the accommodation of yourself and daughter as will be conducive to comfort. Our vessel is to remain off shore while we stay here, and on board you will find much better quarters than this dilapidated hut affords.”

Mazie looked at the speaker in alarm, and her mother, quite as much disturbed, asked quickly:

“Are all of our party to go on board the schooner?”

“The boys and the old man will stay here, for they are eager to work on the wreck of their yacht.”

“Then I’m not going,” Mazie cried vehemently. “It’s bad enough to have to stay here, without being regularly shut up in a prison.”

“I am sorry you object, for we have fully decided,” the man replied, and despite his courteous manner, there was a threatening tone in his voice. “You will be as comfortable as at a hotel, and have no menial offices to perform. Besides, with nothing to distract your attention it should

be possible to read the secret writing more readily.”

Ernest and Perry stepped quickly to Mazie's side, as if to show their willingness to defend her, and Captain Jake literally trembled with anger as he said :

“I will not allow you to take either the child or her mother from us. They can have everything necessary on shore, and we are ready to keep our oaths to the letter.”

“It is unfortunate that you did not arrive at such a conclusion half an hour earlier,” the man said, sternly. “I now know that you would retract your promise at the first good opportunity to give us the slip, and intend to take measures accordingly. There are twenty men on the yacht who obey my orders implicitly ; therefore it can be readily understood that our plans will be carried out regardless of your wishes.”

While the man was speaking, Ernest glanced meaningly at Captain Jake, as if asking if they should make use of the hidden weapons ; but the old man shook his head. Angry though he

was, prudence caused him to realize the folly of resistance.

“Do you think I will do anything toward reading the cipher if you separate us from our friends?” Mazie asked, angrily. “I will not so much as look at those figures.”

“Both you and your mother will be kept on board the yacht until the secret is discovered. I will give you ten minutes in which to get ready.”

Then the man and his companions went out of the cabin, Ernest saying, as he drew from under the bed a gun:

“We can hold our own for a little while, anyhow!”

“And what then?” Captain Jake asked, grimly. “We might shoot down a few, but the others would easily settle us. It’s mighty tough lines, I’ll allow; but we may soon be able to get our necks out of this noose.”

It was agreed between Mazie and Ernest, after some discussion, that on the following day she should ask that he be allowed to assist her during certain hours. By such means they would

at least be able to communicate with one another freely.

These details had hardly been decided upon when the leader of the black men opened the door, and said :

“ The boat is ready, and I believe you will go on board quietly. No one will be allowed to intrude upon you, and every care will be taken to make the enforced stay agreeable.”

Mrs. Houghton led Mazie out of the cabin, and, instead of following, the black man entered, thereby preventing the boys from witnessing the departure.

“ As I intend taking up my quarters on the schooner,” he said, curtly, “ it is necessary you should understand matters, for those who are to keep guard over this building do not speak English.”

“ Then we are to be closely confined ?” Captain Jake asked.

“ You will not be allowed to leave the house except to go to the spring for water. Four men are to remain on watch outside, day and night.

Their orders are to shoot without questioning if you attempt to move about the island. There will be no change in this respect until after the Braganza has been found, and life depends upon your own actions."

As he ceased speaking, the man went out quickly, probably to avoid any discussion of his unnecessarily severe orders, and the boys ran to the window just in time to see Mazie and her mother step on board the schooner.

"Well, I reckon we've settled down to business," Captain Jake said, as he sought solace in a pipe of tobacco. "Here we are, cooped up like chickens, with the cheering prospect of a bullet in our heads if we so much as take a sniff of fresh air."

"The worst part of it is that we're likely to stay a good while," Ernest said, with a feeble attempt at cheerfulness. "Suppose Mazie doesn't succeed in reading the cipher?"

"Then it's a question of staying till they get tired, or we die," Perry replied, mournfully.

"Not much," and Captain Jake spoke very

emphatically. "I'll take a good many risks rather than be cooped up here a week."

"What do you mean," Ernest asked, in surprise.

"Jest this," the captain replied, in a whisper. "When the wind's fair an' the night dark, it wouldn't be sich a terrible job to reach Roanoke on what's left of the canoe. By sendin' word from there to the mainland we could soon have a crowd here who would make them fellers dance. I might be away three days before I was missed, unless the boss of the crowd happened to come ashore."

"Do you mean to try to drift across?" Ernest asked, in surprise.

"That's the idea, lads, an' the next dark night, when the wind comes from the south'ard an' east'ard, I'll make the start. We won't argue the pint, 'cause it's all settled in my mind. Keep your eyes an' ears open; find out where the guards stay while they're on the island, an' how often they come nosin' round the hut."

“But it would be very dangerous to make such an attempt,” Perry whispered.

“It isn’t much different from stayin’ here with four men prowlin’ round to shoot a feller. I’ll take the chances, an’ run all the risks.”

Neither the boys nor Captain Jake believed it would be possible to carry into effect the latter’s plan until after several days, because of the many conditions necessary before it could be attempted with any hope of success, therefore all were surprised when a favorable opportunity presented itself that very night.

After the black man left them, one of the party remained at the window constantly in order to learn what their enemies were doing.

When Mrs. Houghton and Mazie had been taken on board the yacht, the prisoners saw the boat return with four sailors who were unmistakably negroes. All were armed with rifles, and there could be no question but that they were the sentinels. Where they would be stationed was the all-important question.

CHAPTER XVI

A BOLD VENTURE

“NOW watch them sentries,” Captain Jake said, eagerly. “See what part of the island they travel over, an’ where the headquarters are to be, for I don’t reckon they’ll march ’round all the time.”

It was not difficult to obtain this information. Instead of forming regular lines in order to keep in view the four sides of the house, the men threw themselves on the ground in a small thicket of pines about an hundred feet south of the cabin door, and from that point began their duties as sentinels.

“If they stay there it won’t be very hard to give ’em the slip,” Captain Jake said, in a tone of satisfaction. “Then all we want is the proper weather. The wind comes from the right quarter now; but it ain’t strong enough.”

“You wouldn’t leave to-night, no matter how favorable the conditions were?” Ernest said, interrogatively.

“I shall take advantage of the first good chance,” the old man replied. “You see there’ll be a ten or twelve mile walk in case I manage to strike Roanoke, an’ plenty of time is needed. I’d sooner go to-night than a week from now, when they will be more watchful.”

This announcement surprised the boys, although no attempt was made to dissuade the captain from his purpose. They realized that desperate measures must be taken, unless they were willing to remain prisoners for an indefinite time, and both believed their companion could accomplish whatever he was willing to undertake.

During the remainder of the day but little was done save to watch the sentinels, and from this scrutiny the old man believed he had nothing to fear in regard to them. The negroes remained in the thicket until sunset, when four

others came as a relief, and these last stationed themselves as had the first.

The wind, which had been increasing in force every hour, was now what might be called "half a gale," and flying scud obscured the heavens, shutting out even the light of the stars.

"I might stay here a month, an' not have a better chance than this," Captain Jake said, when the mantle of night had fully settled down over the island. "Them niggers haven't even taken the trouble to find out the lay of the land, an' I'm a pretty poor kind of a sailor if I can't give 'em the slip. In half an hour I'll be under way."

"Don't you think the risk is too great?" Ernest asked, not really wishing to dissuade the old man from his purpose, but yet fearing to have him make the venture.

"Not a bit of it, lad, unless we're willin' to stay here two or three months. If nothin' happens you'll see me back ag'in in three or four days with force enough to take all hands

away from the heathen. To-morrow mornin' go for water as usual. Do a good deal of cookin' so's to make them on the schooner think we're contented. Walk back an' forth past the windows pretty often, which will help to show that three are here, an' unless the leader of the gang comes ashore you won't have any trouble in keeping the secret of my absence. Good-by, boys, an' if it so happens that I don't come back, remember I did my best to help you out of this scrape. Don't come to the door. Good-by."

With the last word he lifted the latch, opened the door only so far as was necessary to permit of an exit, and closed it behind him, leaving the boys to listen with bated breath for the report of firearms which would tell that he had been discovered and shot.

One after another the moments went by, and no sound broke the silence. The murmur of the waters as they rolled upon the beach could alone be heard, and after half an hour had passed Ernest said, with a long drawn sigh of relief:

“If he hadn’t got away there would have been some outcry. Most likely by this time he is well into the Sound with nothing but a plank or two to keep him from drowning.”

“Do you believe he’ll ever reach Roanoke?” Perry asked, in a whisper.

“We’ll hope so, but all the chances seem to be against him. It won’t do, though, for us to sit here quietly when he told us to move around so we can be seen from the windows.”

Thus reminded, Perry began to bustle around the hut, and in the exercise he found a certain relief from the nervousness which beset him.

The hours went by until midnight, when there could no longer be any question but that the captain had left the island, and the boys lay down to rest but not to sleep, for the thought of the dangers to which he was exposed prevented their eyes from closing.

With the first light of day both were at the window facing that portion of the Sound over which the old man intended to pass with no other craft than two broken planks; but nothing could be seen of the venturesome voyager.

“There isn’t much satisfaction in the knowledge that he is no longer in sight,” Ernest said, after scrutinizing the surrounding waters, “for he may have been drowned.”

“Let’s *believe* that he reached the island in safety,” Perry said, with a shudder; and then he went to the spring for water, reporting on his return: “The sentinels are still in the thicket. I can see that the fragments of the canoe have been overhauled, and it looks as if half a dozen planks had been carried away.”

The morning meal was prepared with great elaboration, more for the purpose of passing away the time than because either of the boys were hungry, and Ernest was cleaning up the room as he had seen Mrs. Houghton do, when Perry, who was at the window, cried in alarm:

“A boat is putting off from the schooner, and I am certain that in her is the man that gave us our last instructions. If he comes here, Captain Jake’s absence must surely be discovered, and then what *will* happen?”

“He’s seen or heard something to arouse his

suspicious, and has come to find out what occurred last night," Ernest replied, after satisfying himself that Perry's statement was correct.

"It isn't that. Mazie has told him that she wanted you to help her, and the captain will be betrayed through our own foolishness."

"I'm afraid that is true," Ernest replied, thoughtfully; and then, after a short pause, he added bitterly: "We are the ones who will suffer by it, however, for he has got so far away that it isn't likely they can overtake him."

With the deepest anxiety the boys watched the little boat, as she was propelled swiftly through the water by three pairs of oars; saw their enemy step from her to the beach and then walk directly toward the house.

"It won't be long before we shall know the worst," Ernest said, in a low tone. "He is coming for me, and——"

Before he could finish the sentence the door was opened, and the eldest black man stood on the threshold.

“Which of you boys has been helping the girl read the figures?”

“I have tried to, but don’t think I was of much assistance,” Ernest replied, his voice trembling despite all efforts to make it sound firm.

“Then you will accompany me—— Where is your companion—the old man?”

“He—he—he went out a little while ago. Perhaps he has gone to the spring,” and Ernest’s voice was now so shaky that the most obtuse would have observed his agitation.

The man glanced quickly toward the corner where the water pail stood; saw that it was full, and then shouted for the sentinels, who obeyed his summons with the utmost alacrity.

After a few moments of loud and apparently exciting conversation, the negroes started on a run toward the beach, diverging from the house in every direction, and the man took his stand in front of the frightened boys as he asked sternly:

“When did your companion go away? It will not be safe to tell me an untruth.”

It took Ernest but a moment to revolve the matter in his mind, and he concluded that it would be useless to equivocate, or to refuse to answer, therefore he said without hesitation :

“He left the hut yesterday, about an hour after sunset.”

“For what purpose?”

“To reach Roanoke if possible.”

“But he had no boat.”

“He intended to use a plank as an aid in swimming, and counted on being helped by the strong wind.”

The most intense anger was depicted on the man's face ; but he remained silent until one by one the sentinels returned to make a report, and when the last stood before him his passion burst forth in a torrent of words.

Although the boys could not understand what was said, they knew the negroes were being

soundly rated for having kept such careless watch. Each one cowered as if in fear of receiving bodily punishment, and when the lecture was brought to a close they scurried off into the thicket at full speed.

“I should have known how much the oaths you took could be depended upon,” the man said, savagely, as he turned toward the trembling prisoners.

“He was no longer bound by it,” Ernest said, firmly, “and you understood that fact, otherwise there would have been no sentinels posted on the island.”

“I forbid you to speak!” the man cried in a paroxysm of rage. “His escape shall not turn me from my purpose, nor avail you. Go to the boat, and once on board the schooner we will see whether it is possible to prevail against the mighty ones. March ahead of me, and make no attempt to turn aside from a straight path.”

Ernest clasped Perry's hand, and the two went toward the beach, their captor shouting some

command to the frightened negroes in the thicket.

Without waiting for further orders the boys stepped into the boat, which was drawn up on the beach, the man followed, and the trip to the schooner was made in silence.

CHAPTER XVII

ON THE YACHT

MAZIE was on deck, watching for the return of the boat, and, from the look of satisfaction on her face, it could readily be understood that she had innocently exposed Captain Jake's scheme by sending for the boys to assist her on the cipher.

“Good morning,” she cried merrily, when they were within hail; but neither answered, save by an inclination of the head, which caused her so much surprise that she did not speak again until they had clambered over the rail, when Ernest explained in a few whispered words the condition of affairs.

“I don't think they can catch the captain,” he added, in conclusion, “for if he escaped drowning it is positive he reached Roanoke before daylight this morning. It will most likely go pretty

hard with us ; but we'll be able to stand it, knowing Captain Jake will soon be here with a force large enough to overpower these men."

By this time Mrs. Houghton looked out from the companion way, and, noticing Mazie's pale face, stepped forward to ask the cause just as the leader of the black men, who had been consulting with several of his party, came toward the boys.

"Do you know from what point your friend left the island?"

"We didn't see him after he went out of the house," Perry replied, and added, with a smile: "No one fancied the sentinels could be avoided so easily."

With an exclamation of anger the man turned away to issue a command in his peculiar language, which was followed by the lowering of the second boat.

On being told of Captain Jake's bold venture, Mrs. Houghton was thoroughly alarmed.

"He could never reach the island without a boat," she said, in an agony of apprehension. "Why did you let him go?"

“I don't fancy we could have prevented him, no matter what we said or did,” Ernest replied. “I believe, however, that he got across all right, and it won't be many hours before we see him again.”

Except during the few seconds during which Ernest explained what had occurred in the hut, Mazie watched the movements of those on deck, and now she asked in a whisper:

“What are they doing with the sails?”

“The schooner is being got under way!” Perry exclaimed. “They are going to carry us off for fear Captain Jake will come back with force enough to overpower them.”

That this supposition was the correct one there could be no doubt. A portion of the crew were in two boats rowing around the island, probably in search of some evidence as to whether the old man's scheme was a success or a failure, and the remainder were unfurling the canvas, heaving the cable short, or in other ways getting ready for sea.

The leaders of the party paid no attention to

their subordinates. A few moments after Mazie discovered what was being done, the eldest brought from the cabin a package wrapped in crimson velvet, trimmed with silver fringe, and as one of the others spread a square of the same colored silk on the deck amidships, the gorgeously enveloped bundle was placed upon it.

This seemed to be a signal for every officer and sailor to cease work. Those in the rigging came down, and, with the others, prostrated themselves on the deck, while the four leaders, divesting themselves of their outer garments, placed curiously shaped bronze urns on each corner of the silken rug.

These elaborately wrought vessels were filled with aromatic gums or incense, which, when lighted, sent forth clouds of fragrant smoke. As this arose the four men chanted what sounded very like an invocation, the remainder of the party joining from time to time, as if making responses in the manner of their religion.

When this had continued fully ten minutes

the leader approached the covered package on his knees, the entire company singing a wild, exultant strain as he removed the velvet, disclosing what to Mazie's eyes appeared to be a huge mass of glittering gems.

It was pyramidal in form, standing about twelve inches high, and flashing in the sunlight dazzling hues of every color.

Mazie's cry of surprise and admiration was drowned by the wild song, which was echoed by those in the boats, now fully a quarter of a mile away, and the devotees continued the ceremonies as if unconscious that their prisoners were spectators.

During half an hour was this strange scene continued, and then, as the four who officiated covered the blazing gems with the velvet, the crew resumed their work with such effect that when the boats returned from the useless search the schooner was ready for sea.

At the last moment two men were sent ashore, returning in a short time with a miscellaneous collection of goods from the pirate's hut, among

which the boys recognized the old book owned by Captain Winny.

“We’re in for it now,” Ernest said, with a brave attempt at cheerfulness. “They are going to sea until Captain Jake gives up searching for us.”

“But what are we to do?” Mazie asked in dismay.

“Stay here and work on the cipher until they get tired of carrying us around,” Ernest replied, with a forced laugh, and before he could say anything more the leader of the blacks came aft.

“You are to go below and remain there except at such times as we see fit to allow you on deck,” he said, sternly. “If you take my advice the time will be spent in studying the cipher, for the duration of your stay on this vessel depends upon the reading of the secret writing.”

Mrs. Houghton was the first to obey this harshly spoken command, and the others followed just as the white wings of the yacht were spread, causing her to heel in a coquettish way

as the west wind sent her forward with a "bone in her teeth."

Despite the fact that the prisoners were overwhelmed with fear and apprehension at thus being carried further away from home and friends, the boys looked about curiously as they entered the cabin, which was fitted up in a peculiarly gorgeous if not elegant manner.

The saloon, on which opened ten staterooms, was literally covered, save as to the floor, with silk, embroidered in fanciful devices, and tufted with bullion tassels to hold the costly fabric in place. The mainmast was carved elaborately with grotesque figures, embellished by gold and silver leaf, and in a metal band were set a great number of small rubies, turquoises, and amethysts, forming the word "Lingam;" but whether this was the name of the yacht, or some mystic symbol, the boys were unable to decide.

The floor was covered with wood of various hues, inlaid to form pictures of men and women in a variety of devotional attitudes.

“It looks like the representation of a heathen temple, doesn’t it?” Mazie said as Ernest and Perry hastily surveyed the gorgeous apartment. “Do you know I think that it has been fitted up for some such purpose—a floating place of worship. Behind that curtain, in a sort of steel closet or safe, are the idols. I caught a glimpse last night of several things similar to the one we saw on deck.”

The curtain to which she referred was of crimson velvet embroidered in gold, hanging from ceiling to floor.

Like the other nine, the stateroom assigned to Mazie and her mother was in striking contrast to the apartment from which it led, owing to the plainness of the furnishings. Two berths, with well worn, but cleanly bedding, a washstand, three chairs, and a small mirror was all it contained. There was no carpet, and the nearest approach to adornment was a coating of drab paint.

To examine these portions of the yacht had not occupied very much time, for none of the

party felt inclined to linger over details. A hasty glance at this or that peculiarity in the upholstering of what Mazie called the temple, was sufficient for the boys, and then they stood near the companionway, hoping to gain some information of the course by the sounds from the deck.

Since both the officers and crew spoke in an unknown tongue, very little could be learned by listening, and it was only possible to see the man at the wheel or a small patch of blue sky directly overhead.

“If we knew where we were going it wouldn't seem quite so rough,” Perry said, mournfully. “Captain Jake may succeed in finding the schooner providing she remains in some one of the sounds; but suppose they take it into their heads to leave this part of the globe?”

“I don't think we need have much fear of that,” Mrs. Houghton said, hopefully. “They are too deeply interested in the diamonds to go away without thought of returning.”

“Very likely they won't come back until the

cipher has been read," Ernest added, "and it is best for us to set about it at once. They've got the whip hand, and we had better give in gracefully, than to pout when it will do no good."

"It's of no use for me to try any more," and Mazie looked thoroughly discouraged. "I have used every method with which I am familiar, and failed dismally."

At this moment one of the sailors entered, and after prostrating himself before the velvet curtain in an attitude of most profound devotion, he handed Mazie an old book, going back to the deck before she had time to speak.

"This has been brought from the hut," she said in surprise. "What reason could those men have for sending it to me?"

"Oh, 'Phisicke Against Famine,'" Perry added, laughingly, as he read the title. "That's the book Captain Dorr valued so highly that he was careful not to wear it out by too much reading."

"How queer that it should have been brought

just at the moment when we were talking about the cryptogram," Ernest said, musingly, and after a brief pause he added, in a louder tone, "I wouldn't be surprised if in it we found a key to the cipher. Since to go on deck is forbidden, let's spend our time searching for some hidden meaning. Perhaps by taking a certain word on each page we may solve the riddle. Mazie, look for the ninety-seventh word on the first page."

This plan of reading the cipher was a new one, and, without regard to their novel surroundings, the little party were soon deeply engrossed in the mystery.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN PURSUIT

ERNEST was confident he had hit upon the correct method of reading the cipher, and Mazie seated herself at the table, whereon were writing materials, hardly less excited than the boys.

“Have you found the ninety-seventh word?” Ernest asked. “When you do, write it down, and then look for the sixty-fourth on the second page.”

Mazie followed his instructions as he called out the old pirate’s figures in turn, insisting that each should be taken from the succeeding page, until seven had been found, after which he looked at the result.

“I, it, be, go, angels, bade, upon,” was what she had written, and Ernest threw down the book impatiently as he cried:

“I give up the whole thing! There’s no sense in it, and if the old captain wanted to keep his secret, he has done so with a vengeance. I wish we had thrown the figures into the fire, and then these men wouldn’t hold us prisoners in the belief that we can read such stupid stuff.”

“Don’t get discouraged so quickly,” Mazie said, soothingly. “It doesn’t prove that the key isn’t in this book simply because we fail on the first attempt.”

“Try the figures in couples,” Perry suggested, as he took up the paper. “For instance, let’s suppose ninety-seven refers to the page, then find the sixty-fourth word.”

“‘This,’” Mazie replied, after a short search.

“Now try the second couple. Page eighty-four, word sixty-eight.”

“‘Useless,’” was the answer, and Perry continued reading, alternately the number of page and word until, when he had found seven, there could be no question but that they were following the correct method.

“We have found it!” Mazie cried, gleefully.
“In a short time we will finish the work!”

The end was not as near as she supposed, however.

When all the figures had thus been read in pairs from the book, they had indeed a message from the old pirate; but it only served to deepen the mystery, for this was the result after punctuating it as would seem proper:

This useless book will serve a purpose for which it was never intended, and thus do me more good than would any of its teachings. It is by no means necessary to a correct reading of the writings; but may serve to show those, other than the sons of Ham who pursue me, how to read what I have written. Use with zest the name, and by patience, together with a knowledge of secret writings, prepare a rule which shall be to all familiar signs a perfect square. Take away from what has been set down, the sum of the name, and the remainder shall stand revealed.

Each in turn pored over the very unsatisfac-

tory explanation, and then Ernest read it aloud, saying as he finished:

“I’d like to know how much we’ve gained by discovering this? There doesn’t seem to be any sense in it, and the last sentence appears to be the sum of the whole.”

Again and again did the puzzled students read the words, without being able to extract any information, and then Mazie said:

“It’s certain we don’t know what it means, and I propose we call in the head jailer to show him how much has been discovered.”

“And it will prove we have been working,” Perry suggested as Ernest ran up the companionway-ladder, where he beckoned to the leader of the blacks, who happened to be standing near the port rail aft.

“What do you want?” the man asked gruffly, and Ernest replied:

“We have found a portion of that cipher—enough at least to show that it is secret writing, and thought you might like to know what has been done.”

The black man delayed a moment to look astern, which gave Ernest an opportunity of seeing that the wind was rapidly blowing itself out, and then he went into the cabin, where Mazie handed him the result of their labors.

It was fully ten minutes before he ceased studying over the words, and then he asked abruptly :

“What do you understand from this?”

“Nothing,” Mazie replied. “It sounds like nonsense to say, ‘take away from what has been set down the sum of the name, and the remainder shall stand revealed.’ I can’t make out the meaning of such words, no matter how hard I try.”

“And yet in that sentence is contained the secret,” the man said, thoughtfully.

“I’m afraid none of us will ever solve it,” and Mazie spoke in a hopeless tone. “I think we have done all that is possible.”

“Do not be discouraged. You have done very well so far, and will presently be able to read the one important statement. As a reward

for having been industrious, you can all come on deck during the remainder of the afternoon."

Without waiting to see whether they would avail themselves of this permission, the man went out of the cabin quickly, as if believing he might be needed on deck, and Ernest said bitterly :

"He's very kind to give us a chance to breathe fresh air, when without any rhyme or reason he holds us prisoners. I'm not going to take advantage of his permission."

"Then you will be depriving yourself of a pleasure without hurting his feelings in the slightest," Mrs. Houghton said with a smile. "Take my advice and get all the happiness possible out of this involuntary voyage."

Both Mazie and Perry were eager to see in which direction the schooner was sailing, and Ernest followed them on deck.

The breeze had fined down almost to a calm. The jaunty little craft was yet slipping through the water at a wonderful rate of speed considering the lightness of the wind, but it could

readily be seen that she must soon come to an anchor.

The island from which they had been taken was already lost to view in the distance, and the boys knew from what Captain Jake had told them regarding the conformation of the land, that they were standing well down Pamlico Sound.

“It will be a smart man who can find us now,” Ernest said sadly. “No matter how many men Captain Jake finds willing to help him, we shan’t be benefited.”

“Do you notice that these men keep looking back anxiously?” Mazie whispered. “It seems as if they were afraid of being followed.”

“That is exactly what troubles them, and they have good cause,” Ernest replied, as he tried to repress any signs of excitement. “Look straight over the wheel and you will see a steamer. She seems to be heading directly for us. Come below where we can talk without being overheard.”

Perry followed his cousin to learn why he

was leaving the deck so soon, and, on hearing the good news, indulged in the most extravagant antics expressive of delight.

“Don’t count too surely on it,” Ernest said, warningly; “for she may only be one of the regular passenger boats. I did not dare to stay up there for fear it might make trouble if I showed how glad I felt. Each of us will take turns going on deck, and by that means we shall know all that occurs.”

This seemed like an excess of precaution, for it was not likely that the men would send them below unless the pursuing steamer came very near; but Ernest insisted upon it lest they should be deprived of an opportunity to view the chase.

In pursuance of this plan, first one and then another went on deck; but there was nothing especial to report until after dark.

Late in the afternoon the wind died away entirely, but the steamer was at such a distance that nothing definite regarding her could be ascertained.

More than once did Mazie insist that they were foolish to be excited over what could not concern them, since Captain Jake had not been absent long enough to procure assistance; but Ernest argued that he might have fallen in with a steamer near Roanoke, and was thus able to follow them so closely.

When the sun set, the approaching craft was not more than five miles away, and coming directly toward the schooner, a fact which convinced Ernest that his supposition was correct.

“She looks like a small boat,” he said on coming below when the gloom of night had shut out all surrounding objects. “Most likely it’s a pleasure craft or tug, either of which might be met near Roanoke.”

It was Perry’s turn to go on deck, and his report was startling.

“The crew have got both boats out, and are towing us toward the western shore. The water must be shoal around here, for two sailors are kept busy heaving the lead. There can be no question now but that the black men believe as

we do, and are trying to escape under cover of the darkness.”

Neither of the prisoners had fancied the schooner could be moved during a calm, and the information that she was being taken over the shoals changed their joy to despair.

“Can men in small boats pull a big vessel like this?” Mazie asked in surprise.

“Indeed they can; and at a pretty fair rate of speed.”

“Let’s stay near the top of the companion-way,” Ernest whispered, “and if the steamer comes anywhere near, yell the best we know how, regardless of consequences.”

“Hark!” Mrs. Houghton said, warningly, and as all listened, the regular beat of paddle wheels could be heard, telling that the steamer was but a short distance away.

“There’s no time to lose,” Ernest said excitedly. “We *must* make them hear us now, for we may never have another chance.”

CHAPTER XIX

A FAMILIAR VOICE

THE black men were using every possible means to escape from the steamer. They knew beyond a peradventure that if Captain Jake had succeeded in reaching Roanoke it would not be long before a strong party came in pursuit, hence the hasty departure from the old pirate's island.

It was more probable the chase would be continued in order to punish them for what had already been done, even if the prisoners were left behind; therefore, little could be gained by surrender, while there were many opportunities of eluding those on the steamer.

Mazie and the boys had already shown what was possible for them to do in the way of reading intricate writing, and the black men wished

to keep the prisoners on board until the important secret had been discovered.

By the aid of glasses the officers of the schooner knew several hours previous that the steamer was pursuing them, and when night came every method was adopted for concealment. All the lights were extinguished; no one spoke above a whisper, and the men in the boats had stuffed the rowlocks with cloth to prevent the oars from creaking.

When the boys crept to the companionway they saw that those on deck had even taken the precaution of removing their shoes.

The perfect silence, the darkness, and the consciousness that the yacht was gliding through the water quite rapidly, although every sail was furled, caused things to seem unreal, and more than once, as he listened to the sound of paddle wheels in the distance, did Ernest grip his own hand firmly to arouse himself from the idea that in a dream he was on board a phantom ship, sailing by some supernatural power over a sea of ink.

Nearer and nearer sounded the churning of water, which betokened the presence of friends. Then a tiny spark was seen, as if some one on board the steamer had lighted a cigar, and the boys realized that she was forging ahead of them.

Now Ernest was not troubled with fancies; the stern reality presented itself to his mind very forcibly, and he whispered to Perry:

“If they keep on that course five minutes longer there will be no chance of finding us again. We must make a dash for the rail, and hail them.”

“I’m ready,” Perry replied, in a voice trembling with excitement.

Rising to their feet cautiously, the boys waited only long enough to get a general idea where the men were standing, and then ran swiftly forward, shouting at the full strength of their lungs:

“Ahoy on the steamer! You are running ahead of us! Help! help!”

There was no opportunity to say anything

more, for these words had but just been uttered when both the boys were seized by the throat as if with an iron hand, but in the short interval of time before they were hurled into the cabin with a force that dazed them, the answering cry was heard :

“Ay, ay, my hearties! Keep your courage up, for we’ll soon overhaul them niggers!”

At the same instant the flash of a musket was seen, and a bullet went hurtling through the rigging high above their heads.

This was all the boys saw or heard. On realizing anything more they were on the floor of the cabin with contused heads, caused by coming into violent contact with the polished wood.

The hatches were closed and locked, and one of the men stood inside near the companionway with a drawn revolver, as a very unpleasant reminder of what would occur if any outcry was made.

This was no time for nursing bruises; as a matter of fact, neither of the boys realized that any injury had been inflicted, owing to the in-

tense excitement of the moment. Both sat bolt upright, listening intently to the sounds from the outside in the hope of getting some idea of how the chase was progressing.

During the next ten minutes the reports of muskets were heard at irregular intervals, each succeeding one sounding fainter and fainter, a positive indication that the black men were eluding their pursuers.

When half an hour had passed a profound silence reigned, and Ernest whispered to Mazie:

“It’s all up with us now. Captain Jake’s party have lost sight of the schooner in the darkness, and there isn’t a chance that they’ll find her again.”

“We’ll hope for the best,” Mazie replied. “Perhaps the steamer will be close at hand when the sun rises.”

Even this cheering idea was dispelled an hour later when the noise of men moving about the deck could be heard, and then a slight inclination of the yacht told that the night wind had sprung up.

There could be no question but that the men would make every effort to reach the open ocean, and once there they could laugh at pursuit. The sentinel was called from the cabin, and again the prisoners were alone, with no hopeful thought to comfort them.

“It is foolish to sit here magnifying our troubles,” Mrs. Houghton said after a long time of silence. “Our lives are not in danger; we shall not suffer from hunger or thirst, and that is sufficient cause for thankfulness. Since it is impossible to improve matters by fretting, we must look on the bright side. Mazie and I will retire, and you boys had better get some sleep.”

“If we do, it will be on the floor,” Ernest replied. “They haven’t given us a bed, and after the encounter on deck I don’t fancy they will be any too careful regarding our comfort.”

“You can be no worse off than in the hut,” Mazie said, as she entered her stateroom, and the boys were left alone to discuss the situation or sleep, as best suited them.

Very many were the suggestions each made

as to a possible way of escape ; but none promised so much as a probability of success, and it was nearly midnight when Perry said disconsolately :

“ I’m afraid it won’t do us any good to speculate about getting away, for it can’t be done till they are ready to let us go. If our parents only knew where we were I wouldn’t feel so badly. Let’s make up a bed on these lockers, and see if it is possible to sleep.”

The wind had increased until a short, choppy sea was raised, and the yacht danced about with such a jerky motion that it was difficult for the boys to remain on the impromptu bed without clinging to something, which prevented them from gaining very much rest. In addition to the schooner’s erratic movements, both were suffering bodily as well as mental pain, for now that their excitement had in a measure subsided they became sensible of the bruises inflicted when they were flung down-stairs.

With the first light of dawn they were awake, and looking decidedly the worse for wear.

Ernest had a large, discolored lump on his

left temple which gave him a most comical appearance, and Perry's face was swollen until, as his cousin said, "his nose looked like a small plum in a large pudding."

"If we come below once more in the same fashion as last night, there won't be enough left of us to get on deck again," Ernest said with a mirthless laugh. "I feel anything rather than comfortable about the stomach; do you suppose it's seasickness?"

"I guess it is," was the mournful reply, and during the remainder of that day neither the boys nor Mrs. Houghton paid very much attention to what was going on around them.

The yacht was on the open ocean, with sufficient wind to keep the lee rail down in what, to a landsman, would have seemed a dangerous manner, and gliding swiftly over the foam-crested waves, headed for the Bahama Islands.

The sufferers could not complain because of neglect. The steward helped the boys into a stateroom opposite the one occupied by Mazie, and paid them a visit every hour; but since he

could not speak English, his suggestions were of little value.

Not until the following morning, when they had been twenty-four hours at sea, did either of the involuntary voyagers make any attempt to get out of bed. Ernest was the first to venture on deck, and, a short time later, when Perry joined him, he looked quite natural.

“Yes, I’m getting over the sickness,” he said in answer to his cousin’s question; “but there’s nothing very cheering in this outlook. We are going across the ocean, and there don’t seem to be much chance of ever getting back.”

“Mrs. Houghton thought they wouldn’t go very far away because of the diamonds; but she was mistaken.”

“I should say so. Look aloft, and you can tell that they have got ready for a long voyage.”

Perry saw that the topmasts had been sent down, the decks cleared, and every preparation made for heavy weather. The most inexperienced person could have told that she was

snuggled down for an ocean trip, and this was sufficient to prevent any feeling of joy on the part of the boys at their deliverance from seasickness.

“You have not worked on the cipher since we put to sea, I suppose,” the leader of the black men said, as he approached in such a stealthy manner that Ernest was positive he had been listening to their conversation.

“This is the first time we have been able to get out of bed,” Perry replied curtly.

“There is no reason why you should not improve the opportunity by setting about the task at once,” the man said sternly. “It would be well if the secret was discovered before we land, for your accommodations on shore will not be as pleasant as here.”

Having said this with the air of one who gives fatherly advice, the black man walked forward, and Ernest whispered to Perry:

“I believe they are taking us to Hayti!”

CHAPTER XX

SOLVING THE RIDDLE

UNTIL this moment the boys believed that the yacht had put to sea only to escape the pursuit of Captain Jake and his friends. Neither had fancied she would go very far away from the coast; but now the situation seemed even more grave than before.

There was no longer any desire to remain on deck; the nausea which beset them was forgotten in this new cause for alarm, and they hurried into the cabin, where Mrs. Houghton and Mazie, both looking pale and worn, were seated on one of the lockers.

The widow was even more distressed than her daughter on learning what had been said by the black man, probably because she understood more clearly what might be their fate when

taken on shore, and she remained silent until Mazie asked :

“Do you think we shall be any worse off at Hayti than on Captain Dorr’s island?”

“It is impossible to say, my child. Any imprisonment would be irksome, and to be so far from home, among people who probably do not speak our language, is particularly hard.”

“We may as well make up our minds that it must be,” Ernest said, thoughtfully, “for there isn’t the slightest chance of making our escape while the yacht’s at sea.”

“If the secret writing could be solved the men would put us ashore,” the widow replied, “and since that opportunity is before us, why not bend every energy to reading it?”

“I’m sure we’ve done our best already,” and Mazie spoke impatiently. “Ever since we read the supposed directions I have puzzled over the words, ‘prepare a rule which shall be to all familiar signs a perfect square,’ but there doesn’t seem to be any sense in such a suggestion.”

“Suppose we devote the remainder of the day

to the study of that sentence. Let each one work alone, remembering that our liberty depends upon its solution, and something should be accomplished by nightfall."

Before this plan of work could be begun the steward came into the cabin with breakfast, and after the meal had been eaten the prisoners were decidedly refreshed both in mind and body.

"Let us first decide what is meant by 'all familiar signs,'" Mazie said, as she seated herself at the table with paper and pencil. "What would be most familiar to Captain Dorr?"

"Figures, I should say, for he must have been quite well acquainted with them by the time he had studied over these long enough to conceal his secret," and Ernest made his preparations for writing. "Besides, the reference to a 'square' seems to make that plain."

"Then you work on that supposition," Mazie replied. "I'm going to try a square of letters, for those are surely 'familiar signs.'"

"I thought of that," Perry said; "but with twenty-six it is impossible to get a perfect square."

“The letter ‘j’ is seldom used in cryptograms, and by leaving it out there will be no difficulty. I’ll try that plan while you and mother devise some other method,” and Mazie was soon plunged so deeply in study that she did not hear the eldest black man when he entered the cabin.

A look of satisfaction came over his face on seeing the party thus engaged, and then he went into one of the staterooms at the other end of the saloon, emerging therefrom with what Ernest fancied was a chart, which he carried on deck.

During nearly an hour the little party worked over the difficult problem in silence, and then Ernest said, petulantly :

“I am wrong, that’s positive, for neither by squaring any one number, or by placing the numbers in the form of a square, is it possible to get a result which could, by any combination, produce the figures in the document.”

Mazie made no reply. There was a certain look of satisfaction on her face as she pored over the paper, which was covered with figures placed in a variety of ways, and Ernest ceased his useless work to watch her.

Mrs. Houghton and Perry continued their labors, but from the manner of working one would fancy they were not meeting with much success.

Engrossed by the study, neither of the party noted the fact that the schooner's motion had changed considerably. Instead of gliding smoothly over the waves buoyantly as when the boys were on deck, it seemed that she moved sluggishly, rising on the swell as if impeded by something astern, and rolling to and fro as the shapely hull descended the billows. Now and then a crashing blow would cause her to stagger, stand almost motionless, and the rushing sound of water above told that a "green one" had come in over the rail.

The air in the cabin grew oppressive and heated, until even Mazie was forced to cease work.

"Why don't they open the hatch, instead of shutting us in here to roast?" she asked, and Ernest replied as the footsteps of men running to and fro could be heard:

“I think we are going to have a storm. The schooner is jumping about considerably more than she did an hour ago. Tell us what you have done.”

“I’ve made a square of familiar signs,” Mazie said with a laugh, “and that is about all. A cryptogram could be made by it; but whether it is a key to Captain Dorr’s, I can’t say.”

She handed a slip of paper to her mother as she spoke, and, looking over Mrs. Houghton’s shoulder, the boys saw the following :

0	1	2	3	4	5
1	a	b	c	d	e
2	f	g	h	i	k
3	l	m	n	o	p
4	q	r	s	t	u
5	v	w	x	y	z

“It looks something like what we want; but yet I don’t understand how it would be possible to get ninety-seven, or any such number out of it,” Ernest said, after some study.

“Neither do I,” Mazie replied; “but at the same time it surely is a perfect square of familiar signs, and from this idea we may be able to construct one which would give us the desired result.”

“Suppose you try——”

The suggestion Ernest was about to make remained a secret, for at that instant the schooner heeled over as if on the point of capsizing; the occupants of the cabin were thrown violently on the floor to starboard, together with every movable thing on the table, while the heavy pounding of the waves, mingled with the uproar on deck, prevented the poor consolation of speech. The prisoners could not have heard each other scream during that terrible tumult.

While the yacht lay apparently on her beam-ends it was impossible for the frightened party to control their movements. The floor of the cabin had suddenly taken the position of the staterooms. Fortunately all the starboard doors were locked, otherwise the passengers might have received very serious injury.

Now and then above the uproar Ernest thought he heard the sound of axes as if the spars were being cut away, and after what seemed to be an hour, although it could not have been more than a quarter of that time, the schooner gradually resumed her proper position; but tossed and plunged in such a manner as to render it difficult for any of the party to rise.

By exerting all their strength, and taking advantage of every favorable moment, the boys succeeded in helping Mrs. Houghton and Mazie to one of the lockers, where they lay in imminent danger of being sent spinning across the cabin when the yacht plunged into the abyss of waters.

While the vessel remained in the trough of the sea it was possible to hear sounds from the deck, and there was no longer any question but that the spars had gone by the board.

“She has been dismasted,” Ernest said, “and they are cutting away the rigging to prevent the timbers from pounding her to pieces. This will put an end to their reaching Hayti.”

“And also make an end of us,” Perry replied in such a lugubrious tone that, despite the gravity of the situation, his companions were forced to smile.

The position of affairs would have been more terrible but for the knowledge that only a serious disaster could save them from being taken to Hayti, there to be kept prisoners an indefinite time. The horrors of a wreck at sea could hardly be greater than what might be expected on shore.

Until late in the afternoon the little party remained in an agony of apprehension, listening to the ominous sounds from the deck, and then came that noise which betokens most imminent danger—the clank of the pumps.

“She’s leaking, and we’re locked up here to drown like rats in a hole!” Ernest cried. “Why don’t they open the hatches?”

He tried to make his way across the cabin, as if fancying he could attract the attention of those above by pounding on the woodwork; but before it was possible to reach the companion-

way the hatch was flung open, and the eldest black man, looking haggard and worn, came below.

“We were dismasted in a squall,” he said quietly to Mrs. Houghton, “and the spars have started a timber.”

“Is there any danger of foundering?” she asked, with quivering lips.

“Not immediately. If we can keep her afloat twenty-four hours it should be possible to reach the Bahamas. The boys can be of considerable assistance at the pumps, and it is my desire that you and your daughter should retire to the stateroom for a short time.”

Two of the officers came below at this moment, and it was not difficult to understand that they were about to seek aid from their idols.

Mazie and her mother did as they had been requested, and the boys clambered up the ladder to a point where a view of the deck could be had.

CHAPTER XXI

A FAVORABLE OPPORTUNITY

THE scene which met the boys' gaze filled them with fear and apprehension. Ernest had thought it was terrible to remain below, fearing each moment the little craft would sink; but the full extent of the danger could not be realized until one saw the amount of damage done.

Both masts were gone about four feet from the deck, the jagged ends showing what an amount of force the wind must have had to thus rend the heavy spars. The bowsprit remained intact; but the jib boom was missing, and the port rail had been stove from the cathead to within a few feet of the taffrail.

With no steerage way on, the schooner was at the sport of the waves, which sent huge volumes of water over the bows or stern as she swung

hopelessly around, and it was necessary for each person to keep a firm hold of the life lines, so frequently was the deck swept fore and aft.

“A good many must have been washed overboard,” Ernest said with his mouth close to Perry’s ear that the words might be heard above the howling of the tempest. “It don’t seem to me that the crew is half as large as when we started.”

Perry nodded his head, and motioned Ernest to go forward where a number of men were working at the pumps with an energy born of desperation. The remainder of the crew, among whom was one of the officers, were trying to rig a jury mast, in order that the schooner might be brought under some control; but the labor was both slow and difficult, owing to the torrents of water which were flung over the deck.

Ernest and Perry at once attached themselves to the party at the pumps, and until midnight each did the work of a man.

When the boys first came on deck any effort to save the little schooner seemed hopeless; but,

thanks to the admirable discipline, before the night was more than half spent a small amount of canvas had been spread, and she was headed for the nearest land. The water in the hold was lowered considerably, and half the crew were able to prevent an increase, thus giving the tired ones an opportunity to rest.

“You had better go below now,” the leader of the blacks said to the boys in an unusually kind tone. “You have given us no mean amount of assistance, and that I shall not forget.”

Both were nearly exhausted, and although they would have remained at work as long as any of the crew rather than desert what was unquestionably a post of duty, the suggestion was acted upon without delay.

Mazie and her mother had already retired, and they lost no time in stretching themselves out on the locker, falling asleep almost immediately afterwards.

When they awakened, the yacht was motionless; the sunlight streamed in through the open companionway, and Mazie, hearing them discus-

sing this unexpected phase of affairs, called out cheerily :

“Come up here. We are in a beautiful harbor, and there is no longer any danger of being thoroughly wrecked.”

This wonderfully inspiring information was sufficient to bring the boys on deck in a twinkling, and an exclamation of surprise and delight burst from their lips as they saw that the schooner was lying in a tiny sheltered bay, or indentation of the coast, not more than a hundred feet from the shore.

“Where are we?” Perry asked breathlessly.

“The leader told me we were somewhere on the east coast of the Great Bahama bank, south of Settlement Point; but he doesn't know more than that,” Mrs. Houghton replied. “He, with one of the officers and four sailors, have gone away in the small boat, probably to search for some place where the yacht can be repaired.”

“I don't understand why they dare to stop pumping,” Ernest said curiously; but the reason was made plain when he looked over the rail.

The water did not appear to be more than six or eight feet deep, and the yacht's bow was undoubtedly on the sand. There would be no danger of sinking, and the men could gain a needed rest before beginning the arduous work of refitting their craft.

Ernest gazed around curiously at the harbor, the coast line stretching away in either direction, and at the only remaining boat, which had already been lowered, his face lighting up suddenly as if because of some happy thought.

During several moments he stood silent and motionless, surveying the scene, and then, beckoning Perry and Mrs. Houghton to follow, returned to the cabin.

“What *is* the matter?” Mazie asked, as she looked down the companionway.

Ernest laid his fingers on his lips to prevent further questions, and, after assuring himself that they were alone, whispered to Mrs. Houghton :

“The yacht is aground. The only boat is made fast astern, and if those who have gone

away do not return before dark, it will be a simple matter to make our escape. The men cannot pursue us, and, once clear of the schooner it will be possible to find a port from which we can get home."

Strange as it may seem, neither of the others had realized how easily this could be done during the absence of the second boat, and, as a matter of course, all were immediately plunged into the highest state of excitement.

"If there is any opportunity of escape, however slight, we must take advantage of it," Mrs. Houghton said, decidedly; "but I do not understand how it would be possible to get into the boat unobserved."

"After dark we can quietly drop over the stern one by one. It won't be difficult, because from the taffrail to the boat isn't more than five or six feet, and with the painter made fast it can be used to slide down on. Perry and I will row all night, and that should be time enough in which to reach some settlement. Of course if

the others return that settles the scheme, for then they would be able to come in pursuit of us."

"If we don't do it we shall surely be taken to Hayti, and with such an alternative no risk is too great," Mazie said, gravely, and her companions were evidently of the same opinion.

At intervals during the remainder of the day they settled all the details. Each secreted more or less food while eating dinner and supper, and, what was considered a rare piece of good luck, Perry found a wine bottle in which could be carried a small supply of water.

One or another of the party was constantly on watch for the return of those whose presence would render the scheme impossible of execution; but no living thing entered the little harbor.

Twice the pumps were manned to so lighten the yacht that she would not sink too deeply in the sand, and on each occasion Ernest and Perry assisted the laborers in order to have a good excuse for being on deck.

When the sun finally sank behind the broad expanse of water the leader was still absent, and the crew went below at a very early hour, leaving only one man to stand anchor watch.

“Now’s our time,” Ernest whispered, as he came softly down from his perch on the companion ladder. “It is dark, and the negro sits on the forecastle hatch, smoking. I’ll go first, Perry shall follow in five or ten minutes, Mazie after the same length of time, and lastly Mrs. Houghton.”

Without waiting for a reply he removed his shoes, slung them over his neck, and, his pockets well filled with food, crept softly on deck.

To those who were left in the cabin, the suspense was almost painful. With bated breath they listened, expecting each second to hear a cry from the man on watch which would tell that the attempt was discovered, but not a sound broke the silence. Everything was so quiet that they could not believe Ernest had reached the boat until ten minutes passed, and then Mrs. Houghton whispered:

“He must have succeeded. Go, Perry, and we will follow as agreed upon.”

Perry had made ready for the venture some time before, and, not daring even to reply, followed in Ernest's footsteps.

On emerging from the companionway it seemed as if the deck was absolutely deserted. He could not distinguish the form of the man on watch. Groping his way to the taffrail he found the painter, and, grasping this firmly, lowered himself until Ernest, who was sitting in the bow waiting for his companions, guided him to the forward thwart.

“I have cut the painter,” he whispered, “so that we can shove off the moment Mrs. Houghton comes.”

Then the two listened intently, their hearts beating so violently it seemed as if the pulsations could be heard very far away, and Ernest counted the seconds, that he might know when it was time for Mazie to appear.

Six minutes were measured in this manner, and then suddenly a cry was heard from the deck.

In his native tongue the man on watch shouted to his shipmates, and an instant later footsteps were heard coming from the forecastle.

This sudden disturbance startled Ernest, and unconsciously he allowed the painter to slip through his fingers, while Perry's movement of alarm and surprise, caused the little craft to glide astern quite rapidly.

Believing Mazie had been observed while coming from the cabin, Ernest was almost stupefied with fear, and he remained in the bow motionless, while the boat drifted further and further away from the schooner.

It was several minutes before he realized what had happened. Then the noise ceased; the yacht was swallowed up in the gloom, and the tender was outside the little harbor

CHAPTER XXII

ADRIFT

OWING to the darkness, it was impossible for the boys to conjecture how far they had drifted from the schooner ; but the fact that her outlines could no longer be distinguished alarmed Ernest, and he whispered to Perry :

“I was idiot enough to let go the painter without knowing it, and the current has carried us some distance away.”

“Get out the oars,” Perry replied in a tone incautiously loud. “We must go back before Mazie leaves the cabin. What do you suppose caused the alarm ?”

“The man on watch probably called for some one to relieve him. I was pretty badly scared at one time, thinking our escape was discovered. Let me get at the oars while you keep a sharp lookout in the bow.”

In order to effect this change of position without noise, considerable time was consumed, and every moment caused the boat to drift more rapidly toward the open ocean.

The oars were finally got into the rowlocks, Ernest placing each so cautiously that not the slightest sound broke the silence; but to work them noiselessly and effectively was quite a different matter. A single stroke was sufficient to show that it was impossible to prevent a certain amount of creaking, and this those on the schooner could not fail to hear, if it was continued.

“We shall have to paddle,” Ernest whispered. “Are we heading in the right direction now?”

“I haven’t the slightest idea,” Perry replied in the same cautious tone. “We may have turned around half a dozen times in the darkness, and perhaps, be headed out to sea by this time.”

Ernest was silent during the next few minutes as he tried in vain to distinguish objects in the gloom, and then he said:

“We must take chances and paddle toward where we think she is. You may call me all manner of hard names, Perry, for getting you in this scrape. If I had held on to the painter——”

“Never mind the ‘ifs,’ old fellow. We must be back soon, and it don’t pay to waste time grumbling about yourself.”

“We’ll keep her headed as she is, and hope to strike the right place. Be careful not to make any noise.”

Ernest handed his cousin an oar, and during the next fifteen minutes the two boys worked industriously, until Perry said, as he ceased his labors to wipe the perspiration from his face:

“We couldn’t have drifted as far as this from the yacht. Don’t you feel considerable motion?”

“There seems to be quite a swell, and——”

He did not complete the sentence; but, dropping his oar, exclaimed in a tone of fear:

“We have been putting directly out to sea, Perry! The boat must be a good distance be-

yond the harbor, otherwise she wouldn't toss about so much!"

Perhaps Perry had some such idea before, for he did not express as much surprise as would have been natural under the circumstances.

"It won't do to paddle any further away. We must lie still here till morning, and by that time I fancy we shall be sorry for having tried to escape. If it wasn't calm, things would be pretty tough; so we've got something for which to be thankful."

"But think of Mazie and her mother!" Ernest cried. "What will those men do to them when it is learned that we have run away?"

"That's something we can't change by thinking or worrying. I'm going to have a lunch, and then take a nap if possible."

The fact that Perry, who usually looked to his cousin for advice, was acting the part of consoler, aroused Ernest more quickly than anything else could have done, and he immediately ceased repining.

"I suppose we may as well make ourselves

comfortable," he said with a faint laugh. "I'll take supper with you, and then all we shall have to do is wait for morning."

More than once before that time came did the boys sink into a condition of almost complete despair, and it seemed as if the hours had never before been so long.

Now and then one or the other would fall into a doze; but neither got very much sleep, and when the first gray light of early dawn appeared in the sky, they were standing side by side amidships, watching eagerly for the schooner from which they had been so desirous of escaping but a few hours previous.

Gradually, yet very slowly to the impatient boys, the gloom gave place to light, and then they alternately stared at the shore and each other.

They were within a couple of miles of the land, but nowhere could be seen the harbor in which the yacht had taken refuge. The coast line, as far as the eye could reach, was unbroken, and it was impossible to decide

whether they were above or below the place from which the boat had drifted. Seaward nothing larger than a gull's wing could be seen, and Perry said in a low tone, as if afraid to break the profound silence:

“Mazie will think we deliberately ran away from her.”

“I never thought I would want to see those black men after once giving them the slip; now a glimpse of that yacht would make me very happy. But never mind,” Ernest added, with a sigh, “let's buckle down to the oars and get ashore as soon as possible.”

“Wouldn't it be better to stay here in case a vessel comes this way?”

“We can see a craft just as well from the shore, and there'll be plenty of time to put out after one heaves in sight. I want to get on the land, for while we're drifting around here it seems as if we had been shipwrecked.”

“One place is as good as another,” Perry replied, as he took up an oar, and both the boys pulled steadily until the boat's keel grated on

the sand at a point where the foliage grew nearly to the water's edge.

The boys leaped ashore, pulled the bow of the little boat up on the sand, and Perry asked, as he tried in vain to peer through the foliage:

“Now what are we to do?”

“Suppose we push straight into the thicket? It is just possible people live near this place, and from them we can learn in which direction is the nearest port.”

“Shall we leave our provisions here?”

“Why not? They'll be safe, and we shan't be away long enough to get very hungry. Perhaps it would be well to take the bottle so that our supply can be replenished if we strike a water-course.”

Thus lightly equipped, and after one more glance seaward to be certain there was no sail in sight, the boys started, pushing through the underbrush with but little difficulty until a distance of about one hundred yards had been traversed, when the matted foliage offered decided obstacles to rapid progress. Several times they

were forced to make long detours, and after an hour of this laborious work had passed, Perry said, as he halted to regain his breath :

“I don't think it is advisable to keep on any longer. Already we are getting confused as to the location of the boat, and it would be well to turn about rather than exert ourselves to no purpose. If people do live on this island, we can find them more readily by following the coast line.”

“Perhaps you are right,” Ernest said, cheerily, and he turned at once, retracing his steps as nearly as possible.

During this wearisome tramp the boys had found neither water-course nor pool. The air in the thicket, where the cooling breeze from the ocean could not penetrate, was sultry, and the bottle was drained of its refreshing contents before the return march began.

Now both regretted not having taken a small quantity of food, and, urged on by both hunger and thirst, they traveled rapidly, Ernest saying, as if something was needed to revive his own courage :

“We will row slowly along the coast until we find a brook, for surely there must be water somewhere on the island.”

It seemed a very long while before they reached the shore, and, to the dismay of both, the boat could not be seen. It was possible to have a full view of the beach on either hand for a distance of two or three miles, and although the little craft had been left within their range of vision, nothing now broke the monotony of the glistening sand.

“We made the mistake when it became necessary to turn aside so often because of the tangled vines and underbrush,” Ernest said, after a careful scrutiny of the shore; and then he added, pointing toward the south, “I think the boat will be found in that direction.”

“We can try it, and if nothing is seen in half an hour we shall have the poor consolation of knowing that you were mistaken.”

The desire for water was so great by this time as to be almost painful; but both avoided any

conversation as they tried in vain to forget their thirst.

After traveling over the hot, blinding sand for half an hour, Perry stopped suddenly, pointed to well-defined footprints leading from the water to the thicket, and cried in alarm:

“Look! This is the very place where we landed. The tide has risen and carried our boat away!”

Ernest examined the tell-tale marks before making any reply, and there could be no question but that Perry's statement was correct.

“It's a fact,” he said at length. “I thought my own carelessness had led us into the worst possible scrape; but now both are to be blamed. With neither boat, food, nor water, there'll be a chance of learning what a Robinson Crusoe life means.”

Perry's sorrow and fear regarding the future were too great to admit of speech. Throwing himself upon the sand he gave way to grief, and his cousin was powerless to console him.

CHAPTER XXIII

A PROPOSITION

IT is necessary to return to the yacht at the moment when the boys unwittingly left her.

After Perry went on deck to join Ernest, Mrs. Houghton and Mazie waited in painful suspense, listening intently for any sound which might tell that the boys had failed or been successful, and the cry of the man on watch caused them to retreat to their stateroom in terror.

To them the only explanation of the shouts was that Perry had been discovered while creeping across the deck, or in the act of descending to the boat.

As the moments passed and the boys were not led into the cabin, both the trembling prisoners became convinced that the negroes had inflicted some terrible punishment on them.

“Would the crew dare to kill them?” Mazie

asked with a sob, and it was some moments before Mrs. Houghton could control her voice sufficiently to say :

“I do not think they would while the leader is away. Probably the poor fellows have been found and flung into the hold or forecastle to await his return.”

Neither of the unhappy ones gave any thought to their own condition; the possible fate of the boys caused everything else to appear insignificant by comparison.

Not for a moment during that long night did sleep visit their eyelids, and about an hour after sunrise the noise of footsteps caused Mrs. Houghton to open the door in the vain hope of seeing her young friends.

The early visitor was the old black man, and before speaking he looked into the stateroom as if in search of some one. Mazie was directly behind her mother, and as he saw her the man said in a tone of satisfaction :

“So you two, at least, did not leave us last night.”

“Did the boys succeed?” Mrs. Houghton asked, deep anxiety betraying itself in her voice.

“If they are not here there can be no question about it, unless our boat was stolen by some one from the island.”

A low cry of joy burst from Mazie’s lips, causing the man to add, as if the thought gave him great pleasure:

“I do not think you have anything for which to be thankful so far as their departure is concerned. There is hardly a chance they will succeed in reaching any settlement, for no considerable amount of food has been carried away, if the steward speaks the truth. A voyage in an open boat, without provisions or water, is neither a pleasant nor a safe undertaking, and your friends are not to be congratulated.”

Then the man left the cabin, as if this escape was of but little consequence, since the one on whom he relied for a solution of the cipher was yet on board, and the mother and daughter had even more cause for anxiety than before.

The steward served breakfast, standing guard over the table all the while, probably for the purpose of preventing the prisoners from secret- ing any more food; but a few mouthfuls of coffee was as much as either Mazie or her mother desired.

While they were going through the form of eating, the noise of many feet could be heard from the deck, and during the early portion of the day every sound betokened the utmost activity there.

“They have probably concluded to repair the vessel here,” Mrs. Houghton said, and at noon, when Mazie crept timidly to the top of the companionway ladder, this supposition was found to be correct.

Two spars, evidently having been used in some other craft, had been taken from the water, and it was reasonable to suppose the boat’s crew had towed them into the harbor during the night.

Slight as was Mazie’s knowledge of such matters, she understood that they were rigging

the craft anew, and using every effort to accomplish the task in the quickest possible time.

After dinner, which was partaken of but sparingly by Mazie and her mother, the officers of the schooner began dismantling the cabin, preparatory to putting in a new mainmast, and the leader advised his prisoners to go on deck.

“You can study the secret writing there much better than here while the men are at work,” he said. “It is necessary to make our own repairs; but care shall be taken to prevent you from being interrupted.”

“I can do nothing alone,” Mazie replied quickly. “The boys know as much as I about such things, if not more, and without their aid any efforts of mine are useless.”

“That is unfortunate, if you are impatient to be at home,” the man replied, indifferently, as he motioned Mrs. Houghton toward the companion-way, and then turned to direct the men who were making the repairs.

Upon reaching the deck, the prisoners saw that the schooner had been warped in toward the

shore until her bow was high upon the sand, and some of the crew were calking the timbers while others were laboring at the pumps. Huge coils of rope, several of which were yet on a raft alongside, told that the leader must have found a town or settlement where such articles could be purchased, and Mrs. Houghton whispered:

“There is a chance, despite what the black man said, that the boys have succeeded in reaching the place where these things were procured, and we’ll believe that such really is the case until there is some proof to the contrary.”

At this moment a cry from one of the sailors brought the leader on deck, and he, after gazing intently through a glass at some object far out at sea, gave certain orders in his native language which were obeyed by four of the sailors leaping into the boat.

Following the direction in which the glass had been leveled, Mazie could see a tiny black speck far away on the surface of the water, and, believing it to be a drifting spar, she watched with mild curiosity as the men rowed out to sea.

for the evident purpose of bringing it to the yacht.

During the next hour she occupied herself with looking at the workmen, but never once giving a thought to the cipher.

At the end of that time those who had put out to sea were at the entrance to the harbor, and Mazie was startled by hearing her mother exclaim :

“ See ! they have brought back a boat ! Can it be the one in which the boys went away ? ”

“ It is, madam,” a voice replied from the companionway, and, turning, the widow saw the leader of the party, who had approached unobserved.

One glimpse at his mocking face was sufficient to prevent either of the prisoners from saying anything more, and in silence they watched with tearful eyes until the little craft was brought alongside.

“ Your friends are somewhere on this island toward the south,” the black man said as he scrutinized the interior of the boat after making

inquiries of the sailors; "that much is evident from the direction of the wind. The oars are in place, the stolen provisions are yet on board, and the painter was found trailing in the water; therefore, we know they landed. She must have been fastened insecurely, and during their absence drifted away."

"Will it be possible for them to find anything to eat?" Mrs. Houghton asked.

"I think not. The only settlement on the island is north of this harbor, and to reach it will require greater effort than I fancy they are capable of making."

"Won't you send in search of them?" Mazie asked, pleadingly. "Surely you cannot be so cruel as to remain here knowing they are starving?"

"Would you do as much for a person in whom you had no especial interest?" the man asked quickly.

"Certainly. Even if an enemy were suffering, I should try to aid him."

"You have not done so."

“I never knowingly neglected to help any one in distress,” Mazie replied indignantly.

“From the document left by the old pirate you knew that not only I, but thousands of others, have been in deepest distress for many years because that which meant to us more than life itself was stolen. You refused to exert yourself even while knowing of the unspeakable happiness to be conferred upon those who have sacrificed everything in the attempt to regain their own. If these boys die of starvation, as they probably will unless some one goes in search of them, but few will suffer. If I fail in the search for that which your uncle took from us by force, our people can never regain their own, but must remain in misery and degradation. We cannot waste time upon two boys when each day brings its full store of sorrow to many thousands.”

Never before had this man shown the slightest emotion, not even when his companion was drowned; but now every tone seemed to tell of mental anguish, and, despite their own grief, Mazie and her mother were deeply affected.

“It would not interfere in any way with the search for the diamond to send for Ernest and Perry, while I have worked many hours over the cipher and only succeeded in finding an apparently senseless riddle.”

“We shall see how much you are willing to do for your friends,” the man replied, gravely. “They may suffer some, but will not be in any danger during the next two days. Go to work on the figures, and the moment you bring me the solution I will send both boats in search of them, regardless of any delay to the task here.”

“In case I should not succeed, will you go for them at the expiration of the second day?” Mazie asked, eagerly.

“If you fail to give me the solution, not a boat shall leave this harbor; nor will I take them on board if they stand on the beach within sight, begging for food.”

“This is inhuman!” Mrs. Houghton cried. “You not only allow the boys to suffer, but needlessly torture my daughter.”

“It is in her power to aid those who preferred

to run away, and the result is no longer dependent upon any one but her. I shall keep my word to the letter."

As he ceased speaking the man went into the cabin, and Mazie, burying her face in her mother's lap, burst into tears.

"If I couldn't read that cipher before, how can it be done now, when I know the boys are actually suffering for food?" she sobbed, and Mrs. Houghton said bitterly:

"It seems as if that diamond brought trouble to every one who has the slightest connection with it. If the figures cannot be deciphered, we are powerless to aid the poor fellows, for I do not believe it will be possible to excite any pity in the hearts of these men."

CHAPTER XXIV

WANDERING

ALTHOUGH Ernest tried to cheer Perry with words of hope and encouragement, he knew perfectly well into what desperate straits they had fallen.

Without a boat, or the means of making a fire, it was not probable they could succeed in attracting the attention of any passing craft, while to make their way along the coast to a seaport would probably involve a journey far beyond their power of endurance. Ernest could see but one possible way out of their difficulties, and it was extremely doubtful if even this was practicable.

“We must try to find our way back to the harbor,” he said, after all other methods of cheering his cousin had failed.

“You don’t even know in which direction

to travel," Perry replied, petulantly. "We may walk until it is impossible to take another step, and then learn that every yard of distance covered has carried us so much further away from the schooner."

"But nothing can be done by remaining here mourning over our trouble, and although nothing else may be accomplished, we shall probably find water."

Perry's intense thirst had been for the moment forgotten in his grief at learning that the boat had drifted away through their own carelessness in not fastening her properly; but this reference to water aroused him immediately.

"In which direction do you intend to go?" he asked, rising slowly to his feet.

"Against the wind. Our boat must have brought us with it, and we can't go very far astray by doing as I suggest. It's pretty tough to travel under a hot sun, I'll admit; but not to be compared with remaining here idle instead of trying to save our lives."

Perry showed his willingness to follow Er-

nest's suggestion by beginning the march, and the two walked without a halt until noon, when both were so weary that a short rest was absolutely necessary.

"We'll push in among the underbrush to find shelter from the sun, and a nap won't do us any harm," Ernest said, as he entered the thicket.

"If we only had two or three quarts of water I'd willingly get along without food," Perry said, as he threw himself under a cottonwood tree about thirty feet from the beach.

"Go to sleep, and perhaps when we awaken the desire for a drink won't be so great," Ernest replied, setting the example by closing his eyes as if resolved to force the drowsy god into giving him temporary relief.

The slumber which the boys gained during this halt was frequently broken and not so satisfactory but that both were perfectly willing to resume the journey after two hours. Their thirst was in no degree lessened, and the hope that a water-course could soon be found lent a certain fictitious strength to their weary limbs.

They no longer continued straight up the beach, but plunged into the thicket from time to time when the slightest indications of dampness among the foliage were seen.

Each of these detours, however, was productive only of increased disappointment, and as the hours wore on Perry said, in despair:

“It is no use to try any longer, Ernest. I am completely tired out, and we only prolong the agony by searching over this island for water. We may as well sit still as walk.”

“But it will be of no advantage to remain in one place,” Ernest cried, alarmed by his cousin’s despair. “Think of what you are doing, old fellow. You are acknowledging yourself beaten before we have been a dozen hours without water. Three days’ deprivation shouldn’t reduce you to such a condition as this.”

“I know it,” Perry replied with a faint smile; “but in this case all the courage is gone, and under the circumstances a fellow’s power of endurance don’t amount to much. You go on, and I’ll stay here.”

“That would be a fine scheme, wouldn't it?” rejoined Ernest with spirit. “If you really have made up your mind that it's necessary to sit still waiting until starvation winds up the story, why I shall be forced to join you, however much I believe in fighting to the very end.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“Keep on until it is absolutely impossible to take another step.”

“Matters are very nearly in that condition already ; but I'll try it once more.”

By the manner in which Perry rose to his feet Ernest could see that he was really on the verge of exhaustion, even though as yet neither their exertions nor sufferings had been excessive.

He walked with difficulty, for the life on the old pirate's island and subsequent confinement in the schooner had unfitted him for a lengthy tramp, and many times he would have staggered and fallen but for his cousin's timely aid.

The evidences of actual weakness, together

with his utter indifference to what fate might have in store for him, disheartened Ernest. If his companion had been brave, his own courage would have increased ; but, under all the circumstances, it was very difficult to continue the struggle.

The distance traversed from the time of the noonday halt until the shadows began to lengthen, could not have been more than three miles, and during all those hours no change was to be observed in their surroundings. The beach, the foliage, the view seaward was the same as at the point from which the apparently fruitless journey had been begun. It was as if they had not advanced a single yard.

With the approach of night it became necessary to decide upon some place in which to spend the hours of darkness, although had his cousin been in fit condition, Ernest would have insisted on traveling while it was possible to distinguish surrounding objects.

Not much preparation was needed. It sufficed to enter the thicket where two or three

large trees gave promise of enough clear space to permit of their lying at full length.

Ernest tried to start a conversation, for the purpose of helping pass away the time, as well as to change the current of thought; but Perry answered only in monosyllables, and Ernest finally ceased his efforts.

Fortunately weariness of body soon overpowered mental suffering, and the sea, murmuring its wondrous tales to the sands, lulled them to sleep.

Ernest had been wrapped in profound and refreshing slumber many hours when he was aroused by a peculiar noise which he at first attributed to a wild animal.

It sounded like low moans coming at regular intervals, and, rising on his elbow, he tried in vain to peer through the gloom. After a time he realized that it must be a human voice, and with a great fear in his heart he reached out toward his cousin.

Perry had lain down very near the trunk of the tree; but he was no longer there, and Er-

nest crept several yards in the direction from which the sounds came, before finding the object of his search.

“Perry! Perry!” he shouted, dragging the inert body toward him.

“Just one more drink. Only one more,” the boy murmured, and Ernest cried yet louder:

“Wake up, old fellow! You must have had a powerful dream to cause such a change of beds. I wouldn’t rouse you but for the fear that some of these vines may be poisonous.”

There was no reply, and Ernest shook him again and again; but without effect, save to increase the moans.

“Can it be that he is sick?”

Only the most superficial examination was necessary to decide this question. The hot cheeks and hands told plainly of a malarial attack, probably superinduced by anxiety, over-exertion, and exposure to the miasma to be found among the rank foliage.

Having had no experience in such matters Ernest believed his cousin to be fatally ill, and

this, added to the horrors of the situation, plunged him into the depths of despair.

“If I could only find some water!” he cried, raising the unconscious boy’s head to his lap.

How the time passed until daybreak he never really knew. There were moments when it seemed as if he also was delirious, and uttered meaningless cries. The bright rays of the morning sun aroused him to a realization of their condition, and he set about making such provisions for Perry’s comfort as were possible.

A pile of leaves for a pillow, a screen of branches to prevent the bright light from falling directly on his face, and a quantity of dry moss for a bed. After this had been done Ernest left the sick boy alone to go in search of water.

“I must make a signal that can be seen from passing vessels,” he muttered as a broken sapling met his gaze, “and this will serve for a flagstaff.”

Fastening his coat to one end, he drove the other into the sand at a point opposite where

Perry lay, and then ran up the beach at full speed, regardless of the sun's fervent rays.

After running nearly a mile and finding no signs of water, he retraced his steps at the same rapid pace, not daring to leave the sick boy alone any longer.

But he had miscalculated his own strength. Having been without food twenty-four hours, and suffering keenly from thirst, the unusual exertion, together with the heat, overpowered him.

The struggle was ended just as he reached the signal pole, and falling headlong on the sand, he lay motionless, like one dead.

CHAPTER XXV

A HAPPY AWAKENING

WHEN Ernest regained consciousness he was in the stateroom of some vessel which was evidently at anchor, and, quite naturally, he believed his signal had been seen and answered by a passing craft.

His first thought was of Perry, and clambering from the berth with considerable difficulty, owing to a decided weakness of the limbs, he was on the point of opening the door, when a feeble voice asked :

“Are you all right now?”

A glance toward the upper berth, a low exclamation of joy, and Ernest clasped his cousin's hand as he replied :

“Of course I am. You're the one who was sick ; but I reckon you're better now.”

“There has been nothing the matter with me

since last night; but both Mrs. Houghton and Mazie feared you were going to be very sick."

"Mrs. Houghton and Mazie!" Ernest exclaimed. "Have you seen them?"

"Of course. They have been with us nearly all the time since we came on board. Don't you know where we are?"

Ernest looked in perplexity a moment, and then said hesitatingly, as a flash of disappointment came over his face:

"Can it be possible that——"

"I thought it wouldn't be many seconds before you recognized the place. Yes, we have come back to the schooner, and if that black man hadn't sent after us just when he did, our travels would have come to a speedy end."

"But tell me—I guess I'll lie down again, for my head feels queer," and Ernest crept back into the berth.

"I don't wonder at it, old fellow," Perry replied, leaning over until it was possible to see his cousin's pale face. "It appears that I only

had a slight malarial attack, while you were completely prostrated, probably because of over-exertion while trying to help me. The leader of the black party, who seems to be quite a doctor in his heathenish way, told Mrs. Houghton last night that you would be all right in a couple of days."

"What do you suppose they'll do to us for running away?"

"Nothing. The fact that we did our full share of work when the schooner was so nearly wrecked, saved us this time, or, at least, that's what he told Mazie. Besides, he didn't care for us providing we were where it wasn't possible to give information to Captain Jake concerning his whereabouts. It's mighty fortunate, though, that the secret writing was read before yesterday noon."

"Has the cipher been read?" and Ernest's excitement dispelled the weakness sufficiently to admit of his rising to a sitting posture.

"Look here, Ernest, you'll be sick again if you jump around like this," Perry cried, in

alarm. "I had no business to say anything about it yet awhile."

The sick boy was forced to lie down again very quickly, owing to a sudden attack of dizziness; but instantly that had passed away he asked, impatiently:

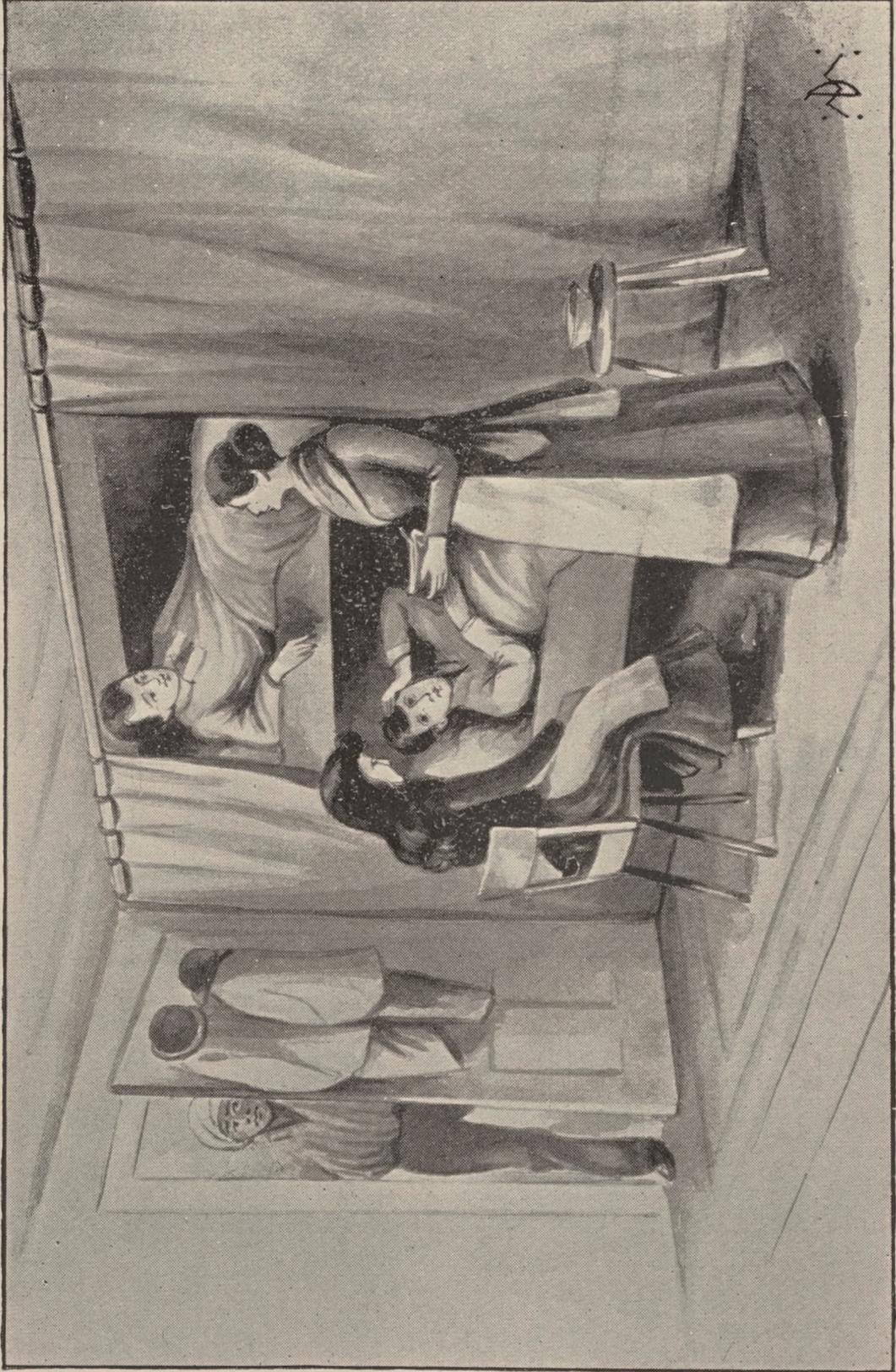
"Why don't you tell me about the cipher?"

"Because I know nothing more. Mazie said she would tell us the whole story when we were stronger."

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the steward, who brought a bowl of broth for Perry; but, on seeing that Ernest had recovered consciousness, he left the room without making any attempt to feed the invalids.

"He has gone to tell Mrs. Houghton that you are all right, and I'll probably get a scolding for having said anything about the cipher."

In this, however, Perry was mistaken. Mazie and her mother were so delighted because of Ernest's rapid recovery that there was no thought of finding fault with any one.



“NOW TELL US ABOUT THE CIPHER, MAZIE,” SAID ERNEST, EAGERLY

(See Page 267)

A generous supply of the broth was given to both boys before either was allowed to talk, and then Mrs. Houghton summoned the old man for further directions regarding the invalids' treatment.

"They need nothing now but rest and a generous diet," he said, after counting Ernest's pulse. "Let them come on deck as soon as they feel able to walk, and the effects of their foolhardy journey will soon pass away."

Having given this opinion, the old man left the room, and Ernest said, eagerly:

"Now tell us about the cipher, Mazie. He says we are in good condition, and I shan't be able to rest until it has been explained."

"There can be no harm in telling the story," Mrs. Houghton replied to Mazie's inquiring look, and the latter began by repeating what the leader of the black men had insisted upon before he would agree to search for the boys.

"I didn't believe it was possible for me to discover the secret, even under the most favorable circumstances," she continued, "and the case seemed utterly hopeless while we were in such

deep distress concerning you. Of course I was just foolish enough to cry, and during an hour did nothing else. In the meanwhile mother had gone to work on the figures, and it made me ashamed to see her puzzling over what she knew nothing about, while I remained idle."

"It strikes me that a person would need to understand very much concerning secret writing before it would be possible to read the old pirate's riddle by any known system," Ernest said with a laugh.

"My success was really the result of an accident," Mazie continued. "I began by trying to arrange a square of letters sufficiently large to correspond with the figures in the cipher; but even if that had been the proper method I should most likely have failed because the thought that you might be starving would keep coming into my mind. Then I grew discouraged again, and tried once more to persuade the old man into sending a boat along the shore. He refused positively and finally would not even listen to me.

"It was evening when I took up the perplex-

ing figures again, resolved to study them until some result was gained. That old book which had been taken from Captain Dorr's house lay on the table, and its title, 'Phisicke Against Famine,' recalled your probable condition so vividly that I was about to put it out of sight when the thought occurred that if any one needed a physic against famine it was you. From that moment everything seemed clear. The last sentence of the message which we discovered by means of the ancient volume says, as you remember, 'Take away from what has been set down, the sum of the name, and the remainder shall stand revealed.' "

"But what is the sum of the name?" Perry asked, impatiently.

"Something which can be determined very easily," Mazie replied, laughingly. "By using the small square I first made, with the name, or title, of the book as a key, it was found, and after subtracting those figures from 'what had been set down,' I had as a result the simplest form of a checker-board cipher. In less than

half an hour from the time the idea first occurred to me that the ancient volume still had some connection with the cryptogram, it was solved, and before midnight a boat left the harbor in search of you."

"I don't understand any better now than I did before," Ernest interrupted.

"You will see how simple it is when I produce the problem worked out on paper," Mazie replied, determined to relate the events in such sequence as she thought proper. "The old man went with the sailors as he had promised, and carried those articles which might be necessary for your comfort. They allowed the boat to drift with the wind and current during the night, watching all the while for a camp fire, and after sunrise rowed along the coast several hours until a pole with a coat on it was seen at the edge of the beach."

"I set it up before making the last attempt to find water," Ernest explained.

"The old man thought you became insensible immediately after placing it in position, for you

were lying on the sand close beside it, while Perry was yet in the thicket. When the boat returned, mother and I were afraid both of you were dangerously ill; but the tea, which the steward made from some disagreeable-looking herbs, had a most wonderful effect. Perry recovered consciousness in less than an hour, while your stupor was changed into what seemed like profound, restful slumber."

"How long have we been here?" Ernest asked.

"Since four o'clock yesterday afternoon."

"Then we were away from the schooner only two days?"

"Just about forty-four hours."

"Well," Perry said, emphatically, "if we haven't got backbone enough to last longer than that, no matter how many hardships were to be endured, we ought to cultivate our muscle."

"Strength isn't all that is necessary under such circumstances. With proper food, and no anxiety of mind, you could probably have held out very much longer," Mrs. Houghton replied,

gravely. "Now you are both looking weary, and it is time you had some sleep. Mazie and I will go into the cabin."

"She hasn't explained the cipher yet," Ernest said, quickly. "We want to hear about this before taking another nap."

"It would require too much time, and you need more rest," was the widow's very decided reply. Then, before the boys could make any protest, both she and Mazie had left the room.

Mrs. Houghton and her daughter were in such a frame of mind when they went on deck as admitted of their enjoying the scene before them. The luxuriant foliage growing to the very edge of the white sand, the placid waters of deepest blue, the song of birds, and even the noise made by the workmen, were all pleasing because of the old man's positive assurance that all the prisoners should be released immediately after the schooner arrived at Captain Winny's Island.

Already was the little craft apparently in a seaworthy condition. The spars were in position, although not quite as shapely as those which had been carried away; the damage to the hull

had been repaired, and the rigging was nearly stretched.

“Now that the boys have so far recovered, and there is no question of our being considered prisoners, I shan’t feel badly if we stay here a week longer,” Mazie said, after she and her mother had gazed in silence on the scene before them several moments.

“At the same time I hope you will not object to leaving to-morrow morning,” a voice behind her said, and, turning, she saw the old man, who had approached silently, as if to overhear their conversation.

“Are you intending to sail so soon?” Mrs. Houghton asked, in surprise.

“If nothing happens, we shall set sail shortly after sunrise. By that time the repairs will be so far advanced that the remainder can easily be attended to while we are at sea.” Then he added, in a lower tone, “and when the full moon once more appears in the evening sky, my people shall have at their shrine that talisman which will enable them to throw off the yoke borne so long.”

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SOLUTION

ALTHOUGH Mazie had signified her willingness to remain on the schooner a week longer, the information that they were to set sail so soon was in the highest degree gratifying, and with the liveliest impatience she waited until the joyful tidings could be imparted to the boys.

Not until an hour after dinner had been served was any sound heard from the stateroom, and then a knocking on the wall told that the long nap was finished.

“We are to start for home in the morning!” she cried as, with her mother, she entered the room.

“That’s good news,” Ernest replied, but without exhibiting as much pleasure as Mazie thought the occasion demanded.

“Why, I supposed you would be perfectly

wild with joy," she said, in a tone of disappointment.

"I fancy we shall be in that condition presently," Ernest replied, laughingly; "but just now we are devoured with curiosity because of the cipher. Give us the whole story of how you succeeded in reading that puzzling combination of figures, and then we will make a very intense exhibition of joy."

Mazie left the room, returning a moment later with several large sheets of paper which she spread on the coverlet of Ernest's bed, saying meanwhile to Perry:

"You can look over our heads and see all that is going on, for I don't feel like making the explanation twice."

From his point of vantage Perry could readily perceive the figures, and Mazie began by saying:

"The square of letters which I made the other day contains the secret both of the message and the key, the sum of the latter being subtracted from the original figures. Take the checker-

board plan of arranging the letters, and set down the key words, which are 'Phisicke Against Famine.' Now find the first letter's place on the board—P. It is in the fifth column, and the third row, therefore represented by 53. Do the same by each letter in turn, repeating the three words until you have characters sufficient to correspond with the cipher, and the result will be this."

Here Mazie pointed to the paper on which was the conclusion of her work, the following being an exact copy of the same.

It must be observed that the original cipher is first written, the sum of the key placed below it, and each number subtracted from the other as shown below :

97	64	84	68	84	72	95	95	54	75	22	76	67	45
53	32	42	34	42	31	52	51	11	22	11	42	33	34
<hr/>													
44	32	42	34	42	41	43	44	43	53	11	34	34	11
69	23	56	55	85	87	75	87	43	75	75	95	55	103
44	12	11	23	42	33	51	53	32	42	34	42	31	52
<hr/>													
25	11	45	32	43	54	24	34	11	33	41	53	24	51
85	62	46	26	93	67	85	75	36	62	67	85	45	95
51	11	22	11	43	33	34	44	12	11	23	42	33	51
<hr/>													
34	51	24	15	51	34	51	31	24	51	44	43	12	44

85	83	63	58	53	53	63	84	66	33	36	74	76	85
53	32	42	34	42	31	52	51	11	22	11	42	33	34
32	51	21	24	11	22	11	33	55	11	25	32	43	51
59	63	35	54	53	66	75	104	43	83	78	74	73	86
44	12	11	23	42	33	51	53	32	42	34	42	31	52
15	51	24	31	11	33	24	51	11	41	44	32	42	34
76	53	35	24	76	84	65	98	36	62	76	66	75	106
51	11	22	11	42	33	34	44	12	11	23	42	33	51
25	42	13	13	34	51	31	54	24	51	53	24	42	55
104	66	86	45	75	72	94	84	52	65	54	66	76	46
53	32	42	34	42	31	52	51	11	22	11	42	33	34
51	34	44	11	33	41	42	33	41	43	43	24	43	12
76	66	55	35	53	64	93	86	54	76	77	96	75	84
44	12	11	23	42	33	51	53	32	42	34	42	31	52
32	54	44	12	11	31	42	33	22	34	43	54	44	32
62	55	75	35	93	64	76	78	63	24	68	75	76	94
51	11	22	11	42	33	34	44	12	11	23	42	33	51
11	44	53	24	51	31	42	34	51	13	45	33	43	43
86	83	77	78	66	82	75	102	64	65	53	75	77	77
53	32	42	34	42	31	52	51	11	22	11	42	33	34
33	51	35	44	24	51	23	51	53	43	42	33	44	43
56	46	43	34	83	76	76	84	43	76	78	63	76	85
44	12	11	23	42	33	51	53	32	42	34	42	31	52
12	34	32	11	41	43	25	31	11	34	44	21	45	33

102	22	46	62	76	77	87	86	45	62	35	84	57	85
51	11	22	11	42	33	34	44	12	11	23	42	33	51
51	11	24	51	34	44	53	42	33	51	12	42	24	34
97	53	93	45	66	73	85	73	55	54	62	75	64	85
53	32	42	34	42	31	52	51	11	22	11	42	33	34
44	21	51	11	24	42	33	22	44	32	51	33	31	51
85	66	62	74	53	67	95	97	57	93	67	86	76	64
44	12	11	23	42	33	51	53	32	42	34	42	31	52
41	54	51	51	11	34	44	44	25	51	33	44	45	12
102	62	66	45	85	87	78	76	55	44	74	74	87	84
51	11	22	11	42	33	34	44	12	11	23	42	33	51
51	51	44	34	43	54	44	32	43	33	51	32	54	33
94	56	93	75										
53	32	42	34										
41	24	51	41										

“Now,” Mazie continued, with an air of triumph, “we have found the sum of the name, and what remains from that which was first set down, consequently the whole is reduced to the simplest possible cipher. It is only necessary to find the equivalent for these last figures, and, using the checker-board key in the same manner as before, Captain Dorr’s secret is revealed to those whom he spent the latter portion of his

life trying to avoid. Here are the words, punctuated as I thought might be proper."

Mazie handed the boys a smaller piece of paper, and they read the following :

" This I do to pass away hours, and preserve secret of the Braganza. Whoever can read this will secure prize. Stand in door of hut facing south at precisely noon. Extreme point of shadow cast by nearest pine, first bearing. Thence due east twenty feet, south one hundred."

Ernest read these lines several times, and then said :

" It seems to me the directions should have been plainer after all the trouble Captain Dorr took to conceal them. What did the black man say about it?"

" He was delighted, and appeared to be perfectly satisfied."

" Even if he isn't, this settles our portion of the business, doesn't it?" Perry asked. " As I understand it, we were to be allowed to do as we pleased after the cipher had been read."

" He hasn't the slightest idea of keeping us on

board any longer than we wish to stay," Mazie replied, quickly. "Of course, we don't care to go ashore until the schooner is somewhere near our homes."

"Certainly not," and Perry added, with a grimace, "I was only thinking that if we had remained quietly on board a few hours longer, considerable suffering and anxiety might have been omitted."

"Perhaps in that case I wouldn't have had sufficient incentive to force me to work out the cipher, as was the case when I believed you boys were starving. There is no reason, however, why we should discuss the matter now that it is happily settled. I'm going on deck again, and I think it would be well for you boys to follow me unless exercise seems disagreeable."

"We'll be there in a minute," Ernest replied, and Mazie and her mother left the room, the boys joining them on deck a little later.

The knowledge that they were no longer prisoners, but free to depart whenever it should so please them, had such a beneficial effect on the

invalids that, before they had been in the open air two hours, it would have required quite a critical examination to discover any traces of the hardships so lately undergone.

Both took the keenest interest in all that was being done by the sailors, and while they speculated as to whether the schooner would be in a seaworthy condition by morning, Mrs. Houghton whispered to Mazie :

“ Watch the man who fills the position of first or second mate, and see if I am mistaken in thinking he acts strangely.”

Mazie did as she was bidden, and after a few moments was forced to admit that his behavior seemed queer, to say the least. He gazed at the white party as if suspicious that they were plotting mischief, and from time to time consulted with his brother officers, looking toward the boys in such a manner as to convince Mrs. Houghton that they were the subject of the conversation.

“ It is foolish to stand here searching for signs of trouble,” Mazie said, at length. They are

probably talking about the boys' attempt to run away and nothing more."

At this moment Ernest, who had been standing a few paces in advance of Perry, stepped toward Mazie as he whispered:

"I don't think those fellows have any too much love for Perry and me, judging from the manner in which they look at us. I'll take mighty good care to keep out of their way during the remainder of the time we stay on the craft."

That the peculiar actions of the officers had been observed by Ernest, caused Mazie considerable disquietude, since it proved that there could have been no mistake on her part, and she resolved to have a conversation with the old man regarding this show of enmity at the earliest opportunity.

While the others enjoyed the scene from the deck of the schooner she went fore and aft in search of the leader; but he could not be found.

"Perhaps it is just as well," she said to herself, "I shall have plenty of time to talk with him before we reach Roanoke."

Then joining the others she soon forgot this slight cause for uneasiness while listening to the discussion between the boys as to the possibility of finding the Braganza.

CHAPTER XXVII

A COWARDLY PLOT

THE little party, who were now so happy in the belief that they would soon be at home, did not care to leave the deck until the steward announced that supper was ready, and by that time the work of refitting the schooner was so far advanced that but little more remained to be done.

Neither of the two men who had followed Captain Dorr for so many years were on board, unless, indeed, they were hiding in their staterooms, and as this was by no means probable, the boys concluded they had gone to the port from which the spars were brought.

“We shall see them in the morning,” Perry said, as he seated himself at the table. “The schooner can be got under way at any time, and it isn’t likely they will lose many hours, because of

the possibility that Captain Jake might accidentally find the diamonds.”

The others were of the same opinion, and Mrs. Houghton proposed that they retire early in order to be on deck next morning when the schooner left the harbor.

She and Mazie went into their stateroom almost immediately after supper, and Perry followed their example ; but Ernest insisted that he could not sleep because of the very long nap during the forenoon.

“I’ll go on deck a little while, and will take good care not to disturb you when I come back,” he said.

Perry made no protest, for he was so weary that nothing in the way of pleasure would have tempted him from the cabin, and Ernest went softly up the companionway ladder, but without intending to move in a stealthy manner.

When he had nearly reached the top, he heard the sound of voices in private conversation. It was impossible not to distinguish a few

words, and these were well calculated to arouse his curiosity.

“We had better speak in English,” the mate was saying to his brother officer, “for if the men should overhear they might be fools enough to inform those whom we must obey.”

“Every member of the crew feels exactly as we do about these people, and would be only too well pleased to aid in our plan,” the second man replied.

“They are surely talking about us,” Ernest said to himself as he crouched lower within the shadow of the companionway. “It won’t do very much harm if I listen to a little more of this conversation.”

“It will be safer if we do the work ourselves, and much more certain,” the first officer said. “Of course there will be a big row when the boys are missed, and if they do not confide in the men they cannot betray us. The master must be made to think that they have run away.”

“When is it to be done?”

“As soon as they are asleep—say in two or three hours.”

“The slightest outcry from them could be heard by the women, and the master would have little difficulty in discovering who had done the work. I tremble when I think of his wrath, for it is said he spares no one who dares to disobey.”

“If you grow afraid so soon leave the work to me, and, unaided, I will remove these stumbling blocks from the path of our gods.”

“I have no intention of refusing to do my full share, for I am convinced that all our misfortunes, since sighting the island, are due to them. Once they have been removed we shall be able to find, without difficulty, the mystic stone which is to make of our people a great nation. Tell me what I am to do?”

“It is very simple,” the first speaker replied in a matter-of-fact tone, as if talking of the most honorable transaction. “In two hours, unless the master returns before then, we will steal into their room. By moving quickly and cautiously we can prevent any outcry. To strangle and

throw them overboard should not be a difficult task. Go forward now to prevent suspicion, and come aft again in two hours."

It can well be imagined that listening to the arrangements for his own murder did not tend to make Ernest feel comfortable or composed; he was trembling as with an ague fit, but not from fear. As yet he did not realize his utter helplessness; but understood that detection now meant instant death, and all his energies were centered on the effort to reach the stateroom without making a noise.

Fortunately both the men walked forward a short distance; had either attempted to enter the cabin Ernest must have been discovered before reaching the bottom of the ladder.

Now he had a moment in which to compose himself. Wiping the perspiration from his face, he stole softly across the floor, entering the stateroom so quietly that Perry was not aware of his presence until he asked in a whisper:

"Are you awake?"

"I've hardly had time to get into bed yet,"

was the reply in an ordinary tone of voice.

“What brought you back so soon?”

“Don’t speak above a whisper,” Ernest said, trembling with excitement.

“What’s the matter now? Has the old man come back?” And Perry leaped out of bed thoroughly alarmed by his cousin’s extreme agitation.

“The two mates believe we are responsible for all their bad luck in this hunt for the diamonds, and have laid plans to kill us in a few hours!”

It was several moments before Perry could ask a question, and while he remained in a perfect stupor of fear, Ernest repeated all he had overheard.

“What can we do? We musn’t stay here!” Perry cried in a tone so loud that Ernest shook him roughly to prevent any further noise.

“Unless you are more careful we will have them upon us immediately,” he whispered sternly. “Help me to form some plan for keeping out of their way till the leader comes back; it is evi-

dent they don't dare to injure us while he is here."

Perry was not in a proper frame of mind to be of much assistance; the fact of their helplessness unnerved him completely, and, clasping his cousin's hand as if for protection, he awaited some suggestion from him.

Several moments elapsed before Ernest spoke, and then it was to say, in a hesitating way, as if uncertain whether such a course would be wise:

"Let us waken Mrs. Houghton; she may be able to suggest something, and, besides, it is necessary she should know what is going on."

"Yes, yes," Perry replied, nervously; "she will know what it is best to do."

Ernest crept softly to Mrs. Houghton's door, and that she was not asleep could be told from the promptness with which his faint knock was answered.

"Will you let us come in?" he asked, and understanding from his manner of speaking that there were serious reasons for such a request, she opened the door at once.

The story of the cowardly plot was quickly told, and the widow at once proved herself to be a valuable ally.

“According to your account the men do not intend to make any move for an hour or more,” she said, after a short pause. “You will have time to search the cabin for something which will serve as a weapon, and in the meantime Mazie and I will see what can be done toward barricading the room. It is only a question of keeping the men at bay until their master returns, which must be very soon if he intends to set sail at sunrise.”

Ernest obeyed these instructions without delay; but a search of the cabin failed to reveal anything which would be of service as a means of defense.

In ten minutes he and Perry entered the room again, to find Mazie and her mother fully dressed, and the night lamp burning.

“I hardly expected you would find a weapon,” she said when Ernest reported his failure. “By taking the bottom boards from the berth we can

barricade the door in such a manner as to make an entrance impossible, except at the expense of considerable noise."

Mazie had already removed the bedding, and was now working in the coolest possible manner to carry out her mother's instructions. This was sufficient to arouse Perry's waning courage, and in a few minutes all were proceeding with the defense as if accustomed to such episodes.

By bracing the boards from the side of the berth the door was made reasonably firm ; but before the work could be completed Mazie raised her hand to enjoin silence.

The sound of stealthy footsteps could be heard from the cabin, and there was no question but that the would-be murderers had come to do their work.

Ernest with his ear to the crack of the door, heard the men enter his room, come out again, and then go on deck.

"It won't take long for them to learn where we are," he whispered to Perry, whose face had grown very pale.

The short interval of time which elapsed before the sound of returning footsteps could be heard again, was utilized by the little party in strengthening the props, and the door was reasonably secure when, by gestures, Ernest reported that the men were once more in the cabin.

The critical moment was not long delayed. The prisoners could hear the knob of the door turned softly, and as it did not yield to the pressure, a brief consultation was held and then a low voice from the outside said imperatively :

“Unlock this door!”

No reply was made to the demand, and it was repeated a moment later.

“Force it open!” one of the men finally said. “We have got so far now that it’s as dangerous to retreat as to continue. Unless the mouths of all are closed the master will hear of what we have tried to do. By cutting the boat adrift it can be made to appear that they have run away.”

This argument evidently convinced the timid one, for he replied hastily :

“Wait here while I get an axe.”

Then was heard the sound of footsteps as the would-be assassin left the cabin, and all hope of making a successful resistance fled from the hearts of the prisoners.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AN OPPORTUNE ARRIVAL

AS soon as the mate left the cabin the sound of hasty footsteps could be heard on deck as if something unusual had excited the men, and for one brief moment those in the stateroom fancied the master of the black men had returned.

That such was not the case, however, could be told a few seconds later, when he who had been left below shouted angrily :

“What is the matter up there? Why have the men left the fore-castle?”

Instead of replying from the deck, the mate came below, and his comrade asked :

“What have you done to raise such a row among the crew?”

“It was necessary to make some explanation, for they became suspicious when I went into the carpenter’s room.”

“What did you tell them?”

“The truth, of course. Do you suppose they won't hear the sound of the axe?”

To this the officer replied angrily but in his native tongue. It was evident that hot words passed between the two men, and Ernest was hoping a regular fight would ensue, when the noise of many footsteps could be heard on the companionway ladder.

As nearly as the boys were able to judge, the entire crew came into the cabin. The quarrel became quite violent, as if participated in by all hands, and during the next ten minutes a perfect babel of cries filled the apartment.

It was impossible for those in the stateroom to decide whether a portion of the crew were opposed to violence, or if simply the method of death was being decided upon.

“If they come to blows the matter may not be settled until the old man gets back;” Ernest said, after trying in vain to gain from the medley of sounds some idea as to the reason for the uproar.

Whatever may have caused this diversion, it was not long continued. Probably hardly more than a quarter of an hour had elapsed from the time the differences of opinion first arose, before the tumult died away, and once more was a demand made for the door to be opened.

“They mean business now,” Ernest said grimly, and then he added to those outside: “We are prepared to defend ourselves, and shall not hesitate to inflict every possible injury if you attempt to force an entrance.”

The mate evidently translated these words for the benefit of his companions, and instantly loud, angry shouts were heard, followed by a vigorous attack upon the door.

“Now we must take what comes,” Ernest said as, with the water-pitcher as a weapon, he stood ready to meet the first assault.

Perry was close by his side, while Mrs. Houghton and Mazie were near the porthole gazing out into the gloom, hoping against hope that the master of the schooner might arrive before it was too late.

The attack on the door was made with savage fury, and when half a dozen blows had been delivered, Perry said:

“They know by this time that we have no weapons, and intend to make quick work of us.”

The two upper panels were already shattered, and the crowd of black men, which nearly filled the cabin, could be seen.

Again the axe descended, the door gave way, and Ernest raised the pitcher to strike at least one blow before being overpowered, when in the merest fraction of time the tumult was hushed. The men who a moment previous had been clamoring for blood, stood as if suddenly turned to stone.

Ernest, who had been watching the foremost man, now looked toward the companionway, and then cried joyously:

“We’re saved! We’re saved! Their master has come!”

Pressing near the aperture, the remainder of the little party could see, standing near the lad-

der, the one man above all others who could aid them. He was making no threatening movement; but had his eyes fixed upon the group as if only a glance was necessary to subdue.

During fully five minutes he stood there motionless and silent, and then one by one the men crept toward the companionway, bent only on escaping from that withering gaze.

The two mates were the last to move, and before they could reach the ladder the old man said, sternly :

“Stop! I wish to know the meaning of your attack upon these people whom I have promised shall be safely landed in their native country, and the explanation must be made here, in English, that they may understand all you say.”

The man whom Ernest had heard propose the murder attempted to speak in his native tongue; but was immediately interrupted by the leader, who asked, angrily :

“Did you hear me say that I wished those who have aided us so materially in our search for the talisman to hear all that was said?”

“I would prefer to speak to the master privately; but his commands are not to be disobeyed.”

“It might have been well had you realized that before,” was the sarcastic reply.

“What we have attempted to do,” the man said, with a show of submissiveness, “was to aid in the task which is so dear to us all. Unaided did the master and his friends discover the pirate’s hiding-place, and, though many years were spent in the search, no harm befell either of the sacred three until these people were met. Then the great Chola was drowned, and his ashes scattered to the winds because his mission had not been accomplished. After that our enemies came in pursuit, and nothing save your skill prevented our capture; then the elements conspired against us, and the search was still further delayed. The gods are angry because these white people are on the sacred vessel, and to propitiate them did I resolve to rid her of their hateful presence. The master himself must feel that we shall never find the mystical

stone while they are allowed to pollute our shrine.”

“I have listened to the babbling of a child,” the old man said, when the mate ceased speaking. “If the gods wished this thing done, would you alone know of such fact? Am I their mouthpiece, or do they speak through those who should obey? Go into the fore-castle, fools, and there remain until you are summoned.”

The two officers ascended the ladder in silence, and when they reached the deck the old man said, as he approached the shattered door :

“It is not necessary for me to say I regret this thing has been done; but it shall not be repeated, and you need have no fear concerning the future. The steward shall make ready other rooms, and from this time until we reach your own country it will be my care to see that nothing more, of an alarming or a disagreeable nature, can occur.”

Without waiting for a reply he went on deck,

and the little party were left alone to discuss the more than unpleasant episode.

“If those fellows have got the idea that we must be killed before the diamonds can be found, the old man will have his hands full trying to keep them at a proper distance,” Ernest said, gloomily. “It won’t do to go on deck very often, and who knows but that the steward will consider it his duty to put poison in our food?”

“Don’t try to imagine disagreeable things,” Mazie said, with a shudder. “It can’t take very long to reach the coast, and there is no question but that the leader and his friends will protect us.”

“Mazie is right,” Mrs. Houghton added. “It will do no good to speculate upon what may happen; but we must exercise every caution during the remainder of our stay on board. We need not leave the cabin, save, perhaps, to stand on the companionway ladder, and, after what has been seen of the power which the leader has

over his men, I do not think we have reason to fear another attack."

The entrance of the steward put an end to this very unpleasant conversation. He brought a light lunch, as if it was necessary they should have something with which to occupy their attention while the rooms were being put in order; and, while the mournful party were eating, the sound of a man speaking in loud, angry tones, could be heard from the deck.

"The leader is reading the crew a lecture on our account, I fancy," Mazie said, and, as the speaker continued several moments, the others were of the same opinion.

It was quite late in the evening when Mrs. Houghton again proposed that they should retire, and it is safe to say that every member of the party looked carefully to the door fastenings before lying down.

The involuntary passengers did not sleep very soundly on this night; but yet the schooner was got under way before they were aware of the fact, and when, shortly after sunrise, Ernest

attempted to get out of bed, he found walking very difficult.

The old man himself summoned them to breakfast, and after they were seated at the table, he said, courteously :

“ We have started, as you perceive, and with wind enough to carry us across at good speed. I think there is no doubt but that this voyage will end, so far as you are concerned, in two, or, at the most, three days.”

“ Is it safe for us to leave the cabin ?” Mrs. Houghton asked.

“ If you mean as regards the crew, there is not the slightest possibility of danger. I am positive they will never again offend.”

After waiting a few moments longer, as if to assure himself that they would be properly attended to, the old man went on deck again and at the first opportunity, when the party were alone, Ernest said :

“ He may think he knows exactly how the crew feel about us ; but it's a mistake. When the steward comes in, watch him closely, and you

can see 'mischief' written on every feature of his black face."

During the remainder of the meal all observed the attendant closely, and when the table had been cleared Mazie gave her opinion of the situation by saying:

"I believe Ernest is correct, and that not only the steward, but most probably the crew, would throw us overboard at the first opportunity. Their idea that the diamond will never be found if we are permitted to remain on what is called the 'sacred' vessel, would be sufficient inducement for them to disobey the leader's commands."

"You may be right," Mrs. Houghton added, as a troubled look came over her face; "and to avoid any possible danger we will remain here, or in the rooms, until the time comes to go on shore."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE PIRATE'S ISLAND

WHETHER the precautions decided upon by the involuntary passengers were absolutely necessary, it was impossible to say. With the exception of the steward, none of the crew came below, and as neither of the little party went on deck during the next two days, there was no opportunity for any show of hatred.

During this time the old man took especial pains to visit them at least once every two or three hours to assure himself that they wanted for nothing, and on each of these occasions he reported such progress as the vessel had made.

It was about nine o'clock on the morning of the third day after leaving the harbor which had served as dock, when the leader came below, he having been on deck since a very early hour, and made a most pleasing announcement.

“We are within a few miles of the coast,” he said, “and shall land very soon. I do not intend to run up the Sound again; but propose leaving the schooner outside while we go ashore in the small boat.”

It is needless to speak of the delight all felt at knowing that the unpleasant voyage was so nearly ended. This joy was exhibited in a variety of ways; but no one was more demonstrative than Ernest, until a disagreeable thought occurred to him, and then he asked, quickly:

“How will it be possible to land from the outside? To reach Captain Winny’s island it is necessary to cross the coast line of sand, and after that has been done another boat is needed.”

“I understand what you mean,” the old man replied, with a smile. “It can be readily understood that we do not care to run the risk of meeting with your friend, or any one whom he may have sent in pursuit of us. By leaving the schooner outside, and taking the small boat with us, even at the expense of dragging her a long distance over the sand, we shall be prepared for

flight if it becomes necessary. However, I do not anticipate any trouble. We shall probably finish our work on the island, and leave there by to-morrow morning at the very latest."

"But what is to be done with us?" Mrs. Houghton asked, quickly. "We might be forced to remain there many days before any one came to take us off."

"Do not give yourself any uneasiness concerning that," the old man replied. "After what your daughter has done for us we shall take every possible step to insure the comfort of all. You will be landed at Roanoke unless we should have the good fortune to sight a vessel bound through the canal."

With this assurance and the knowledge that they were within the boundaries of their own country, all fear of what the crew might do was forgotten, and the little party hastened on deck, viewing the long stretch of low-lying sand as if it was a most beautiful and fertile piece of land.

The little schooner was already being hove to ; both boats were in the water, and the general

appearance of everything indicated that the voyage had come to a close.

As he watched the sailors, Ernest became aware that several looked at him from time to time with an expression which was anything rather than friendly ; but it seemed as if he was so very near home that there could no longer be any reason for anxiety.

“It won't be many hours now before we say good-bye to them, whether the diamonds are found or not,” he thought, “so they are at liberty to look as sour as they please.”

When the schooner had been hove to, eight men were ordered into one of the boats, and, approaching Mrs. Houghton, the old man asked :

“Is there anything below which you wish to take on shore?”

“Our baggage is so limited that we can readily carry it with us,” the widow replied, laughingly.

“Then, before we leave the schooner for the last time, I wish to present that which was promised as a reward for reading the cipher. You can divide them as seems proper,” and he

handed her a tiny box, which, on being opened, revealed to view seven small, but very brilliant diamonds.

Mazie fairly screamed with delight as she saw the sparkling stones; but her mother said, gravely, at the same time extending the package toward the old man:

“They are very beautiful; but we cannot think of accepting anything so valuable.”

“Do not hesitate on that score, madam,” he replied, gravely. “We have held you prisoners without other right than our own necessities, and it is but just that some reparation should be made. At a future day I shall endeavor to offer a better recompense.”

Then turning quickly, as if to prevent any reply, he gave some orders in his native tongue to his mates, after which Mrs. Houghton and Mazie were assisted into the boat, the boys clambering over the rail in their own fashion.

The schooner had been brought as near in-shore as the depth of water would permit, and with two pairs of oars out, the trip to the beach

was made in a few moments. Then the boys understood how the sand spit was to be crossed.

With four men on either side of the boat it was a simple matter to carry her to the Sound, when, without delay, the last portion of the journey was begun.

Eagerly the little party of white people scanned the shore of the old pirate's island for signs of the Midge, and while they were yet a long distance away Ernest electrified his companions by shouting :

“There she is afloat ! Her upper works seem to be nearly repaired, and I believe I can see some one on board ! Ahoy ! Yacht ahoy !”

Mazie and Perry joined their voices to his ; but without really expecting to receive a reply, and, consequently, their surprise was very great when a face with grizzled beard appeared above the rail, revealing the familiar features of the Midge's owner.

“There's Captain Jake !” Mazie cried in delight. “Now the question of how we are to get home is settled.”

Then the boys and Mazie shouted again, the sailors glaring at them angrily, and the astonished commander of the launch finally succeeded in replying :

“ Ahoy on the boat ? ”

“ Don't you know us, captain ? ” Ernest shouted at the full strength of his lungs, and although the boat was a long distance away, those on board could distinctly hear the old man give vent to a prolonged whistle of surprise.

“ I am very glad your friend is here, ” the leader of the blacks said to Mrs. Houghton.

“ It surely is a great relief to me, ” the widow replied.

Neither Mazie nor the boys paid any attention to the scowling looks around them, so busily were they engaged in watching their old friend, and when the boat's keel grated on the sand all three leaped out, to be caught consecutively in the arms of the captain, who appeared undecided as to whether he should first welcome them, or settle his accounts with the black man.

“Don't give way to anger until you have heard our story,” Mrs. Houghton whispered as she in turn clasped his hand, and without making any reply, or even bestowing a look upon the master of the schooner, Captain Jake led his friends toward the temporary workshop erected on the beach near where the Midge had gone ashore.

“Now tell me all about it,” he said, seating himself on a piece of timber. “That black feller is makin' ready to go up to the hut, an' before he gets very far I want to have some idea of how we stand. This time I'm fixed so's I can defend myself, an' ain't obliged to shut my mouth while he talks.”

In the fewest possible words Mrs. Houghton gave an account of all that had occurred since they were forced to go on board the schooner, and in concluding displayed the package of diamonds.

“Wa'al, that ain't so bad after all,” the captain said, his eyes losing considerable of their vengeful look; “but what about the stuff we

found in old Winny's hut? Have you got that yet?"

"Nothing has been taken from us," Mrs. Houghton replied. "Except for the fact of being prisoners, we couldn't have had better treatment."

"I reckon the trip won't turn out a losin' one after all," and the captain's face wore an expression of most intense satisfaction. "The yacht is comin' out of the scrape all right, an' in a couple of days I shall have the engine workin'."

During the conversation the boys and Mazie were examining the Midge from the shore, and were on the point of venturing aboard by means of a rudely constructed raft, when the leader of the blacks was seen coming toward them.

"Let's wait a minute, and see what's up," Ernest suggested.

The black man, having moored the boat a short distance from the shore, leaving one man on board as keeper, probably in order to be able to make a hurried start if the occasion should

arise, approached Captain Jake as he said, in a friendly tone :

“I hope it may yet be possible to convince you that I have not willfully injured any one.”

“I can't say but that you've done the fair thing by the widder, if we don't take into consideration the fact that you carried her an' the youngsters away ag'in their wills.”

“Such a course was forced upon me by circumstances,” the man replied, gravely. “I have tried to atone for the injustice, and now come to you with a proposition.”

“What is it?” inquired Captain Jake, with rather an important air.

“I want some assistance in locating the place designated by the cipher, and am willing to pay liberally for the service.”

Remembering the diamonds shown by Mrs. Houghton, and with an itching palm for some of the same kind, Captain Jake replied :

“If the job won't take too much time, I'm willin' to do what I can.”

“We shall probably finish it before sunset,”

the black man went on. "Come with me to the house."

The remainder of the party had suffered so keenly through the mystic stone that this last chapter in the story had for them the most absorbing interest, therefore they followed Captain Jake, determined to witness all the details of the search.

CHAPTER XXX

THE CURSE OF THE STONE

DURING the walk from the beach to the old pirate's house, and while the leader of the blacks was conversing with his crew, Ernest said to Captain Jake:

“You haven't yet told us what you've been doing since we were carried away. Have you seen our parents?”

“After makin' such a fool of myself as to let that schooner give me the slip in the gloom, I've stayed right here. I don't feel very proud about showin' up among folks what are likely to hear of the fizzle.”

“My father must be hunting for us by this time,” Perry said, with a sigh. “I wish they could know we are all right.”

“I don't reckon you have any call to worry about that,” Captain Jake replied, cheerily.

“We haven’t been away from home so long yet as to give them a chance to worry. Most likely they think you’re havin’ a reg’lar lark.”

Both Ernest and Perry believed that this view of the case was correct, simply because it coincided with their desires, and with considerably lighter hearts they questioned the old man concerning his movements since the night he left them to make his perilous trip.

“Oh! I got along slick as grease on that trip,” he said, with a laugh. “The wind carried me at the rate of two or three knots an hour, and by sunrise I was aboard a tug owned by a friend of mine ready to hunt for you. We waited only long enough to get extra provisions, coal, an’ some weapons that could be fired without doin’ more damage to the holder than any one else.”

“How long did you chase us?” Perry asked.

“Till the next day at nightfall, many hours after you had got well out to sea. That much we learned from a Beaufort pilot, an’ it wasn’t any use to go further, cause your craft could easily give us the slip. We put into Moorehead

City, where I got what supplies an' materials I should need in patchin' up the yacht."

"Have you been here ever since?" Mazie asked.

"Every blessed day except one when I went over to Roanoke after grub."

"Then you must have a boat," Perry suggested.

"Of course I have. You don't s'pose I'd be such a fool as to come back to this place without some means of leavin' when I got tired, do you?"

By the time this conversation was finished they had arrived at the house, where the black man was waiting for them with every sign of impatience.

"The crew of the schooner are in a condition very nearly approaching insubordination," he said to Captain Jake, "which explains why my friend, whom you have seen, is not here to give the assistance I require from you. It is not well to leave the sailors alone while any of your party are on the island."

“Are they still bent on killin’ them?” Captain Jake asked, in surprise.

“They believe it should be done if we wish to be successful,” was the quiet reply. “If we should fail in the first attempt, it will be necessary to conceal such fact from them until your party can be sent to Roanoke.”

“If any monkey shines are tried, they won’t find me as short-handed as you did,” was the grim reply.

“There need be no fear while I am here; but instead of wasting time over what will not happen—for we shall find the diamond—let us consult the cipher once more, that we may be ready to begin work exactly at noon, according to the directions.”

Ernest, who had overheard this conversation, now observed the sailors more closely. They were lying on the sparse grass in front of the house, talking earnestly among themselves, and watching keenly every member of the white party.

“I believe they *would* make trouble for us if

anything went wrong," he said to himself, and then, motioning to Perry, he whispered: "Suppose we go into the house and see what weapons Captain Jake has there. It might be possible such information would come in very handy."

Mazie and her mother had already entered the building, and the boys followed them, leaving the two men studying over the old pirate's directions for finding the mystic stone.

The interior of the cabin presented very much the same appearance as when the little party last saw it. Captain Jake had added to the store of provisions, made a more comfortable bed, brought in a goodly supply of fuel, and otherwise prepared for a long stay. In one corner was a modern fowling piece and a revolver, while near by stood the ancient weapons found in the old pirate's underground arsenal.

"I reckon we can take care of ourselves, no matter how much those black fellows may be inclined for mischief," Ernest said to Perry, and before the latter could reply, Mazie cried, as she pointed to the open door:

“See, they have begun to dig for the diamond! Come, boys, I wouldn’t miss seeing that wonderful stone when it is first taken from the ground.”

Ernest and Perry followed her as she ran out of the house, and on arriving at the place where some of the sailors were at work, it was found that the task of exhuming the Braganza had really been begun.

It was twenty minutes past noon. Bearings had been taken from the pine tree’s shadow, and the probable place of deposit decided upon.

The black men were working with feverish energy, while Captain Jake and their leader stood near by, the latter displaying the most intense emotion; his hands were clasped so tightly as to check the circulation of blood, and his face was absolutely livid.

Rapidly the men worked until half an hour passed, and yet nothing had been found save water. The boys and Mazie had given up all hope that the mystic stone would be brought to light, and the leader of the blacks already wore a look of the most profound mental agony, when

a loud, joyous shout from one of the sailors caused the blood to bound in the spectators' veins.

That shout of triumph was the only display of feeling indulged in by the blacks. Then one would have supposed they were engaged in the most common-place task.

From the excavation was sent up what appeared to be simply a package of tarred canvas, which the leader quickly cut open, his hands trembling violently, despite the immobility of his face.

Beneath this outer covering was found a small, but stout wooden box, the lid of which was removed without difficulty, displaying what seemed like balls of fire, rather than anything to be worn as an ornament.

Mazie uttered a loud exclamation of surprise and admiration; but the old black man fell on his knees as he held the glittering stones on high, while his companions gathered around him in every attitude expressive of adoration.

This apparent worship continued about five

minutes, and then, placing the package in his bosom, the old man said to Captain Jake, as he, with the sailors, went toward the water's edge:

“Remain here until I return from the schooner. My faithful companion must be permitted to join with me in celebrating the recovery of the talisman.”

The sailors had hurried into the boat, and their leader followed without speaking. Quick, vigorous strokes carried them away from the shore very rapidly, and when they were thirty or forty yards out Captain Jake shouted, as he ran toward the beach:

“Ahoy, there! Bear more to the starboard, or you'll strike the timbers of that wreck!”

The occupants of the boat were in such a state of excitement that it is doubtful if they heard the words.

The jagged timbers were dead ahead, and as a sudden gust of wind crested the waves with foam, the little craft, urged on by eight sturdy arms, struck the obstacle with such force as to crush every timber.

From that time all the frightened ones on the shore could see was a confused mass of struggling wretches, and bits of broken planks.

Instinctively the little party ran to the very edge of the beach, where they aided man after man ashore, until all save the leader gained a place of safety.

“Can you see anything of him?” Ernest cried as Captain Jake shaded his eyes with his hands, the better to distinguish objects among the crested waves.

“Not a thing,” was the mournful reply. “He must have sunk like a stone.”

“Would the diamonds be heavy enough to do that?” Mazie asked, in a tone of awe.

“Not in themselves, child; but 'cording to my way of thinkin', there was a curse on 'em such as would ha' carried down the best swimmer that ever went into the water.”

By the merest chance Ernest happened to look toward the sailors just at this moment, and saw that which caused an exclamation of fear to burst from his lips.

The black men, their faces distorted by grief and rage, were evidently making ready to rush upon the white party, and like a flash of light the leader's words came into his mind.

“Look out!” he shouted. “They are going to avenge their master's death by killing us!”

CHAPTER XXXI

AN UNPROVOKED ASSAULT

THERE was good cause for Ernest's warning cry. The black men, on being assisted through the surf by Captain Jake and the boys, clustered together a short distance down the beach, where they remained watching for some sign of their leader until there was no longer any possibility he could be alive.

That he alone of all the boat's crew should have perished, and so soon after succeeding in what had been a life search, seemed strange even to the party of whites; but to the blacks it was positive proof that their gods were angry because the sacrifice of those who profaned the schooner had not been permitted.

The two elder members of the throng harangued the others, probably arguing that if the white people were killed at once it would be

possible to recover the mystic stone, and just as Ernest looked in that direction the onward rush was made.

One minute later and it would have been impossible to reach the cabin before the infuriated men overtook them.

Fortunately Captain Jake's presence of mind did not forsake him, and equally fortunate it was also that Mrs. Houghton remained in the hut.

Seizing Mazie by the hand, the old man shouted as he started at full speed toward the cabin :

“Run for your lives, boys!”

Of all the party Perry was the only one who appeared confused. He hesitated as if not knowing which way to turn, and it was necessary for Ernest to literally push him along before he understood exactly what should be done.

Had the sailors been armed with any weapon besides their sheath-knives, more than one of the party would have been killed during that short chase ; but with the advantage of fully an

hundred feet in the start, it was possible to reach the hut while the nearest pursuer was ten feet behind Perry.

Even then one life might have been forfeited but for Mrs. Houghton. She had heard the howl of rage as the black men leaped toward their intended victims, and, seizing the fowling piece and the revolver, she stood in the door of the hut with the latter weapon leveled.

The ominous looking tube was sufficient to bring the sailor in advance to a halt, and before Captain Jake could raise the gun, the entire party were running at full speed around the corner of the house out of range.

“Barricade the door, lads, while I keep watch at the window!” the old man shouted as he took up his position where he could command a view of the blacks, who had come to a halt at the southern point of the island near the pirate’s grave. “I have a mind to put a bullet through that feller who is dancin’ ’round, most likely tryin’ to coax ’em on ag’in. I ain’t so old yet but that I could do it.”

“Don’t!” Mrs. Houghton cried. “We must not be the ones to shed the first blood. Perhaps they will go quietly on board the schooner now it is known we have weapons.”

“It ain’t well to fool yourself with any such idee as that,” Captain Jake replied, grimly. “If they’ve got the belief that the Braganza is lost forever unless we’re put out of the way, we may as well make up our minds for a long fight; more especially since there’s only one on board who don’t believe it must be done.”

Although the white party were not aware of the fact, a boat had started from the yacht as soon as possible after the accident had occurred, and now while Ernest and Perry looked out of the window facing the sea, after having barricaded the door, she was being drawn up on the beach.

The sailors on the island joined their companions at once, and a long conversation ensued, the principal topic of which probably was the result of the catastrophe.

“Now we’ll get an idee of what they mean to

do," Captain Jake said, as he watched them jealously.

"See!" Mazie cried, "some of the men are going in both directions along the beach. What can they be doing?"

"Lookin' for the body of the man who was drowned, most likely; but they might just as well save themselves the trouble."

"Do you think the current would carry it away?" Ernest asked.

"Not a bit of it, 'cause the water is pretty nigh slack between here an' the spit. It's them diamonds what are holdin' him down, an' the body won't rise till they have washed out of his clothes. It's jest the same as death for any one to touch 'em, an' we're going to have our share of trouble 'cause we helped find 'em."

"That is a foolish superstition," Mrs. Houghton said. "You have no right to speak of such ridiculous things."

"It's true, just the same, an' we'll find it out before this scrape is over," the old man replied doggedly.

“The boat is going back to the schooner, leaving the greater portion of the men behind,” Ernest cried from his post at the window.

The little party ceased conversation in order to learn from the maneuvers what the black men proposed to do.

The boat remained alongside the yacht ten or fifteen minutes, and was then rowed back to the shore with an additional number of men on board.

“They mean business this time,” Captain Jake said, as the party landed. “Every blessed one of ’em have got a gun, an’ it’s us they’re after.”

Ten men were stationed at different points on the beach, probably to watch for the body of their drowned leader.

Four sailors rowed the boat to and fro near the sinister-looking timbers of the partially submerged wreck, and the remainder, six in number, marched to where a full view of the house could be had, each taking his station behind a tree, or just beyond gunshot range.

“That’s so we can’t get away,” Captain Jake said, in a matter-of-fact tone. “They’ll stand guard there till the others have searched awhile for the corpse, an’ then we can look out for squalls.”

“If they come at us with a rush we shall stand no show at all,” Ernest said, his face growing several shades paler than usual. “Those flintlock guns are good for nothing but to make a noise.”

“We’ll prepare for their reception,” the old man said, as he looked around scrutinizingly. “In the first place, these windows must be boarded up, if that is possible, an’ then we’ll overhaul the guns.”

To carry this plan into effect was not so simple as might seem. The supply of lumber was limited to such pieces as yet remained from the floor, and the only nails obtainable were those which Captain Winny had driven into the walls for pegs.

It was possible, however, to close the window overlooking the Sound with some degree of

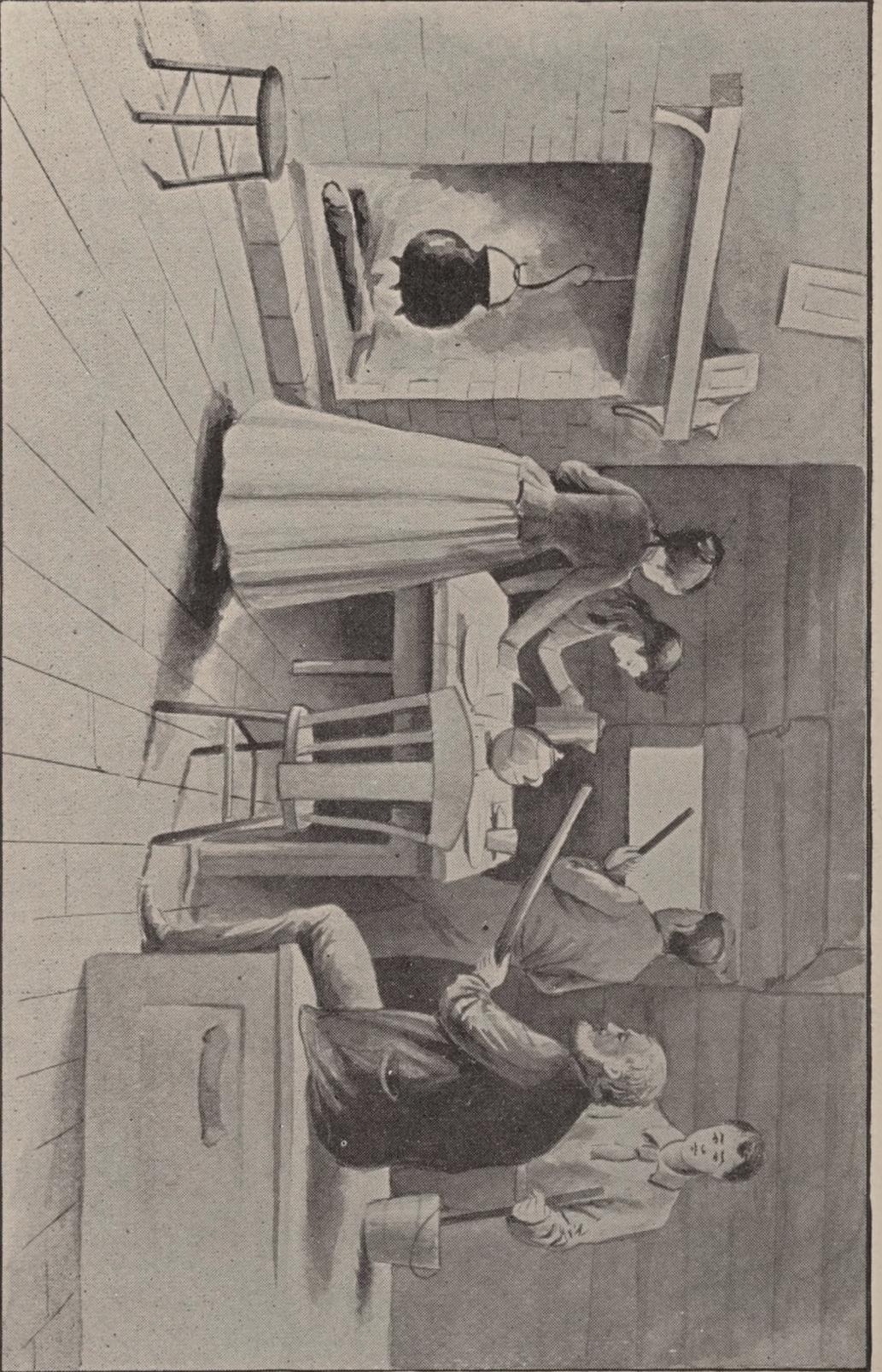
security. The one facing the south was necessarily left open the width of twelve inches from top to bottom.

In the door, and at several places around the wooden walls, loopholes were made in such a manner that a reasonably good view could be had of what occurred on the outside.

“I reckon we’ve done about all that is possible,” the old man said, as he surveyed with critical eye the result of their labors. “Now, Perry, you stand here and keep them niggers in sight, while Ernest an’ I try to put some of the flintlocks in shootin’ condition. Don’t hesitate to fire if any of the villains give you a chance.”

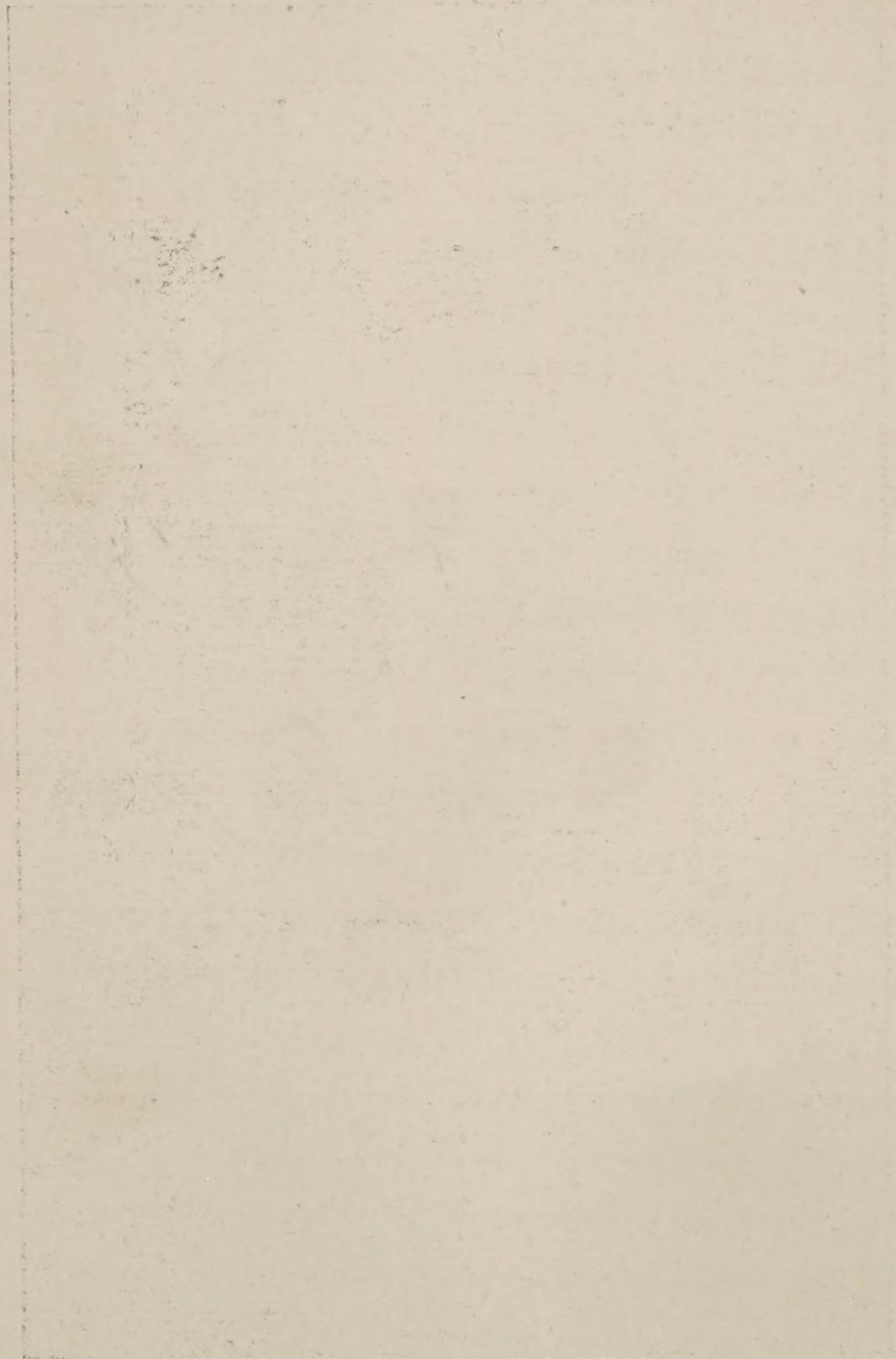
“It seems terrible to shoot at a human being,” Perry replied, as, armed with the fowling piece, he took up his position by the partially closed window.

“You’ll find that it ain’t half so bad as for them to shoot at you. There mustn’t be any hesitation now, for if we don’t fire to kill at the first chance, they’ll think we’re afraid, which will be all the worse for us when the fight begins.”



DEFENDING THE HUT AGAINST THE BLACKS

(See Page 334)



Perry promised to have no scruples about using his weapon, and, aided by Ernest, the old man began work on the ancient guns, Mazie joining the sentinel at the window, from which point of vantage she reported all that could be seen.

“The men in the boat are rowing around the wreck, and making signals to those on the schooner. Some of the sailors who were on the beach have come up to those on guard, and all appear to be creeping nearer the house.”

“Watch for a chance to shoot, Perry!” Captain Jake cried at this point. “The principal thing is to keep ’em from closin’ in on us.”

During the remainder of the day this condition of affairs remained unchanged. The search for the body of the drowned man was continued, and those who watched the house succeeded in crawling up a few paces despite Perry’s vigilance.

A thorough examination of Captain Winny’s weapons was not calculated to give much encouragement to those who would soon need every

possible method of defense. They were rusted both inside and out; but, regarding not the possible danger, Captain Jake loaded them heavily.

“I’ll take the responsibility of touching ’em off,” he said. “Now, Mrs. Houghton, you an’ Mazie set about gettin’ supper the same as if our friends had taken their black bodies to a more cheerful place, an’ I’ll give Perry a rest, for he’s had a pretty long watch.”

While the widow and her daughter were preparing a meal which made up in quantity what it lacked in quality, the old man discharged his weapon twice, remarking, as the noise of the reports died away :

“There’s one feller who won’t take very much interest in what happens after this.”

“Did you kill him?” Mazie asked, in a tone of awe.

“No such good luck,” was the grim reply; “but he’s got a couple of bullets somewhere in his body, an’ the other fellows are puttin’ him on the boat. Two or three doses like that an’ they’ll begin to have some respect for us.”

It was not a very jolly party which gathered around the supper table on this evening. The fact that night was fast approaching, when the blacks could creep up unobserved, caused the most dismal forebodings, and even Captain Jake looked anxious.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE NIGHT ATTACK

WHEN night settled down over sea and land every member of the besieged party was on the alert.

In order that no advantage should be had by the enemy, Captain Jake carefully extinguished the fire, and stationed one of his small army at each side of the building. Mrs. Houghton and Mazie were overlooking the northern and western portions of the island, because these were the points from which an attack was less liable to be made. Ernest was armed with the fowling piece, Perry had the revolver, and Captain Jake took charge of the entire flintlock collection.

Mazie and her mother were unarmed.

“Our lives depend now on the kind of watch that is kept,” the old man said, gravely. “Don’t

make any more noise than is absolutely necessary, and if any one begins to feel sleepy, own right up to it so's we can make sure he ain't allowed a chance to close his eyes."

"I don't fancy that will happen to a member of this party," Mazie replied, with a nervous laugh. "The knowledge that those men were outside waiting for an opportunity to kill us, would prevent my eyes from closing during a whole week."

"There are times when a person falls asleep, no matter how much danger there is in front of him," Captain Jake said, as he began to make his rounds from one loophole to another, as was his intention to do until morning, for the double purpose of aiding in the watch, and learning whether every member of the party remained on the alert.

The night was so clear that the light of the stars brought out with distinctness every object not within the line of shadow, and until midnight nothing of an alarming nature had been seen.

Mazie began to believe they had been mistaken regarding the intentions of the blacks, and had just expressed her sorrow because Captain Jake wounded the sailor, when Ernest said, in a whisper :

“ A boat is putting off from the schooner, and appears to be loaded with men.”

That was sufficient to quicken the pulse of every one, and with bated breath they waited for the first sound which should proclaim that the battle, in which all the chances were against them, had begun.

Another hour passed in silence, and then Captain Jake discharged one of the flintlocks at a dark object which had just emerged from the shadow of a tree.

The unexpected report so startled the watchers that the effect of the shot was not observed, save as Captain Jake was concerned. The recoil of the weapon knocked him over, and for a moment the others believed he had been killed by a shot from the outside.

“ Don't spend any time on me,” he shouted as

Mazie ran toward him. "The gun kicked, and there's no harm done unless they sneak up while you're not on watch."

"Are you hurt much?" Mrs. Houghton asked solicitously, as Mazie ran back to her post of duty, and the old man arose from the floor.

"Not half as much as I shall be if them villains succeed in catchin' us," was the grim reply. "Now that some of the rust has left the barrel, I reckon it'll work easier."

There was no further opportunity for conversation. At that moment Ernest discharged both barrels of his gun in rapid succession, and before the noise of the reports died away, Perry fired a volley.

The battle had begun. The blacks were advancing by leaping from the shelter of one tree to another, and during the next ten minutes not a word was spoken by the defenders of the cabin.

The small apartment was filled with smoke; the reports of the weapons were deafening, and the continuous rattle of musketry from the out-

side, after the assailants learned that it was impossible to creep up unobserved, made a most furious din.

More than one bullet had found its way inside the building, through the interstices of the timbers, or the loop-holes; but no injury had been done. Ernest could show a rent in his coat, and Perry's cheek had been scratched by a splinter.

This much had been ascertained when the enemy retreated for an instant, probably to carry the wounded to the boat, and before the besieged had time to congratulate each other on their good fortune, the black men commenced another fusillade.

Captain Jake discharged his flintlock through the half-closed window as both the boys emptied their weapons, and again the old man fell to the floor.

This time no one fancied he was injured, because of the previous tumble, and it was not until he made a feeble attempt to rise that Mazie asked :

“ Did it hurt as much as before ? ”

“It’s a little worse, my girl, for one of them niggers has plumped a bullet through my shoulder. Don’t leave the loop-holes!” he shouted sternly, as Mazie and her mother started toward him. “I can take care of myself awhile longer, an’ we must know what’s goin’ on outside.”

“At least let me try to bandage the wound,” Mrs. Houghton pleaded. “You can come here where I will be able to keep a lookout while doing something to stop the flow of blood.”

The boys were too deeply engaged with the enemy to give their wounded companion any attention. Despite the fact that both loaded and discharged their weapons with the utmost rapidity the blacks steadily closed in around the cabin.

Owing to the gloom outside, and the dense smoke in the cabin, it was impossible to take very accurate aim, and only at rare intervals did one of the enemy fall.

Mrs. Houghton had bound up Captain Jake’s wound, which was more painful than serious, with a strip of cloth torn from her dress, and

was on the point of insisting that he remain perfectly quiet, when Ernest said :

“The barrel of my gun is so hot that I can hardly hold it.”

“Use the water from the pail to clean it, while I take your place with a flintlock,” the old man said, as he rose to his feet with no little difficulty and began loading the weapon.

“If it kicks again you will be dangerously injured—perhaps killed,” Mrs. Houghton cried warningly.

“That can't be helped jest now. Ernest, clean your gun as quick as you know how, and I'll hold your place for awhile any way.”

In his eagerness to finish the work in the least possible space of time, Ernest dashed the water into the barrels without thinking that the moment might come when the very essential liquid would be even more precious than the diamonds given them by the leader of the blacks.

By this waste, however, he succeeded in completing the task quickly, and when Captain Jake

fired his second shot, Ernest was ready to resume his post of duty at the loophole.

The suffering which the recoil of the flintlock caused the old man must have been very great; but he made no complaint, only saying, when Ernest insisted on his moving aside:

“I reckon I will, lad, for the old gun can't be depended on when you want to do any very fine shootin'.”

The second assault did not continue more than twenty minutes, and again the blacks retreated, now disappearing entirely from view.

The besieged certainly needed a breathing spell, and while Mazie and her mother ran from one loophole to another, the male members of the party cleaned their weapons.

“Are there any more cartridges for the revolver?” Perry asked, when he was ready to return to his post.

“All I brought were in that paper box on the shelf,” Captain Jake replied, starting to his feet in alarm as the thought came into his mind for the first time that the lack of ammunition might soon end the battle.

“There are only six left,” Perry said, in a tone of despair. “I have tried not to waste any; but it was necessary to fire every time I saw one of those men.”

“You ain’t to be blamed, lad. It’s the curse of the Braganza, that’s all,” and the old captain stepped back from the loophole as if all hope had departed.

“This is no time to talk about such silly fancies,” Mrs. Houghton said, angrily, knowing that unless he could be aroused from his rapidly increasing despondency they were indeed lost.

“I don’t believe there can be any curse attached to a stone,” Ernest added, bitterly; “but at the same time all my cartridges, except eleven, have been used. We shall have to depend upon the flintlocks entirely if they make another charge.”

“Look! look!” Mazie cried, from the loophole which faced the ocean. “I can see a bright light! Do you suppose the schooner is on fire?”

Captain Jake was at her side in an instant,

and after gazing through the aperture a moment, he shouted :

“ The villains have set fire to the poor little Midge ! Oh ! if I only had ’em within reach of my two hands, one at a time, I’d make the niggers howl ! ”

After a few moments, when the flames showed above the tops of the trees, there could be no question but that the yacht was on fire. The sea was illumined until the black tracery of the schooner’s spars and rigging could be seen in the distance ; but the enemy took good care to keep out of sight.

Although the little steamer would be of no assistance while the black men were on the island, every member of the party felt that by her destruction a most serious blow had been struck, and the chances of finally escaping from their assailants seemed now to be few. No one dared to speak, lest a tremor of the voice should betray the despair in the heart, and during the next half hour perfect silence reigned.

All watched the flames as if fascinated by them, and not until the fire finally died away did any one leave the aperture through which the spectacle could be seen.

Then, when only a dull glow told of the dastardly and useless deed, Captain Jake said, after clearing his throat several times, as if fearful his voice might tremble:

“Well, folks, there’s no use cryin’ over spilled milk. I’ll wash a little of the powder out of my mouth, an’ then we’ll settle down to watchin’ ag’in. You see——”

He ceased speaking very suddenly, and, stepping quickly to his side, Ernest saw him staring at the empty water-pail.

“Is it all gone?” the boy asked, suddenly remembering how he had wasted the liquid.

“Every drop,” Captain Jake whispered, hoarsely; “an’ if them niggers don’t do anything but wait round out of gunshot, we’ll have to give up beaten mighty soon.”

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE HIDDEN HOARD

THE remainder of the party had heard Ernest's question, and understood perfectly well the meaning of the old man's look of dismay as he gazed at the empty pail.

"It's goin' to come kinder tough," he said, with a feeble attempt at cheerfulness; "but I reckon we can stand it. Instead of makin' things worse by frettin', s'pose we settle down to ship-shape work. Seein's how the enemy have hauled off to have a little fun burnin' the Midge, it wouldn't be a bad idee for us to take a rest. You young folks lay down while the widder an' I stand watch. It won't take more'n a jiffy to waken all hands if you happen to fall asleep."

It may seem strange that there should be any desire for slumber while they were surrounded by enemies. with no water in the hut, and but

a scanty supply of ammunition ; but the smoke made their eyes heavy, and the excitement caused great mental fatigue. The younger members of the party at once availed themselves of the opportunity, and in a few moments all were wrapped in slumber, despite Mazie's previous assertion that it would be impossible for her to close her eyes under such circumstances.

It seemed as if the black men, after burning the Midge, had decided to suspend operations for awhile.

The captain and Mrs. Houghton kept vigilant watch ; but nothing could be seen save a dull glow in the direction where the little steamer had been anchored, and after half an hour had passed, the widow asked, in a low tone :

“ Does the wound give you much pain ? ”

“ It twinges a bit ; but that's nothin' compared to the thirst it causes. I have a mind to risk goin' to the spring.”

“ Some of the blacks may be hiding close by, waiting for just such an opportunity, and it would be impossible to escape if they made an

attack," Mrs. Houghton replied, with a very perceptible tremor in her voice.

"I reckon that's what the villains are countin' on ; but almost anything is better than stayin' here with this burnin' thirst."

"Wait an hour longer, when there will be more chance of finding them asleep," the widow replied, hoping that as the time wore on the other would recognize the danger of such an attempt. "Tell me what is to be done if another attack is made to-morrow morning?"

Captain Jake looked around to ascertain if the others were asleep, and then replied, in a whisper :

"It's my opinion we'll be in their clutches before noon. We can hold 'em back just about half an hour, an' then the jig is up."

Mrs. Houghton knew some time before that their condition was desperate ; but to have her fears thus verified by the old man really startled her, and during the following hour not a word was spoken.

At the end of that time the old man arose

softly from the table which he had utilized as a seat, and whispered, as he shook Ernest and Perry :

“ Rouse up, boys, an’ stand watch while I go for some water. “ It’s what we’ve got to have, an’ now’s our chance while them heathen seem to be quiet.”

Both were on their feet in an instant, for the slumber had not been profound, and Ernest said, pleadingly :

“ Don’t venture out, Captain Jake. We can surely get along one day without water.”

“ Perhaps so, if we were certain of getting it then ; but that’s what no man can say. I’m goin’, and it’s no use to argue. You an’ Perry are to stand by the door. If them villains creep up on me, fire one volley, an’ barricade the entrance ag’in ; but on no account put your nose out of the house.”

It could readily be seen that nothing could turn the old man from his purpose, and the boys did as they were bidden.

Captain Jake took up the water-pail and the

coffee-pot, gazed once more through the loophole, and then began to remove the fastenings from the door.

“Remember the orders,” he said, in a whisper, hesitating a moment, and then, with one backward glance at his friends, he walked swiftly toward the spring.

The anxious watchers could distinguish his form even after he was among the shadows, for he made no attempt at concealing himself.

Twice did he bend over after reaching his destination, and Mazie whispered :

“He has filled both vessels and the black men have not seen him.”

The words had hardly been spoken before a flash of light came from among the foliage, followed by a loud report, and Ernest cried :

“Come on, Perry! I’m not going to stand and see them shoot him down, no matter what his orders were.”

Perry followed his cousin without hesitation, and when the boys were a dozen paces from the door, four men came out of the underbrush in

pursuit of the captain, who was running as fast as a man can when handicapped by a load of water.

There was no thought now of saving the cartridges. Each boy fired with the utmost rapidity, while the captain hurried on in a zigzag course to prevent the blacks from taking accurate aim, and before the ammunition was exhausted he had reached the hut.

Ernest and Perry followed without delay, but not because of any immediate danger. Three of the black men were lying on the ground dead, or so badly crippled as to be harmless, and the fourth had taken to his heels in the direction of the water.

It was but the work of a few moments to fasten the door securely again, assisted as they were by Mazie, and, meanwhile, the old man was regaining his breath.

“I’d a’ gone under if it hadn’t been for you,” he said, extending his hands to the boys. “That was one of a mighty few cases where it was best to disobey orders.”

“With only four against us I knew we could do some good, and not run much risk,” Ernest replied; “but we have paid for that water with all our cartridges.”

“You couldn’t have spent them better, lad, for three of the scoundrels are out of the fight, an’ I reckon the other has learned a good lesson.”

Then the old man quenched his thirst with a copious draught of the precious fluid, and Mrs. Houghton insisted on bathing the wound despite his protest against the waste of water.

Now it was Captain Jake’s turn to lie down, and the boys and Mazie performed guard duty until the crimson flush of morn appeared in the eastern sky. The enemy had made no further demonstrations, nor could any signs of them be seen on the land.

Seaward the graceful little schooner rose and fell on the lazy swell, and the restless waters, which had engulfed the Braganza and its finder, rippled musically on the beach.

The old man was not awakened until Mrs. Houghton had prepared breakfast, and, as he

gazed through the loopholes in every direction, Ernest reported the peaceful condition of things during the night.

“They’ve hauled off to hatch up a plan, by which we can be taken out of here without too much damage to themselves,” he said. “That bullet only went through the fleshy part of my shoulder, and, excepting for being a little stiff, I’m as well as ever. We’ll try to clean up the flintlocks a bit more, an’ give ’em a fairly warm reception when they come ag’in.”

“Do you suppose they’ll make another attack this forenoon?” Perry asked.

“We needn’t look for ’em ag’in till sunset.” Captain Jake replied, in a positive tone. “They’ll hunt for the leader’s body as long as it’s light, an’ give us a dose after dark.”

The barricades against the windows and doors needed strengthening in many places, as could now be seen, and the old man proposed that these be attended to even before any attempt was made to render the guns more serviceable.

The two things lacking were lumber and nails ;

but the captain soon saw a way to procure them.

“This hut is sheathed inside with boards,” he said, reflectively, “an’ by rippin’ off a few we shall have all that’s needed.”

This was begun without delay, Mazie insisting on being allowed to perform a certain share of the labor, while her mother acted as sentinel.

“All right, my girl,” Captain Jake said, good-naturedly. “You can start in over by the fireplace, where you can’t do mischief, even if nothing is accomplished.”

Determined to show that her services were not to be despised, she set about the work with a will, and in a comparatively short time had removed the three boards which formed the base of the projection on one side of the fireplace.

“Those short pieces are just what we want to fasten the others together with,” Ernest cried as he saw the result of her work. “Get some more if you can.”

Mazie turned to do as he desired, and no one paid any particular attention to her until they were startled by a loud cry of surprise, and, turn-

ing, saw her standing in front of a small pile of gold coins, while from an aperture in the wall issued a tiny stream of the precious metal, the pieces clinking together with a musical murmur.

It is needless to say that every member of the party ran quickly toward her, and not until the yellow stream ceased falling did any one break the silence.

Then the captain said with a long-drawn breath of surprise, as he knelt in front of the treasure :

“I needn’t feel so bad about the Midge now, for my share of this lot will be enough to buy two or three just like her.”

“I might think it was a lucky find if we were sure of ever getting home again,” Perry said, as he watched the old man gloating over the treasure. “But the way things look now, it’s a question whether we shall be able to carry ourselves——”

“Come here quickly!” Mrs. Houghton called from the window. “There are as many as a dozen men marching straight toward the house.”

“Jump to the loopholes, boys!” the old man shouted. “They’re goin’ to charge in a body!”

“And without ammunition we shall not be able to do very much toward preventing them from shooting us down,” Ernest replied, gloomily.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE PARLEY

EVEN though the little party could not defend themselves, every one sprang to the loopholes as if it were possible to do so.

Mrs. Houghton's statement in regard to the advance was correct. The blacks had marched up from the beach to the line of trees; but there they halted, and when the besieged were where a view of the outside could be gained, the men were screened by the foliage.

After one brief glance Captain Jake had turned his attention to the flintlocks, and was now loading them with the utmost rapidity.

"Take hold, lads!" he shouted. "We can give 'em one or two rounds before they get here!"

"They don't seem to be coming yet awhile," Ernest cried, from the window. "All hands are

behind the trees, and—— Here is one fellow starting this way with something white tied on a stick.”

Captain Jake ceased his work to look through the window, and after a moment he exclaimed :

“I’m blest if they ain’t sending out a flag of truce !”

“What can they want of us, except to politely request that we come out and be killed ?” Mazie asked.

“We shall soon know,” the old man replied, as he unbarred the door and stepped boldly into the open air.

The bearer of the white flag was the mate, he who had been the first to propose that the boys be killed, and he advanced until within a dozen yards of the building before halting.

“It strikes me you’ve got considerable nerve to come here with a white flag after doin’ your best to kill us,” Captain Jake said, angrily.

“We do not desire to harm you,” the man replied, with a slight inclination of the head.

“Then what’s the meanin’ of all this shoot-in’ ?”

“There will be nothing more of the kind if you deliver up the two boys to us. Besides, we will reward you more generously than our master did the girl who read the secret writing.”

“What do you want of the lads?”

“They have offended our gods, and until both are offered as sacrifices, we shall never find the body of our master nor recover the mystic stone upon which the welfare of our country depends.”

“An’ you think I would do such a thing for the sake of savin’ my life, to say nothin’ of the money?” the old man cried, in a rage.

“It is better to do so than to be shot down like a dog, as will be the case if you defy us,” the mate replied. “We intend to remain here until our purpose has been accomplished, and you must finally succumb, however large an amount of ammunition there may be in the house.”

As he said this he looked searchingly at the old man, probably hoping to learn from the expression of his face how many hours the little party could hold out.

“I reckon we can keep it up as long as you care to,” Captain Jake said, with an evident effort at carelessness. “Perhaps you haven’t figured on the chance that some craft may come along before you are able to get inside of the house.”

“That can hardly happen until after we have succeeded ; but we will not waste time by talking about it. I propose to give you half an hour in which to make up your mind. You may look at the matter in a different light after a little reflection.”

“I don’t want five seconds,” the old man screamed, “an’ I’ll give you jest that length of time to get away from here. It won’t be safe to stay after I go inside.”

The mate hesitated a moment as if about to make another proposition ; but the expression on Captain Jake’s face caused him to change his mind. Wheeling suddenly, he walked at a rapid pace toward the thicket, and the old man rejoined his companions.

Ernest and Perry had overheard the conver-

sation, as a matter of course, and the former called the captain aside, whispering to him in a voice that trembled in spite of himself:

“I don't want to say anything foolish; but I can't help thinking that it would be better for you to do as that man proposes. There is no chance that either of us will get out of here alive if they make another attack, now that our ammunition is exhausted. Since there is absolutely no hope, why not surrender two for the sake of saving three, and two of them women?”

“Lad,” the old man replied, as he passed the back of his hand across his eyes, “do you think so meanly of me as that? I care as much for life as the majority of people; but ain't in love with it enough to save it in any such way.”

“We had rather die together than desert a single member of the party,” Mazie said, as she slipped her hand in Ernest's, having overheard a portion of the conversation.

“I think it would be better to do as Ernest

has proposed, and I fancy I know what he has been talking about," Perry said, as he approached the captain. "If some can be saved, why not take advantage of the opportunity?"

"Because we do not wish to purchase our safety at any such price," Mazie answered. "It is time we got ready to resist the attack, which will probably be made very soon."

"You're right, my girl," Captain Jake said, heartily. "We won't think again of what the boys have proposed; but pay strict attention to givin' them villains such a reception as they deserve."

While this conversation was going on Mrs. Houghton had remained at the window, watching the movements of the men near the thicket, and when the others joined her she said:

"They are preparing for some kind of mischief. It looks to me as if they were melting tar."

Ernest took her place at the loophole, and after studying the scene two or three minutes, he exclaimed, in a tone of fear:

“They *are* melting tar, and smearing it on bundles of wood. The intention probably is to set this hut on fire.”

“They’ve got to come within shootin’ distance before that can be done,” Captain Jake said, grimly, “an’ these old flintlocks can be depended on for a little damage.”

There was plenty of time in which to make all the preparations possible. The guns could not be used more than once in case of a furious assault, but they were charged heavily. The rusty cutlasses were placed near at hand, and then there was nothing for the besieged to do but wait until the final struggle began.

During the remainder of the day the blacks kept within the shelter of the thicket, never once showing themselves, save in the distance. The small boat was rowed around the scene of the disaster constantly, and a party patrolled the beach from time to time, thus proving that their leader’s body had not been recovered. The schooner was still hove to off the shore, and twice the searchers went out to her as if for instructions.

When the shadows of night began to fall, however, the scene was changed. The blacks gathered just outside the thicket, showing by their numbers that nearly the entire crew were on shore, and Captain Jake said :

“I reckon they’ve got the best of that other old man, for I don’t believe he’d agree to any business like this.”

“He couldn’t help himself against all that crowd, no matter how hard he might try,” Ernest replied. “I know he wouldn’t sanction anything of the kind.”

“We needn’t worry about him now, lads,” Captain Jake said, grimly, “for here they come. Stand firm, an’ give ’em the toughest dose we can before all hands jump in on us.”

There was no necessity for this injunction. The boys were nerved for the worst, knowing full well how desperate was the condition of affairs, and prepared to struggle to the bitter end.

The blacks circled around the house in order to approach all four sides at the same moment.

Each carried a package of the prepared wood

in addition to his weapons, and all were careful to keep out of range while taking up their positions.

Then came a brief pause, and when the gloom of night had settled down it was possible to see the dark figures of the men creeping stealthily toward the hut.

CHAPTER XXXV

SMOKED OUT

“DON'T shoot until you're certain of hittin' the mark,” Captain Jake said, as he and the boys stood at the loopholes looking out into the darkness, the latter doing their best to repress a tremor of fear, for both believed this last attack would be brief and fatal.

Mrs. Houghton and Mazie were looking from the loopholes which overlooked the Sound, and after all had peered into the gloom in vain several minutes, the latter said :

“I can see four or five men circling round as if dragging something.”

Neither the boys nor Captain Jake paid much attention to this information ; a deliberate assault was all they feared, and until that was made no immediate danger need be apprehended.

Ten minutes more passed, and Mazie cried :

“They are dragging something, and I believe that the object, whatever it is, gives out sparks.”

This last announcement was sufficient to arouse the old man's curiosity, and crossing to the opposite side of the hut he gazed in the direction indicated by Mazie.

It was some time before the meaning of these new tactics could be determined, and then he cried :

“The villains are goin' to set the hut on fire without givin' us a chance to shoot at 'em. They've tied ropes to the bundles of wood, an' by makin' a long circuit around can pull the stuff against the cabin.”

Almost immediately after the old man spoke it was possible to understand the maneuver. The tar-covered kindlings were lighted by those within the shelter of the trees, after which several of the party stationed on the opposite side dragged the inflammable material across the open.

Within five minutes from the time the first fire package was discovered, no less than six were

advancing toward the building, the rapidly increasing flames bringing the hut out in strong relief and rendering more dense the gloom among the trees.

Against such an enemy weapons were useless, and Captain Jake stood as if stupefied until Ernest asked, nervously :

“There are two shovels and an axe here ; why can't we dig a tunnel to Captain Winny's magazine ? It isn't more than six feet from the door, and it will take some time for these logs to get well on fire.”

Captain Jake hesitated only an instant ; there was not enough water in the hut to extinguish one bundle of the wood and tar, and even had there been an inexhaustible supply, it could not have been used without the besieged exposing themselves to the enemy's bullets. It was barely possible Ernest's plan might succeed, and he cried :

“It can't do any harm to try it, lad. Mazie, you and your mother keep us posted as to how matters progress outside, an' we'll make a big pull for it.”

With an energy born of despair the old man and the boys began the work of tunneling. Perry chopped at the hard earth with the axe, while the others shoveled, directing their course at such an inclination as was believed would bring them to the bottom of the excavation.

Meanwhile, Mazie and her mother reported all that could be seen outside.

Nearer and nearer came the moving flames until they were drawn close to the building, and the smoke, which drove through the loopholes and crevices, grew so dense as to be almost stifling.

“There are as many as eight piles of burning wood directly against the house,” Mrs. Houghton said, when the tunnel had been dug to the depth of eight feet. “The logs are blazing fiercely, and the wind drives the smoke directly inside.”

“Have they burned through yet?” Captain Jake asked, without ceasing his labors.

“It will be some time yet before anything like that can happen.”

“Lie down with your faces pressed close to this fresh earth, an’ by that means you can hold out a good while longer.”

It was impossible now to have a view of the outside, owing to the smoke and flames, therefore it was as well to follow these instructions as to remain where every breath was painful.

With their arms around each other, Mrs. Houghton and Mazie threw themselves on the loose earth, while the laborers worked yet more rapidly, forgetting fatigue in the frenzied efforts to save their lives.

Ten minutes passed; the hungry flames roared fiercely; at several points the logs had yielded, and the heat was fast becoming unbearable.

Fragments of blazing wood fell from the roof, and each instant respiration grew more difficult. To Mazie it was as if she was in an imperfectly built oven, and she no longer had any hope of escape.

Just at the moment when death seemed inevitable a cry of joy from Ernest announced that the work had been successful.

“Get down here quickly!” Captain Jake shouted. “Crawl in without mindin’ the loose dirt; you can’t suffocate now that a passage has been opened. I’ll stay back long enough to pull some of this earth over us.”

What a blessed relief it was to Mazie as she made her way down that narrow but comparatively cool passage! She had never known anything sweeter than this first breath of pure air; while crouching at the bottom as the boys labored to make the poor place of refuge larger, she inflated her lungs again and again, until the inward heat had in a measure subsided.

It had not been possible for Captain Jake to cover himself very deeply with earth; but after taking up a position directly in the rear of Mrs. Houghton, he managed to push so much behind him that he was in a reasonably good condition to bear the heat, which must necessarily increase as the fire came nearer.

The boys continued to work until they had an aperture into the magazine sufficiently large to crawl through, and by the time this had been

done both were so completely exhausted that further effort would have been impossible.

Partially buried as they were, and with the flames roaring above them, not a word could be heard from the outside. The fugitives might well fancy that the blacks were keeping vigilant watch, expecting each instant that their intended victims would be driven out by the flames, and all knew that the time must shortly come when their partial escape would be known.

“If they have heard anything about the hole, we may expect to see 'em here mighty quick,” Captain Jake said, in a low tone.

“Hark!” Ernest cried. “They've concluded we didn't sit still to be burned. I can hear shouts, most likely of rage.”

He had hardly ceased speaking when the reports of firearms rang out, as if the weapons had been discharged directly above the fugitives' heads, and Perry asked:

“Do you suppose they are such fools as to waste ammunition by shooting into the flames on the chance of hitting us?”

“It’s something more than that!” Captain Jake cried, excitedly, as he crowded roughly past the others in the effort to get out.

“Don’t be rash,” Mrs. Houghton said. “These shots may be only a ruse to draw you on, so they’ll know where we are hidden.”

“There is no game about this,” the old man said, decidedly. “Some kind of a fight is goin’ on, an’——”

He did not finish the sentence, but made every effort to scramble out of the excavation, shouting wildly:

“Hello! Help this way! Shipmates ahoy!”

Then, to the great surprise and intense delight of the boys, they heard a voice, very near at hand, calling:

“Ernest! Ernest! Are you here?”

“It’s your father!” Perry cried, and before his cousin could reply the old man said to some one who had approached the mouth of the excavation:

“The lads are here, and safe, barring a leetle too much heat. Can you get near enough to help us out?”

Then Ernest heard his father reply :

“That’s easily done; the wind blows the flames from this side. Give me your hand.”

Captain Jake was pulled into the outer world once more, and one by one the others were liberated just in time to see the blacks moving in hot haste for their schooner, while a party of white men accelerated their movements by a rapid discharge of revolvers.

CHAPTER XXXVI

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

NOT until the blacks had succeeded in making good their escape, probably at the expense of several wounds, did the boys learn to what they were indebted for this very timely deliverance.

It was told in a fragmentary way by Mr. Barnard while they watched the old pirate's hut slowly reduced to ashes.

The crew who had accompanied Captain Jake in pursuit of the schooner reported the abduction to the authorities at Norfolk, and the daily papers published the story. Perry's father was in New York at the time, and Mr. Barnard without waiting for his friend, hired Captain Jake's shipmates to accompany him in the search.

It was not believed the little party would be found on the island, and the pursuers wished to

give it a wide berth ; but Mr. Barnard insisted on stopping for the purpose of learning from the old man whether he had gained any further information concerning the missing ones.

The tug arrived off the island just as the hut was well on fire, and the glare of the flames among the trees prevented their craft from being seen by the blacks. It was known that Captain Jake intended to remain there until the Midge had been repaired, consequently the fact of the hut being in flames, and a party of men standing outside, making no effort to extinguish the fire, seemed sufficiently suspicious to warrant Mr. Barnard in landing his full force.

Once on shore, the true state of affairs could readily be divined, and a charge was made upon the blacks with such good effect that they beat a hasty retreat after firing one volley.

The boys had begun to relate their adventures, in reply to Mr. Barnard's questions, when Captain Jake, who had gone toward the beach at full speed, after being assisted from the excavation, to aid in punishing the blacks, came up, breathless and excited.

“They’ve got clean away,” he said, in a tone of bitterness, “an’ that’s all the satisfaction we shall have for the destruction of the Midge, to say nothin’ of the big pile of gold I was foolish enough to believe would square up what they have cost us.”

Quite naturally Mr. Barnard wished to know the meaning of these last words, and Ernest told of the pirate’s hoard which had been discovered at the moment when escape seemed impossible.

“There’s no reason why you should feel badly about that,” Ernest’s father replied. “The money won’t burn, and it surely can’t be melted in this small blaze. Wait until the timbers have been consumed, and I predict that every piece will be found, none the worse for the scorching.”

Captain Jake realized the truth of this statement, and, all troubles having vanished, went about greeting his friends who had arrived so opportunely.

Instead of going aboard the tug, the rescued party remained on the island, a supply of food having been brought ashore, and the day had

dawned before the boys finished their story. Ernest's father was surprised at the amount of property which Mrs. Houghton had in her possession.

"The diamonds are very valuable," he said, "and rare because of their wonderful purity and brilliancy. With the jewelry, and the gold to be recovered from the ruins of the hut, you will have quite a comfortable income."

"I do not consider that it all belongs to me," Mrs. Houghton replied. "Captain Berry and the boys are fully entitled to an equal share."

"But you are Captain Dorr's legal heir, and while I cannot speak for any one except my son, I do not think it right that what you probably need should be divided."

After some discussion, in which all took part, it was decided that the gold Mazie had discovered should be common property, Mrs. Houghton retaining the other valuables, and Captain Jake was perfectly satisfied with the arrangement.

"I reckon that will buy me a new steamer,"

he said, in a complacent tone, "an' allow pretty good wages into the bargain."

"You need not bear the entire cost of the yacht," Mr. Barnard replied. "The boys shall each pay one-third, and if they come South next winter can help you run her."

It was nearly noon before the flames had subsided sufficiently to admit of an attempt to recover the gold, and then the work was completed in a comparatively short time.

The money had been left in the corner near the fireplace, and the falling timbers had not disturbed it.

At three o'clock on the same afternoon those who had suffered so much through the "curse" of the Braganza, if such a thing can be, steamed to the northward, and here this story must end, since it was only intended to recount such events as occurred south of Roanoke.

It may be well, however, to state a few facts which have been learned within the past month.

Mrs. Houghton's share of the old pirate's property was sufficient to make her quite wealthy,

as compared with her previous circumstances. She and Mazie now live near New York City. Ernest and Perry are frequent visitors at their home, and already has Mrs. Houghton promised to make one more trip south of Roanoke.

Captain Jake had the new yacht built under his personal supervision, and two weeks ago he sent photographs, not only of her hull, but all the interior arrangements.

“I’ve got four snug little staterooms,” he wrote, “and a steward’s pantry that can’t be beat. Now seein’s how you boys are equal owners, why not come down when it gets cold up your way, an’ go with me on a trial cruise? We’ll stop at Captain Winny’s island; but do no huntin’ for the Braganza. That diamond will stay where it is now—at the bottom of the sea. Will you come?”

Ernest’s reply was brief, but to the point:

“We will be there in October, and if by any chance the diamonds can be recovered, we shall work very hard to get them, despite the supposed curse.”

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