

THE TALE OF
THE TEN



W. CLARK RUSSELL



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THE TALE OF THE TEN

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ON

THE TALE OF THE TEN.

'There seems no limit to the capacity of CLARK RUSSELL to produce stirring stories of the sea. He has so long and so closely communed with the illimitable ocean that he has acquired something of its power and its infinite variety. His latest story, "The Tale of the Ten," is as good as anything he has yet written, which is high praise. It is better than some, inasmuch as the action is more rapid. Once started with the story, my Baronite found it difficult to lay the book down till he had seen comfortably shot, or hanged, every one of the Ten. This desire is, through a series of breathless incidents, fulfilled. Like the Ten Little Niggers of earlier fame, the rogues drop off one by one, "and then there were" only just enough to send to Norfolk Island. The story, skilfully constructed, graphically told, is adorned with some of those marvellous descriptions of the many moods of the sea in which CLARK RUSSELL is unapproachable.'—PUNCH.

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'Mr. RUSSELL has written nothing more entertaining than "The Tale of the Ten." . . . Scenes as dramatic and as impressive in their literary effects as the reader can desire who likes good writing as well as a good rousing story, are not rare in this sterling, robust work.'—MORNING.

'A capital story, well contrived and carefully wrought out, and with an interest thoroughly kept alive from the beginning to the close.'—GUARDIAN.

THE TALE OF THE TEN

A SALT-WATER ROMANCE

BY

W. CLARK RUSSELL

AUTHOR OF

'THE WRECK OF THE GROSVENOR' 'MY SHIPMATE LOUISE'

'THE CONVICT SHIP' ETC.



A NEW EDITION

LONDON
CHATTO & WINDUS

1899

PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
LONDON

PR
5282
T/4
1899

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THE TALE OF THE TEN

CHAPTER I

THE BARQUE 'QUEEN'

ONE moonlight night two men stood at the extremity of a point of land that jutted into the black ripple of Sydney Bay. The moon rode high and rained a light that floated in the air in a mist of splendour ; the vision was overwhelmed by the brilliance ; the dark shore on either hand the spot where the two men stood sank into visionary streaks a little distance from them, and looking across Sydney Bay was like being at sea.

The Circular Quay had not been built in those days : ships lay moored in creeks ; and here and there you caught a glimpse as of a thundercloud of mast and spar interlaced and knitted into deep shadow, here and there touched into silver gleams. In the bay the riding lights of ships winked against the flooding moonlight weak as fireflies.

A ship rode opposite the men ; she was perhaps three-quarters of a mile distant, easily to be distinguished as a handsome little barque, with all her sea-gear rove and her sails stowed, as though just arrived or shortly departing. The men looked at her whilst they quietly conversed. Past her this moment there went floating, dim as a column of vapour, a large ship newly arrived from the old country. In a few minutes she broke up the silence in the Bay by the roar of iron links swept through iron, and by the halloing and bawling of men, as the sails melted in the moonlight into wreaths and festoons delicate as vapour.

It was ten o'clock. Some chimes came in faint strains from Sydney town. They were caught up by the ships' bells, and a pretty noise of tinkling, with clearer, deeper, nearer notes

from some throats of metal up the creek past the men, trembled in a fairy music across the waters. Here and there upon the breast of the Bay crept some little shadow of boat, framed in a dim glitter of phosphor that would have been a bright light had the moon been dark. Scarcely had the last of the ships' bells rung out ten o'clock when a noise of oars caught the attention of the men.

'Here he comes,' said one of them, straining his eyes in the direction of the sound under the sharp of his hand as though the sun was in the sky.

'No, no,' answered the other gruffly, 'why, Trollope, that noise means a gunwale full of tholes. You'll not see Hankey till he's here.'

As the man spoke these words, both of them articulating in accents of refinement, a low, long white boat came close in out of the haze of the moonlight with a man in the stern-sheets, who stood up on catching sight of the figures upon the strip of land, apparently staring at them. You saw a gleam of buttons on his frock-coat, and the six men who were bowing leisurely on the thwarts were uniformly apparelled.

'Oars!' cried the man in the stern-sheets.

The boat floated to a stand right abreast the creek, into whose yawning mouth, glooming swiftly out of the silver into dusk, thickened by the masts and rigging of ships, the man continued to stare for some moments as though in expectation. The two men down on the point where the water came strumming with a guitar-like note in black ripples, watched him.

'What is that boat?' said one of them.

'Either the harbour guard-boat, or she belongs to a man-of-war,' answered the other.

'What have they got the scent of? On the track of deserters, perhaps. Or keeping a bright look-out on what's yonder, eh?' and the speaker nodded in the direction of the barque.

The man in the stern-sheets resumed his seat, the oars were leisurely dipped, and the boat vanished in the vaporous sheen.

Five minutes after she was out of sight, a black spot showed close in on a line with the barque. It enlarged swiftly into a little boat, with a man sculling her. He was alone. He drove the boat a short way up the creek, where the brine brimmed without break of ripple, and jumped out, keeping a hold of his boat by her painter. The others joined him.

'Well, Hankey, what's the news?'

'I've been an hour with Poole, and have corkscrewed out of him as much as I think is to be got. A couple of bottles of champagne made him chatty, and the captain was ashore, and the chief mate indisposed in his cabin. There are a few passengers on board. She sails to-morrow at two, and seemed to me, whilst she lies in the moonlight, as I walked her deck, the prettiest little craft that was ever handled by a sailor. Easily to be worked in my judgment by half-a-dozen men. Her yards are square for her size, but I'd undertake to roll up her main-topsail, blowing hard, with three men.'

The others listened eagerly. The man spoke with an educated accent. The three of them suggested the broken officer, the gentleman who had come to the colonies for the gold rush, who had failed, and made shift for his life in twenty different directions, sailorising seemingly being one of them, as might be inferred at all events from Mr. Hankey's talk of top-sails, and the others' appreciative understanding of his words.

'Has she an arms-chest!' said one of them.

'Yes.'

'Where stowed?'

'In the second mate's cabin. Rather mean,' continued the speaker, 'as an arms-chest, contents: a few cutlasses, refuse Navy goods, a few old pistols, and maybe a sheaf of short blunderbusses. The Scotch owners don't put money into their arms-chest,' he added with a sudden laugh.

'But this is your surmise?' said one of them, 'otherwise the chest may be handsomely stocked.'

The gentleman gave the painter of the boat to one of his friends to hold whilst he pulled out a short pipe.

'Let them be of to-day's pattern and purchase,' said the man who had received the boat's painter, 'the mate's port-hole is big enough to pass them through, I suppose?'

'Any ammunition?' said the third man, speaking with a delicate accent and a slight lisp.

'Well, now I forgot to ask that question,' was the answer.

'How many go to the crew?' said one of them.

'Of foremost hands, eleven. They can't muster more. The full complement is eighteen. As fast as the chaps sign they pocket a month's advance and desert, and the police can do nothing for the captain. The second mate told me that the *Queen* hauled out to-day merely for the better chance of keeping the men aboard. They have given special instructions to the guard-boat to keep a watch through the night.'

'She has just passed,' said one.

'A six-oared arrangement in charge of a Cornstalker in buttons. She saw my boat hanging on the barque's quarter, and hailed; the second mate looked over and said it was all right, I was his friend, and was not to be troubled should they fall in with me sculling ashore.'

'There's no mistake, I hope,' said the gentleman, who slightly lisped, 'as to its being safely on board?'

'Poole, when the champagne mounted, bragged of it,' was the reply. "'Only think,'" said the man, laying his hand upon my arm with a silly grin, "even Anson's Jack Spaniards went ragged in comparison with us!" "Bosh!" said I. "It's a horrible big trust though," said he. "If some of our pier-head jumpers get the breeze of it, we may need to polish our irons." I asked him in a dawdling, sleepy way, looking at the moonlight on the water, as if I could think of nothing but the poetry of this romantic scene—the gentleman with the lisp here interrupted with a laugh—"where they stowed the thing for the best safe-keeping of it?" "Oh, confound it," he answered, "I ought to know, for I had the handling of it. It's in a strong room, specially built, just abaft the mainmast, in the main-hold. The wool's snugged all around it; a stupid blunder in the packing," said he, whilst I filled his glass, "for suppose spontaneous combustion, the wool glowing under battened hatches, and the ship living for days, as ships *do* live in such a state, and then making port; why," cried he, emptying his glass, "it would be all liquor, and we'd be pumping it out along with the water."'

'She is a lovely sight in this light,' said the man named Trollope, his voice softening as his eyes went to the little barque. 'It was in such another as she that I came out at a shilling a month. *She* could pile it to the cathead to a song of thirteen knots in a top-gallant breeze. Yet there's something yonder,' said he with a nod of his head across the Bay, 'that could give her a towrope and not know it.'

The three men stood viewing the scene for some minutes in silence. The moonlight was upon them, and their shadows were defined with such amazing sharpness that they might have been six men, three sleeping at the others' feet. Trollope began to whistle, then rounded on his heel.

'How is London looking at this moment, I wonder?' said he. 'If all comes off right, it's my home. There's no other place in the world to live in, and I know the world.'

'I'm off,' said the man who had come from the barque; 'shall I scull you to the steps?'

They got into the little boat, two sitting low in her, and she glided quietly up the creek where some ships were lying. As she vanished, the barque's bell struck five-half-past ten. The notes sounded like a flute, and in a minute or two the stillness was broken by a clanging that, to a fancy listening behind closed eyes, might have made a Sabbath morn in England of that Australian night of moon and stars.

The barque *Queen* had been advertised to sail from Sydney three weeks before she finally started. Her detention had been owing to the captain's difficulty in getting men, or keeping those who signed the articles. She was insufficiently manned as it was for a barque of her tonnage in those days, of single topsails and liberal labour.

The captain grew mad with impatience. Some of the passengers seemed to be looking about for other ships sailing for Europe. Fortunately for the *Queen* all other vessels were in the same quandary. At last the mate of this composite barque got together a wild, rugged, ragged, and hairy crew—objects that had been starved out of the gold fields, wretches who for nights had slept like dead soldiers on the field of glory. Then lest even *they* should tumble ashore and vanish whilst the captain was eating his lunch and the mate was overhauling the live stock with the butcher, the ship was hurriedly warped out: shore-fasts were let go, capstans manned, and in a few minutes the beautiful little fabric was sliding needle-like before a pleasant breeze under a wing or two of white cloth for the anchorage where she was now lying.

At two o'clock in the afternoon of the day following that on which she left her berth, the *Queen* got under way. Her destination was London. It was calculated she would cover the distance in seventy-five days. She had made the run out in eighty, which was faster than steam, as steam *then* was.

The windlass was manned, and a chorus with some fire and spirit in it rang over the bush that darkened the nearer shore where a white villa or two gleamed. There blew a fine fair sailing breeze, rich with Australian sunshine and the blue of the heavens, and fragrant as a nosegay. The slop chest had been overhauled in the morning; the crew had washed themselves and put on clean shirts, and now showed as a fairly respectable body of English seamen. They had

slept in bunks, they had eaten heartily of the ship's food. The work they had been put to had taken the kinks out of their backs and the turns out of their arms and legs, and they felt something like men as they thought of London river and hove in the iron links one by one to the cheery yells of the mate looking over the bows, and to their own roaring heartening chorus of 'Time for us to go.'

Two or three boats were making shorewards from the ship, and men and women standing up in them waved responsive signals of farewell to the motions of some of the passengers on the poop. The number of people bound homewards in the *Queen* numbered in all, ladies and gentlemen, nineteen. All were on deck as the anchor was lifted from the ground, and the barque to the impulse of her jib and foretopsail, rounded slowly to her course. They looked a shipload, and seemed nearly all men. Indeed, there were but seven ladies, one the wife of a Colonial merchant, Mrs. James Dent, others a Mrs. Holroyd and her daughter Edith, Miss Margaret Mansel, a fine young woman with dark eyes and a pensive musing air. The pilot had charge of the ship, and the captain walked the deck apart, everybody easily seeing that he was full of the business of the vessel and wished to be alone.

He was a type of the skipper that has vanished off the face of the waters. His face was the colour of the freshly sawn end of a balk of mahogany, which uncommon hue was accentuated by his snow-white hair and whiskers. His grey eyes were set deep in his head; long years of staring into hard weather had berthed them below their natural moorings, and you wondered how he saw out of two such holes. His legs had been arched by years of the heaving plank. He wore the tall hat of the London streets, and this was his headgear whether in the roaring gale of the Horn or the roasting calm of the Doldrums.

The ship's head was now fair for the open, and they were making sail upon her as fast as they could set it. There is no prettier sight than that of such a barque as this getting under way and slowly whitening the blue with the light of her canvas. The topsails fall, the yards are hoisted, top-gallant sails swell as their clews slide to the yardarms, the forecourse arches its foot of snow, beyond are the jibs tremorless as the wings of the poised albatross, arching to the fishing-rod end of the flying jibboom; the whole fabric is clothed. She floats in beauty, gay with the lights of the day;

a delicate line of pearl, lustrous as the inside of a shell, trembles from her cutwater along her metal sheathing and goes away in a little wake whose extremity invited many an eye aboard this ship to the delicious sweetness of the island-studded bay they were leaving.

Some of the passengers were well worth observing. They play a large part in this traditionary and remarkable story of the sea, and a few of them may be introduced at once whilst the barque is making for the Heads. A man is leaning over the low brass rail that protects the poop from the fall of the quarter-deck; he pulls a heavy black moustache whilst he seems to be gazing ahead; he would be an extremely handsome man if it were not that he has a most pronounced turn-up nose. His looks are manly, his air frank, he is broadly built and stands above six-foot. You would judge that he had served in the army by his posture even as he leaned. A sailor when he leans sprawls from breech to heels, and the rest is as slack as his shirt collar. On the other hand, a soldier never lounges.

A little distance from him, but not apparently acquainted with the man, stood another with a broken military cut; this person was of medium height, with strong whiskers shooting with an air of briskness into their own dead blackness. He too was good-looking, straight-nosed, had a well-bred look, a dark eye, quiet and searching. His clothes were indeed too new. They lacked that comeliness of wear which George Eliot commends. But who would notice such a thing in a man going home from Australia?

A third gentleman leans against the port-rail; his little blue eyes, weak with the damp of drink, are fixed upon Miss Margaret Mansel, who is talking to Mrs. Holroyd and her daughter on the other side of the deck. He is a biggish man of the fat and rolling sort, yellow-haired, with a faint butter-cup fluff of moustache which one hand or the other is for ever haunting. These three men were last night standing upon a slip of land in Sydney Harbour and admiring the barque by the light of the moon and the scene of the bay under the stars. Who could have guessed by their conversation then that they had booked as passengers by the *Queen*?

The tall man with the heavy black moustache was Captain Henry Trollope: the second Mr. Paul Hankey, and the fat fellow at the rail, Alexander Burn.

Another passenger at whom the ladies occasionally glanced

askance was Mr. Sampson Masters: at a little distance his was as perfect a face as you could figure. When he drew close his features showed blistered and pocked by drink and dissipation. He stood near the wheel, looking from under the brim of a white felt hat with a black hatband, right up at the canvas, yet with glances any sailor would have seen were critical.

There were other men, several; one was a little chap, Mr. William Storr, an auctioneer going home after doing business in the Antipodes. His round, lightly whiskered face was enthusiastic with the sense of departure and the beauty of the scene. Close beside him stood a large man who had booked his passage by the name of Mark Davenire: he wore a heavy silver chain upon his bright green waistcoat, and his cabbage-tree hat was tilted upon his nose, whilst his eyes somewhat stealthily travelled round about.

The shyness peculiar to Englishmen was noticeable amongst the passengers at the start. The ladies, it is true, fluttered before long into conversation with one another, but the men held off; which was strange in three of them at all events, for they had seemed on very good terms on the previous night.

'Good gracious me!' suddenly exclaimed Mrs. James Dent, whose black hair was plastered down her cheeks and over the back of her ears in the early Victorian style, 'isn't that an open boat out there?'

She pointed with a hand that sparkled. The ship was now close in with the entrance to Sydney Bay, and the object the lady pointed at sank and rolled, and wallowed about three-quarters of a mile distant right ahead. Everybody drew to the side to look. Captain Trollope fixed a glass in his eye. Captain Benson, the white-haired skipper, took the ship's telescope from its brackets and gazed with attention.

'I hope you will pass her close,' said Mrs. Dent.

'She shall slide alongside of us, madam,' answered the captain.

'What's there in an open boat,' said Mrs. Storr taking her husband's arm and towering by help of an oddly-shaped hat to nearly half a head above her husband, 'to make the ocean seem more desolate than when there's nothing in sight?'

'Ha!' exclaimed Mr. Burn waddling up to the little group that had gathered about the captain, and expanding his 'ha!' in a fat, beery sigh, 'there's a depth of meaning in that question, and it shows the ocean in a new light.'

Mr. Storr looked at him suspiciously; the lady smiled and said, 'When we came out in the *Light of the Age* we fell in with an abandoned ship. She made the ocean look a horrible desert. The same effect is produced by that small boat there.'

'You will find the reason to be this,' said Mr. Burn with a gentlemanly though an oozy accent, 'great fields of solitude need accentuation to the eye. A single object achieves this. A single star makes the heavens look as wide again. A lonely wreck furnishes the imagination with a starting point for measuring the prodigious distances of the ocean.'

He spoke as though he had been an actor in his day.

Captain Trollope glanced at Mr. Burn through his glass, and then turned his head with a smile which his moustache effectually hid. Others, such as Mr. Davenire, Mr. Caldwell, a dark-faced, black-bearded, Jewish-looking man, and one or two others also listened with an air of faint amusement.

'But there's such a plenty of land about,' continued Mrs. Storr, who was evidently gratified by the attention she appeared to be receiving from most of the gentlemen, 'and still that open boat makes the sea look more lonely than a moor by moonlight, with the arm of a gibbet dangling a dead man over the snow.'

This vigorous image seemed greatly to impress Mr. Burn, whose hands plied his little moustache with a sudden vehemence.

'There's an open boat right under the bow, sir,' shouted the mate from the forecastle.

As the boat slid by a strange murmur from the ship accompanied her. She was a whaleboat, had probably belonged to a foreign whaler, and in the bottom of her lay two dead men, one with his teeth in the throat of the other, as though, wanting a knife, or too feeble to use one, he had sought in his agony to quench his thirst thus.

But it was a sight common enough at sea. There are few who have used the ocean who cannot speak of it as something they have seen or suffered. How should any man but a sailor understand such things? Most of the ladies hid their faces and recoiled from the rail: some of the gentlemen turned pale, and Mr. Burn looked sick. But it was for the rude hearts forward to give the true signification of the thing that had now circled into the wake, tumbling in its ghastly loneliness upon the waters broken by the ship's passage. Oh, what did it not speak? The long nights, the burning days it

told of, the empty beaker, the glazing eye, the phantasm of a cold valley, so sweet with the musical babble of running rivulets, that the froth at the lip of the deluded wretch flaked afresh!

There was nothing to be read in the old skipper's face as he put the glass down. Mr. Dent looking at the white-haired seaman with something of a determined manner, as though he summoned resolution to his utterance, exclaimed, 'I wish we hadn't fallen in with that boat. It's an unlucky sign to stumble over a corpse on the threshold of a journey.'

'Those bodies are well clear of the ship, sir,' answered the captain. 'They'll not hurt you.'

'Granted,' exclaimed one of the passengers with small eyes and a lifting yet half-concealed sort of grin that made his face loathsome for self-complacency, 'but the gentleman refers to the sentiment of the thing, not the fact of it. I wonder that you, captain, as a sailor are not superstitious. The trade is the most gullible in the world.'

The captain looked at the speaker's boots and then aloft at his ship.

'I shan't be able to eat any dinner after that sight,' exclaimed Captain Trollope, strolling up to Mr. Storr.

As though to test him, the first dinner-bell rang, and even then more than one eye had taken notice of a leaning shaft of brilliant canvas hanging steadily right astern past the boat, with a fulness of cloths and a steadfastness of posture that gave one the idea of pursuit.

CHAPTER II

THE CHASE

THE passengers dined by the light of a splendid sunset, which streamed through port-hole and skylights, glittering in crimson scars in the gleaming furniture of the table, and glorifying by one wavering spoke of misty light the figure of the white-headed skipper; for the lamps were already burning, so as to take up the evening tale when the sun had gone.

It was one of those pictures of ship-board hospitality you will seldom, or never, meet upon the high seas in these days. Now, the great steamship splits its hundreds into twenty tables, and the captain is a mere detail of buttons and lace, faint and dim in distance as host, and high and lonely as

master. In the days of the *Queen* the passengers of a ship formed a family party; they sat in rows; the captain at the top could answer the question put to him by the man at the bottom; when people got to know each other therefore, conversation at meal-times was easily general.

A couple of stewards moved along the line of diners; they each wore camlet jackets; each was wonderfully nimble of limb. Through the windows you heard the noise of passing waters, like the sound of a thaw at night in an open country.

When all were seated and every passenger had taken his and her place this first day—for the swell was light: the movement rhythmic, and then again all were seasoned travellers—the captain glanced down the line of faces on either hand, and for an instant seemed struck by the appearance of the people he was to navigate to England. The number of men seemed to make the ladies comparatively few, yet there were seven of that sex to break the male array into colours of garments and caps.

It was not Mr. James Dent nor yet Mr. William Storr who took the eye of the old skipper in that swift momentary glance of his to port and starboard down the table. He was impressed by a certain odd similitude as of a sort of turf or horsey family likeness; it was a kind of professional resemblance as in clean-shaven actors for example; but how to define it? Certainly Captain Trollope was as different a looking man from Mr. Burn, as Mr. Shannon with his large protruding blue eyes and ginger beard was from the black and sullen-faced Mr. Caldwell. But old Benson was no hand at defining. Military failures at home and in the colonies, thought he as he yawned at a spoonful of soup; they had paid their fares, some forty, some fifty guineas apiece, and without exception seemed a body of very gentlemanly men.

At the foot of the table sat the chief officer, Mr. Matthews, a brown man with a red curl of beard, and a shade of paleness in his complexion as from recent illness. On his left was the ship's surgeon, and on the other hand Mr. Paul Hankey. Little was said at the start. Most of the men appeared to eye each other critically, as though they met for the first time. Mr. William Storr, who, as an auctioneer, should have been able at least to feel the pulse of the company, tried to start a conversation on the subject of the boat, but was silenced by many looks of aversion from the ladies, and by the gentleman named Cavendish asking with an odd grin:

'Are you in the interest of the owners on board this ship, sir?'

'I don't understand you,' answered Mr. Storr.

'Pooh!' said Mr. Masters, who looked uncommonly handsome in the deceptive radiance of sunset and lamplight, glancing as he spoke at Miss Margaret Mansel, 'the gentleman means that you want to save the cabin table.'

Mr. Storr stared stupidly for a further explanation.

'Pray,' said Mr. Hankey, in a very airy, gentlemanly tone, addressing the mate, Mr. Matthews, 'where does Mr. Poole, the second mate, dine?'

'Here, when the others have finished and I have gone on deck,' answered the mate.

'I came out with that gentleman in the *Golden Ball*,' said Mr. Hankey; 'he was third mate of her. I should say a better sailor never jockeyed a yardarm.'

'That's a good expression,' said Mr. Matthews, smiling slowly.

'Were you ever at sea professionally?' inquired the surgeon.

'Ask no questions of a man who has sought luck in Australia,' answered Hankey with a bland smile and a bow.

Here the black, Jewish-looking man named Caldwell broke in:

'I did not receive much encouragement when I came out. They told me that last voyage the son of a baronet, whose father lived in a mansion in Hyde Park, had sailed as saloon passenger for the gold rush; the ship arrived, and was within a day or two of her sailing for England full up with wool, when the midshipman at the gangway saw a scarecrow crawl over the side. It touched the remains of its hat, its rags fluttered, its face was of a beastly yellow, and hollow with famine and suffering. "Don't you remember me?" it sighed. The midshipman, who was without sentiment, said "No." The scarecrow named himself. He was the baronet's son. He had been knocking about for three months, had found no gold, could get no food, had pawned himself down to his socks, and had come to beg a passage home. They took pity on the poor devil, and gave him an under-steward's berth; that is, he was not even thought good enough to wait at the table at which he had formerly sat. He had to take the dirty dishes forward to the galley and wash them. Those were encouraging yarns to a man like me.'

He was about to add something, but choked the words down with a glass of wine.

The conversation prospered after this. Mr. Caldwell's anecdote set the others chatting. Those who had looked somewhat askance at one another now fell into talk, and the captain found himself at the head of a table full of people who promised on the whole to form an agreeable and sociable party. There was some reference to gold.

'Who knows the latest value of the nugget?' said Mr. Davenire, the big man with the bright waistcoat and silver chain.

'Three pound to three pun' one per ounce,' answered Mr. Dent.

'It was the story of Hargreaves' discovery that brought me out here,' said one of the gentlemen, named Mr. Peter Jolinson. 'That fellow, I mean, who up in Bathurst knocked a hundredweight of gold worth four thousand pounds out of a rock. Good angels, what joy for Hargreaves!'

'Did the gold rush bring *you* out?' said Mr. Masters, languishing across the table as he addressed Miss Mansel.

'I came to better myself as a governess, and am driven home again by colonial indifference to my few gifts,' said the girl, blushing.

'One and all, one and all!' exclaimed Captain Trollope.

'The colonies are mere rat-traps for the catching of the vermin of the old country,' said Mr. Storr.

'Many suicides happen in your experience, captain, during your runs home since the gold find?' inquired Mr. Hankey.

'One man died suddenly last voyage,' answered the old skipper. 'We thought it was suicide till the doctor discovered that ardent spirits had burnt up his viscera. Why should a man kill himself,' he continued thoughtfully, looking at Mrs. Holroyd, 'when he has paid his passage, and will get home by waiting?'

Nobody seemed disposed to consider the point, and shortly afterwards the whole of the passengers went on deck.

It was now evening, a fine, clear dusk, full of stars, and a moon over the port-bow. The breeze had scanted, yet the sails slept, and the ripples spread out thin as silver harp-strings from the bows. The awnings had been furled, and the dew sparkled crisply on rail and binnacle-hood. The ocean swept in a measureless shadow to the stars, and more than one passenger, particularly the ladies, shuddered when the com-

pany passed through the companion-way on deck, and found the beauty of the night tragic with the tiny ark of horror that was somewhere astern.

The second mate, Poole, before diving to his dinner saluted the captain.

'Nothing in sight, sir, but a small sail right in our wake, scarcely visible even with the night-glass. But I'm not sure that she didn't throw up a blue ball a few minutes ago.'

'Bring me the glass,' said the captain. The second mate then went to dinner, and the captain, putting down the glass, tucked Mrs. and Miss Holroyd under his arms, and walked the weather side of the poop.

The men lolled about. Mr. Cavendish, whose expression was an objectionable small-eyed grin of self-complacency, got hold of Miss Mansel. Mr. Burn talked with great politeness to Mrs. James Dent and her daughter. Some of the fellows went down on to the quarter-deck where smoking was permitted, and hung in groups chatting pleasantly, as though a single dinner aboard the *Queen* had made them all good friends.

The close of the dog-watches in fine weather is the pleasantest hour of the day at sea. The moonlight ripples on the waters, the breeze is soft, and the stars shine purely. The shadows of those who sit or stand fan slowly with the movements of the ship. This was a very perfect night. The dust of the meteor sailed across the Southern Cross, and the slow passage of the scintillant smoke seemed to deepen to the eye the hush in the heavenly solitudes. Forward some man was playing a concertina softly. Several of the passengers, including Captain Trollope, Davenire, Caldwell, and Hankey, went along as far as the galley, and appeared to listen. Here they found a couple of seamen pacing with naked feet.

'I say,' says Captain Trollope, 'are you a pretty strong crew here?'

One man plucked a pipe from the car that formed his mouth, and answered 'No.'

'Short-handed by how many?' asked Mr. Davenire.

'By as many as we are,' answered the other man.

'How's the salt beef in these parts?' asked Captain Trollope, lighting a cigar.

'Ain't got to it yet. Had fresh messes so far,' answered one of them.

'I have known a rotten harness cask,' said Mr. Hankey, staring at the two men by the moonlight betwixt his hard,

black whiskers, 'breed the bloodiest mutiny that was ever heard of at sea. I say, Davenire, think of the spirit of murder lying pickled in a barrel of beef! What romance-hunter would seek for the fiend *there*? But I'll tell you what,' said he, stepping up close to the two astonished seamen, 'when the sheath-knife's too blunt to fashion a tobacco-jar, or even a comb for a sweetheart, out of the beef that's served to men to nourish them, and to give them bone, heart, and hands for the halliards and the handspike, why——' he broke off with a theatrical laugh, and rounding on his heel sauntered aft, watched by the brace of Jacks till he was out of sight on the poop.

It was just about then that the chief mate, who was in charge of the watch, uttered an exclamation, and at the same moment a rocket was distinctly observed to explode some considerable distance astern. A little later the steady glare of a port-fire showed, and this was followed by another and yet another rocket.

'That's from the little craft that was hanging astern this afternoon,' said the captain to the mate.

'She must be signalling us, sir. There's nothing else in sight.'

'What could she want with us? Has a mail-bag been omitted? Another rocket! Bring the ship to, sir, and let us see what's wrong there.'

This was done amidst some excitement on the part of the passengers. Even now in these the first few hours of their departure from port, the monotony of the deep was felt. Here was to be a picture by moonlight—a pursuit all the way from Sydney Harbour, something more to look at and think of than the white splendour flowing to the bows.

'Aft here, my lads, and round in on the mainbraces! Put your helm a-starboard!'

And amidst some stamping, harmonised by song, the ship was brought to the wind, and Mrs. Peacock, who watched the movements of the men from the side of Mrs. Storr, on gazing up at the heavens, beheld with astonishment that the moon had changed her position.

A group of the male passengers stood together on the quarter, and after looking one another in the face by the bright light, talked softly.

'What can she be?' says the gentleman named Davenire, staring with all his might into that part of the sea where the fireworks had shone.

'Chaw! nothing for us to trouble about,' said Mr. Shannon.

'Doooid odd though, all the same,' muttered Captain Trollope, 'just out from Sydney, and chased all the afternoon.'

'Any message for us, d'ye think?' softly exclaimed the handsome and decayed-looking Masters, strolling to the group.

'I'd be glad to see her sink if I thought so,' answered Captain Trollope.

Here another fellow with an air of aimlessness approached the knot of men which, had you then counted them, you would have found ten. On the other side of the deck where the skipper and mates stood were the rest of the passengers. Suddenly Captain Trollope, looking round, seemed sensible of the character and quality of the group he formed one of.

'Come, break up!' he whispered, and in a moment the little company dissolved, some joining the ladies, others stepping the deck, others silently overhanging the rail.

Old Captain Benson raised and let fall the night-glass to and from his eye with a manner of strong impatience. He was not used to detention of this sort. He felt there was nothing distressful in the matter, and seemed to find something impudent in a signal that required him to stop. The night wind was gentle, full of dew; it blew perhaps a four-knot breeze, and the old skipper's heart yearned to brace it. The snow-white sails of the main curved stirless to the mast, and there was not swell enough in the ocean to flap as much as the noise of a hand-clap from the rest of the cloths.

The *Queen* must have lain like a beacon of light upon that sea for the stranger to steer for, and within twenty minutes of the ship having been hove-to there came floating to the vessel, shining like a fabric wrought out of the lights of the deep, a large powerful cutter, shredding the dark brine into gleams and froth. Down came her great main-sail with a roar of hoops, and whilst a strong voice was shouting for an end of rope, the clever little craft glided close in under the counter where she lay with three or four men in her, all looking up. The moonlight flashed her white planks into ivory, and painted in clear colours the figure of a man standing near the mast with a portmanteau beside him. A fellow, letting go the tiller, ran a few steps, and shouted, looking aloft at the crowd of faces upon the ship's quarter.

‘Is Captain Benson there?’

‘Ay,’ said the captain slowly; ‘what do you want?’

‘We’ve brought off a gent who wishes to be put aboard.’

‘Where is he?’ said the captain.

‘Here,’ said the man, who stood beside the portmanteau, advancing to the rail of the cutter; ‘I beg you will allow me to come on board.’

‘But what do you want, sir?’ shouted old Benson, glaring suspiciously down at the figure that was dressed in a black coat and light trousers and a soft dark hat; he was clearly no official.

‘You will not ask me to call out my business from this low elevation, sir.’

After a pause:

‘Throw a ladder over the side,’ sang out Captain Benson.

The man seemed to shake hands with the fellow who had run from the tiller; some thought the gesture looked as though he gave him money. He gained the deck swiftly, clawing up the steps with one hand, whilst he held his portmanteau with the other. Captain Trollope passed him close humming; a few others brushed by him also in silence, and all whilst he stood for a few minutes on the deck fetching his breath.

But even in that time, whilst the captain, mates, and passengers were waiting for the stranger to approach, a fellow in the bows of the cutter let go the rope’s end; you heard a halloing of some sailors’ song as the gaff of the cutter’s main-sail mounted, and to the astonishment of Captain Benson she was off, leaning from the breeze, fretting the silver under the counter into a wake, with a fellow at the helm brawling out, ‘A good voyage to you!’

The mate stood a moment looking idly on, then sent a bull-like roar to the cutter to return and stand by the ship till it was seen what the passenger wanted. A growling ‘No, no,’ rolled back through the damp night breeze, and the cutter grew dim in the silver haze of the night.

By this time the new arrival, grasping his portmanteau, had walked aft to Captain Benson, vigilantly and distrustfully eyed by several of the male passengers as he went; indeed, they followed him and hung close to catch what passed. You could almost read by the light of the moon; the stranger’s figure and face were as determinable as by daylight; he was rather short and rather slim, and wore long whiskers

of a pale yellow. He was very white, and his dark eyes glistened in their settings as he rolled them round upon the people.

‘I do believe,’ whispered Mr. Dent to his wife whilst he bobbed his head with intent eyes at the man, ‘that he’s James Murray.’

‘Do you mean the manager of the such-and-such a bank?’ said she, giving it its name.

By this time Captain Benson appeared to have recognised him.

‘Why you’re Mr. Murray, hain’t ye?’

‘That’s my name, captain, and if you will step apart I’ll give you my reason for desiring to sail in this ship to England, and my excuse for becoming a passenger in an irregular way.’

‘What does he want to say?’ muttered Captain Trollope to Mr. Davenire.

‘Is one small portmanteau all his luggage for England?’ answered the other.

‘I think I recognise an acquaintance,’ exclaimed Mr. Murray, and he extended his hand to Mr. Dent, lifting his hat at the same time to the colonial merchant’s wife.

‘Get way upon the ship, Mr. Matthews,’ said Captain Benson, and with little courtesy or ceremony he said, ‘Step below, sir.’

Mr. Murray, picking up his portmanteau, followed the white-haired skipper down the companion steps. Captain Trollope and one or two others lurked in a heedless off-hand way round about the open skylight, through which they were able to look straight down into the cuddy. But Captain Benson and Mr. Murray sat out of earshot at the head of the table where the captain’s chair was. The old man fastened his deep-set searching eyes upon his companion, who was certainly pale and agitated; but then, to be sure, the situation he had placed himself in was an extraordinary one. He was a man of about forty, and pulling down one of his long yellow flowing whiskers, he spoke thus:—

‘It was only at the last moment, Captain Benson, when, in short, it was too late to book a passage in your ship, that I received a letter from London requiring my immediate presence at our office there. It concerns some enormous piece of rascality, and I am the only one in the Australian employ who can help them.’

'When did you get this letter?' asked the captain.

'A ship from London arrived last night—what's her name again?'

'The *Magician*!' suggested the captain.

'So,' said Murray, 'if her mails were not late in delivery, at all events my letters did not come to hand until noon. Unfortunately I was out on business. When I returned to the bank and read the commands from London your ship had started, or was about to start. I was determined to take the first ship and a clipper, and immediately hired the cutter *Wooloomooloo* to follow you, giving myself no time to bring off more luggage than what you see there,' said he, pointing to his portmanteau.

Captain Trollope and Mr. Davenire came into the cuddy, and Trollope drank a glass of water. Davenire carelessly hummed. They looked searchingly and suspiciously at Murray as they passed him, pausing on the steps as though but to catch a single syllable.

'But all this is very irregular, Mr. Murray,' said Captain Benson, whose formal sea prejudices were working in him as though they would rise to a passion. 'You could have taken the next ship, sir.'

'But good heavens, captain,' cried Murray, 'you know very well what the detention has been through desertion; a chance for sailing from Sydney may not happen for another month.'

The skipper's mahogany countenance relaxed, for this was the truth, as he knew, and it was a good excuse too.

'Of course, sir, I pay you your passage money all the same, as though I had booked at your agent's,' continued Murray, pulling out a note-book well lined with sovereigns and Bank of England notes. 'The matter is extraordinary, the case quite exceptional. You shall hear all of it as we go along,' he continued, pouring out his words with an oily fluency, under which the captain's temper was entirely unable to break. 'Any cabin forward or aft will do for me, and, of course, I pay first-class fare. Can I have something to eat now, sir? I am starving.'

The passengers were beginning to leave the deck when the captain rose. He called to the steward, and surlily bade him find Mr. Murray a bed, and provide him with some refreshments: then went on deck. It was five bells—half-past ten. The passengers had hung about above, unwilling

to intrude, but they had come to want their grog and biscuits at last, and some of them were sleepy.

'A strange business this,' said Mr. Dent, meeting the captain at the head of the companion steps. 'What brings Murray away in such a hurry?'

Mr. Caldwell and Mr. Shannon, who stood by, lounged a little closer. The captain briefly gave the colonial merchant Murray's story in effect.

'Wouldn't the chasing of a clipper ship in a cutter be considered a rather lunatic scheme?' exclaimed the black-faced Mr. Caldwell, joining in. 'Why, in anything of a breeze this ship would be twenty parallels ahead of that cutter in a week.'

'True, sir, I don't understand it,' answered the captain, and he slipped from the little knot of people and walked to the wheel, near which stood the mate. Mr. Matthews was moving forwards, for wherever the captain takes his stand there the deck is sacred:—

'Within that circle none durst walk but he.'

But the skipper softly hailed the worthy fellow, and he returned.

Oh, what a glorious Pacific night was that through which the ship was then sailing! The captain and mate stood aft, the ink-black shadow of the helmsman swayed slowly with the play of a pendulum over the grating he stood on; the planks of pearl ran forward vacant, save that a couple of figures talked together at the port extremity of the poop sunk in shadow there. The ship shone with light, and was as fair to see as a meteor of the skies as she rippled along her course, leaving a luminous dust-like wake behind her.

'What was the next ship for England?' said the captain. The mate named her.

'Was she well forward?'

'She only wanted men.'

'After all,' said the captain, looking astern, 'foreseeing the weather, and guessing our distance, Murray showed smartness in capturing us as he has. They should reward him at home for his promptness. How many bank managers would have exhibited this activity?'

'I've never seen him before,' said the plain-spoken mate, 'and I don't like his looks.'

'He showed money in plenty for his passage. A pas-

senger's looks no more concern a ship than the cut and colour of her figure-head. He arrived starved and frightened, sir.'

'With a little portmanteau for a long voyage, sir,' said the mate.

The captain grunted. The mate certainly sometimes exhibited an unreasonable dulness of mind. Mr. Matthews was again about to move forward.

'Have you any acquaintance amongst the passengers, sir?'

The white-haired skipper was of the old school, and sir'd a man with the pomp and persistency of old Sam himself.

'No, sir,' answered the mate; 'I believe Mr. Poole knows one or two of them.'

The captain made a step to the skylight, looked down and watched for a moment in silence those of the passengers whose figures he could compass, as they sat at table sipping and munching. They included one or two ladies, and Captain Henry Trollope showed in bold relief, and so too did Mr. Masters and Mr. Burn, who was drinking bottled beer. Sounds of laughter and talk arose. The captain made another step, and caught sight of Mr. Murray squaring his elbows at a tray of refreshments and talking eagerly to Mr. Dent. He returned to the mate who awaited him.

'Some of our gentlemen passengers,' said he, 'appear to have seen hard times.'

'And hard drinking, sir.'

'The goldfields soon toughen a man into rough looks, they say,' said the captain. 'A few of them appear as though they knew the ropes. I caught one casting as sailorly an eye as ever a seaman directed at the set of the ship's sails.'

He paused, and then made some reference to the ship's course and the promise of the weather, and went below, leaving the mate to trudge out his solitary watch till midnight.

CHAPTER III

THE BANK MANAGER

NEXT morning the wind was off the bow—a head wind—and the seas ridging at the ship in rich, sparkling lines of violet and lace. When the passengers came on deck after breakfast they found the second mate, who had charge of the ship,

standing at the rail with his arm round a backstay, gazing with the idle eyes of custom at the large figure of a whale that was swelling wet, black and gleaming, along the course of the ship, half a mile away to windward.

It was a fine sight when the huge, gleaming bulk rose and fell with the motions of a ship, bursting the glittering heads of brine into snowstorms, whilst, as though it pulsed its way along with a steam-engine inside, it blew a tall spout which arched like a feather when the weight of the wind took it.

Mr. Hankey stepped halfway up the poop ladder with a pipe in his mouth, and said to the second mate, who stood just above, close by :

‘Do you see yonder cloud that’s almost in shape of a camel?’

‘By the mass, and ’tis like a camel indeed,’ answered Poole, grinning.

‘Methinks it is like a weasel,’ said Mr. Hankey.

‘It is backed like a weasel,’ exclaimed the second mate, laughing heartily.

‘Or like a whale,’ cried Mr. Hankey.

‘Very like a whale,’ answered the second mate, with the tears standing in his eyes.

Mr. Hankey nodded his appreciation ; probably this was the only second mate then afloat who could have Poloniused him so aptly and quick. He raised his foot by another step to command with his eye the platform of the poop, and said :

‘Did you ever hear of a man chasing a clipper to get a passage?’

‘There are plenty of instances of belated passengers overtaking vessels in small boats and otherwise,’ answered the second mate, looking aft to see if the captain was on deck.

‘What would the cutter charge for such a job?’

‘A hundred sovereigns, every penny, and perhaps a heavy consideration on the top if the chase was successful.’

‘All for what?’ said Mr. Hankey, looking at Mr. Murray, who stood alone right aft, staring at the whale.

‘Ha!’ said the second mate.

‘And one little portmanteau,’ said Mr. Hankey.

‘Oh, that would be nothing, sir, when a man’s in a hurry.’

‘Do you smell anything like a rat?’ said Mr. Hankey.

The second mate’s grin instantly disappeared on his catch-

ing sight of the captain. He stepped aft, backwards, as though to command a clearer view of the main-royal, and Hankey, seating himself at the foot of the ladder, was joined in a very short time by Captain Trollope, Davenire, Burn, and Masters. There was a uniformity in the variety of this group of smokers that impressed the eye of even the second mate, when, having satisfied himself that the main-royal was properly set, he returned to his place at the head of the poop-ladder. He had known Mr. Hankey merely as a passenger when outward bound, and in Sydney had partaken of some friendly drinks with him. He had understood that his uncle was a lord in Holy Orders, and undoubtedly Mr. Hankey was a gentleman. Yet what was it, he thought, that made that knot of fellows beneath him so various in their attire—alike, and yet unlike? Scarcely their military bearing, though they had *that*, some of them. He was puzzled, and scratched the back of his head and looked right aft over the stern at the lovely, delicately troubled blue of the sea there; but once looking, he continued to look, then to frown, then to strain his sight. Muttering to himself 'By Gosh!' he walked aft, touching his cap to the captain, whom he thus addressed:

'There's a steamer's smoke right astern of us, sir.'

The captain sheltered his eyes with his hand.

'I believe I see it, sir,' said he, and looked at the faint blue film through a telescope.

The second mate walked forward.

'What's the old man looking at?' said Captain Trollope, rising to the height of the ladder, and addressing Mr. Poole.

'There's a steamer coming up astern,' answered the second mate shortly. His duty as an officer in charge forbade him from conversing with the passengers. Captain Trollope descended the ladder in quick recoil, and said in a hoarse, low, eager voice: 'There's a steamer coming after us,' on which every man knocked his pipe out and went to the poop.

A steamer in the days this story belongs to was a real curiosity in those seas. A man-of-war with a funnel might now and again be met, sometimes with a foreign colour at her mizzen-gaff: a few, but a very few, steamers communicated between Europe and the Australias. Hence the apparition of that smoke lifting its fibrous height higher and yet higher above the blue sea-limit, caused great excitement fore and aft. A steamer it certainly was—not the smoke of a

burning ship, as Mr. Murray suggested, 'because, sir,' said the captain, looking at his pale face and yellow whiskers keenly and doubtfully, as though his old-fashioned prejudices still viewed him as an intruder, despite the fifty guineas the man had that morning put down, 'burning ships lie still, and yonder smoke is overtaking us.'

'What vessel *can* she be, do you think?' said Mr. Dent. 'There was no steamer at Sydney when we left.'

'Except the tug,' said Mr. Burn, who had pressed forward, speaking with a strong beery accent after a breakfast of bottled ale.

There was a general laugh. The notion of a tug being all this distance from her port was unusually rich and original.

The clipper broke her way somewhat sluggishly through the flowing lines of head sea, fiery with sunshine. She was off her course, half the main-royal was aback, and every weather-leech lifted at each light plunge of the bow. Her pace, therefore, was comparatively small, and as the breezes of the night had for the most part been faint and fluctuating, the distance she had already made from Sydney was not great. It was a noble, inspiring morning; the wind was of a rare softness, charged with some aroma of ocean, which might have come sweet with remoteness from the giant kelp of the Antarctic circle. An awning shaded the poop. The Jacks forward filled the eye with the various business of their vocation; the main-deck ran from the quarter-deck white and clear; the *Queen* carried no steerage passengers. From time to time a cow lowed in its stall; hens cackled and pigs grunted. It was hot. Who could realise the ice and blackness of that Horn which the ship was by-and-by to pass, in the face of the trembling bed of light through which she was bruising her way?

Extraordinary interest was manifested in the smoke astern by many of the gentlemen passengers. They did not trouble the captain with questions, but talked apart. Mr. Murray, on the other hand, had been a little importunate till the captain gave his arm to a lady and marched away. He had wanted to know if she was likely to prove a steamer from any other Australian port than Sydney, or was she a man-of-war? Was it conceivable that she was bringing more passengers for the clipper? He looked anxious and about ten years older than when at breakfast. Captain Trollope, Davenire, and one or two others of the set viewed him curiously.

'I don't think,' says Trollope to Caldwell in a low mysterious voice, 'that he'd fire a magazine as an alternative.'

'We keep too near the cust country,' exclaimed Mr. Hankey, looking at the smoke. 'I daresay some point of it is still in sight from the masthead.'

'Gentlemen,' said Mr. Storr, joining them, rubbing his hands, 'this, I think, promises to be a voyage of excitements.'

'What took you to Australia, sir?' said Captain Trollope, looking down at the little man over his big moustache.

'Business,' answered the auctioneer.

'Did pretty well, I hope?' said Mr. Masters.

'I did not dig for gold,' answered Mr. Storr, with a sarcastic glance of suspicion at the handsome but decayed young fellow.

'And so you *did* pretty well,' said Captain Trollope. 'Ha, ha! That's sheer betwixt the ribs of some of us, Hankey.'

Here Mr. Burn diverted the attention by arriving with Miss Mansel and the ship's telescope. The gentlemen crowded about the good-looking young woman to point the glass for her, and Mr. Masters begged her not to shut the eye which she applied to the tube. By this time the steamer had risen to the height of her paddle-boxes, disclosing a lean, dog's-eared funnel that vomited a black fat coil of smoke twenty miles long, and one pole mast forward, on which some signals were seen to be flying, but as the colours blew fore and aft they could not be distinguished. There was no doubt now that her business was with the clipper. Indeed, Mr. Dent, after looking at her through the telescope, professed to recognise her as the tug *Bungaree*, of Sydney. A mirage lifted her, and she looked closer than she was. But she was splashing after the ship at eight knots, and the clipper was barely doing five, and presently she was showing her small squab hull fair upon the water with the figures of men visible on the bridge, and flags still streaming at the pole mast, but dumb as a sea-tongue through being on end.

Captain Trollope looked for Mr. Murray; he had disappeared.

The barque was luffed till way was almost shaken out of her. It was a moment of great excitement. The chase of the cutter had been nothing compared with it. Thrice in twenty-four hours to be pursued! Old Benson was puzzled. The traditions of the ocean seemed all awry. Three weeks' detention

in Sydney Harbour through desertion! And, now, when fairly away to be checked by a species of pursuit unprecedented in his experience! However, it was clear enough the steamer wanted the ship. The second mate had managed to spell out the flags which, in Marryatt's Code, signified 'Important, must communicate.'

'Bring the ship to the wind, sir,' said Captain Benson to the officer.

She was a small clinker-built boat, with green paddle-boxes, and the foam fled from her sponsons as the foot of a cataract hurls into its channel. Three men stood on her bridge, and as she came alongside with a beat of paddles that, with the arrest of the wheels, sank into a sullen roar of water, a man in a white wide-awake and long lean yellow face and linen jacket, hailed from the bridge.

'Ho, the *Queen* ahoy!'

'Hallo!' sang out Captain Benson.

'Has e'er a stranger been put aboard your ship since yer sailed from Sydney?'

'Yes, sir,' shouted back Captain Benson.

'Was he put aboard by the cutter *Wooloomooloo*?'

The captain lifted his hand.

'You must allow me to come on board if you please,' exclaimed one of the men who stood upon the bridge: he was dressed in a sort of uniform, a bell-shaped cap with naval peak, light cloth braided jacket of military cut. The captain of the steamer shouted down her call pipe: the paddles were manœuvred, the tug drew close alongside, and watching their opportunity as the slight swell rolled the two vessels to and from each other, the official-looking individual and another sprang on the barque and came aft.

'Good gracious me!' exclaimed Mrs. Dent to her husband, 'it's Superintendent Fox.'

The other might have passed for a Bow Street runner. His nose was like the end of a bludgeon, the left eye was twice the size of the right, and as he stepped aft with the superintendent he gazed with a grin of ragged black teeth round upon the people. Yet he was some sort of official too, to judge by his clothes. The superintendent walked right up to Captain Benson, and said quite audibly:

'You are the master of this ship, sir?'

'That's so,' answered the captain, puffing and straddling, and firmly settling his tall hat.

'I am here,' said the other, 'to arrest Mr. James Murray, manager of the such-and-such a bank, Sydney, for embezzlement.'

'Lor!' said the captain, 'what's the amount, sir?'

'Seventy-six thousand pounds.'

Captain Trollope whistled long and low. The fellow with the horrible grin of teeth turned slowly and looked at him.

'It seems as if others are to have the innings,' said Mr. Caldwell, in a hoarse whisper in the ear of Mr. Cavendish, who was staring with his congenital grin, made loathsome through the projection of his upper lip by his eye teeth.

'I don't see my man,' said the superintendent, running his eyes over the group of passengers, following on with a level, penetrating stare at the seamen forwards who had struck work for the moment to gaze aft.

'Go and tell Mr. Murray he is wanted, sir,' said Captain Benson to the second mate, who, knowing where to look, ran down the companion steps: he was instantly followed by the superintendent and his assistant.

Captain Benson remained on deck. The passengers talked in whispers. The sensation was profound. Mr. Mark Davenire and another went stealthily to the skylight and peered down: their ears seemed to enlarge as they strained them. It was about eleven o'clock in the morning. The sun was shining with a strong heat, and there was a sense as of being in harbour with that tug lying close alongside panting in her heart: the blue water slopped noisily between the two vessels as they rolled at each other, and Mr. Burn, leaning over the rail, seemed able to forget what was going forward in the ship in laughing at the tug's helmsman, whose thin shape shot out of a pair of compasses into a mere pellet of head, a mere rope of onions, the littlest on top.

'This state of suspense is dreadful,' whispered Miss Mansel to Mr. Shannon. 'What will they do to the wretched man?'

'Put him in chains,' answered the ship's surgeon, who stood near.

'The brutality of it!' exclaimed Mr. Shannon, with a face that was suddenly dark with passion. 'Did you ever see a chain gang?'

The girl with a shudder answered that she had seen men on railway platforms in England linked together, and that had been a sight that sickened her. Mr. Shannon was about to speak when he caught a look from Captain Trollope; it was a

look of menace, almost of fury ; it had but the life of an instant ; next breath the tall soldierly-looking man seemed to be listening at the companion-way at what was passing below.

All on a sudden up rushed Poole, the second mate.

‘Where’s the doctor?’ he shouted.

‘Here,’ answered the ship’s surgeon.

‘You’re wanted, sir!’

The surgeon ran after the mate into the cuddy. The captain’s teak-coloured face betwixt its fringe of white hairs took a resolved hard weather look ; he walked apart from the passengers, and strode in short excursions beside the wheel, guessing a fatality and awaiting its report.

What was the doctor wanted for ? the passengers wondered. Had Murray stabbed himself, shot himself ? No ; they’d have heard the report of a pistol in that scene of deck subdued by alarm and expectation, whilst on high all was still, but for now and again the gull-like cry of a suddenly jerked block.

Mr. Storr, standing beside the companion hatch, faintly cried ‘Good God!’ and made a quick step out of the way. In fact the companion ladder was then full of figures rising clumsily with the dead weight of a man’s body. There was a general recoil, and most of the ladies went hurriedly forward.

‘By Jove, he’s killed himself!’ said Mr. Davenire.

The rest of his friends looked on with cold faces.

The lifeless body of Mr. James Murray was passed through the companion-hatch in the triple clutch of the hideous rogue of the black teeth, the superintendent, and the second mate. They put it flat down upon the deck, right in the way of a ray of sunshine that flooded the convulsed face, which looked alive with the movement of the muscles. The surgeon dropped a large silk handkerchief over the dreadful countenance.

‘Is it a fit, sir?’ exclaimed Captain Benson, coming along smartly on his rounded shanks from his sacred walk near the wheel, both his loose arms jerking with agitation and temper.

‘Poison, sir,’ said the surgeon.

‘He was too quick for us,’ said the superintendent with a surly look at the corpse.

‘Did he poison himself?’ cried the captain, who unconsciously formed the centre of a crescent of passengers, with one very white face under Mr. Storr’s straw hat.

The superintendent whispered to his ugly mate, who rolled below, and returned with the dead man's portmanteau.

'He had come prepared,' said the surgeon to the captain.

'But with what?' demanded the skipper.

'Prussic acid.'

'A surer trick than the bullet,' whispered Hankey to Masters.

'It makes no mess, certainly,' said Masters, looking as coolly at the body as if it had been a fish newly landed.

'Do you carry it back with you?' said the captain.

'Ay, sir, yes, along with that,' replied the superintendent, pointing to the portmanteau.

'Then for God's sake,' cried the old skipper with an angry toss of both his fins, 'take 'em both out of the ship at once, sir; take 'em both out of the ship at once, and leave us to proceed. Is that a sight for ladies?'

'I should be obliged by a sailor or two to help,' said the superintendent.

They contrived it by placing the body on a grating covered with a piece of sailcloth, that the ladies who lingered on deck might not continue to be shocked. They passed the dead wretch through the gangway, and, watching their chance, cleverly launched grating and figure to the paddle-box of the steamer, where the thing was caught, the body removed, and the grating returned.

'Is it all right with you?' sang out the captain.

'All right, sir,' answered the master of the tug. But no hand was flourished, no signal of farewell was exchanged. It had been too ugly a business to admit of any sort of kindness.

'Only this very morning at breakfast,' said Mrs. Peacock, with a working face to Mrs. Storr, 'he was talking to me most affably. He knew my husband well. I find it impossible to think of him as a villain.'

'I find it harder to think of him at all,' answered Mrs. Storr. 'Only imagine! he was talking to me and my husband this morning about his intention of settling in London, and of buying a house through Mr. Storr. His voice trembles upon my ear still. It is now the voice of a ghost. I am thankful the sun is up.'

'Trim sail,' cried the captain. 'Round with that maintop-sail smartly, Mr. Poole.'

His command was re-echoed by the second mate with the voice of a young lion. In a minute the poop rang with the

yeo-ho heave-hoing of pulling and hauling Jacks. The tug splashed her paddles heavily alongside, floated ahead, and curved away for Sydney. The sun sparkled in splendour in her broad race of foam, and the light sea tossed it, and the bright breeze whipped it into many glittering fragments of rainbow, till it looked like a stretch of flower garden in tow of her. The breeze had freshened on a sudden without shifting its quarter or blowing up a rag of cloud: when sail was trimmed the clipper took the brilliant gushing of wind as a horse starts to the touch of its rider. She heeled her three shining spires with their flights of steady wings between; the sea-flash broke in smoke from her weather bow. The white water swept in a smooth, silky seething alongside.

‘He paid his passage-money, too,’ mused the old skipper, pausing at the companion-hatch, with his deep-set eyes fixed upon the receding figure of the tug. ‘A cheaply earned fifty guineas, and not his to spend either. So, I suppose——’

Here the old chap gave a start, remembering the time, and a few minutes later he had returned on deck, and was screwing the sun down to the sea, with an occasional glance, in the intervals of his observation, at the line of smoke astern, and a look once or twice at Captain Trollope and some others, who stood in a knot at the lee-mizzen rigging deep in conversation that hummed with wary undertones.

CHAPTER IV

THE SLEEP-TALKER

THEY talked over this matter of embezzlement and suicide in the fore-castle as well as in the cabin. Were you ever in a ship’s fore-castle? Did you *never* see a company of sailors dining in their sea parlour?

Here is an interior with a little square hole for light and escape called a scuttle; you may also enter it by way of the main-deck, round the windlass ends. Nearly all hands are below: the kids full of smoking meat have been brought along from the galley, and the sailors are falling to. What a fall to is that; no table, no chairs, no convenience of any sort. Hammocks bulge in grimy bulk from the ceilings; a few bunks are shaped to the ship’s side, and vanish in the darkness of ‘the eyes’ right forward. There is not light enough

to see by, although it is noon by the clock. Jack has lighted his flare of wick and the vision in the recess by a dance of light.

The men still feed upon fresh mutton threehalfpence a pound, mangled and yoked to the wool waggon, was leagues of travel into black veins of upland spruce.

Jack sits upon his chest, or in the corner at the contents of the mess kitchen, gone away with it like a dog. You may see him with a cube of bullock's heart with the tarry blade he carries in his shipboard work in his sheath, munching sullenly like an old goat, with a curse at the leather betwixt his teeth, whilst he balances his pannikin to the light, watching the black rum and water sway as though he expected some revelation of tadpole. He is happy at last when he flings tin plate and tin pannikin down, and pulling out a plug of tobacco leisurely cuts himself a pipeful.

'I say, mates,' sings out Bill, lighting his pipe with a rope-yarn at the lamp, 'how do a man feel when he's pisoned?'

'As I do,' says Joe. 'They spits better meat than this in London town for cats. Why don't they send cat's meat to sea? It's nothen but dawg's meat for sailors, I allow.'

'I helped to tilt the poor devil on to the grating,' said one of the men, 'and I'm bubbled if you couldn't feel him a stiffening just as with the eye ye see a piece of wood a-curling when it's on fire.'

'Git out,' said a sulky sailor called Jim.

'S'elp me then, you old cuckoo, but I ought to know, for I 'ad the 'andling of him.'

'How much did 'e steal?' asked a sailor.

'Why,' answered Tom gravely, as one who is acquainted with the meaning of figures, 'I hear it was a matter of about a quarter of a million.'

Silence. No man had any notion of that quantity, and none liked to expose his ignorance.

'When I first caught sight of that chap,' continued Tom, 'I guessed there was something up. I don't like a man who wears long whiskeys. I once sailed with a man with long whiskeys, and he tried to put his ship ashore twice whilst I was on board. He managed it arter I left her. When I caught sight of him this morning, I says to myself, thinks I,

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yeo-ho heave-l; to sail along with us, thinks I, stand by, my splashed her voyage of blue moons. Why,' he continued, ex-curved awa hand, 'his chasing of us showed him up. Why her broa'ship like the others? But he was of that sort, I bright 'ao reckons that a man's nakedness can be hidden by rain-bring himself all over.'

of r 'What did he take that killed him?' asked a man.

ir 'Nobody knew.

'Reckon it stowed snugly and might be worth a man's carrying about,' continued the sailor. 'Think of an open boat like what we passed yesterday: throat so scorched that when ye mutter for a drink, ye start and look round wondering what devil in the air was mocking of ye. Wouldn't the little portable, whatever it was, that saved that man from chains and the lash, come in middling handy at such a time?'

The speaker resumed his pipe and gazed around to observe the effect produced by his powerful imagination.

'I wish that old owl 'ud belay his jaw. He's too gallus quick with his blue lights,' sang out a querulous voice from a hammock.

'I'll tell you what,' exclaimed the man Tom in a mysterious voice, whilst the atmosphere of slush-flare and dim daylight turned of a faint blue with tobacco smoke; 'that there covey as was took off ain't the only rumdiddles aboard this ship.'

None of the men seemed much interested.

A voice under the scuttle exclaimed, 'There's a cove aboard this ship with a face ate up by drink. He looks as decayed as an old cheese, as the jagged side of the moon in a telescope. I've some recollection of having met that man. I've some recollection,' continued the voice, 'of a man having been stabbed to the heart in a quarrel, and of a chap all the same as this pocky party being wanted for the job.'

'There's more'n one of them first-class passengers,' says Bill, 'who's been to sea. I'll swear to that; though they mayn't have the looks they've got the eyes of sailors.'

'Sogers you swear. Don't talk of 'em as sailors,' exclaimed Tom. 'I make out ten. There's a sort of professional likeness among 'em, though you shall tell me one bunker stands six foot with a mustachy, whilst another might be a forecastle duff on end. I know I ain't to be mistook. I've been along with troops afore now, and I can tell ye a military officer without asking for his sword' (spit).

'Two or three came for'rads yesterday,' exclaimed a fellow

grinning so hard that he was forced to pull a sooty inch of pipe from betwixt his teeth, 'and was for working up a mutiny, durn me, ha! ha! Talk of the harness cask and the demon of murder^a-lying in it. If the mate overhears you, thinks I! He whips off on his heels just as though he'd been saying nothing of consequence. But I'll tell ye what, there's more powder for bust-ups in them half-laughs and purser's grins than in the straight-faced tip.'

Here they were interrupted by a roaring voice in the scuttle. Pipes were emptied, caps adjusted, and half the men tumbled out into the sunshine to go on with the work of the ship.

The horizon was clear, but the slant of the vessel was sharp with freshening gusts, and in one of them, as it swept salt blue and shrill over the bulwark rail, splitting into railway whistles upon the shrouds, the mate of the watch bawled out an order for the fore and mizzen royals to be clewed up, and the flying jib to be hauled down. A misty appearance thickened the blue on the weather bow, and some stuff like scud, pale as though whitened by moonlight, was flying up out of it.

'In main-royal and gaff-topsail,' called out the skipper from the weather quarter.

The barque was thrashing through it nobly then. The froth lifted pouring in swells or humps of dazzling whiteness from either quarter; and the sea-smoke flew like explosions of cannon from the bow. The awning was rattling like the feather in Miss Mansel's hat.

'We must have the mainsail off her.'

The men raced with a will to the summons of the mate's voice. High aloft the main-royal was ballooning from the grip of its gear. A man was hauling taut on its lee brace when Mr. Davenire, standing clear of the ridge-rope of the awning, close beside the main-rigging, and staring on high, exclaimed to Mr. Alexander Burn:

'I think we might manage it.'

'Off, ye lendings!' cried Burn.

The two men whipped off their coats in a jiffy, and were halfway up the rigging, whilst the sailors were still busy with the gear belonging to the sail.

'What did I tell ye?' says Bill in the waist, looking up.

'A fine mess they'll make of it,' was the answer. 'All to be done over again.'

The two gentlemen reaching the futtock rigging, gained the top with wonderfully nimble knees. Fat as he was, Mr. Burn did not stop to blow. On the contrary, he showed the road, and was shinning up the topgallant rigging when Davenire was making a breathless pause of it for a moment or two in the crosstrees.

Old Captain Benson, gripping the weather-vang, looked up with a face of stern disapproval, which slowly softened, however, when he saw the sail swiftly fining down into lines of man-of-war-like neatness and a very daisy of a bunt. He was astonished. Mr. Burn, coming into the crosstrees, gazed down with a flourish of his hand.

'Main topgallants'l, sir?' he sung down.

'No, no, gentlemen, not yet, thank 'ee,' cried the mate, laughing and looking aft at the captain.

'I'll warrant that sail to go round the Horn without blowing adrift,' says Mr. Burn, in his wheezy, frothy, bottled-beer voice, to the mate as he stepped out of the rigging and put on his coat.

Captain Trollope, lounging to leeward, muttered to one of his friends as the hearty figure of Burn went along the weather side of the poop to court the congratulations of the captain.

'I wish those fools wouldn't show off. Burn bubbles over with self-conceit. He froths, like his ale, with it. If there were no women on board, Burn would keep quiet.'

'He talks in his sleep,' answered the other, who was Mr. Isaac Cavendish, the man with the little eyes, and odious, self-complacent grin. 'I heard a voice in his cabin last night. It was Burn's—a jolly silly voice, a beery babble.'

'If that's so, he must shift,' said Captain Trollope rapidly, frowning as he again sent a glance at Burn. 'Let's go below and see if it can be managed.'

Meanwhile, Burn, turning a hot and grinning countenance upon the passengers as he walked, stepped up to old Benson, and said, 'Well, captain, what do you think of that for a stow?'

'Sir,' answered the captain, with some blood of confusion, and perhaps of temper, deepening with a new shade the heavy weather stains upon his face, 'it is a very good stow, I have no doubt, but aboard my ship it is not customary for the passengers to do the work of the sailors.'

'Not the dirty work, naturally,' said Burn, half closing one eye as he turned his gaze upon the man at the wheel.

‘But a little clean, healthful gymnastics, you know—besides you’re short-handed, I believe.’

‘We shall be able to manage, sir,’ replied the captain, bridling.

‘Didn’t it make you sick to look down?’ said Mr. Storr, who had stealthily paced up to listen.

‘No; but was it because I didn’t see you?’ exclaimed Burn, bursting into a shout of laughter and catching hold of the astonished auctioneer by the arm. ‘Only a joke, my dear fellow. Sick! Why,’ says he, talking loud that all might hear, ‘it’s like going to heaven to be up there; you can hear the angels singing. Is there a musician amongst us able to bestride a yard-arm with a note-book and take down the melodies of the skies?’

Old Captain Benson walked forward on indignant legs to get out of the way. Though he reckoned that this spouter might have been once a seaman, he guessed by his looks and speech he was now fresh from the stage, a profession he despised through ignorance of the many affecting qualities of the actor.

The barque stormed along; the mainsail was off her, but she could bear the rest, and her hull swept phantom-like in a shadowing of spray; the bow seas smote her, and she leapt them with living grace. She was off her course, however, by three points, and this kept old Benson looking to windward. There was nothing more to come, however, in the shape of wind, spite of the blue dimness and the rags of steam-like stuff blowing out of it. Indeed, before the afternoon had far advanced the breeze had scanted, had shifted into the southward, and when the passengers went below to dinner they left the ship clothed to her trucks as in the morning, the yards slightly braced in, and the watch rigging out the fore-topmast studding sail boom.

It was a quiet dinner-party that evening; the suicide that day, the shock of it—for Murray had been well known to several—worked on the ladies. The captain talked in quiet tones to Mr. Dent and Mr. Storr. He seemed not to desire the conversation of the others or to evade it; he was civil, but his behaviour was that of a man who doesn’t know his company. Some must have noticed this, but they allowed it to make no visible impression. They found the mate at the foot disposed to be chatty, and their talk was principally occupied with such texts as he provided or they suggested.

This was strange, you would have thought; as they had many experiences in common, and could have found themselves perfectly independent of mate or skipper. At intervals one would speak of the goldfields; another, perhaps, would let fall something dreamy and confused about the bush (the worst culprit in this special knowledge was Mr. Patrick Weston, whose face had a strange twisted look, as though famine having wrung it, conscience had fixed it, defying all after days of better cheer to help it). But on the whole their chat betrayed little or nothing of themselves or their past. Some seemed to have tried their luck on the stage, and the whole of the ten seemed to know a great deal about ships and the sea. If, indeed, they were boldly questioned, they made answer. Miss Mansel, for instance, who sat opposite to the great figure of Mark Davenire, said that she wondered he had had courage to climb the mast. Was he ever a sailor?

'Why, yes,' he answered, rolling in his chair as he clutched at the swing tray for a decanter of Marsala, 'when a boy I was a sailor. All good boys go to sea.'

'And you remember how to stow a sail after all these years, sir?' says the mate.

'I'll tell you what, Mr. Matthews,' exclaimed Davenire, poisoning a full glass, 'I believe you could put me to no job aboard this ship which you wouldn't find me superior to.'

'One would think, gentlemen,' said the mate, lying back in his chair and talking softly—he did not choose that the captain should think him too fluent—'that some of you had shipped in anticipation of finding the vessel short-handed.'

This was awkwardly put and meant. It was taken in ill part, and the men fell to talking one to another across the table in light off-hand speeches about the wind and the weather, giving no heed to the mate, who presently rose with something of a look of chagrin, and marched on deck to watch the ship.

The darkness drew round in as gentle and lovely a night as that which had preceded it: the moonlight flooded the zenith, and the spires of the *Queen* shot straight up into the silver air, every cloth silent with the breathing of the soft night wind. But by eleven o'clock the cabin lamps, saving one faint glimmer, were extinguished; old Benson had gone to his cabin, the passengers had turned in; the second mate walked in lonely watch, and the man at the wheel rose and

fell in a shape of bronze tinctured with the gleam of the binnacle lamp.

Seven bells had been struck, when a tall radish of a figure came out of one of the cabins, and, going round the foot of the table, entered, without ceremony, a berth that immediately faced it. Two gentlemen occupied the berth. The tall figure was Mr. Isaac Cavendish; he laid his hand upon the man in the upper bed, who violently started up with a most significant swift motion of his arm to his pillow. The light of the moon was upon the sea, and the sheen of it filled the berth with a delicate mist.

'Trollope, I want you to come and hear Burn talking in his sleep,' says Cavendish in a whisper. 'You may hear him *here!*'

The gentleman who occupied the under berth was Patrick Weston: he was snoring dismally just then in gulps and gasps like a pump when it sucks. Yet despise the clamour raised by those bellows of nostrils, the two gentlemen could distinctly hear a noisy voice proceeding from a cabin abreast—a greasy voice that sometimes attempted a tragic note which it cut short with a laugh. In silence Captain Trollope sprang out of his bunk. He was attired, as his companion was, for his bed, presentable for an emergency, such as fire or collision. They crossed the cuddy and entered Mr. Cavendish's berth, which he shared with Mr. Caldwell. This gentleman lay a very corpse in sleep, thanks to a draught which the surgeon had given him for a face-ache.

Trollope and Cavendish closed the door and listened. Their motive was to discover if Burn's words penetrated the bulkhead. Cavendish insisted that he caught some syllables. They now stood with straining ears. It generally happens that when you are prepared to listen the noise ceases—that when you have run to bring your friend to witness an object it has disappeared. They had to wait ten minutes before Burn was again disturbed by a dream. He then announced his intention to begin by an odd parrot-like laugh.

'Hush!' whispered Trollope; 'even that noise is enough to bring the captain out upon him.'

'No use in attempting Othello here,' spoke the dreamer with a distinctness of utterance that was highly alarming to those whose ears were in waiting. 'What do you say? . . . I wish you wouldn't be so infernally impertinent. What's that again? . . .' Here came a long pause as though he

gave his phantom opponent plenty of time to explain himself. He then began to mutter. The tone was derisive, the words inaudible.

‘We had better make him understand at once that this won’t do,’ whispered Trollope; and they passed into Mr. Burn’s berth.

It was the smallest berth in the ship—a mere hole, with a bull’s-eye for a window. It contained but one bunk, and in it the two men dimly distinguished the lumpish figure of Mr. Burn, with one leg over the edge of his bed, in a posture of conviviality. His right arm was mad with pantomime, and he muttered in a low tragedy note in blank verse. Captain Trollope watched him, then let his hand fall upon his shoulder. Burn instantly started up with a horrid ringing scream. It is told of a certain Scotchman that he delivered a yell like a wolf on stepping out of a bathing machine and putting his foot into the water. Such another cry did this man Burn raise as he sprang out of his bed, and, half asleep as he was, contorted his half-clad shape of suet into a fighting attitude.

The cry aroused everybody. Cabin doors were opened, and questions in male and female voices were hissed through the cuddy. The captain, in a long pea-coat scarcely concealing the extremities of a pair of bed-drawers, came out of his cabin and hastily turned up the lamp. He shouted to the mate through the open skylight to know what horrible cry was that; and the mate, putting his head into the open frame, replied that he had heard no cry, and didn’t know what the captain meant.

‘It’s only Mr. Burn, who howled in his sleep. It’s all right! he’s awake now,’ said Captain Trollope, making a step into the cuddy.

The captain bowled down to Mr. Burn’s door to satisfy himself; then, growling out ‘Glad it isn’t murder, sir,’ went on deck to look at the ship and the night, whilst most of the passengers returned to their beds. Two or three, however, came gliding round the table to Burn’s cabin.

‘What the deuce is wrong?’ whispered one.

‘Go to your cabin, Hankey; it’s all right, I tell you. Away with you, Johnson—Shannon—for God’s sake don’t make a crowd of us. I’ll talk to you of this in the morning. This is no hour to be debating and whispering here, with the captain and mate on deck and the lamp burning brightly.’

These words Captain Trollope delivered in swift, imperious whispers. He spoke as the leader of a gang would, and, as obedient members of a gang might, did those whom he addressed slink away to their cabins. He was alone with Burn, to whom he said.

'You must shift your berth. You'll have to sleep with a man.'

'What the blazes has gone wrong?' exclaimed Burn.

'You shrieked out.'

'What made you dab your hand down then? Who the deuce wouldn't shriek out, as you call it, when he's struck in his sleep?'

'You fat fool! A baby would not have been aroused by my touch. But this is what I want to tell you: you talk in your sleep; you're a danger to us; your voice can be heard through the bulkhead of the adjoining cabin. You must rout out of this, I tell you, and sleep with a man.'

'Well, that can be arranged, I suppose?' said Burn, with a sulky yawn. 'What did I say in my sleep?'

'You spouted some bosh in blank verse; you had a quarrel with a stage prompter.' Burn was broadly grinning. 'Consider,' continued Trollope in a whisper of rage, 'what's to be the result if you should dream of the job and argue it out with one of your bottle-bred phantoms?'

'Well, I admit it *is* dangerous,' said Burn. 'Shall I turn out at once? Where am I to go?'

Trollope put his head out to look at the cuddy clock; then exclaimed:

'Oh, I suppose you may be trusted for the rest of the night. Try to keep awake.'

He yawned himself as he spoke, and without another word slipped across the deck to his own cabin.

That morning at seven o'clock old Benson was pacing the poop in goloshes and tall hat. A couple of seamen were swabbing down the planks, which glanced in the morning sun with the brightness of diamonds; the sun-dried brine flashed with each lazy roll of the barque, and the vessel seemed on fire with the glory that broke from her decks. The mate, unshorn, and grim with three hours of watch, paced the break of the poop athwart-ships. The sails had a shadowing of dew upon them, and they floated off heavily from their yards and sheets as the swing of the swell put some weight of breeze into their hollows. The yards were braced as square

as if the ship was in port. The mainsail was hauled up; all the after fore and aft canvas brailed in and hauled down, but the mainroyal shone on high, and there was air enough to keep the cutwater fretting the clear blue; lines of ripples rolled harp-like aft, with now and again a flake of foam that dissolved as fast as the eye could catch it.

A beautiful cloudless morning, but misty eastwards, with the splendours of the risen sun, so that it was not until the trembling dazzle had drawn well on to the port bow that captain and mate spied the hulk of a dismasted vessel lying almost directly ahead. Distance made a toy of it to the naked sight. In the glass it showed as a brig or a schooner, with painted ports, floating with a comfortable height of side. She was ragged with trailing wreckage. There was no smoke—no sign of life. Clearly an abandoned craft, to be caulked by old ocean with weeds and shell into an unsinkable fabric; to strain southward and dance to the thunders of terrible weather in the vast hollow seas of the Southern Cross. Such an object, eternally buoyant with the caulking irons of Neptune, the whaleman sees at night by the icy glare of the moon in the north as he storms before the gale. It is sometimes robed in the Leviathan weed of those wild seas, and flogs the snow-darkened hurricane with livid kelp as it soars to the boiling peak.

Neither the captain nor the mate of the *Queen*, however, was of a sentimental turn. They saw no poetry nor any possibilities of romance in anything their eye rested upon, even though it were the shooting colours of the Aurora, or an angry Atlantic sunset.

‘A dismasted vessel right ahead, sir,’ says Mr. Matthews, looking round.

‘I see it, sir,’ says old Benson, and then he fetched the glass.

Whilst the old skipper was working away with the telescope, Trollope came up through the companion hatch.

‘Good morning, sir,’ says Captain Trollope, ‘another fine day, but at this pace the *Queen* is not going to keep her promise of a ten-week run.’

‘Perhaps not, sir,’ answered old Benson, with an unconscious sneer and an impatient glance aloft.

‘I am asked by Mr. Burn to apologise to you, captain, for the row he kicked up in the night. It was pure nightmare, he believes.’

‘It alarmed the ladies,’ said the captain shortly.

‘He fears he might repeat it if left alone,’ continued

Trollope. 'I suppose there is no objection to his changing his berth?'

'None, sir, if he can find another. He can speak to the steward on the subject.' He was about to step forward, when, rounding on his goloshes, he exclaimed, lifting up his face, and staring hard into the eyes of Captain Trollope:

'Were you acquainted with Mr. Burn before you met him in this ship?'

'No,' answered Trollope, coolly meeting the old fellow's gaze. 'Why do you ask?'

'I had thought you were friends before you joined the vessel.'

'No, sir.'

The skipper walked forward to where the mate trudged. Captain Trollope went to the rail, and saw the wreck ahead; he leaned with folded arms, gazing listlessly at it, as at something that bored and sickened him. From time to time he flashed the glance of an eagle from under his drooping lids at the skipper and mate as they stood together. He looked a fine figure of man, soldierly, of proportions heroic when compared with the stump-ended frames of the two battered seamen at the other end of the deck. But that upward curl of nose played the deuce with his beauty.

'There is a something,' said Captain Benson to his mate after looking round to observe if the man was out of hearing, 'in some of the passengers which I do not understand, and, not understanding, do not like. You at the foot of the table hear more of their talk than I. I make ten of them. They seem to have met before.'

'I've gathered that, sir,' answered the mate.

'Captain Trollope yonder denies previous acquaintance with the gentleman who howled last night.'

'He may have a reason for saying it,' answered Mr. Matthews. 'I will keep my ears open, sir. I believe I shall be able to satisfy myself that he has not told you the truth.'

It was not often that old Benson unbent himself thus to his mate. He was now somewhat restless in mind. Some half-formed suspicion, incredible, incommunicable, teased him.

'They all seem gentlemen, though, Mr. Matthews,' says he, with another look around to see what had become of Captain Trollope.

'They are that, sir,' answered the mate, 'there's breeding in their speech. Some are very respectably connected, I judge, from what's now and again let fall at table.'

'Endeavour to find out, sir,' said the captain, speaking

softly, 'if they were known one to another, before they booked their passage.'

'Ay, ay, sir.'

'Ten men, you see, all showing like gentlemen of broken fortunes, desperate with ill-success in the colonies and with having to face life in England penniless—all of them previously acquainted'—here the old chap's broken sentences fined down into a rumble, at which the mate strained his ears in vain. 'But how should I know they're penniless?' continued Benson.

'They have a castaway air, one and all, sir,' said the mate, who was attending to his captain's speech with a face of growing astonishment.

'It is *that*, perhaps,' continued the skipper. 'What luggage did they bring?'

'Nothing that needed stowing under hatches,' answered the mate with a slow smile.

The captain was about to speak. The first stroke of eight bells checked him.

'You have my instructions, sir,' said he, speaking through the chimes.

Mr. Matthews touched his cap, and the captain walked aft, where several of the passengers stood viewing the wreck.

CHAPTER V

THE WRECK

THERE was poetic insight in the remark of the lady passenger that a solitary object encountered upon the ocean, whether a ship in full sail, or such an abandoned craft as that out yonder ahead of the *Queen*, changes the face of the deep by imparting a quality of melancholy through mere compulsion of the sight to realise the mighty distances. It was eight bells, and the wreck was about three miles off; the fiery sun was eating into the heart of the wind, and the barque's languid crawling threatened tardy approach to the impatient.

The ship's telescope went the rounds: all were agreed that no signs of life were visible aboard the hulk. The horizon swam in silver past her, and her sheathing flashed in wet dazzling stars as the long cradling Pacific heave slightly rolled her.

'*She* would have given us the chance,' said Mark Davenire to Captain Trollope as they stood together at the mizzen rigging.

'Yes, I see your meaning,' said the other. 'But she comes too soon,' and he rolled his keen eye at the *Queen's* longboat, and then at her quarter boat, as though one thought put another into his head. 'I'll tell you what it is,' he continued, speaking almost in a mumble under his heavy moustache. 'The mob of us must be devilish wary, hold apart, and talk little or nothing at table if we're to run daylight into this errand. Here we are two days out; here am I a first-class passenger; yet by the blood of my heart, as my old colonel would say, that gimblet-eyed skipper was as insolently blunt and suspicious just now as if I had been a stowaway, brought aft to him black with the fore-peak, by one of his Jacks.'

'There are too many of us,' said Davenire.

'Yes; less could have managed.'

'Masters may be all right. But drink hasn't burnt the vanity out of him. If he goes messing about with Miss Mansel, something may be said, some feather-light hint unconsciously dropped—she has eyes like corkscrews, and ears like hatchways.'

'How do you know?'

'She watches us.'

Captain Trollope made no answer. A moment later the breakfast bell rang. The wreck was now within a half-hour's reach as the pace then was; the passengers hurried into the saloon to breakfast quickly that they might see the show as it passed within musket-shot, unless the *Queen's* helm was shifted.

'Are we to meet with any more excitements?' exclaimed Mrs. Peacock to the captain.

'What is to be understood by that word, ma'am?' answered old Benson.

'Every item in the catalogue of naval disaster,' said Mr. Storr.

'Any bargains to be had in that catalogue?' called out Mr. Burn, smiling at the little auctioneer whilst he filled a tumbler with a draught of Bass's beer.

'Midnight yells should go cheap,' answered Mr. Storr, with a sarcastic leer at the fat man.

'I wish that fool Burn would shut up,' exclaimed Trollope to his neighbour, and he leaned forward to catch a sight of him.

'There are no excitements to be expected, ma'am,' said the captain.

'I hope we shall meet with plenty,' exclaimed Miss Holroyd, a kindly-faced young woman of two-and-twenty, destitute of personal attractions.

'You must consider, my dear,' said Mrs. Peacock, a little severely, 'that I am making this voyage for my health.'

Captain Trollope, wiping his moustache, rose from the table and stalked out on to the quarter-deck. A few followed, then the whole table rose, and by that time the wreck was close aboard on the starboard bow.

She was a plain little hull; had possibly been some New Zealand or Australian keel trading to the islands. Her long tiller swept from bulwark to bulwark, as she rolled, like a human arm wild with appeal. The whiteness of every splintered thing told of recent disaster. In the water under her port haunch was a wonderful brilliant, sparkling, and multitudinous flashing of minute azure and silver lights: the whole rose and fell in splendid gleams with the motions of the hull and the lift of the sea.

'What can that be, captain?' inquired Mrs. Holroyd.

'Fish, ma'am,' responded the skipper, and he put a binocular glass into the lady's hand.

And fish that swelling knoll of brilliance was, the biggest of the length of your finger, by what courted, and by what detained, who can tell? There was no grass on the sheathing: nothing good for fish to eat; the lovely cloud shone beautiful in the blue water in the shadow of the wreck. Nobody had seen such a sight before, and passengers and seamen lining the rail stared their hardest. Mr. Poole, stepping aft to the captain with a flourish of his thumb to his cap, said in a low voice:

'I fancy there's life aboard that craft, sir. I see a sort of vapour oozing out of the caboose chimney as though the fire was not long out.'

The captain took his glass from Mrs. Holroyd, and suddenly said with emphasis, 'It's as you say, sir. Take and board and overhaul her.'

A boat was lowered, and the second officer and four seamen pulled away for the hull. Even as the boat started, the black wet gleaming curve of a grampus showed between the wreck and the barque; it breathed in a sigh that was as music for the silent poetry of that hull; instantly the shining cloud under the wreck's quarter sank and vanished.

Three of the set who may now be called the ten, stood smoking their pipes in the gangway watching the boat and the hull, but conversing in low voices. The helm of the *Queen* had been put down, the lighter canvas trembled in floating fingers of sunshine and shadow high aloft, the ripple had died at the cutwater; the cook stepped out of the galley, hot and cursing, to empty a bucket of his galley parings over the side, and the stuff floated motionless.

'I tell you what,' says Mr. Caldwell to Mr. Masters, standing in the gangway, 'if that hull there hadn't come too soon she'd have saved us the most troublesome part of the job.'

'No, man,' answered Mr. Masters; 'what could we have to say to a dismasted vessel? There's to be no cruelty, you know, and a fortnight of a crowd in that thing there would make a hell of her.'

Caldwell gazed at him with a black thoughtful scowl; he was the most savage-looking of the lot, with a sullen motion of blood-stained eye when talking, though he could be nimble enough with his sight when he chose.

'What ocean d'ye think this is, Masters?' said Mr. Peter Johnson, who was one of the three.

'Hanged if I know! The Pacific, I suppose.'

'And the heart of it, too,' says Mr. Peter Johnson. 'If this water could be kept smooth, you'd see the gleams of the wakes of whalers crossing and recrossing one another. Nothing but whalers here. How long has yonder vessel been in that state? Probably not three days. And here's a splendid little ship already alongside of her, willing, I presume, to do anything and everything in the name of humanity. What the deuce, then! Where would the cruelty be? I'd board her and take my chance of a rescue in twenty-four hours for a hundred sovereigns. Well, no, not in twenty-four hours,' says he, with a look up at the lofty serene sky.

'Where have they put Burn?' said Masters.

'Along with Shannon,' answered Caldwell. 'Davenire takes his berth. Shannon will have a bucket of cold water at hand, and it is agreed that he shall tilt a drencher over the squealer should ever he start on one of his midnight sweeteners again.'

Meanwhile, watched with deep interest by all the passengers on the poop, the boat reached the side of the wreck, where she was manœuvred so as to board clear of the trailing raffle. Mr. Poole sprang into the main-chains, and was

followed by a seaman. The others shoved off and hung within easy hail.

There was nothing for a sailor's eye to critically consider in this little craft. She had apparently been rigged as a brigantine. Scores of such fabrics you may observe any day in the seaports of the old home, lying alongside quays, ballast rattling into their holds, cargo springing to the leaps of coal-blackened men. She was without a boat; portions of the bulwarks had been crushed flat to the waterway. She was as sheer a little hulk as ever made piteous appeal out of nakedness to the careless eye of the passing mariner; tight in her timbers, however, Mr. Poole thought her when his experienced tread felt into each heave and found it buoyant.

She had a small deck cabin aft with two windows, and a door looking forward; and forward, just abaft the galley, was a house in which her seamen had slung their hammocks. Poole and the sailor went first of all to look at the galley fire. They stared about them as they went. Her decks were comparatively clear, and it was certain she had been a light ship, bound for a cargo.

What man on boarding derelicts of this sort can conjecture the sight that is to greet him? Death at sea is a horribly fanciful artist. Poole remembered once boarding a vessel abandoned as this was, and being confronted on getting over the side by a frightful mask of face that swayed and moved in the cage of a heap of fallen shrouds. He was for flying; the mask had a firm squint, and was moustachioed. Its gestures conveyed a ghastly threat to Poole; but rallying his heart and looking close, the mate beheld the figure of a dead man so entangled in the rigging, whose ends lay over the side, that at every lift of swell the head motioned a living menace.

There was nothing of the kind, however, to be seen here. Poole and the man walked warily to the galley and peered into a tiny caboose with a tiled floor, a sort of sentry box seized to the deck. Strange it had not gone with the masts. Some brown coal vapour, thin as the smoke from a tobacco-pipe, lazily crawled into the chimney out of the almost extinct embers of a fire. So then she had not been long abandoned.

They looked into the deck-house and found nothing but a few hammocks and some odds and ends of clothes. Mr. Poole hailed the *Queen*.

'Hallo!' sang back old Captain Benson.

'Maybe, sir, if you were to send a hand aloft with the

glass he'll make out signs of a boat, for the galley-fire's not yet out.'

The white-haired skipper raised his hand, and Mr. Poole followed by the sailor went aft.

They had gained the gangway, and were within a dozen paces of the door of the after deck-house, when they came to a halt as though shot or paralysed. Full in the doorway stood a figure. It was a man of about thirty, naked to the waist. His breeches were of floating dungaree, and his feet were naked. The sad sight to behold—the bad, most afflicting part to see, was his face. He was grinning with the withered smile of consumption. The puckering about the mouth was like a hunchback's. His teeth lay naked to the full width of the distended lips, and they made the whole face as unmeaning and mocking as a skull. His hair was brown, soft and long, his eyes too were brown and might not have been wanting in beauty; but the brilliance of famine or madness was in them now.

'Father of light, what's this?' cried Mr. Poole.

The poor creature put his finger to his lips; his smile vanished. He made a beckoning gesture with a short sailorly bow as of entreaty. Poole went up to him.

'Are there more of you?' said he.

'Stop!' cried the man with a peculiar hard accent that might have been a Welshman's, 'I have been waiting for this chance. Come with me, sir,' and the half-naked figure turned and led the way into the cabin. Mr. Poole looked quickly about him expecting to see others, or fearing to find the dying or the dead, or, which would have been worse, more lunatics. It was a narrow interior, snug enough, cabined on one hand with one central table and a line of lockers for seats. Upon the table lay a chart which the half-naked man went straight up to. He passed his fingers through his hair, and looking round at Mr. Poole who now fearlessly stood close, he put his forefinger upon the chart and exclaimed in his harsh almost hissing accents:

'Is this or is this not the situation of this vessel?'

Mr. Poole bent his head and perceived that it was a chart of the North Sea.

'Never mind about the ship's place,' said he soothingly. 'Are there more of you? My vessel waits for us.'

'Why don't you answer me?' exclaimed the madman, stooping his face close to the spot his finger still rested upon.

'All yesterday I was trying to find it out. The latitude and longitude's wrong. Can't I fix a ship's situation on a chart as well as another? I'll pit my whole stock of blood against any man's as a navigator. No sun to take, for it was dark all last night. And when there is a sun he spins like a Tyneside grindstone round the horizon. Oh, it makes me sweat,' he cried, fetching his naked chest a slap that made Mr. Poole skip a pace or two clear of him.

'Let me deal with him, sir,' said the sailor, whispering hoarsely into the second mate's ear. 'I've got a brother-in-law that's locked up. Ye must match artfulness with artfulness along with the likes of this.'

'Shove ahead then,' said Mr. Poole.

'Beg pardon, I'm sure,' said the seaman, stepping to the madman's side. 'But let me see;' here he thrust his nose at the chart, it was a hundred to one if he could read. 'Why, of course! this to be sure must be the vessel's sittivation.' The madman listened with a face of teeth and hair that might have expressed satisfaction or conviction had he been sane. 'But I must tell yer,' continued the sailor, 'there's an old gentleman called Captain Benson, close aboard, who'll be happy, I'm sure, to compare his charts with yourn. Suppose you come and have a talk with him.'

The poor creature's brown eyes glared suspiciously. He looked up through the little skylight, round the cabin, then at his naked trunk which he on a sudden hugged with a maiden's modesty.

'Where shall I find your clothes?' said the second mate.

The madman took no notice. He pointed again at the chart, and looking at the seaman said:

'Does the old gentleman know anything about navigation?'

'Know? Why, he can tell where he is by the sun arter she's set. A lonesome star of a thick night will put him within a hinch of his true place. The Hadmirality have offered him pounds a week to navigate their fleets, but he don't like the notion of wearin' a uniform.'

The wretch gave a crazy nod which made his smile terrific. Mr. Poole pulled off his coat and buttoned it over the shoulders of the madman. Whilst this was doing he said to the seaman: 'Look into these cabins, whilst I get this man to the boat. Come along, sir,' said he, blandly, 'and I will introduce you to the old gentleman.'

‘Without my chart?’ shrieked the madman.

The second mate rolled the North Sea up and fixed it as a telescope under the poor fellow’s arm.

The *Queen* lay close in with the wreck, and what passed aboard was quite easily visible to the naked eyes of the passengers. There had been life then in that derelict, and one poor miserable human sufferer was to be delivered from a horrible death! Yonder dismasted fabric, swaying in the flash of the brine, with now a lift of green sheathing, and now a dip of her painted ports, takes the tragic and thrilling significance of human suffering itself from the spectacle of one man as he is landed into the boat, flourishing his naked arms, and talking and halloing to the ship.

‘Did not you promise that we should meet with no more horrors, captain?’ said Mrs. Peacock to old Benson.

The commander wiped his weather-discoloured face with a red pocket handkerchief big as a small ensign, and answered, ‘There can be no horror in the saving of a man’s life, ma’am.’

‘He is mad!’ exclaimed Mrs. Peacock, watching the man as he approached the boat.

‘I cannot help it,’ answered Captain Benson.

‘Good Giddens!’ murmured Johnson to Burn, catching the special point of the incident with discernment worthy of a loftier mind. ‘It would just be that pendulum-swaying that would craze me. See how wearily and regularly she rolls, but without way. It would work the wits loose in the brain: they would pitch from side to side like shifting ballast, and the continual hammering of them upon the skull, first on this side, then on that, would set me grinning and raving just like yonder coon in a very few hours.’

‘He would be nearly naked,’ said Mr. Burn in his oozy voice, ‘but for the mate’s coat. Why should a man when he goes daft always want to strip himself? Is it because madness brings a chap close to his original state of nature?’

‘Here he comes,’ said Mr. Johnson; ‘stand by for a rush of ladies.’

‘Where’s the captain,’ shouted the madman as he bounded over the rail, delivering himself eel-like from the grip of a seaman, and dropping the second mate’s coat overboard in the swift struggle. He had kept a hold of his chart, however, and now flourished it as he screamed: ‘Where’s the captain?’

‘Lay aft some hands and secure that poor fellow,’ shouted old Benson, travelling forwards to the break of the poop with incredible activity.

Before this command could be attended to the lunatic was at his side.

‘This is the chart, sir,’ he cried, unrolling it with insano vehemence, whilst the ladies in a body rushed below, leaving Mr. Dent and Mr. Storr standing at the companion way ready for immediate flight. ‘They tell me you’re a first-class navigator. I can’t make the ship’s situation right. Look here!’

Old Benson saw that the chart represented the North Sea.

‘The sun,’ cried the lunatic as he stared for a breath with an eagle’s unwinking eye at the blazing luminary, ‘goes round and round like a horse in a circus. Can *you* catch him?’ he asked in a hissing whisper, with a horrible grin of cunning. ‘He don’t shine of a night, and all day long he gallops round and round.’

By this time, however, the surgeon, the second mate, and some seamen had gathered about the poor creature. He yelled when they were obliged to use force. His shrieks on the quarter-deck rang in echoes from the silent hollows of the sails, and you seemed to hear a faint answer to them trembling in a sort of moan aboard the wreck. He had the sense to see he was not to be returned to his vessel, and his craving was for *her*. It took half the ship’s company to get him forward. They stowed him away in a wing cabin, securely bound, and a sailor watched him.

How long was this voyage going to occupy, some of the passengers wondered. It seemed but a few hours ago that they had sailed out of Sydney Harbour, yet in that time so much had happened, a whole round voyage of prosaic steam might contain less incident. But that’s the way of the sea. The noise of whales blowing their fountains in the dark; the loveliness of a level plain of ocean scored by ice-like swathes, the horizon melting into a delicate faintness of hot blue, with one white sail reeling and winding in the air afar; or the staggering ship with the rigging full of figures, and an ensign of appeal shrieking in rags at its seizings, the whole plunging fabric pale with the sheeting of spray through whose flashful drifts you behold the curved and freckled backs of huge green seas, scourged into spitting and frothing madness by the cold and steady gale, rushing into the dimness of the horizon, but how to catalogue the sights and revelations of the deep?

These and a thousand like create the life of tacks and sheets, all the romance of the fabric of sail from truck to waterline; they serve as plates to embellish the plain tale of a voyage. The story of the inner life of the ship goes on as the vessel sails along, and these strange details of wrecks and madmen, of open boats and throat-sucking thirst, of the gleam of the grampus and the subsidence of a knoll of gem-like fish, drift leisurely by and vanish far astern.

The *Queen* was brought to her course, her sails slept to the light air, and their silver trembled under the shadow of her hull. The wreck slid away, forlornly rocking.

'You are certain there was nobody else on board, sir?' said Captain Benson to the second mate.

'Certain, sir.'

'Who is this madman?'

'The mate, I allow, sir; he hasn't the looks of the captain—gone loose-headed on a sudden with loneliness.'

'Or grief,' said Captain Benson, casting his eyes upon Mr. Storr, who stood listening. 'There may have been a wife or someone dear to the man lost to him in that business,' said he with a nod at the wreck.

The second mate smiled with surprise at this effort of sentiment on the part of the skipper. Sentiment is not esteemed at sea. They say that no man who is sentimental can make a sailor; no man who can admire a glorious sunset or watch fascinated from the flying jibboom end the spectacle of his full-rigged ship shearing at him with froth-clouded bows through the water, can make a sailor! God help ye, Jack, then, if this be so. But after all this may be but the opinion of brutal theorists.

'Is there any chance for the man?' said the captain, addressing the surgeon as he came up the poop ladder.

The surgeon shook his head. 'He howls like a wolf, said he; 'he might have lived another week in that wreck yonder, but the sun won't rise upon him alive to-morrow in this ship.'

'Lor!' said Captain Benson.

It befel as the surgeon predicted; a little time before the first dinner-bell rang, and when the poop was alive with the passengers moving leisurely in the violet twilight of the awning, a seaman came hurriedly out of the berth in which the madman lay confined, and just when the dinner-bell was ringing, and the passengers were going below to prepare them-

selves for the table, the doctor came aft to the skipper, who stood grasping the brass rail at the break of the poop in a posture of expectation, and exclaimed 'He is dead.'

'Then, sir, we'll get him stitched up at once and bury him in the morning,' said the captain.

Whilst the passengers were eating, a couple of seamen stood over the dead body forward, stitching it up in a piece of sailcloth ready for the last toss. One of the two was the man who had been set to watch the lunatic. He drove his needle with a pale hard face.

'Bill,' said he presently, when they had stitched the face out of sight, 'do the likes of these here have immortal souls?'

Bill was a man of some colour in his blood; he turned his eyes, dusky and almost as bland as an African's, upon his mate.

'I guess if he was a sailor,' he answered, 'no soul was ever sarved out to him, mad or not mad.'

'Ain't sailors allowed souls, then?'

'Ask it of yourself, Tom,' answered Bill, in a voice of mingled indifference and contempt.

Tom stopped in his work. The polished needle he held gleamed like fire in a flash of westering sun striking through the little scuttle; he looked at his mate with a face awork with agitation; an emotional man one could easily see he was, a sailor of the snuffing sort, yet smart and skilful.

'Am I to believe,' says he, laying one hand not without reverence on the dead body, 'that this pore chap didn't have no soul to go to God with?'

'Ye can believe what yer like,' answered the other, 'but I'll tell you what it is; the more you believe the more yer'll be warping yer intellects to the bearings this covey's was brought to. Let's bear a hand with the job. 'Taint all jam.'

They stitched in silence, and when they had made a bolster-shaped parcel of the body they carried it out in obedience to instructions, and placed it upon the fore hatch, and Tom went aft for an ensign to cover it with.

It was the second dog watch, a lovely evening, the ship in full sail, the low sun lighting up all the west in red glory. The cook lounged out of the galley with a cigar in his mouth, and his hat rakishly tilted towards his left eye; he looked at the body, and asked Tom, who was in the act of throwing the ensign over it, when it was to be chucked overboard. The seaman answered with a solemn silent shake of the head.

‘Why must they go and bring them things for’rads?’ continued the cook, albeit with a careful glance aft to make sure of his audience. ‘Everything that’s disgusting,’ said he with a voice of affectation, ‘comes for’rads. Is it a dead body? Is it uneatable meat? Is it spuds like tumours and flour that laughs in your face with the maggots that tumbles the surface of it—it must all come for’rads.’

Some seamen approached and lounged at the bulwarks abreast to listen.

‘Ain’t it enough that men should have to sign for a working day of twenty-four hours,’ continued the cook, breaking up his speech with occasional puffs at his cigar, ‘that everything bad should come for’rads? There’s a body,’ says he pointing. ‘He was a mate they say; why don’t they keep him aft? Mates bunk and mess aft when they’re alive; why shouldn’t they bunk if they can’t mess aft arter they’re dead? No. They must be brought for’rads. When they’re carrion they become proper for common sailors to consort with.’

‘Bloomed if it ain’t every word true though,’ said one of the loungers at the rail.

‘Is there e’er a man here that can answer me this question?’ exclaimed Tom, who, having covered the body, was leaning against the foremast with a knife and a plug of tobacco in his hands; ‘had ever that chap a soul?’

‘I allow that if *you* have *he* had,’ said the cook, with a look at the little row of loafers.

‘It’s hard, it’s hard,’ cried Tom, flourishing his knife and plug of tobacco, ‘that a man should be denied a soul because he goes mad. I say, whoever says it, lies! I liken madness to a storm o’ wind. The waves beat and the ship jumps, but the soul,’ he said, with a pale smile, ‘sits snug within, quite sane, a-knowing all about it, incapable of action ’cos of the dishorganisation outside, but fit and in proper trim to go aloft when the time comes,’ he added, with a look at the body, ‘where it’ll receive more pity, and in my opinion stands a better chance, than some who enjoys the use of their senses down to the hour of their being brought-to.’ Saying which, with a rather wild face, he made for the fore-castle entrance, and disappeared, talking to himself.

‘Fired if I don’t think Tom’s been turned daft by watching of it,’ said one of the loungers, indicating the body with a lift of his chin.

‘Tom’s one as sails about with an anchor over his bows,

ready to let go, but can't find soundin's to bring up in,' said another of the loungers.

A sudden call from the poop broke up this conversation.

At eight bells the cook locked up his galley, and the first watch began. Another fine night of waters, rippling in moonshine! The barque, with starboard overhanging studding sails, floated like ice through the moon-whitened air, and many trembling stars studded the arches between the sails; and under the yawn of the fore course the lamps of heaven shone like distant lighthouses. A seaman walked the deck of the little fore-castle on the look-out. The rest of the watch had stowed themselves away for a nap abaft the longboat, and in the deep shadows under the bulwarks; they gave the dead body as wide a berth as they could, and the watch below turned in growling that the thing should be so near them.

The least of Jack's loves is a dead man as a shipmate.

The ship had tripped, so to speak, over four dead bodies already since the start, and a hairy man, his legs thrown over his hammock edge, disclosing toes with nails which looked like shoe-horns, asked in a gruff voice, after sucking out the last spark in his pipe, if 'these here deaths didn't mean death to the blushen ship too in the end.' This started some superstitious jawing among the fools, and hammock answered hammock, till a passionate voice in the dusk of 'the eyes' bawled for silence and sleep.

Two men came down from the poop smoking pipes, and going along to the fore-hatch, stopped and looked at the body.

'That's much how it would have been with me,' said Mr. Mark Davenire; 'a toss and a bubble, and not the memory of a moment, by Jove, to follow me!'

'Better that than death in the bush,' said Mr. Hankey, 'where, if the fowls of the air permit, you rot into a grin of bones. There's a beastly baseness in the disclosure of one's marrow-pipes. I should wish to lie secret, or at least hidden, as that chap will be when he's over the side. I'd not even that the moon should shine upon my skeleton,' and the man's face looked up pale, betwixt its hard black whiskers, at the planet that was softly glowing over the port beam. They began to pace the deck to and fro abreast of the corpse.

'When is our business to be done?' said Hankey in a quiet voice. 'Trollope seems to hang in the wind. Is not this the right sort of weather? Why not make an end of it this very night? Are we waiting for the Horn?'

Davenire hissed a cautious 'hush' as a sailor stumbled up out of the shadow of the longboat, and passed them to mount the forecastle ladder, where he joined the fellow on the look-out.

'The ship must reach the agreed situation,' said Davenire, speaking with a note of authority, as a leader or lieutenant. 'Trollope isn't sure; besides that, old Benson's on the watch. Bosh! the old cock stares, and I find him brusque as Trollope does, as though distrustful. But what in the name of holy Jimmy *can* he suspect? Any way, if the job's to be done, it must be rushed effectually. There's to be no opposition, *and no bloodshed*. That must be seen to. It's not to be a hanging affair.'

'When is that arms-chest to be dealt with?' said Hankey.

'Presently. I should have thought you'd see that,' said Davenire, drily.

Hankey wagged his head in the moonshine.

'Hark!' exclaimed Davenire, 'what are those two chaps up there arguing about?'

The look-out man and the seaman who had joined him came to a stand at the head of the forecastle ladder. They did not appear to heed the presence of the two gentlemen, who, moving a few paces forward, halted to listen in the shadow of the berth in which the body had lain. From the poop lightly floated the voices of passengers in conversation, mingled with the music of a piano in the cuddy, faint with the intervention of mizzenmast and cuddy front, and you could hear the high tones of a woman singing.

'Don't you make no mistake,' said the voice of the seaman named Tom, 'you've never tarded to and thought over things as I have, Bill.'

'Why, no,' answered Bill; 'and I've kept my senses in consequence.'

'Ha!' exclaimed Tom, panting out the word with the noise of a heavy snore, 'it's fearful to think if a chap's head's agoing wrong his soul's bound to go wrong too. What's the soul? Can ye explain it? Is it part of the physical faculties, or a separate hessence which breaks away from the dead body just as the smoke of a candle goes up arter the flame's blowed out? Lor' bless me, what's a happening to my head? Fired if my brains ain't been jammed by the girth of this here cap,' and the listeners heard the man fling his cap violently on to the deck.

The other walked silently into the bows of the ship.

'That fellow's losing the right time in his works, isn't he?' said Hankey, as the two strolled leisurely aft, turning for a moment to look at the figure of the man who was standing motionless in the moonlight like a shape of ebony, with his eyes seemingly fixed upon his cap at his feet.

'There's always a religious seaman in a long-voyage fore-castle,' said Davenire.

'He's needed,' said his companion.

'I remember a man,' continued Davenire, 'who, before the voyage was ended, got two-thirds of what had been the profanest set of blasphemers that ever slept in a fore-castle, to regularly assemble at a prayer meeting in the first dog-watch. He was a pale man, with large spiritual eye-balls. He got first one and then two to listen to him. It was slow work, but he persevered. The passengers made him a purse before the ship's arrival, and he distributed the money amongst his congregation, refusing to take a penny piece. That was——'

He was interrupted by a loud groan or cry of 'Jesus, receive me!' immediately followed by the splash of a body.

'Man overboard!' yelled a voice from the fore-castle head.

'Hanged if it isn't that pious seaman!' cried Davenire, and he and his friend rushed on to the poop.

'Help! help!' shouted a voice alongside. 'Pick me up, afore I'm drowned. Good Lord, what have I gone and done!'

The fine white moonlight was so clear you could distinctly see the man's upturned face as he struck out. The ship slowly drove past. Some of the ladies were screaming. Mr. Poole, who had the watch, sprang to the quarter, and with both hands launched a large life-buoy quoit-like. It struck the swimmer, who was shouting for help, and he went under, but was up again in a minute, and floated, holding on to the life-buoy, bubbling and bawling, whilst the ship was gradually coming round to the wind.

They got him aboard, after some bothering with the boat. Old Benson, in his tall hat, stood stern and firm at the head of the poop ladder; the shadows of his legs, painted by the moon on the white plank, might have framed some gigantic egg with its top sliced off. All the passengers had gathered near him to view the drenched man lifted over the rail; some of the ladies trembled and fanned themselves, and Mr. Dent looked scared and white in the pale light. The half-drowned

man stood upright, hatless, with plastered hair, and a gleaming wet shadow spread at his feet.

‘Is he able to speak?’ cried the captain.

‘Are you able to speak?’ shouted Mr. Poole in the man’s ear.

‘Why, yes,’ answered the fellow, passing his sopping arm over his streaming face. ‘What’s it all about? Gi’ us a drop of liquor, some ‘un.’

‘Did he fall overboard?’ demanded the captain.

‘He threw himself overboard, sir,’ sang out a voice from the boat’s falls.

‘Gi’ us a drop. My senses are all abroad,’ said the man.

Captain Trollope went down the port poop ladder. He pulled a flask of brandy from his pocket, and the soaked and crazy seaman drained a couple of gills. Then his teeth began to chatter, and he trembled violently.

‘Did you fall overboard?’ shouted old Benson.

‘I chucked myself overboard,’ answered the fellow, in a shuddering, whispering voice.

‘Chucked yourself overboard!’ cried the literal captain.

‘D’ye mean to tell me you meant to drown yourself aboard my ship?’

‘Not arter I was in the water,’ replied the man, looking at Captain Trollope as though for another sup.

‘Take him forward—take him forward!’ shouted the skipper, in accents of horror and rage.

‘I thought I was going mad,’ cried the man, ‘and that I could only save my soul by perishing first.’

‘Take him forward,’ bawled the captain; ‘and, Mr. Poole, set a watch over him.’

‘I’m calm now. I feel it’s all right. The wetting’s done me sights of good. It’s all along of watching that chap on the hatch,’ exclaimed the man.

But here Mr. Poole and others fell to shoving him, and in a few moments the hustling group walked forward, and vanished like smoke in the dusk of the forecabin.

CHAPTER VI

THE ARMS-CHEST

WHEN Captain Benson came on deck early next morning the sailors were washing down, and the ship was stretching along under full breasts of canvas; a smart breeze had come on to blow in the middle watch; the ocean was pouring steadily out of the south-west; past the foam of the ridge abeam, as the *Queen* rose, you could make out three white spires—a big ship, bound like the barque, no doubt, round the Horn. The seething blue hollows astern were freckled with small white sea-fowl. They had no business so far north; you meet them gleaming over waters whose skies are whitened by giant fields of ice. They raced after the *Queen*, faultlessly moulding their flight to the heave of the sea, and they filled with interest, beautiful and living, the wide yeast of the wake that rushed off astern, whiter and more defined than a London coaching road.

The captain looked at those birds for a few minutes and then round upon the sea, letting his gaze rest upon the three shining needles abeam. He now called the mate to him.

‘How is that man who threw himself overboard last night?’

‘All right, sir;’ and the mate pointed to the fellow, who was scrubbing, with an earnest face, at the deck near the mainmast.

‘Is he safe to be at large?’

‘I’ve overhauled him and believe he is, sir. The man’s a fair sailor and sound enough; but he’s of a pious cast, and his brain got shifted by watching the lunatic yesterday.’

‘We’ll bury the body at five bells,’ said the captain.

‘Ay, ay, sir.’

The captain looked hard at the sailor, as though he reasoned within himself whether he should call him aft and rate him; then, perhaps guessing that the mate had done all that was necessary in that way, he was rounding on the flat soles of his goloshes, when he stopped again and said, with a glance along the poop:

‘Have you found anything worth making a note of at your end of the table, sir?’

‘Why, no, sir; since you spoke to me on the subject I have found the people very cautious in their conversation.’

‘Is it to be ascertained who Captain Trollope is?’ said the captain.

‘Some of the gentlemen may know, but will they give us the truth? There’s Mr. Dent, sir; or some of the ladies, perhaps——’

‘They have inquired of me,’ interrupted the captain, hastily. ‘I don’t like his looks, sir.’

‘And yet, but for his nose, a tall, fine, gentlemanly man, sir.’

‘I don’t like his looks, sir,’ repeated the captain, hotly; ‘and I don’t like the looks of the man they call Masters. Whilst, as to Mr. Caldwell’—here he peered cautiously round—‘I wouldn’t have a man with *his* face in my fore-castle.’

Mr. Matthews let sink his head in thought. He was puzzled by the captain’s suspicions, yet not more, perhaps, than the old fellow himself was by them. What were they to fear? A mutiny of ten passengers? There could be no mutiny where there was no authority, and the ten gentlemen, moreover, seemed perfectly happy. They had praised the ship’s Marsala, they ate heartily of the galley’s various dishes, they lounged in groups and talked together quietly, smoking on the quarter-deck, or conversing with the ladies in a very gentlemanly way indeed. Why was the captain suspicious, then? thought the mate, as he walked with a grave and sober face to the athwartship rail to watch the fellows washing down the quarter-deck.

A small gloom overhung the spirits of the breakfast-table that morning. A dead man was in the ship, and he was to be buried.

‘When is the funeral?’ asked Mr. Masters of the captain.

‘At half-past ten, sir,’ answered old Benson, looking sideways at the worn, dissipated, yet still handsome features of the man.

‘Were you ever present at a funeral at sea, Miss Mansel?’ said Mr. Masters.

‘Never,’ answered the girl, with a slight, unconscious shudder.

‘There’s a poem on the subject. I used to know it when I was a lad,’ said Mr. Storr.

‘A hundred thousand poems on the subject,’ snarled Mr.

Caldwell, turning his dark, gloomy face upon the auctioneer. 'There's nothing in nature that hasn't a poem hitched to it, and some of the best things are tailed like kites, every rhymester knotting on his piece of paper, till the whole dead-weighted show is brought with a sickening thud to earth.'

'You're not fond of poetry, perhaps?' said Mr. Storr doubtfully.

'About as fond of it as Captain Benson is,' answered Mr. Caldwell.

Miss Holroyd tittered, old Benson coloured up. His dignity was mighty impatient of any personal references of that sort. He had made his way aft from the fore-castle, and was alarmed by the slightest tone or hint of sarcasm. His only answer was a glance of suspicion down the line of doubtful men on either hand. Captain Trollope looked annoyed, and the conversation sank till the long intervals of silence embarrassed the person who broke it.

At half-past ten they despatched the dead body over the side. Nobody knew whose child he was. No man to have saved his own heart from breaking could have given him his right name. The ladies were affected by the ceremony, and Mrs. Peacock dropped a tear.

The hole the body made in the water did not more swiftly fill than did the memory of the madman fade when old Benson closed his book and passed into the cuddy for his sextant.

This thing is mentioned here, because the log-book of the *Queen* gives it. But for three days after this entry nothing in any way memorable was recorded by the mate. The voyage now looked as though it was to wear a settled face; the seamen gave no trouble; of a dog-watch Tom's deep voice might be heard in argument with the cook or the man Bill by anyone who chose to lounge near the galley, otherwise the fiddle squeaking on the booms perplexed all voices to even the most attentive ear stationed further aft than the long-boat; moreover, the general eye of the poop was engaged and diverted by watching the sailors dancing.

It was the afternoon of the third day that the sparkling fiery blue breeze which had driven the ship forging through it till the lift of the soft cloud of foam on either bow was often as high as the catheads; it was on the afternoon that this sweet-sailing wind failed; it dropped on a sudden like the tail of a blast out of an electric storm; the lofty sails came into the masts with an eager report, as though the ship herself

snatched a voice out of this shock of surprise. The run of the seas fell into a smooth swell, which rolled foamless like liquid glass against the dark green of the ship, so exposing her sheathing that on looking over the side you saw the reflection blushing like some wavering dart of sunset on the pure round of the water. About two miles on the port beam lay a whaler; the *Queen* had learnt, with the help of flags and a huge blackboard roughly written on with chalk, that she was an American, almost full up, almost three years out, now bound round the Horn for the distant port she would probably take six months in fetching.

A clumsier old waggon never dipped her gangways in a swell, and every lift of her square stern hid from the sight of the people who were looking at her on board the *Queen* the mowing and shining heights of a tall ship hull down. The mercury in the captain's barometer had been steadily sinking since noon. The sky slowly thickened all round, and no sound came from the sea. The swell rolled in breathless heaps, and the white birds vanished. It was the most uncomfortable time the passengers had passed. The ladies could not stand, and the gentlemen staggered, though old Benson observed that most of the men strode the reeling deck with very easy legs—legs of the sea, pliant, elastic, swift in recovery, and a walk that is pleasanter to see than a dance.

Nobody could have supposed that the *Queen* would roll so abominably. She sank to her covering boards, and a nervous ear might easily have found a direct threat of storm in the cannonading of canvas aloft, in the crackling of strained rigging, in noises of breaking crockery, heavy goods fetching away, little shrieks of women, loud calls from the poop, and answering curses from the forecastle. They clewed up and furled down to the topsails, in which they tied two reefs. At one time when this was doing, Trollope and two or three others stood near the mizzenmast looking up at the main; they swayed easily on their legs like a boy straddling the middle of a swaying see-saw; the reef tackles were then being hauled out, the yard was on the cap, and a few hands were slapping their way up the weather rigging.

'Shall we lend them a hand?' said Mr. Burn, turning to observe the captain, who walked on the quarter.

'I'm game for one,' said Mr. Johnson.

'Quiet!' said Trollope. 'Don't stare aloft. You never seem to know when you're watched.'

'I'm getting blistered sick of waiting,' said Shannon.

'Thunder, how that whaler rolls!' cried Burn.

She was still a clean-cut figure out abeam, but the sail past her had disappeared in the dimness. The spouters were taking a hint from the *Queen* and shortening canvas; with the unaided vision you saw a row of tiny figures dotting the fore-yard, whose points of studding sail boom seemed to spear the very heads of the swell.

'Wash, wash, wash, wash,' muttered Shannon, counting off the monotonous regular steep rolls of the whaler in a sort of ticking way. 'Ancient and fishy will be the smell of blubber that she belches from her hatchways at every plunge. I served six months in one of them. . . .'

'We're going to have a black gale,' interrupted Trollope, and he went below.

It was hard to guess by the sinking of the glass what was to happen, saving that a wild, uncomfortable change of some sort was at hand; the workings of the sky were strange and subtle; it was a dirty blue, then it turned of an ashen pallor, a sort of grime thickened upon it till it spread a whole loathsome face of uniform sullen dark green from line to line, with the whaler wallowing dim as a phantom in the hollows, touching the stormy dusk with sudden flashes of white canvas; yet you saw no break of cloud, and the swell, now beginning to lose its weight, ran like grease.

They dined in the cuddy by lamplight. The captain's seat was empty. Mr. Matthews entered hurriedly for a mouthful and returned, scarcely finding time for the questions which were discharged at him from the skipper's end. Mr. Poole was also on deck, and some one said all hands were on the alert.

Captain Trollope and Mr. Hankey were the first to quit their seats; they went on the quarter-deck and stood in the gloom under the overhanging ledge of the poop. A few sharp glances followed them, and a knowing look of arched eyebrow and compressed lip was darted by Johnson to Cavendish.

On a sudden the captain was heard roaring down the steps for his oilskins, and one of the stewards ran on deck with a long waterproof coat.

Hark! What was that?

A sound of the muttering of artillery behind the sea; next minute the heavens opened in a violet blaze; a woman screamed; it was as though a mass of fire had fallen through

the skylight into the cuddy; a loud, but still distant roar followed, and then fell the rain in a living sheet. It shrieked upon the planks overhead, it swelled in the scuppers and floated the loose rigging; it poured like streams from fire-hoses overboard, and still not a breath of air.

Several men left the table and joined Trollope under the poop. The recess here provided as good a shelter as a cabin. There was in the atmosphere an ashen suffusion that yet was not light; you seemed to see, and yet saw not by it; it lay pale on the face like the light of the next world; it was more terrifying than pitch blackness. The gentlemen under the poop sucked their pipes and watched the rain roaring in smoke off the planks. The lightning was now fast and flaming, sheeting over the heavens in twenty confluent forks at a time, and the thunder seemed to split in crashes right over the mast-head. Still no wind.

'I know these storms,' said Davenire; 'there's no gale here. It's going to pass away like a woman in a swoon after a yelling fit.'

'This should give us the opportunity we want,' said Masters.

'We're not ready, and you know it,' exclaimed Captain Trollope. 'Am I to have the handling of this job? I want no suggestions, and much more caution from some of you.'

'What did he say?' exclaimed Burn to Shannon when the thunder had passed.

But before an answer could be made to this question the sea was lighted up by a marvellous, beautiful, but terrific stroke of lightning that fell like a ball some distance away on the port beam of the *Queen*. It flashed through the air as though discharged by some vast gun pointed downwards; a dead unreverberant shock of thunder followed. Some one shouted on the ship's fore-castle; there was another cry on the poop overhead.

'What has happened?' cried Mr. Storr, rushing through the cuddy to the entrance where the men stood.

'The whaler has been struck and is on fire,' answered Captain Trollope, coolly.

He must have had a keen sight and a practised eye to know it, for the lightning made a most dissembling phantom of the Yankee. But he was soon proved right by a light beginning to burn steadily on the sea. The lightning flashed about it, the thunder roared over it; the rain had ceased. A

candle flame would have burnt straight in the air. The invisible black swell ran softly, beaten into a low pulse by that great fall of wet, and still yonder light burnt on, growing in brilliancy, till you could see the whaler coming and going to sudden tongues of flame leaping and dying about the foremast.

'Full up with oil. By Jove! what a bonfire we're going to have,' said Mr. Burn.

'A ship on fire,' yelled Mr. Storr into the cuddy.

'Dare we show ourselves?' cried Mrs. Dent, jumping up from the table.

'It don't rain,' answered Mr. Storr; 'the lightning's passing.'

Here Mr. Matthews, sparkling in wet oilskins, came below to inform the ladies with the captain's compliments that there was a ship on fire in sight, and that if they would care to witness the dreadful spectacle a platform of gratings and dry planking should be at once contrived for them to stand on.

'I would not lose such a sight for a million,' exclaimed Mrs. Dent.

'This sort of thing is called going home for one's health,' said Mrs. Peacock, who had been almost dead with fear during the raging of the storm.

Miss Mansel laughed. However, all of them, including Mrs. Peacock, speedily clothed themselves for the deck, and then the *Queen* was alive with sightseers. The storm was settling northwards, leaving a breathless calm in its wake; southwards the evening was beginning to show in pale stars amidst rifts of heavy vapour slowly going to pieces. It could be seen with the night-glass that the whalers were fighting the fire, which had caught a strong hold; already the bows of the craft were in flames, and whilst you watched you could see how those fiery dartings, snaking into thick smoke, crimsoning it, then blackening out, coiled their way aft like serpents, with an appearance of frequent repulsion, though at every fresh spout of flame something caught fire a-low and aloft.

'Keep a bright look-out for her boats,' cried Captain Benson, who walked alone near the binnacle in short excursions.

He was agitated. Few sights at sea move sailors more to their depths than a ship on fire. He finds nothing thrilling, splendid, or romantic in it, as some of the ladies on the *Queen's* poop did, as Mr. Storr did now that the danger of

the storm was passed. To the sailor a burning ship is the most heartbreaking voice the sea can find a tongue for. You saw the influence of the sight upon the gang of men under the break of the poop: they stood staring, sucking their pipes, dropping now and then a remark in a sullen note of helpless sympathy.

'She'll have plenty of boats, though,' said Mr. Masters.

'Ay; but that don't take the desolation out of the picture, my friend,' answered Mr. Burn.

'Fire a rocket, Mr. Matthews, fire a rocket,' called the captain, his words passing clear though hoarse through the still air, 'and burn a port-fire,' and he repeated, 'keep a bright look-out for the boats.'

He stopped his way hastily to the companion, and disappeared, but returned in a minute, having observed such a rise in the glass as was good for his spirits.

'Make sail on the ship, sir,' he cried. 'Out reefs. Loose topgallant sails. Aft here, and set this spanker.'

Whizz went a rocket as he spoke betwixt the two tall masts of the fore and main; a minute later the figure of the second mate overhanging the port was brilliantly outlined against the weltering blackness over the side by a stream of hissing blue fire, fountaining from his hand. There is no effect wilder, more grotesque, more dramatic, more tragic in ghastly suggestion than that produced by the blue light at sea. It lights up a small area of ocean with a hellish complexion, and beyond it all is thunder-blackness. It makes spectres and demons of the shapes of men it shines upon. The ship its quivering fires tincture, trembles out upon the dusk into a death-like vision; every shroud and rope is a faint line of phosphor; the canvas soars shuddering out of the sepulchral sheen and fades.

The passengers looked at one another with stars of the blue fire in their eyes. It was just the light of horror, and just the night of quiet, with no more of the thunder left than an occasional violet glare astern to deepen to the very heart of it the meaning of that lonely flickering light away upon the sea.

A small air was stirring out of the south-west; the few stars in that quarter looked down with a shrewder tremble. The seamen were halloing about the decks as they made sail. The port-fire had burnt out. Another rocket had sailed and flashed aloft, and now the yards were being manned for the

breeze, and the ship, with old Benson beside the wheel, and hands forward on the look-out for boats, was rippling softly towards the burning mass.

A dreadful fire she was when they were close enough to view her. She lighted the ocean for miles, but no boats were in sight, nor signs of living creatures aboard.

'They'll have made for the ship in the north,' said Mr. Matthews to the second mate. And that, no doubt, was the case, though the *Queen* had been the nearer vessel. For a couple of hours old Benson kept his ship hanging in the wind, and the passengers watched with admiration and fear, a splendid but frightful picture, from which the sense of the human life that had been there, having made its escape, could not rob the spirit of tragedy. She lay but a quarter of a mile distant. Figure the tons of oil in her, the oil-soaked planks, the well-greased masts, the dripping in her every pore! The heavens overhead shook in folds of crimson to the horizon.

Captain Benson, however, was not the man to delay his voyage to enjoy a show. Four bells were struck, ten o'clock, every figure on deck had its shadow beside it, and now the moon was hanging in the sky and looking red, wild and bloated through the thick smoke that blackened the north. The skipper saw there was no life in the burning ship and no boats about; he heard four bells strike, and glancing once more at the glowing and throbbing heap which shone as daylight for anything to be seen a league round, he gave orders for sail to be trimmed. The passengers took the hint, perchance not ungratefully. They were a little weary of looking, yet they felt under an obligation to stop while the fire lasted, and the *Queen* stayed. Slowly the crimson mass drew away on the port quarter. A pleasant air was now blowing. The stars sparkled plentifully in the south and east, and the sails lifted with that look of yearning and impatience which you may notice in the eyes of a horse that starts on an errand it knows. By-and-by the blaze astern was no bigger than a globular lamp glowing in the distant liquid dusk: by which hour most of the passengers, after draining their glasses or sipping wine and munching cake, had gone to bed.

Old Benson was a man of habits. When he commanded a full-rigged ship, then, in certain latitudes, he regularly took in his fore and mizzen royals and flying-jib, whether there was any occasion to do so or not; also, after

the passengers had retired, and the cabin lamp was turned low, he would come on deck in his tall hat and pea coat, and smoke one Manilla cheroot, marching up and down abreast of the wheel. You might tell the time by the skipper's star of tobacco aft, and strike the bell when he threw the stump away.

He was marching up and down now, at this hour of hard upon six bells; at the forward extremity of the short white length of poop-deck stepped Mr. Poole, the second mate; a solitary figure grasped the wheel. The sails swelled to the main-royal, and from under the bows came a noise like water in little streams merrily running over shingle.

'Mr. Poole,' suddenly called out the captain in a voice that sounded harsh and parrot-like, perhaps with the suddenness of it, and the soft silence it broke into.

'Sir,' answered the second mate, and he came swiftly aft, touching his hat as he met the old skipper abreast of the after-quarter-boat, clear of the wheel.

'Whose voices are those down on the quarter-deck?'

'One's Mr. Davenire, sir. I think I hear Mr. Hankey, and there are two or three others.'

'Why don't they go to bed?'

'I don't know, sir.'

'What are they doing, sir?'

'Smoking, sir.'

After a short, expressive pause, old Benson said: 'The mate tells me you knew Mr. Hankey before he came on board this ship.'

'He came out in a ship that I was in, sir.'

'Who is he?'

'I know nothing of him, sir,' responded the second mate, speaking nervously, as a young officer well might when challenged by a skipper in the manner which old Benson was now wearing.

'Didn't he come on board the ship the night before we sailed, at your invitation?'

'No, sir. A small boat sculled alongside. I looked over the rail and was hailed by name. Recollecting the gentleman, and understanding that he was to be a passenger aboard this ship, I asked him aboard.'

'What was your talk about?'

'Many things, sir—I forget; the ship I had come out with him in; his struggles in the colonies, and so on.'

'Did he inquire about the consignment of gold?' said the

captain, standing hard as bronze upon his rounded legs, whilst he watched the face of the second mate by the light of the moon, his glowing cigar poised, a loose white hair or two trembling.

The second mate was afraid to speak the truth, and told a lie. This questioning of the old skipper astonished and alarmed him. Unformed suspicions filled his head and muddled it. When he should have said yes he answered no. The captain quitted him abruptly and went some paces forward, and strode awhile athwartship smoking, but at some feet abaft the rail at the break, so that those who stood under could not see him. There was nothing, however, for the old man to hear but a low rumble of voices, with an occasional laugh, saving that once a clearer voice began, without heed of the cuddy door being open and the ladies sleeping within, to tell a story which dismissed the old skipper to his regular post, and whilst he sucked at his cigar-end he heard a shout of laughter.

Captain Benson this night lingered a little longer than usual on deck. Seven bells found him pacing his dignity walk betwixt the wheel and the mizzen-rigging; at this hour all was hushed under the break of the poop. The last of the passengers had turned in, and the ship was in possession of the watch on deck, who snored in corners or wearily paced the fore-castle.

Now it was that old Benson, after taking a view of the compass, and sending a searching look aloft and to windward, and after gruffly delivering a sentence or two of instructions to Mr. Poole, went below to get some rest; but no man could tell at what hour this old skipper would reappear, for he was mysterious as a spectre in his tricks of emergence. Often it happened that within ten minutes of the old dog's having gone below for the night, the mate of the watch, lounging at the rail, relieved of the tyranny of that bow-legged presence, would look aft and start on beholding, walking close beside the wheel, the shadowy but familiar figure in a tall hat and long coat.

Midnight was struck on the bell, a hoarse voice bawled down through the fore-scuttle, 'Eight bells below there; d'ye hear the news?' The wheel was relieved, and the chief officer, with his eyes full of sleep, came up the weather poop-step and talked for a few minutes to Mr. Poole, who then went to his cabin.

The moon was far astern on the quarter, sinking, and the burning light of the whaler gone long since. Clouds of fleece flew across the stars, which shook in splendour, and the barque strained as she drove the brine into recoiling flashes. But the breeze had headed her; they had braced up in that first watch, and the ship was off her course.

Scarcely twenty minutes had elapsed since the watch was relieved, when Mr. Matthews, who soberly paced the weather side of the poop, was surprised by observing the second mate gliding with great rapidity across the deck from the lee poop-ladder. Matthews came to a stand; Mr. Poole exclaimed, breathing fast:

'What do you think? The arms-chest in my cabin has been forced, and the whole of the weapons stolen!'

CHAPTER VII

THE CAPTAIN'S STATEMENT

THE barque heeled to a damp gust of the night breeze as the second mate, in a voice low with agitation, spoke. Mr. Matthews did not rightly catch his meaning. The man repeated his words:

'All the small arms stolen out of the chest?' exclaimed Mr. Matthews, stiffening his leaning figure, and peering hard at Poole by the windy starlight. 'How long have they been gone?'

'I've only just discovered the theft,' answered the second mate.

'This must be reported to the captain at once,' said Mr. Matthews. 'Keep the deck till I return.'

He went below and knocked on the captain's door. The skipper swung in a cot, and when the mate told him that Mr. Poole had just discovered that the whole of the ship's small arms were stolen, he tumbled out of his swing bed on to the deck in shirt and drawers, as an ape drops out of a tree when shot.

'Who's done it, sir?' puffed the old man whilst he pulled on his breeches and coat, and took down his tall hat all in a passion of hurry.

'The ship must be searched for the things, sir,' said the mate.

‘Ay, to her dunnage,’ blew the skipper. ‘The small arms stolen!’ he exclaimed, brought to a halt by an instant’s shock of sheer incredulity. ‘Why, this looks like a plan, don’t it? A conspiracy, hey, sir? Forward or aft? Softly, sir.’

He opened the door, and they stepped out lightly.

‘Send Mr. Poole here,’ said old Benson in a whisper like the sound of a saw, and he went straight to the second mate’s cabin. He entered it without ceremony. A little lamp screwed to the bulkhead was burning. The lid of the arms-chest lay open, and the skipper had no need to look twice to see that it was empty. Whilst he was gaping at it Mr. Poole arrived.

‘What’s the meaning of this, sir?’ said the captain, pointing to the chest.

‘I have no idea, sir,’ answered the second mate, who was pale and very much alarmed.

‘You have the key of this chest, sir. Where is it?’

The second mate opened a locker and took out a key. ‘Here it is, sir, just as I placed it. Just as it’s lain from the beginning. The persons who’ve stolen the arms did not want my key. The lock’s been forced.’

The skipper put his nose close to the heavy black chest.

‘When did you make this discovery, sir?’ he said, casting his little eyes about.

‘Just now, sir; soon after the chief officer relieved me.’

‘What made you examine the box just now?’

‘The questions you put to me on deck, sir.’

‘Let me see the list of the small arms.’

Mr. Poole produced a packet of papers from his little locker, and handed a dirty old parchment-like piece of stuff to the captain, who stepped close to the lamp and read aloud: ‘Seven muskets, five blunderbusses, four horse-pistols, five other pistols, a dozen of cutlasses.’ ‘They must be in the ship,’ he exclaimed. ‘I don’t like the look of this, sir. I’ll not believe,’ he went on softening his voice, with a glance at the bulkhead of the adjacent cabin, ‘that the crew have had a hand in it. Yet the fore-castle must be searched. This was done when all hands were on deck, watching the whaler on fire. Who sleeps next ’e?’

‘Captain Trollope and Mr. Weston, sir. I don’t think myself ——’ stammered the second mate with a bewildered look.

‘What sir, what?’ panted the old skipper.

'I doubt if they're in the ship,' continued the unfortunate officer. 'That window was open when I came below. I don't recollect leaving it open when I went on deck at eight o'clock. Whoever did it has washed my berth out for me,' and striding to his bunk he grasped and held aloft a quantity of blanket sodden with salt water.

The captain made no answer. He darted many quick and curious looks around the little interior.

Tommy Poole! Your captain viewed but a poorly embellished hole; a portrait of Poole's mother cut out of black paper, the lineaments bronzed, a small crucifix at the head of the bunk, a rack containing a few pipes; but a man who on six pounds a month supports an old mother and a childless wife cannot handsomely furnish his cabin.

'Go and call up both stewards,' said the captain.

The two men slept in the steerage. They promptly arrived, tumbling astonished and eager out of their bunks. They were amazed to find the commander of the ship at this sepulchral hour of one bell standing hatted, his face inflamed, his hanging arms vibrating like the legs of a dreaming dog, in the cabin of the second mate, who was himself colourless as though he had been stabbed.

'Trickle,' said the captain, 'some one has plundered the arms-chest.' He pointed to it. Trickle sank his head and opened his mouth.

'Did you notice anybody hanging about the cuddy last evening when all the people were on deck looking at the fire?'

Trickle thought hard, so did John the under-steward; they stared at each other, they resolved in the anguish of their struggle with recollection; one seemed to have it, then the other with a jerk of his fist, one finger up, to no purpose. In fact, both men had been on the fore-castle while the sea-show lasted, and when they went aft the passengers were coming in a body from the poop into the cuddy, talking about the fire and looking about them for grog.

Captain Benson stepped into the cuddy and moved slowly along the floor, glancing by the dimly-burning lamp at the cabins to right and left of him, and at the berths in the shadow beyond the companion-steps, up which he presently stalked. He was astounded. The old heart of oak was terrified too. What could the robbery of the arms-chest signify but a conspiracy? Certain people had armed themselves at the ship's

expense—for what purpose? His soul croaked a conjecture that made him reel on his sturdy bow legs as he stepped out of the hatch into the rush of the black wet wind and the gloom of the night, wild with flying cloud and dipping stars. The mate came up to him.

‘The chest is plundered, sir,’ panted the captain.

‘Where’s the ammunition, sir?’ inquired the mate.

‘Ha!’ cried old Benson, pulling his hat down to his ears, ‘I had forgotten that. Go below and tell the second mate to place the powder and ball in my cabin.’

They found the ammunition untouched. It had been stowed in the steward’s pantry, and they might have hunted for it all night but for John, who, on the yesterday morning, having tumbled on his knees to explore a small cupboard for an oil-can, had handled the powder and ball without knowing what they were. They all knew that the ship carried no more ammunition than this. Mr. Matthews placed the stuff in the captain’s cabin as commanded, and returned on deck to report. The old skipper was astounded.

‘What’s the good of muskets without powder and shot, sir?’

‘Unless the people who’ve stolen the things brought powder and shot with them,’ said the mate.

‘I don’t believe it,’ said Captain Benson irritably. ‘D’ye think it’s a piece of horse-play? Some trick to scare the women? The work of one of the gentry below,’ he added, turning a thumb down.

Here the second mate came up from to leeward.

‘Well, sir!’ exclaimed the captain.

‘I’m quite sure,’ said the second mate, ‘that the weapons were thrown through my cabin window overboard.’

‘He left his window shut and found it open when you relieved him, sir,’ said the captain to the mate. ‘His bed is awash.’

‘Looks to me then like some dirty practical joke,’ said Mr. Matthews, ‘and of course it will be the work of one of the ten of ’em.’

‘I’d like to think so,’ said the captain. ‘Though it’ll be a scandalous outrage at that, with a rousing bill on top for the joker to pay; but better that the arms should be overboard than secreted in the ship. For what motive, sir, should a man have for breaking open an arms-chest and plundering such a collection as we carried?’

'I'd drain my heart of its blood to find out who did it, sir,' said the second mate, speaking with emotion. 'I'd give all my wages for this voyage, to be able to point him out. Look at the position it puts me in, sir. You discover that I previously knew one of the passengers, and you talk to me about them in a manner that lets me see you've got your suspicions, and the next thing that happens the arms-chest in my cabin is broken open!' He added with a rising rage that forced an oath from him: 'It's enough to ruin a better man than me.'

'I have made no charges, sir,' exclaimed the captain sternly, falling back a step and riding on either leg as though he was about to spring, his custom when his anger struggled with his dignity. 'I have no doubt that things are with you precisely as they seem. You will help us to discover the people who have committed this robbery. This ship shall be thoroughly searched, Mr. Matthews, but quietly to-morrow after the cabin breakfast is over. Have you any private arms?'

'None, sir, I regret to say.'

'And you, sir?' said the skipper to Poole.

'None, sir.'

'It's not of the crew's doing,' muttered the captain, after a pause. 'There nothing more to be said about it till daylight.'

The old man went below, but merely to look at the ammunition and stow it away. He then returned on deck, and walked it during the rest of the night. The mate paced the windward planks, often sending a look through the skylight, often pausing to bend his ear at the companion hatch, often standing at the brass rail forward and plunging his sight into the deep shadows betwixt the bulwarks. The shape of the second mate showed shadowily to leeward. This ship wanted a third officer; she brought one out, but the man, who was twenty-three years old, immensely broad and a daring devil aloft, had run with the rest at Sydney, and the captain was unable to replace him. The sailor at the wheel easily saw there was something amiss, and, on going forward when relieved at four bells, he told his mates of the watch that the captain was walking the deck, armed to the teeth, that the two mates were watching likewise, and that he saw a naked revolver swinging at Mr. Poole's fist as he passed by. This led to some talk to leeward of the galley.

‘What the blooming blazes is wrong with the ship?’ says Bob, and draining his eyes by straining them with his knuckles he stared aloft, and then around him, in the cow-like way that long-voyage sailors fall into.

‘It’s all right for’rads, ain’t it?’ said a man. ‘The men are quiet enough, aren’t they?’

‘Perhaps the ladies are giving trouble,’ exclaimed Bill.

‘More likely them covies with the guffy looks and the sailor tricks—sorter drilled Jack Mucks some of ’em seem, with the shore-going togs of gents on the look-out for a job, and a general knowledge that ain’t natural, ’ticklerly him with the big maystachianos and the cocked nose over ’em, like a duck thankin’ gord for a drink. He’s always a-watching of something or other, not like the rigler passenger.’

‘Aft here and get a small drag upon this lee main-brace,’ sang out the mate, who had been eyeing this talking group with suspicion.

The dawn broke in a dim slate at the edge of the working sea, flinging that tender light of pensiveness which, as Wordsworth says, stops just short of sadness. A melancholy waste was the ocean till the sun flashed it up into blue hollows and bright foam. It shone upon three grey faces. Old Benson looked as if he had not been to bed for a month, and the mates as though they were just out of jail. Poole went below to clean himself and send his bed to the galley with the consent of the mate whose watch it was below, and whilst the men were washing down, the captain called Mr. Matthews to him, and spoke thus:

‘The more I think of last night’s business, sir, the more I’m persuaded it’s the work of some of the passengers.’

‘And that’s my conviction.’

‘I have seen nothing in the behaviour of the men,’ said the old skipper, ‘to warrant suspicion of a spirit of mutiny among them.’

‘Nothing, sir,’ echoed the mate.

‘They have not complained of the provisions, and there is nothing to find fault with in their general conduct.’

‘Nothing, sir,’ said Mr. Matthews, staring at the fore-castle, where a seaman was making the head-pump chatter.

‘I hope it may prove nothing but a practical joke,’ said the captain. ‘But the ship has been robbed, and the thief is aboard, and we must find him and the goods. Therefore, sir, after breakfast, you and the second mate—who is as guilt-

less in this thing as he says he is, the man's manner's convincing—will carefully search the cabins of the passengers, and you will afterwards go forward, explain the circumstances of the robbery to the crew, and rummage the fore-castle.'

'Ay, ay, sir.'

Presently Mr. Poole came on deck to take charge of the starboard watch. The captain and the mate went below. Surely the ship was safe enough now with the glorious sun at her fore yardarm. It was a noble morning, a bright breeze, the Pacific running in long blue hills, breaking into lightning-like sea-flashes. The ship was under all the sail she needed, and smoked through the seas, shredding them at each stoop into crystal veils, which often flew in an airy beauty and a dazzling gleam of gems sheer over the fore-castle head.

There was nothing in sight. The first of the passengers to come on deck was Mr. Dent. He went along to Mr. Poole, cheerfully rubbing his hands and looking about him.

'Soon up with the Horn at this rate,' he cried, 'and once round that frozen corner we shall be looking out for the north star.'

'It's a fine morning, sir,' said Mr. Poole, drily.

Others arrived, amongst them Captain Trollope. Poole watched the tall figure of the man intently as he paced the deck seeking an appetite for his breakfast. Whilst he stared Mr. Hankey swung out of the cuddy front and came up the poop ladder.

'Good morning, Poole. I say, old man,' he said, with an insinuating leer, 'what was the shindy about last night in your cabin?'

'There was no shindy,' answered the second mate, coldly.

'A noise of voices disturbed me,' said Mr. Hankey.

'You'll often hear a noise of voices at sea,' said Poole, looking aloft with the idea of finding an excuse to sing out an order.

Mr. Hankey walked over to Captain Trollope. The breakfast bell now rang. What is more delicious to a hungry man at sea than the smell of eggs and bacon? The cuddy air was full of it, and the table was delightfully hospitable with hams, pies, boiled beef, galley rolls, butter, yellow and sparkling with brine, and what good cheer besides? The captain came out of his cabin, the ladies assembled; in a few minutes the long table was full, the mate at the bottom, and every lee window blazed with sunshine white with foam.

‘Did we make a good run in the night, captain?’ said Mr. Storr.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘You were a good deal about, weren’t you, captain?’ said Mrs. Peacock. ‘I heard your voice.’

‘The sea’s an up and down life, madam,’ answered the old skipper.

‘That girl opposite is taking us all in,’ said Johnson, with his eyes on his plate, to Davenire.

‘Which of us would she choose if the chance were hers?’ answered Davenire, with a cool smile as he met the fine eyes of Miss Mansel.

‘Were you disturbed by the shindy last night, Mr. Matthews?’ said Hankey, calling down the table, whilst he cut himself a slice of ham.

‘Shindy’s a strong word,’ answered the mate, with a troubled look and a glance at the skipper. ‘Is it English?’

‘What took place in the night?’ said Captain Trollope.

The mate seemed to be listening to what Mr. Dent was saying; the merchant talked of wool and horns, the prosperity of the colony, and the duties of the mother country. Conversation trickled on down both sides of the table, till, breakfast being nearly over, Mr. Isaac Cavendish started up. Instantly Captain Benson shot out of his chair, and grasping the table, his face discoloured by twenty passions and feelings, he cried out, ‘I request that nobody will quit the cuddy till I have made a statement.’

A deep silence followed this. All the people stared. Mrs. Peacock turned of a dead white; Mrs. Storr seized her husband’s arm; Mr. Cavendish sat down, and every face on either hand the table was directed at the captain. Mr. Matthews quickly and keenly glanced at some of the men. Their faces expressed simple wonder and great curiosity tinged with expectation of amusement. Captain Trollope pulled his moustache whilst he watched the skipper; in fact, his face sat almost expressionless behind that abundant decoration.

‘I hope no needless alarm will attend what I’m going to say—I refer to you ladies—’ began the old white-haired man very purple, very agitated. ‘This ship carries an arms-chest containing weapons for the defence of the people aft in case of trouble forward, or in case of any other difficulty,’ he added, stuttering on spunkily, with a look at Trollope such as

he would direct at a black squall he couldn't see through. 'The chest was in the second mate's cabin; the lock has been smashed, and the whole of the weapons removed.'

Mr. Storr's jaw fell.

'With what object?' asked Mr. Dent, endeavouring to speak as though he felt perfectly cool.

'We don't know, sir. But what we certainly do know is the thief is in the ship.'

'At which end of her do you imagine, Captain Benson?' asked Captain Trollope coldly and haughtily.

'We shall find out, sir,' responded the skipper, speaking with fifty marks of dislike and suspicion of the man.

'But good gracious, captain, are we in danger?' said Mrs. Holroyd.

'In no danger whatever, madam.'

'Do you suspect anybody?' called out Mr. Masters, jerking the words at the captain with a petulance that was like insolence.

'The lock smashed, d'ye say?' exclaimed Mr. Storr. 'That would have made a noise. Who heard such a noise?' He advanced his head and looked up and down the table.

'It was done when everybody was on deck last night watching the fire,' said the captain.

'Is it some sleep-walker's trick?' exclaimed Mr. Caldwell in his sulkiest manner.

'What do you think?' cried Mr. Dent, catching at the fancy and staring eagerly.

'There's Burn here who talks and sings in his sleep,' exclaimed Mr. Davenire, 'but I don't know that he walks. D'ye walk, Burn?'

'It would be horrible to believe it,' exclaimed Mrs. Peacock, looking at the fat man.

'I walk in my sleep, but I've not done this,' said Mr. Shannon.

'I am sorry to have to tell you, ladies and gentlemen,' here broke in the captain roughly, 'that, in the interests of the lives and property committed to my charge, every passenger's berth must be thoroughly searched.'

'The ladies?' said Mr. Weston in a small voice, looking, with his wrung face, as though after speaking he thrust his tongue in his cheek.

'I said every cabin, sir,' thundered the captain.

'Quite welcome to begin with mine,' said Captain Trollope

sarcastically. 'If I can be of any help—perhaps some of us here may have been forced by circumstances into the Excise—you have a custom house in Sydney, hey?' he called across to Mr. Dent, who made no reply.

'So far as I am concerned,' said Mr. Cavendish, smirking at the skipper, 'I am quite willing that my cabin should be searched. But wouldn't it show some breeding, captain, and that sort of courtesy which fifty and sixty guineas may be thought money enough to purchase, if you began with the fore-castle?' He bowed and sat back with his repellent incommunicable look of self-complacency.

'I assure you there's no need to search *my* cabin,' said Mrs. Holyrod.

Some laughter crackled in the neighbourhood of the mate, who listened to what was passing with a dark face and fixed attention.

'I am very sorry, ladies,' said the skipper bluntly, 'that you should have been brought into such a matter as this aboard my ship. Very sorry.' He bowed to them in a general way. 'We must find out who's robbed the arm-chest, and what's become of the weapons. Since, then, the cabins *must* be searched, this atrocious piece of rascality,' he added, scowling into the air, 'was bound to reach your ears, exaggerated, of course. I hope,' he went on, gazing significantly at the row of faces on either hand, 'that there is no gentleman here who objects to his cabin being searched?'

'You may search away for me. Begin at once. The fore-castle should show the road though in such a job.' These and the like exclamations followed the captain's remark.

'You don't open portemanteaux, I hope?' said Captain Trollope, and he glowed as he spoke.

'That I shouldn't permit,' said Mr. Davenire, with a mounting colour handsomely managed.

'We must find the weapons, gentlemen,' exclaimed the captain. 'I am speaking in the interests of the ship and of our lives.'

Saying this, he left the table, fetched his hat, and went on deck. The mate followed. The passengers remained seated, talking.

'What's the meaning of it all?' exclaimed Mrs. Peacock.

'I should like to see the chest,' said Mr. Johnson. 'Suppose the lock smashed, *that's* no warrant the box ever contained small arms.'

'I doubt if the master of a vessel has a right to search his passengers' cabins,' exclaimed Captain Trollope, sitting with a lofty air, 'though Captain Benson's welcome to begin with mine, as I told him.'

'The powers of a commander of a ship are absolutely despotic,' said Mr. Dent. 'They are unlimited, and very properly so.'

'But who the deuce wants to steal a ship's small arms?' exclaimed Mr. Burn, with a grin, as he ran his eyes over the people opposite. 'Were these arms valuable? Were they choicely mounted? Were they precious on the score of antiquity? Pah!' said he, with a shrug, standing up, 'you'll find there's been some stupid blunder. The arms were never stowed perhaps, and perhaps the second mate never noticed until last night that the lock was smashed when the box was shipped.'

He rolled down the cuddy and on to the quarter-deck, where he filled a pipe.

'He talks too much,' lightly groaned Captain Trollope in Mr. Davenire's ear, as they followed the fat man.

The people quitted the table. Some entered their cabins as though to await the persons who were to search them. Four or five men got together on the quarter-deck close against the cabin front, and stood smoking; of these first one and then another in a careless, offhand way would go to their cabins, then return, lighting their pipes afresh. The seamen had not been put to work; they hung in a little crowd abreast of the galley, looking aft with countenances of expectation. It was clear that one of the mates had gone forward, told the crew what had happened, and they waited for the forecabin to be rummaged.

Old Benson walked the deck with a resolved gait and as stern an expression as the hearty looks of his face could put on. He reasoned with himself thus, and his lips worked as he discoursed to his own heart: 'If some of those gentry have plundered the arms-chest and distributed the weapons amongst them, they may throw them overboard through their cabin windows before the search begins. I am in no hurry therefore, for I want *that* to happen. Better that the things should be hove through the windows than secreted, or even a portion of them secreted. If they are secreted it is with a design, and that design——'

The horror of the fancy forced him into a quick walk, and

the helmsman grinned to see how the white-haired old man talked to himself.

Both mates were on deck. Somebody struck four bells, ten o'clock. Mr. Storr came on to the poop with his wife on his arm. Miss Mansel also arrived: presently Caldwell, Johnson, and Hankey lounged up the poop ladder from the quarter-deck. The captain on seeing them called to Mr. Matthews:

'Begin the search, sir, and take Mr. Poole with you.'

Whilst these words were still in the skipper's mouth Captain Trollope rose through the companion way and stepping across to old Benson, he exclaimed somewhat stiffly, carrying himself with a well-bred air, 'If I can help your officers in searching this ship, pray command me.'

'We shall be glad of whatever assistance the passengers render us,' said Captain Benson, standing bolt upright with his arms hanging down.

'It is inconceivable,' said Captain Trollope, 'that this theft or joke, as it may turn out, should be the work of anybody aft.'

'We must find that out, sir,' answered the skipper bluntly, and to rid himself of the gentleman he stepped to the binnacle stand and watched his ship from beside it.

One of the most extraordinary incidents that ever occurred on the high seas followed.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SEARCH

THE mates left the poop together: the passengers who were then on deck followed them, and old Benson stumped his three fathoms of white plank alone. The seamen grouped near the galley were now talking with some excitement. Old Benson looked nervous and disordered in spirits as he glanced at the open skylights. That he was within his rights in searching the passengers' berths he hoped rather than knew. There were not many marine Acts of Parliament in those days. Benson feared trouble on his arrival in England—detaining law-suits which might imperil his command. Was he wise, moreover, he wondered, in rendering his suspicions

peculiarly significant by ordering the cuddy to be attacked before the forecastle?

He stepped uneasily along on his short arched legs, red and troubled, a singular little figure of a seaman, almost shapeless with his hat down to his ears and his broad beam of coat. There were commanders at sea that morning in cheerfuller spirits than Captain Benson.

Meanwhile they had begun to search the cuddy. Mr. Matthews did not like the job, neither did Mr. Poole. Both men had frankly looked their apologies in a sailorly way, and most of the company understood their feelings.

‘Is it not reasonable,’ exclaimed Captain Trollope advancing from the companion stairs to the cuddy front as the two mates entered, and thus arresting them, so to speak, on the very threshold of their business, ‘that we should be satisfied first of all that there is a chest of weapons broken open?’

‘But even then,’ said Mr. Caldwell, ‘are we to believe that there were arms in it?’

‘Gentlemen,’ said the mate, ‘you shall see the chest.’

He opened the door of Mr Poole’s berth. Several persons entered; two or three others talked at the table apparently without interest in what was passing. The ladies kept their cabins.

‘Now you see it,’ said the mate.

Hankey examined the lock and exclaimed, ‘Yes, newly smashed, by Jove! no doubt of that.’

The second mate lifted the lid, and Captain Trollope, looking down into the open box over his folded arms, said, ‘What were the weapons?’

‘Blunderbusses, horse-pistols, cutlasses, and so on,’ said Poole, scarcely able to hold his face as he gave a name to the ridiculous parcel.

The mates were half stunned by the roar of laughter that attended this.

‘Good booty!’ exclaimed Captain Trollope, wiping his lips. He burst into another laugh. ‘Blunderbusses and horse-pistols, eh! I think I see old Captain Benson taking aim: the wrong eye shut—a purple face glowing at the butt-end like the August moon at the tail of a shoal, the piece all trigger and the flint gone.’

Another shout of laughter.

‘Suppose we begin the search *here*,’ said Mr. Davenire, looking with crooked eyebrows at the portrait of Poole’s

mother, whilst Mr. Caldwell advanced his black head to view the crucifix.

The mate looked a remonstrance. He did not relish the officiousness of these gentlemen. But he had overheard the skipper's answer to Captain Trollope on the poop, and had nothing to say. The search then began. The locker was opened, the mattress tumbled, they peered under the bunk, they beat the bulkheads as though for secret panels and mysterious hiding-places.

They next went in a body to the mate's berth. Ten gentlemen were now assisting the two officers to find the plunder, and they made a considerable crowd in the little cabin. Their number was a trouble: nothing could be done for elbows and shoving.

'There's no good in all this skylarking,' said Burn; 'I mean if the thief's to be discovered.'

'There's nothing here,' said Captain Trollope, looking around him with slight disdain over the head of the mate.

'Bet your holiest prospects on *that*,' said Mr. Matthews slowly, cap in hand, wiping his face, for indeed the whole of them shone with perspiration and most of them with good spirits.

'Next cabin,' shouted Mr. Masters, and the heap dashed in a huddle into the cuddy bearing the two mates helpless in the thick of them.

'Aren't you going to search the ship with us?' bawled Mr. Hankey to Mr. Storr, who stood in a posture of uncertainty at the head of the table. The little auctioneer responded with a pale smile, and a weak meaningless flourish of the hand.

'There's the Captain looking!' said Shannon in a low voice to Caldwell, and they both laughed. Sure enough in the open frame of the skylight was the head of the skipper: he gazed down with his face full of blood, amazed and enraged, but he, like his officer, had nothing to say.

The next cabin attacked was the one shared between Mr. Dike Caldwell and Mr. Isaac Cavendish. The twelve filled this little room like a burst of wind. There was hardly space for an elbow to jerk itself. Shouts of laughter reached the captain's ears; they tumbled the mattress, they roared over an old razor strop. A tooth brush was flung through the open port-hole: it was Caldwell's, and he turned savagely upon the joker.

'That portmanteau?' said the mate.

'No, you don't,' said Caldwell, with one of his ugly black scowls; and he sat down upon it.

'Mr. Matthews, I appeal to your common sense,' exclaimed Captain Trollope, endeavouring to fan himself with his hat: 'is it conceivable, even supposing Mr. Caldwell were the culprit, that he'd thrust the rusty contents of an old arms-chest among his shirts and waistcoats?'

'You don't touch it,' snarled Mr. Caldwell, keeping his seat and looking dangerously at the mate. 'Not that your rotten stuff is here,' he added, smiting the leather: 'but they've thrown my tooth-brush away, and I'll be hanged if these gentlemen shall make a fool of me by a public exhibition of my private effects.'

'It was understood that the portemanteaux were not to be touched,' said Mr. Davenire.

'It's a measly business so far as I am concerned, gentlemen,' said the mate, 'something new to me in this line of life. I don't fancy,' he added dryly, 'that we shall find the weapons we want in these cabins.'

'Obey orders, if you break owners,' said Mr. Weston. 'Next cabin and shove ahead.'

Thus they proceeded, and the captain meanwhile came and went at the skylight. It was noticeable that the men contrived that their own cabins should be first searched; they rushed the business with the mates by help of laughter, skylarking, and crowding. When it came to the ladies' cabins, however, there was a well-mannered pause.

'The mates may now search for themselves,' said Captain Trollope, twisting on his heel; and, pulling out a cigar case, he strolled contemptuously and leisurely towards the quarter-deck.

'Trollope,' shouted Hankey, 'the captain's cabin hasn't been searched yet.'

'By thunder, no!' cried Trollope, coming hastily back to the group.

'You'll not enter my cabin, if you please,' roared the captain through the skylight.

'Captain Benson,' said Mr. Davenire, going under the skylight and looking up through an eyeglass, 'you have affronted us, the first-class passengers of the *Queen*, with your suspicions. We now *choose*,' he went on with a well-contrived drawl, 'to suspect *you* of having plundered the arms-chest.'

The skipper looked down with the spirit of murder aflame in each deep-seated little eye. He was dumb with wrath till, finding his voice, he shouted to Mr. Matthews to come on deck. Some of the men were then for going at once to the captain's cabin; Trollope restrained them.

'We'll do better than that,' said he; 'we'll get a red herring of apology out of him for the trail.'

'Gentlemen,' said the mate, coming down the companion steps after a few minutes, 'by order of the captain the search is over. Follow me to the fo'c'sle, Mr. Poole.'

'I say,' here bawled Mr. Johnson, 'aren't Mr. Dent and Mr. Storr's cabins to be searched?'

'The innocence of us all aft,' said the mate with a grave smile, 'has converted the whole thing into a joke. The captain's desire is that it may go no further.'

'A joke!' growled Mr. Caldwell, pushing his scowling face close to the mate, whose fists instantly doubled, whilst his smile fled like a shadow of cloud from his features; 'you search my cabin as if I was a thief, and you call it a joke.'

'It's you who've made a joke of it: I was obeying orders,' exclaimed the mate, with a slight shade of green entering his complexion as he looked round him.

'The culprit is the commander, not his officers, Caldwell,' said Captain Trollope.

'Cheer up, Poole,' said Hankey, slapping the second mate on the back; 'jump forward now, and carry the mate along with you; it's the sailor who hopped overboard that's the thief, and you'll find the whole of the weapons in his sea-boots.'

Mr. Dent came out of his cabin and stood with Mr. Storr.

'I say,' exclaimed Captain Trollope, striding up to them with an unlighted cigar in his hand, 'we mean to make the skipper apologise for this affront. You expect an apology, I suppose?'

'The captain is within his rights—I don't wish to meddle—where are the firearms?' answered Mr. Storr, stammering with uneasiness.

Captain Trollope looked down at him with so inimitable a countenance of anger and disgust that the little man trembled.

'Come on deck,' said Mr. Dent; and the two men climbed the companion steps.

The ladies now came forth. Mr. Burn officiously offered his arm to Mrs. Dent, who declined with the curtsey of a

cook. Mrs. Peacock was conducted up the steps by Mr. Hankey; the other ladies helped themselves. They were briskly followed by the ten gentlemen, with Captain Trollope at their head. It was hard upon noon, and the captain was calling through the skylight to the steward for his sextant. Forward the ship looked deserted. In fact the mess kids had been carried from the galley, and the men ate their dinner whilst the two mates went the rounds of Jack's sea-parlour.

This was the situation at this hour. The captain was about to take sights, and the ten knew their business too well to hinder him. They lounged until eight bells had been made, the old skipper sharing his fiery glances between them and the sun, and when the bell was being struck by a seaman who smoked furtively whilst he stood waiting, the two mates came out of the fore-castle.

'Let's hear the report,' murmured Trollope to Davenire.

Mr. Matthews, followed by Poole, came on to the poop; he was pale with heat, perhaps with fatigue; he was scarcely recovered from an illness, and the corners of his mouth drooped with dislike and contempt of his latest job. The ladies and most of the men crowded close to hear. Most of the women looked very frightened. Miss Mansel's dark pensive eyes were frequently directed in rapid glances at some of the gentlemen. The little skipper stood bolt upright, his arms hanging, his sextant in his clutch at his side. The mates touched their caps.

'Well, sir?' said Captain Benson.

'We can find nothing that answers to what's missing,' said Mr. Matthews.

'I never believed that the weapons *were* forward,' said the little skipper, rosy with rising wrath.

'Captain Benson,' exclaimed Captain Trollope, towering up close to him—Dent and Storr shrinking to see it, though the mates instantly put themselves on either hand their captain—'that sentence, sir, was far from well in your mouth after what has occurred. But let that be as it will; I, together with other gentlemen here, expect that you will make us—the whole of your passengers, in short—an abundant apology for the affront you have put upon us.'

'As how?' sputtered the captain, starting back with a paralytic flourish of his sextant. 'I am commander of this ship. The vessel has been plundered of her arms. Where are they? Can you tell me?' he cried, making a hideous

face at Captain Trollope, with his sneer of vehement scorn that opened his lips and almost eclipsed his familiar countenance with wrinkles and terrifying looks. 'I suppose, as a passenger, you have an interest in the safety of the vessel? I take it,' he began to roar, looking with real fury around him, but always at the gentlemen, 'that *you* must wish, equally with myself and your fellow-passengers, to discover the thieves, that we may judge of their motives. Apologise! I'd sooner sink the ship.'

'Oh, gentlemen!' shrieked Mrs. Peacock, 'what are you exciting the captain like this for?'

'For mercy's sake don't think of sinking the ship,' whined Mrs. Holroyd, clutching her daughter by the arm; and both their faces were as white as any sail above them.

'If you don't apologise,' said Captain Trollope, 'you will hear of us again on your arrival.'

'If you persist in this conduct, sir,' exclaimed Captain Benson, scowling up heroically into Trollope's face, 'I'll have you laid by the heels—I'll have you in irons as a mutineer—you shall know my power as commander, by——' And this little man who never swore made his speech awful to the ladies with an oath.

Captain Trollope turned a deep scarlet; he stood motionless, but speechless also; others of the ten men bit their lips and looked towards the bows; Caldwell drew closer to the captain by a stealthy pace, and a face that made Mr. Storr feel sick. The crew were watching and listening. They had gradually drifted in a body to abreast of the main hatchway, and were still coming aft. No man in his senses could have mistaken their attitude. Was it this, or quite another reason, that caused Captain Trollope to walk suddenly over to leeward, where he overhung the rail, gazing seawards, and swinging one foot in hard kicks against a stanchion?

The skipper stood watching him for a minute or so; his lips worked. It looked as though he would be unable to restrain some command that raged like a choking fire in his throat. Then suddenly exclaiming, 'Mr. Matthews, turn the men to, sir. Let the business of the ship go on, then attend me in my cabin. Mr. Poole, you'll keep the look-out,' he stepped to the companion way and vanished.

The records of fore-castle mutiny form probably about two-thirds of marine literature. But who ever heard of a revolt amongst the first-class passengers of a ship? There is one

memorable instance, indeed, of an officer in command of a number of soldiers causing the captain to be clapped in irons, and thus degraded, the unhappy seaman was carried to St. Helena, the ship being navigated by the mate, at the point of the bayonet. The theft of the small arms, the insults, the behaviour of ten at least of the passengers looked uncommonly like the dark shadow of mutiny, or some bitter bloody trouble of a similar sort at hand—but *aft*!

The mate having turned the men to, and taken a look at the ship's course, entered the captain's cabin. The old skipper, reverend with white hair, and comely with the look of sailorly heartiness and manliness which his hat half hid when it clothed his forehead to the white line of his eyebrows, stood at his little table with a hand upon it, lost in thought. He started when the mate entered, and instantly looked stern and full of business.

'You found nothing forward, of course, sir? I can judge by the deportment of the crew that they are to be trusted. Some one aft has robbed the ship; more than one perhaps; what has he done with the weapons? What was his object in stealing them?'

'We have the powder and ball, sir,' said the mate. 'If they're aboard, the things are as useless as if they were over the side.'

'Who is that Captain Trollope? Who are these ten passengers? They are a confederacy, sir. They threaten mischief—what do they intend?'

'I believe, sir,' said the slow and practical mate, viewing his captain's inflamed face with steadfast thoughtful eyes, 'that you will discover this business is nothing more than a practical joke, poor and vulgar, but something to make a bankrupt of its author if he's to be come at. Mr. Poole in the foc'sle told me this, recollecting the matter with a sudden surprise. He said the gentleman named Hankey, during his visit to the ship the night before we sailed, asked, among other questions, about the arms-chest, and burst into a laugh when the box was shown him and the contents stated.'

'Stated—stated!' blew the little man in a great fit of passion; 'what right had the second officer to *state* the contents as you call it, to receive a visitor, to talk to him, I say? Was he drunk?'

'Looks to me, sir, as if Mr. Hankey was the prime joker in this job.'

‘Who’s to prove it?’ hissed the fiery skipper. ‘His cabin was searched, I suppose!’

‘No man of that ten is fool enough to hide two or three hundredweight of old iron and steel in his cabin with the stewards in and out and the stuff itself plunder, sir.’

‘Is the second officer to be trusted? Give me reason to doubt him, and I’ll break him out of hand; he shall be under lock and key for the rest of the voyage.’

The mate reflected and answered earnestly, ‘You’ll find he’s perfectly honest and trustworthy, sir.’

‘You don’t forget what we’re carrying home, do ‘e?’

‘I do not,’ answered the mate firmly.

‘Give the men to understand that we have our suspicions of the ten cuddy passengers, and start them on keeping a bright look-out for themselves. Let them know it may come to their saving their throats by doing it.’

The mate, with astonishment slowly growing in his face, said, ‘Ay, ay, sir. But what name and shape am I to give to our suspicions?’

The old skipper was at a loss. He stared vacantly through the large cabin window, then exclaimed, ‘We must watch ‘em. You will keep your eye upon ‘em sir. You will keep your eye upon Mr. Poole also.’

They stood thus in somewhat aimless discourse for another ten minutes or so. The mate then left the cabin.

Though there was plenty of white flying sunshine and sparkling weather overhead, a gloom dark as the shadow of storm lay upon the people when they sat at lunch that day. From time to time Captain Trollope would sternly look at the skipper, and the skipper would return the look with equal sternness, and to a spiritual eye with the word ‘Irons’ writ large upon his face. If people spoke, it was scarcely more than to ask for things. Mrs. Peacock, it is true, once inquired if the thief had been discovered, but the answer she got silenced her, and Mr. Dent and Mr. Storr were afraid to mention the subject.

However, tiffin at sea is no detaining meal, and the chairs fore and aft were quickly emptied; the captain called the steward, went to his cabin, and there questioned the man closely; he had faith in this fellow. His name was Trickle, he was legged like his master, and was about thirty years old, and the Jacks would tell him he walked on his father’s legs, and it was right the skipper should take a fatherly interest in

him. He had nothing to tell the commander of the ship; had no suspicions. He was of Mr. Matthews's opinion; that it was a practical joke, with some deeper meaning in it than fooling; as for instance, it might have been the work of one who disliked the second mate and hoped to get him into trouble.

'Go and send the second mate to me.'

Poole was eating his lunch in the chief mate's place. He arose nervously.

'So it seems, sir,' let fly old Benson in a broadside of sputters the instant the young fellow presented himself, 'that you did not give me the whole truth when I questioned you about your knowledge of some of the passengers.'

'I told you all I then recollected, sir.'

'Did you tell me that you had shown the arms-chest and stated its contents to the gentleman named Hankey when he visited the ship in Sydney Bay?'

'I forgot all about that, sir. I am heartily sorry. God knows I'd have stove his boat in sooner than have allowed him aboard could I have foreseen this.'

Benson's passion rose high; he thundered and swelled. 'D'ye know what my power as commander is, sir?'

'Too well,' sighed Poole, standing upright like a private.

'How am I to know you're not in league with certain people in this ship for some purpose that I mean to watch and frustrate, sir? D'ye know your responsibilities? If I catch ——'

His speech was arrested by a sensation of choking; it was over in a minute, but the second mate was greatly alarmed, and asked if he should procure some brandy. The skipper waved aside the question with a stout-hearted flourish of his arm, and was about to speak when he was again halted by his eyes lighting upon the barometer close past the second mate.

'That will do, sir,' and the officer left the cabin.

The commander, whose face had recovered its wonted hue, opened a locker and drank a glass of liquor. He then looked at the barometer again, critically considering the fall, which was indeed of a character to demand his earnest attention. He put on his hat and went on deck, and, without noticing anybody, stepped to the wheel, looked at the course, then at sea and sky, then aloft at his ship.

It was hard upon ten o'clock. The ocean swept blue from the ship to the southern horizon, where it ran fretting in a queer tinge of olive that was as though a dye of storm were

sifting and spreading into the brine from far recesses down the slope. But the breeze was fresh, the sea ran in brilliance, the ship rushed in foam, and there was nothing in the heavens or the waters to indicate an approaching change.

The gloom of the cabin, however, was upon the poop just the same. The passengers conversed in low voices, and when the captain made his appearance the ladies silently watched him. All healthy spirit of comradeship had been broken up amongst the mates; you saw Captain Trollope lounging in the gangway leaning against the bulwarks, stern and lonely. Shannon squatted solitary upon the grating abaft the wheel till the captain emerged, when, darting an ugly look at the old skipper, he slouched forwards, keeping alone, however. So with the rest, saving Burn and Masters, who sat together diverting themselves, the one with working a Turk's head upon a piece of rope, the other watching him.

That afternoon, some while before eight bells, a film drew over the sky; it was laden with a delicate beading of cloud; in places it looked like netting. The sun lost shape and flooded twice his diameter with an oozing or draining of sickly light. The sails of the ship took an odd sulky glare of brass, and there being little wind they sucked hard into the masts at every roll upon the mountain swell out of the south.

The glass had continued to fall. There was storm in the face of the heavens, in the weedy swells of the sea. The sun went out in a blood-red smoky glare, and the night fell, black as ink, with a light air out of the eastward and a wild moan in each gust, which the heavy dip of the ship on the large swell forced betwixt her masts. But long ere this she had been snugged down to a few cloths of canvas; full of savage beauty was the picture she made when, having rounded into the trough, she rolled her naked spars athwart that sullen flare of sunset in the far north-west.

The gale grew slowly. It sprang out of the blackness and filled the rigging with a hundred piercing whistles. It had an edge of antarctic spite in it, and for the cold of that first low blast there might have been a continent of ice close aboard. It freshened. The lashed seas split in thunder-claps against the diving and straining ship, and the darkness was made a visible whiteness by the foam that burst off bow and beam. At two in the morning it was blowing a hurricane. The sea was running in black hills, and the face of it was frightful with the light of the storm. The slant of the deck at each

leeward roll was steep as a roof, the helmsmen were lashed to their posts. The captain stood under the shelter of a square of canvas in the mizzen rigging belted to belaying pins. The mate hung to leeward where the pitiless shriek and roar sometimes flew high enough above his head to yield him the sensation of a lull.

In the grey of the morning the wind slackened, yet it still blew a living gale. The discomfort was shocking. The main-deck was drowned and the cuddy awash spite of the secured doors. The ladies lay in their beds speechless with sickness and terror. Mr. Dent, with clenched teeth, wrote an account of their condition and thrust the paper into a bottle which he carefully corked; then, with reeling head and flying legs, he gained the companion steps, rose upon them to the height of his head, and watching his chance, flung the bottle at the sea with such dexterity that it struck the rail and went to splinters upon the deck, at the instant that his wideawake flew cleverly overboard. The captain, holding by the rigging, and leaning in his girdle like a man heaving the lead, roared some words into the wind at the colonial merchant, who, catching no meaning and fearing for his life if he trusted to his legs, slid down into the cuddy and regained his cabin.

This happened shortly before the breakfast hour. The ship was then labouring heavily, and the stewards prepared a meal at the risk of their lives; they were constantly thrown; they stumbled, and tripped, and reeled with their hands full of crockery. Some of the ten emerged and cheerfully helped them. By the time breakfast was ready the whole of the ten gentlemen had left their cabins and were seating themselves in their accustomed places as the old skipper came below.

Giving his spray-soaked hat to one of the stewards, he took his chair at the head of the table. Some of the gentlemen catching his eye bowed. He inclined his head gravely, and inquired of the steward after the ladies and Mr. Dent and Mr. Storr. They wanted nothing, he was answered. The name of food increased their nausea. Mr. Hankey and two or three others seemed desirous by the looks they cast at the captain to propitiate him. Captain Trollope sat grim and hard-faced as a figure-head. It was something dark, however, down here; a single lamp was burning; the shadow of the flying sky lay like a thin fading coating of some grey paint upon the skylights; at intervals a brightness of foam

was flashed inwards through the weather windows, but to leeward the glass lay almost continuously buried deeper than the thunderous dazzle went, and the atmosphere that way was charged with the dusky green of the sea.

The table submitted a poor show of dishes; the cook could do nothing with the galley fire, and the ten gentlemen and Captain Benson—the mate did not appear—drank beer or wine.

‘It blows a strong gale of wind, sir,’ said Mr. Johnson politely; he sat nearest to the captain.

‘It blows hard, sir,’ answered old Benson, arresting the hand with which he was about to cut a slice of some kind of sausage, whilst he watched the steward crawl on his hands and feet to leeward to pick up a piece of ship’s beef that had sprung from the table.

‘I presume there is no danger?’ said Mr. Masters.

The captain let his little eyes dwell upon the man for a minute; he then answered with a significant look, with one of those slips which will make old-fashioned English of old men’s talk, ‘Was you never at sea before?’

‘Oh, just a little,’ answered Mr. Masters airily, but with a mind of caution that betrayed itself in the fingers he fiddled his tumbler of beer with; ‘but I was never in such a hurricane as this.’

‘Gentlemen,’ said the old skipper firmly, ‘you are all of you very fortunate in possessing good sea legs. There are not many landsmen who could sit and eat at this table with so much courage and good spirits, and with so nice a trick of fitting themselves to the heave.’

Captain Trollope looked hard at him, but did not speak.

‘Mr. Cavendish,’ called out Burn; ‘you for one, I think, have knocked about amongst ships?’

Mr. Cavendish answered with a pleasant nod over a glass of foaming ale.

‘Others of these gentlemen, so far as I have been able to gather,’ continued Mr. Burn, motioning in a gentlemanlike way, ‘have tasted of the perils to which your life is wedded. In these times men see and do much.’

‘I believe so, sir,’ answered the captain with a grunt of suspicion, choking further words, however, with a mouthful of sausage.

‘I presume, sir,’ said Mr. Caldwell, turning his gloomy face upon the captain, ‘that you don’t begrudge me the privilege of

sitting at this table in a gale of wind merely because I happen to enjoy what you think proper to call a pair of sea legs?’

‘Certainly not, sir, certainly not,’ responded the captain, swallowing at the risk of suffocation to get the words out quickly. ‘I am always happy to see my passengers assembled at table, and I wish the ladies were with us this morning,’ and he rolled a somewhat vacant eye upon the cabins abreast.

After this no man spoke for some time. The long pause was filled with the dull thunder of shattering seas. The cabin was loud with the shrieks and groans of strained fastenings. The roaring in the rigging sank in a giant tremble through the shaft of mizzenmast, and shook the interior like the vibrations of an engine. In momentary trances when the ship lay rail under in the deep hollow—in those breathless moments ere she was rushed to the height of the green acclivity that flickered mountainous on her bow like flashes of lightning before thundering into white water, you heard the dim beat of the rudder, the furious drag of it at the wheel chains.

The ten gentlemen ate and drank silently, but with calmness. They conveyed their wants by pantomime, and helped one another with well-bred alacrity, yet as though the novelty of acquaintance was not wholly worn off. Little Benson took mental notes of these and other points. The plain sailor was astonished. Could these ten gentlemanly men of various ages be the—the what? Ay, *that* was it. He munched and was bewildered.

All of a sudden Captain Trollope, standing up but holding on, addressed Captain Benson in a huge, hurricane-lunged voice such as a man would send across a moor at night for help: ‘You have had time to reflect, sir, and now probably you will see your way to make the voyage a pleasant one by apologising for the affront you caused your mates to put upon us yesterday?’

The skipper jumped up and looked at him; his lips worked, but no sound was made; then, with a gesture of frenzy, he hoisted his arm and snapped his fingers at Captain Trollope. In this strange posture he remained for some time, swaying on his arched legs like a swing-tray, watched by some of the men as though he had gone out of his mind. He then called for his hat, drew it to his ears, and again snapping his fingers at Captain Trollope, stepped on deck.

A great laugh went up when the little chap passed out, and no man’s laugh was louder than Trollope’s.

CHAPTER IX

OVERHEARD

THE *Queen* struggled with this violent weather for six days. It was in the teeth of her course, and blew her north-north-west above a hundred leagues. She was nothing strained in the hold; her pumps sucked after a brief spell; but aloft she showed a distressed look, with the rain-blackened canvas frapped to the yards, and the gear blowing out slack as a man-of-war's pennon in a light wind.

The roaring outside, however, subdued all life within. The captain and mate would occasionally talk over the robbery of the arms-chest; but the gale and the safety of the ship were overwhelming present anxieties, and the incident of the theft grew dim as a fact and as a dangerous riddle. Likewise the captain gave but scant attention to the ten. They loafed through the furious weather as best they could, snugging down in corners for a smoke and markedly breaking themselves up, so that they seemed no longer the same company of gentlemanly men who had come together by chance and quickly developed into a gang-like clan. They'd come on deck, and, holding on stoutly, stare for a little into the whole heart of the blast. Then the captain, aswing in his hempen belt under the shelter of a square of canvas, would watch them. Some seemed to like to test their power of eye and strength of breath by thus facing what they were bound speedily to turn their backs upon. Of these were that massive man with the silver chain, Mark Davenire, and, strangely enough, the fat Mr. Burn.

That most of them had used the sea professionally no one could doubt; nothing but custom could have made the wild hull of the *Queen* so easy to their legs. The mate seemed more struck by this than by the plunder of the arms-chest, or by the captain's suspicions of the people and his behaviour to Captain Trollope. He paused once to exchange a few sentences with Poole: the commander was below, and they stood in the shelter of the canvas in the mizzen rigging, where they could hear each other.

'Look at that man,' says Mr. Matthews, gazing askew at Mr. Peter Johnson, who stood with two others at the break of the poop, holding by the rail; 'he's been a soger in his

day. *Must* have been! What but a drill sergeant could have straightened his spine so? Yet call me the thief of the chest if he hasn't been a sailor too. Where's his shell-back, then? Why isn't he curved like the rest of us?'

'Wasn't long enough at it perhaps, sir,' answers Poole.

'They're watching this ship,' continued the mate, 'as seamen would. The fat chap asked me why we hadn't sent down our royal yards. Why didn't we rig our flying jibboom in and send down the long topgallant-masts? He said he and some of the others would lend the sailors a hand if the thing was urgent.'

'Well, I'm jiggered!' exclaimed Poole with a kind of admiration in his faint smile.

'I don't know,' the mate went on, 'if the captain's made any observations. I've logged a few fancies down in my mind whilst watching them this weather. It seems to me that they come up to study the ship. I saw Mr. Shannon with that black devil Caldwell at his elbow. It was yesterday morning: they stood as those three are now standing, and I've gone dark and see only a madman's sights if the beggar Shannon wasn't giving t'other a lesson in seamanship: in the names of ropes, in the reeving of gear, in the setting of canvas—in twenty things above Mr. Caldwell's tricks of the trade.'

'How was that to be known, sir?'

'Why, by the sight, by looking, man. D'ye hear *only* with your ears? Can't you get language out of a pointed finger?'

He broke off and went below, clawing his way along the rail like a parrot to the head of the poop ladder.

In all this while they sighted nothing. The ocean worked in mountains round them. It was of a lead colour, freckled and frightful, and every giant sea poured its foaming head with awful majesty.

On the evening of the fifth day the weather moderated. At midnight some stars were shining, the loose scud flew white as milk, and much about this hour a beautiful light, that irradiated a wide space of sea and air, like a little moon, fell out of the heavens and flashed with a single note of thunder into the water. This seemed like a signal to the wind: in twenty minutes it had fallen a stark calm, and through the dark hours of the morning the ship lay rolling

upon a round vast black swell, without a single pulse of life in her outside the trouble of the sea.

A beautiful dawn : a cloudless day, hot and still. The ocean had wonderfully flattened. The canvas had dried, the planks ran white and hot, the drowned poultry had been hove into the sea. The forecastle was like a laundry yard with sailors' clothes hung up to dry. The ladies came on to the poop after breakfast, looking very pale with their stormy imprisonment of five days. The captain had taken a star in the night, and his own and the observations of the two mates at noon placed the ship far north-west of her course. But detention was the only mischief the gale had wrought. The gallant little ship had sprung from those furious seas into this calm zone without a wrung spar, without a rope-yarn's cost of damage. She was clothed to her trucks in sail again. All gear was hauled taut, everything was in its place, and as she slept, after her conflict, upon the silent roll of the glassy sea, she looked a ship fresh from port.

The moon had grown late, and would not show till after midnight. When the evening closed upon the barque it was a clear liquid dusk, splendid with stars. But their light was not in the air. The captain walked the deck with the Dents, and their conversation was about the arms-chest, the motive of the theft, and the like. The poop at ten o'clock was tolerably well stocked with figures. The mate was in bed. Mr. Poole had the watch, and a lonely shape trudged the forecastle-head.

Two men, pipes in mouth, passed from under the break of the poop and stationed themselves at the foot of the mainmast for a chat and a smoke. It was a warm night, but the place these men had chosen was made pleasant by a refreshing fanning of the mainsail, that hung festooned from its yard. All this particular part of the deck was thick and black with the huge pillar of the mainmast and its lines of gear, belayed to girdling pins, along with other furniture, such as the pump, the winch, and the rest of it hereabouts in the wake of the main hatchway. The two men were Mr. Dike Caldwell and Mr. Patrick Weston. They were both fresh from the cuddy and the grog bottle ; but there was no virtue in whisky to give animation to Caldwell's surly voice.

'I wish,' says Weston, lighting his pipe at a silver tinder-box, then handing the toy to Caldwell, 'that this had been the night fixed on. We're most of us beastly sick of waiting.'

‘The weather wasn’t to be helped,’ said Caldwell.

‘I suppose the gold ’ll be easy to get at?’ says Weston.

‘Hankey knows where it’s stowed. Trollope’s notion of keeping a couple of men aboard is a good ’un. The whole ten ’ll want to go ashore with the gold to make sure of its tomb. The fellows we detain ’ll watch the ship whilst we’re gone.’

‘They may run away with her.’

‘That’s to be provided against,’ said Caldwell, in his slowest, ugliest tone. ‘Od’s thunder! Don’t *you* know sailors?’

‘That business of the arms-chest has been a puzzler to some of them,’ said Weston. ‘Old Benson will come to view it as a miracle. Hankey told me that blunderbusses made a deuce of a splash as he drove them through the porthole. He says they were real old-fashioned pieces, fit for the Tower of London, bell-mouthed, and wholly worthless, except as weapons to lay about with. Some of the pistols were heavy cavalry affairs, proper to bring a dragoon to his knees on drawing. What’s the good of sending a ship to sea armed with such stuff? We might as well have left it alone. There was nothing to be afraid of in that old ore.’

‘Best where it is,’ said Caldwell gruffly.

‘Strange,’ continued Weston, raising his voice as though with cheerful spirits, ‘that the splashes weren’t heard. It was a quiet night too, but every heart was beating at that burning ship.’

Caldwell brayed out a sort of laugh. A small wind blew into the sails, and silenced everything aloft. Not a brace needed touching. The ship floated forward with a sudden hush upon the passengers as of enjoyment of the sweet, dew-cold draught.

‘I suppose Trollope will stick to to-morrow night?’ said Weston.

‘If it’s like this,’ answered Caldwell. ‘Hand us that tinder-box of yours.’

He chipped in silence, and then sucked at the glow; meanwhile the people had found their voices again: the breeze made them alive up on the poop. It swelled the cuddy windsail, and Weston, whilst his companion lighted his pipe, watched with an unpleasant grin upon his distorted face the figure of the steward, with features silvery with perspiration, put his head into the canvas tube and stand upright.

'Look at that sight,' said he to Caldwell. 'A boa-constrictor gorging a man!'

'I'm not sure,' said Caldwell, 'that Halloran Island was the best choice. I'd have looked further eastward. Saunders, knowing all about it, settled the thing. But who's to guess what runs in such a scoundrel's head?'

'Oh, but it can't matter!' exclaimed Weston peevishly. 'It's too late now. One island's as good as another if it's uninhabited, and there's nothing to render it visitable.'

'Visable! It's a piece of garden if Saunders isn't as big a liar as Masters. Just the sort of place your creeping whaler touches at for nuts and water. To go and sink three hundred thousand pounds' worth of stuff in that shining soil, with the chance of Saunders failing to keep his appointment in the brigantine. Hush!'

The steward had come out of the windsail and approached them on his way to the forecabin. He stared hard at the two gentlemen, but there was no light to know them by. He passed on, looking backwards once.

'Do you know,' said Weston softly, 'that that curly-legged son of a gun has the scent of us?'

'What then?'

'I wish the blazing business was over,' exclaimed Weston. 'I guess the whole ship distrusts us. We may find ourselves cornered in the wink of an eye. Benson's just the sort of man to take his chance when he's frightened, and that small-arms business *has* frightened the old codger.'

'We are ten,' said Caldwell, in a low, brutal, grunting voice. 'Ten resolved men, whose one opportunity lies in this job. We are in plenty enough to eat up the ship. How are we to be cornered, as you call it?'

'Hang it all, man, you *must* know. What's the use of firearms to a man under hatches?'

'We are too many,' said the other, letting his head fall back and looking up at the stars. 'Seven could have worked this joke of a ship, and we keep two of the fo'c'sle hands, and it isn't ten into three hundred thousand either. Rot this sort of expeditions! They always carry a crowd. . . . I say, look at those shooting stars. Cheap fireworks,' said he, continuing to stare straight aloft, 'which there's never a cockney would condescend to look at. Make a theatre show of it, and the beasts couldn't swarm fast enough. Perfect clouds of brilliants, upon my word——'

He felt a hand upon his arm.

'Oh, my great thunder!' exclaimed Weston, in a whisper of terror, 'every word we've said 's been overheard!'

Caldwell stood stiff and stirless as a graven image. At this instant the dark, shadowy form of a woman passed from the other side of the mainmast, and went towards the cuddy.

'Who is it?' exclaimed Caldwell, finding his voice and his life too, as it were, in a very flash.

'I didn't see her face,' answered Weston.

Instantly Caldwell was gliding after her. The cuddy entrance was close at hand. The lamps burned brightly. The night was so fine that, though it was now growing late, the ladies and others of the passengers lingered on the poop. The woman looked behind her as she entered the door, and Caldwell perceived that she was Miss Margaret Mansel. He carelessly paced to the foot of the port poop ladder, which he seemed to mount: there standing he commanded a view of the interior. He saw Miss Mansel walk to the table and rest herself upon her hand, with her head turned in the direction of the quarter deck, and he noticed how quickly she breathed and how white she was.

Weston remained in the shadow of the foot of the mast. It was impossible to mistake the uncertainty and terror expressed by the girl's attitude; Caldwell continued to watch her. What would she do? Would she go straight with the tremendous secret to the captain? His fingers opened and closed. Fifty horrible fancies worked behind his dark face whilst he held it fastened upon her. She stayed a minute at the table, then stepped round it to her cabin, which she entered.

Caldwell returned quickly to Weston.

'She must be watched,' said he. 'If she would only drop dead? What mumbling, cursed idiots, the others will think us! What's to be done? If she overheard but a quarter, she knows all. Where was she?'

'Just round t'other side. Whilst you were looking at the stars, I heard a movement, and saw her sitting at the foot of the mast. I suppose she was down here for quietude and the fanning of the sail.'

'Was she asleep?'

'By Heaven, no! Did her instantly getting up and walking away look like it?'

'Keep your eye upon her cabin door,' said Caldwell. 'I'll

see Trollope. We ought to arm ourselves. She's bewildered, but when she's got her head she'll be off to the captain with the news. Watch—you can see from here, or step closer if you like—whilst I find Trollope and Davenire.'

The man spoke with a subdued voice, but there was the ferocity of the brute-beast in it. His whole figure shook with the fevered strokes of his heart. He walked rapidly to the ladder and gained the poop. The first shape he saw leaning alone, tall and firm against the stars at the rail well forward of the mizzen rigging, was Trollope. One of the mates, he could not tell which, was pacing the weather side of the deck. He heard the captain's voice aft. A few ladies were walking near the captain, who stood in conversation with Mr. Dent and his wife. Half a dozen figures lounged here and there. The dusk was deep, and it was hard to tell a man till you went close. But Caldwell instantly saw Trollope.

'Our secret's out,' said he in a whisper that seethed through his lips in his efforts to control its volume. 'Miss Margaret Mansel knows that we're ten, and mean to seize this vessel to-morrow night.'

Trollope stood bolt upright.

'It's my fault and Weston's. We were gabbling like drunken lunatics, but softly in the darkness down yonder, never doubting we were alone. Who in the black fiend's name should be on the other side of the mast all the while but Miss Mansel!'

Trollope stood motionless. He seemed to have lost his voice. The sheen from the foremast skylight lay faint on his face, and as much of his features as was visible looked knotted, black, and distorted, swelling his brow with blood till the tension there forced him to lift his hat, and then he spoke.

'Where is she?'

'In her cabin.'

'You atrocious beasts.'

'I'm madder than you. Mind your words,' said Caldwell in his desperate whisper. 'If ever a devil was in a man's heart, it's here. There's no good in abuse. What's to be done?'

The officer of the watch, who proved to be Mr. Matthews, came across from the other side of the deck and stepped leisurely past, as though to look at them. He then went round the skylight to his former post, and seemed to watch them.

'In her cabin, do you say?' exclaimed Trollope. 'She'll be up in a minute with the news. Perhaps she is waiting for the captain to go below. What made you—*you*, man, of them all so damnably incautious?'

'Look here! there's this to be done, and it's the only thing to do. We must arm ourselves and take the ship to-night.'

Just then Davenire came along from the direction of the wheel. He stopped dead just abreast of them.

'What's wrong?' he exclaimed.

'How do you know that anything's wrong?' said Caldwell, clawing the air as though to subdue the other's strong voice.

'Look at Trollope's attitude. Look at yours. What's wrong, I ask?'

He repeated this question hotly.

'Which is her cabin? Is she out of it?' said Captain Trollope, and he walked to the skylight and put his head into the open frame.

'Miss Mansel has our secret,' said Caldwell. 'I'll tell you how it happened,' and he related the story, tumbling curses into it as he talked.

Davenire grasped him by the arm. He was a giant of a creature, and the other's arm felt lifeless in that grip of rage.

'I'd like to have the shooting of you both,' said he, letting fall his hand. 'Has the girl gone to the captain yet?'

'If our attitudes are so expressive,' said Caldwell, 'we shan't help ourselves by standing here. There's Matthews over the way watching us, and the captain's still on deck. Come forward.'

Trollope joined them. 'She's not in the cuddy,' said he; 'she doesn't seem to have left her cabin. Have you told Davenire?'

Mr. Cavendish and Mr. Hankey sauntered up.

'This won't do,' said Trollope quickly. 'Davenire, follow me on to the main deck. Caldwell, stop and watch if she leaves her cabin. Don't group yourselves, and be quick with your tale. If the girl makes her report, you and Weston must bounce it out. You'll lie like fiends. She's hysterical, d'ye see? She's imaginative, she dreams, she works a nightmare into a horrible accusation that must include Dent and Storr.'

Speaking these words swiftly and softly he went on to the

quarter-deck, followed by Davenire. He was perfectly collected by this time; Davenire, on the other hand, could scarcely speak for wrath. Weston still watched the cuddy from the foot of the mainmast where the shadow buried him. He quitted his post when Davenire and the other passed.

'I'd have brained her,' said he, 'if I had known she sat there listening.'

'You all-fired dog!' Davenire said.

'What are you doing here?' asked Trollope.

'Watching the cuddy to see if she leaves her cabin,' answered Weston, looking with a mad, helpless eye at Davenire's vast bulk.

'Has she done so?'

'No.'

'Go right aft where the captain is, and let him see you. Talk with a lady if you can find one. You'll have to outswear the girl.'

'The ship should be seized to-night,' said Weston.

'Go aft.'

Weston went slowly up the poop ladder. The other two walked forward. The shadow lay deep near the galley and long-boat, and the two continued to pace twenty yards of the deck there. They talked in whispers; the night was so gentle, the air so sweet and warm, that half the watch below, as well as the watch on deck, were nodding in odds and ends of places, and a couple discoursed on the fore-hatch in low growling notes.

'If the girl whips out with it to-night, they'll lock us up one by one whilst we're in our cabins; that's how they'll secure us.'

'The captain durstn't do it on the charge of a girl who might have been dreaming.'

'The idiots mentioned the island, and the value of the nuggets,' said Davenire. 'Could she dream *that*?'

'We're to know nothing of it. We're passengers going home. How can an accusation take effect?'

'I'll tell you what,' growled Davenire. 'If this ship isn't seized to-night, the game's up.'

'She won't be seized to-night,' answered Trollope coolly, 'and I'll tell you why. Burn and Masters have turned in drunk as drowned owls. Miss Holroyd's ill, the mother's fidgety, and the surgeon's in and out, and will be in and out through the night. Half the ship's company are sprawling

about the decks; how are you going to get them under hatches without more murder than *I* have a mind to for one?’

‘They’ll be there to-morrow and to-morrow,’ said Davenire. ‘How *then*? Do you expect everything so to happen as that we may seize this ship sweetly and quietly as though she lay unwatched in dock?’

‘I lead in this matter, I think,’ said Trollope quickly and fiercely. ‘If every man is to be boss, it’ll be the fiend’s delight with the job all round, and nothing to come of it after.’

‘The secret’s known, man!’ exclaimed Davenire. ‘The whole ship’ll be full of it.’

‘There’s nothing to be done to-night,’ said Trollope in a steady voice.

Davenire spat in his fury, and made as if he would leave his companion. At this moment Caldwell came off the poop and joined the two.

‘She has not left her cabin as yet,’ said he, ‘and the people are going to bed.’

The three halted, looking aft. The steward was turning out the lamps in the cuddy, leaving one dimly burning. The interior was easily visible from where the men stood. They saw the surgeon come out of one of the berths, and go on deck as though to report to the captain. Mr. Dent stood with Mrs. Storr at the table. But when the colonial merchant had emptied his glass, he shook hands with the lady, and both withdrew.

‘If we’re not to seize the ship we should turn in,’ said Davenire; ‘there’s Johnson, Shannon, and others on the poop, and the mate’s all eyes this night.’

‘What’s the hour?’ said Caldwell.

It was something after eleven.

‘I shall loaf about here till midnight,’ said Trollope. ‘If she keeps her cabin till then, she’ll wait for the morning.’

‘And then?’ said Davenire.

‘And then! haven’t I said it?’ exclaimed the tall man, peering into Davenire’s face. ‘The fools who have messed us into this must *lie*. What’s your hurry besides? We’ve been blown four hundred miles nor’west. Look at the southing in the course we’re now making. Sunday night will be time enough.’

'There'll come no Sunday for this job if to-night's not to begin it,' growled Caldwell in his brutalest accent.

Trollope without answer walked into the cuddy. Whilst he drank some water he stood close beside the girl's door listening for a sound. When he returned to the quarter-deck Davenire and Caldwell had disappeared.

CHAPTER X

THE SLEEP-WALKER

MEANWHILE on the poop the captain walked right aft beside the wheel smoking a cheroot, and with him paced the surgeon, who told him that Miss Holroyd's illness was of a very light nature : something she had eaten had disagreed with her.

'Otherwise we are a healthy ship, sir?' said the old skipper.

'Aft, yes; forward, up to the sailor's average, sir,' said the surgeon.

'It is a good average,' exclaimed the skipper after a suck at his weed.

'A very poor average surely, sir,' said the surgeon. 'How would you have it otherwise? They get nothing to eat. If it were not for the air they feed on, they'd die.'

Old Benson came to a stand as though shocked, and exclaimed sternly, 'There is no class of labouring men better fed than the sailor.'

The surgeon bowed contemptuously. It was not for him to argue with this despot of the quarter-deck.

'Pork, beef, pudding, soup, biscuit, rum, sugar, molasses,' continued the skipper, totting off the items upon the air with a flourish of his red-ended cigar as he croaked on. 'Does your labourer get such food ashore? Can a man starve on such food at sea?'

'Captain,' said the surgeon, 'it's the skeleton of famine that slaughters sailors' meat and pickles it, and the same skeleton serves it out to them. This, sir, is a liberal ship. I've eaten of the fore-castle dishes, and there is no nutriment in what I swallowed. There is nothing I saw proper to maintain vitality in the human frame, saving the worms in which the biscuit abounds.'

He is drunk ! thought the astounded captain.

The mate's voice just then was heard calling. The skipper went along the deck, and the surgeon below.

'I couldn't make out who it was, sir,' said the mate standing at the rail, and addressing some one on the quarter-deck.

'It's too hot to turn in,' exclaimed Captain Trollope in a drawling note.

The little skipper reached the mate's side and looked down.

'Who is that, sir?' said he peering suspiciously, though he saw plainly enough, for Trollope stood in the small sheen flowing through the cuddy windows.

'Captain Trollope, sir,' said the mate.

'What are the regulations in this ship?' exclaimed Trollope, backing to the quarter-deck capstan, and leaning in a haughty pose whilst he looked up. 'Do you put your passengers to bed like schoolboys, that a man can't walk the deck here on a hot night for a mouthful of fresh air without being challenged by the officer of the watch?'

'It was no challenge,' said the mate. 'I thought you were one of the seamen.'

'I shall stay on deck all night if I choose,' said Trollope, pulling out a cigar-case with no intention, however, of smoking. 'My passage money entitles me to the use of this ship.'

'To your cabin and the table, sir, but to the deck at the discretion of the commander,' bawled the skipper, who had come to this talk angry from the surgeon.

'I decline to listen to you, Captain Benson,' said Trollope. 'You act impertinently in addressing me. You owe me an apology, and I intend to exact it as a gentleman, and as a man who has had the honour of holding Her Majesty's commission. Failing it, sir, when we arrive in London, I will take a very early opportunity of what you sailors call "squaring the yards" with you.'

Saying which he lounged out of sight into the shadows about the galley.

Old Benson's lungs pumped with an engine's power with passion. The mate, a few feet distant, heard him blowing like a grampus. But what could he do? Prudence not to be neutralised by temper was one of his several useful naval qualities. Supposing he locked Captain Trollope up—laid

him in irons as his present rage dictated? The news would spread on the ship's arrival. The papers would comment with their usual impertinent freedom on the subject. Captain Benson would be known as the skipper who clapped his passengers in irons for venturing to take the air of a hot night. A man who knew Benson well, once said of him to another, 'There is not much sentiment in Benson.' 'Yes, plenty,' answered the other, 'but they call it fifty-per-centiment.'

The old skipper hoped to sail the seas a few years longer, and to add to his dividends, which were already not inconsiderable, and so, after blowing at the rail for a few minutes, he threw his cigar away and went to his cabin.

Seven bells were struck at that moment—half-past eleven. Johnson and Hankey were beside the skylight; no other passengers were on deck. The man at the wheel stood solitary aft. The two men lighted their pipes when the captain went below, and the mate said nothing, for why should he stop men from smoking when the ladies had gone to bed?

A wide high night of stars and clouds moved slowly over the ship. Here and there the sea-glow glanced in puffs of green smoke, and the ripple at the forefoot broke steady and strong; but the ocean was wonderfully smooth, save that the long sighs of the Pacific breast, at peace, rolled in the wake of the recent gale, and the three heights, rising pale, beat time to the mysterious unheard music, which sets the stars dancing over the mastheads of sailing ships.

The shadowy figure of Captain Trollope came and went on the quarter-deck within sight of the mate, who watched him as if he feared he was going to blow up the vessel. Not till eight bells did that tall shape disappear. Mr. Matthews, with some relief of mind, then saw it stalk into the cuddy, and close its own cabin door upon itself. Johnson and Hankey had by this time smoked their pipes out and vanished. The girl had not shown herself. One or another had found an excuse to listen tiptoe fashion at her door; once Hankey did so, Shannon too, and Caldwell, all under the pretence of drawing water from a filter abreast of Miss Mansel's berth; but no sound had been heard, and it was then felt and understood by the conspirators, who were sober, that the girl, for good reasons she would doubtless be able to explain, had resolved not to communicate what she had overheard till the morning.

It was now Mr. Poole's turn to take charge of the ship. He arrived promptly, and when the mate was gone, sent a lazy glance at the sea, and to thoroughly awaken himself for the four hours' duty, fell to pacing the deck. There had been some bustle forward at eight bells when such of the watch below as were in the fore-castle turned out, but all was quiet again.

A midnight calm overhung that dark end of the barque. The look-out man sat himself down on the foot of a cat-head, and folding his arms, sank his nose and snored through it; that, he thought, was look-out enough for a fine night, in a spacious ocean, and nothing in sight.

Scarcely was it one o'clock in the morning when a most dismal, melancholy wailing was heard proceeding from the sea, apparently right ahead. It was something like the cry of the jackal as it sneaks to the river's edge for a meal of black meat, but startling and amazing, because so sudden, so uncommon, so unexpected, and wild and beast-like. 'What's that?' said Mr. Poole aloud to himself, and when that strange cry was repeated a minute after, clearly proceeding as before, from the sea right ahead, he yelled out again, 'What's that?' loud and shrill.

The look-out man leapt to his feet, and sprang into the head to look over the bows. The watch tumbled on to their legs, and ran confusedly to the fore-castle. Again sounded the melancholy, long-drawn, heart-subduing, wailing noise, and Mr. Poole, wild with impatience and excitement, unable to obtain a reply from the men, jumped on to the quarter-deck and rushed forward. Thus were the principal decks for a space rendered vacant; the helmsman was far aft; nothing happening on the quarter-deck would be visible to him.

'What is it?' cried the second mate, thrusting in amongst the men and looking over the bows.

The ocean came in a smoky shadow to the ship, and the ripples arched aft in trembling gleams, but the sound of the feathering of them into froth was too dim and delicate to break the awful hush of night upon the ocean to the ears which now crowded at the rail of the fore-castle head. The wing-shaped canvas soared in pallid spaces from bowsprit and jibbooms, deepening the darkness of the night behind them. They pulled tremorless at their sheets, and weight enough was in the breeze to gently heel the whole fabric, the main-royal sailing like a cloud against the stars with the swing of the

swell, and two thin lines of winking lights shooting into the black water astern from the eddies and broken brine about the barque's haunches.

'I don't see nothen,' said a gruff voice. 'What the blazes is it or was it?'

'Ain't that like a raft out there?' exclaimed another.

'Raft in your eye,' grumbled Tom. 'There's another man gone mad and another soul gone lost.'

Again it sounded, always ahead, yet faint, and seemingly in the air. What is one to compare that melancholy affrighting note to? Probably the African explorer may hear something like it when the cathedral gloom of the mighty forest has blackened into midnight.

'Seems to be drawing ahead of us,' said a man in a hoarse whisper of fear and awe.

'Where's the gale blowed us to?' said another. 'Smite my eyes if the Red Sea ain't abroad!'

'Hold your jaw,' cries the second mate, 'and use your eyes. What d'ye see?'

'Dummed if I don't think it comes from aloft?' said a sailor, and turning his back on the rail he lifted his chin and stared straight up at the fore royal.'

'Hallo, hallo! Why, what the blooming blazes is *that*?' roars Tom, writhing and staggering, and pointing.

They looked: the figure of a man was now to be seen—but as an apparition or phantom—bestriding the flying jibboom end! A cold horror ran in the blood of the superstitious seamen. A dead silence fell upon them whilst they stared, and not the least amazed and terrified of the gogglers was young Mr. Poole, the second mate.

'Fo'c'sle there!' came a hail from the jibboom end, 'can any of you tell me how the deuce I've got out here?'

'Hang me,' muttered the second mate, 'if it isn't one of the ten passengers. Hallo, you, sir!' he shouted, 'what are you doing out there? Lay in, lay in! You've alarmed the whole ship's company with this tomfoolery.'

'Tomfoolery!' cried back the gentleman, who continued to bestride the boom end, 'who's the toomfool that's played this joke off on me? Who's launched me out on this dangerous place? If I let go I am a killed man.'

'Is he drunk?' said the second mate.

'Lunatic, sir, lunatic,' growled Tom.

'We must bring him in,' said the second mate, 'or he'll

be overboard. Jump out some of you men and help him along.'

But even as he spoke these words the shadow at the flying jibboom end had cast its legs over, and was sliding in towards the fo'c'sle in a manner that instantly satisfied the experienced eyes of the Jacks that he required no assistance. He drew in very stealthily, pausing when at the bowsprit, as though to admire the picture of the ship as she drove in sleepy beauty, pale and silent, over the water.

'Come in, sir,' bawled the second mate, and in the man came, gaining the deck with as nimble a spring over the rail as was ever witnessed on a man-of-war.

The seamen crowded round him; Mr. Poole shoved in; the gentleman was Mr. Walter Shannon. He wore pyjamas, and a white shirt, and was hatless and barefooted. A figure thus clad would easily dissolve at the distance of the flying jibboom end of the *Queen* into the pallor and gloom of the canvas. Rubbing his eyes and yawning, looking first up and then down, then round him with sudden motions of his head, Mr. Shannon counterfeited a hundred marks of agitation, distress, and bewilderment.

'What is the meaning of this, sir?' said the second mate sternly.

'I think I see it all now,' exclaimed Mr. Shannon, talking as though his teeth chattered. 'I have walked in my sleep.'

'And talked too, I allow,' said a man with a grunting laugh. 'What Christian country does that there howl of yours belong to?'

'It is quite clear to me now,' exclaimed Mr. Shannon, speaking in a voice of awe, 'I have walked in my sleep. To think of my having crept in my unconsciousness to that extreme point of the ship there! Good angels, what an escape!'

'There worn't much the looks of an escape in the way you came slidin' in,' said a man.

'Stop your people from being impertinent, Mr. Poole,' said the gentleman.

'What's the good,' suddenly roared Tom, 'of a man laying out to a ship's flying jibboom end and yawning? Goin' there for *that*? What's the bloomin' *good* of it? All in the dead of night. Do they call it sleep-walking? I've know'n sailor men ashore get a month for smaller skylarking jobs than

this,' and the grumbler, stepping to the fore-scuttle, dropped noiselessly into the seamen's den.

'The captain 'll want to know the meaning of this boomed joke of yours,' said Poole, stooping to get a view of the poop under the foot of the foresail.

'What do I care for the captain?' responded Mr. Shannon, folding his arms and stiffening his spine into a lofty carriage.

'Is he ship's doctor as well as ship's captain? Then he'll know how to cure my disease. And may I ask,' he went on in a tone of wounded dignity, 'if no look-out is kept aboard this ship of a night? How is it that there's nobody aboard a shipful of people to stop a man from going overboard in his sleep?'

'It's my look-out,' said a rough voice. 'I never seed you nor the likes of you come foward.'

'Well, sir,' says Poole, hotly, making a move in the direction of the fore-castle ladder, 'sleep-walking or no sleep-walking, the captain's got to hear of this, and the rest 'll be his job.'

'Stop!' exclaimed Mr. Shannon. 'Here is a portion of the crew. Are these men the watch on deck?'

'What's dat got to do with you?' growled a man.

'I should like to learn,' continued Mr. Shannon, speaking as though he would detain the interest of this queer business on the fore-castle as long as possible, 'if any man saw me pass, how I looked, how I walked.'

'Who's agoing to keep a look-out for sleep-walking passengers on such a night as this?' said a man. 'We signed to do men's work; if you want nussing you should have shipped your Sally along with you.'

'These men are beastly impertinent,' exclaimed Mr. Shannon, letting fall his arms and spinning round. 'If you are common sailors you should behave as such.'

'Come aft, come aft, sir!' exclaimed Poole, catching him by the arm; and he added, in a hot whisper, 'This is the sailors' end of the ship. You're mad to anger them here. Look! every belt has its knife. I'll not be answerable——'

'I'll make it right with you, my lads. Fired if I yet know where I am;' and Mr. Shannon stretched his arms and yawned, and stared again, first up and then down, and then around, with a fine affectation of bewilderment and alarm.

But it had now run into more than twenty minutes since Mr. Poole rushed from the poop to the fore-castle to learn the

meaning of the distressful, spirit-moving wailing, and in less time than twenty minutes a barbarous murder may be done.

With sauntering steps Mr. Shannon followed the second mate off the fore-castle, but when he was in the thick of the shadow betwixt the bulwark and the long-boat he made a stride, and, catching the officer by the shoulder, arrested him with a hand of iron. Poole sprang round to his own defence. The other laughed softly at the second mate's fighting attitude, and exclaimed:

'My dear fellow, you quite mistake. I merely wish to ask you——'

'By thunder, Mr. Shannon, but it'll go hard with you if you handle me again in that fashion!' interrupted Poole, in a voice strong with resentment and dislike. In fact the strength of the other had put the shock of a blow into his mere grasp.

'My dear Poole, I really apologise; I merely wished to ask a question. Am I,' said he, making a step so as to command the interior of the cuddy and obtain a clear view of the quarter-deck, 'to return to my bed, or do you wish me to accompany you to the captain's cabin?'

'There's the captain himself,' exclaimed Mr. Poole. And as he spoke the little figure of Benson howled from the head of the poop ladder:

'Where's the officer of the watch? Who's that man in white down there? How is it there's nobody in charge?'

The unfortunate young mate mounted the steps: he was followed by Mr. Shannon, from whom, as though he had been a spectre, Captain Benson shrank, staggering off in a clumsy recoil. Poole instantly began:

'It's Mr. Shannon, sir. We found him on the flying jibboom end, sir. He was singing out in a doleful, frightful voice, and I rushed forward, getting no answer from the men, thinking there was a boat, or raft, or something of that sort under the bows.'

It was too dark to see the Captain's face, but the expression of it was figurative from the noise he made in breathing. Then he fell to sputtering:

'The ship was placed in your charge, sir. You had no right to leave this deck, sir. Out on the flying jibboom end? Mr. Shannon, d'ye say?'

With a loud, suspicious sniff, he approached the gentleman, who exclaimed pleasantly, 'It's all right now, captain.'

Hope I haven't brought the second officer into a difficulty. It's through no fault of his that I was out at the end of your long spar yonder. I walk in my sleep. Ever carried passengers before who walk in their sleep? Must have heard, of course, of that dreadful disease called somnambulism? is it a disease? A distemper, then. A distempered brain will make a man walk when his intellect is wrapped up in slumber. I might have gone overboard.'

Here the whole white figure of him shook with a well-acted shudder.

The little skipper followed him with panting impatience, mad to get in a word. The other falling silent, he whipped in :

'You mean me to believe that you found your way from your bed to the jibboom end with your eyes shut?'

'With my eyes open,' exclaimed Shannon, lightly. 'The sleep-walker seems to stare with straining eyeballs, but sees not.'

'Fetch the doctor, sir,' said the captain to Mr. Poole.

The second mate rushed down the ladder.

'Why disturb the doctor, captain?' said Mr. Shannon, walking to the foremast skylight and sending a hawk's glance down.

The captain now perceived that the gentleman's feet were naked, as he had before observed that his head was uncovered, and that in short the man was costumed for the bunk.

'What's the good of rousing up the doctor?' continued Mr. Shannon, returning close to the skipper, who stoutly held his ground. 'Don't you believe me? What on earth do you think should carry me to your flying jibboom end, as you call it, in my bed-clothes, to risk my life, if it wasn't this trick I've had ever since I was a child? I had nearly let go when I opened my eyes and looked down and saw the barque's cutwater spitting fire into the sliding black water, half a thousand feet off, as it seemed.'

The skipper fell back a step. Was the man insane? He was in a lonely part of the deck with him—a little man, and t'other had a chest like a table; and in silence he pricked his ears for the return of the mate and the arrival of the surgeon.

'You've got a sleepy-headed crew,' Mr. Shannon went on. 'Why didn't they stop me from climbing out on to that spar? What in flames is the good of such a look-out as is kept

aboard this *Queen*? The ship's not over insured, I hope? I don't know how the rest of them below will relish my yarn.'

'He is mad,' thought Captain Benson. But he was in a terrible rage too. He went to the rail to blow, holding the other, however, in the corner of his eye. Two figures at this instant came out of the cuddy door. 'Come up, come up, sir!' the skipper shouted. The zealous but unlucky Poole sprang up the ladder. The doctor's step had the leisureliness of uncertainty.

'Here's this gentleman says he's walked in his sleep out of his bunk on to the flying jibboom end, where he fell to howling, causing the second officer to commit a grave breach of duty by quitting his charge to see what the matter was on the fo'e'sle, instead of calling me. Now, sir?'

The captain volleyed these words at the doctor, who answered quietly, 'A case of sleep-walking, eh? Who is it? Mr. Shannon. Sir, you have had a narrow escape of your life.'

'But are we to believe it, sir?' gasped Captain Benson.

'I would advise you not to exasperate me with these needless affronts,' said Shannon, sternly, and his white figure looked firm in the dusk. 'This is the second time you have given me the lie.'

'My arms-chest has been plundered,' bawled the skipper. 'Things are wrong in this ship. What are you doing in the middle watch at the jibboom end, howling? How did he howl, sir?' he cried, rounding on Mr. Poole.

'Most shockingly and infernally, sir.'

'Just explain, doctor, that I am a somnambulist, will ye? Have you any book on the subject? But of your own experience, no doubt, you'll have plenty of tales to entertain and convince the captain with.'

Contriving every attempt of sulky contempt his figure could convey by that light, Shannon lounged to the companion way, and sank, all white like a ghost, through the hatch.

Ghost-like still he slid through the cuddy. All was still, save the quiet complainings of the ship. Captain Trollope had been mistaken in supposing that the doctor would be in and out all night with Miss Holroyd; the young lady had been sleeping soundly for an hour past, and Mrs. Holroyd was in bed in the bunk atop, asleep too. Nevertheless, Mr. Shannon shot a look at the Holroyds' berth as he passed; they slept two doors abaft Miss Mansel; between lay Mr.

and Mrs. Storr ; and forward by a door was the cabin shared by Mr. Peter Johnson and Mr. Paul Hankey.

Mr. Shannon slid on noiseless naked feet, and coming under the foremast skylight, he stopped to catch what the captain and the doctor were saying. He heard the doctor tell the captain that there could be no doubt Mr. Shannon had walked in his sleep ; surely no mere love of fooling would take a man out of his bunk in his bed clothes, and set him a-cock-horsing the end of that dim projecting spar ; it was a mercy when he awoke that he hadn't fallen. Mr. Shannon heard the grumble of suspicion in the captain's answer ; they moved from the skylight, and their words grew inaudible, on which Mr. Shannon lightly knocked on Davenire's door and passed in.

This had been Burn's berth. Mark Davenire sat upright in the only bunk it contained ; his huge legs, clothed in drawers, hung over the edge of the shallow board that held the mattress, and his great figure seemed to fill the place. By the dim light of a lamp swaying at a bracket the two men saw each other. Davenire's eyes had an extraordinary brightness. They shone like fire in his pale face. Sunlight would have submitted him white as milk. His large, heavily-framed form was trembling, and, as Shannon entered, the big pale fellow put down a flask.

'Give me that if there's a drop in it,' whispered Shannon.

'Here,' said Davenire, pointing to his side ; he would not extend his arm ; he did not want Shannon to see how his hand shook.

The other picked up the flask and sucked down a raw mouthful. 'I've done my bit,' said he, 'I got them all forward. How was it with you ?'

'Oh, my God !' muttered Davenire.

'Do you mean——?'

'No, no. The secret's our own still. I've been listening to her calling to me through there.'

Shannon shuddered, and said in a defiant sort of way, as though seeking for spirit in demeanour, 'Was it quietly managed ?'

'Caldwell's a bloody monster !' was the answer. 'Whatever he took in hand in this way is bound to be quietly managed.'

Shannon drew close to the bunk, and, speaking with his lips at Davenire's ear, said, 'There must be no delay now. If Trollope won't consent, the rest must rise and do it.'

Murder's been brought into the business ; we'd hoped against that, you know.'

'A poor girl!' groaned Davenire, trembling and talking as though his other ear was strained at the open port.

'If weshould be clapped under,' continued Shannon, 'we're hanged men.'

'To-morrow night!' said Davenire. 'Or this night that's to come,' he added, looking towards a large silver watch that dangled at the extremity of his great silver chain by the side of the lamp. 'Sneak off now and turn in.'

Without another syllable Shannon slipped spectre-like from Davenire's berth and gained his own.

CHAPTER XI

MISSING

THE grey of dawn found Captain Benson asleep in his cot, and Mr. Matthews, the chief officer, in charge of the barque. The circle of the sea ran with a searching sweep black as ink against that lifting melancholy light of heaven, but in a few minutes the sun sprang clear, and a man aloft in the main-topmast crosstrees, sheltering his sight whilst he gripped a shroud, plunged his gaze far astern, and, hailing the deck, sung out, 'Sail ho!' Something, perhaps, that had been passed in the night, or standing north or south athwart the barque's wake, invisible from the deck as the dome of St. Paul's, so that the mate, after a careless look, saw to the first business of the day on board ships—washing down the decks.

The pleasant air that had steadied the sails of the *Queen* throughout the dark hours was still in motion ; the sea was a marvellous calm breast of water, sparkling from the flash of the sun into a vast restful surface of light silver blue ; not a fowl of the deep hovered, no fish sprang, nothing showed under the quarters or in the wake or alongside the beautiful little fabric, clad in the brilliance of the early morn. She was overhung with studding sails, and swam with a white sheen as of ice trembling off the edges of her cloths till the height of mast from royal yard to truck seemed to undulate eel-like in the liquid splendour.

The first of the passengers to make his appearance was Mr. Storr; it was still very early. The little man went up to the mate, and, after some talk about the wind and the rate of progress and the fine weather, he said he had passed a broken night.

'Too hot, perhaps,' says the mate.

'Bad dreams,' answered Mr. Storr, 'and what's stranger than that is, my wife was troubled with nightmares also.'

'How is Miss Holroyd—have you heard, sir?' inquired the mate.

'I don't know. If her cabin had been next mine, then supposing she'd been restless, talked deliriously, and so forth, I might be able to account for our having been disturbed with ugly sleeping fancies. But one cannot hear through two or three bulkheads.'

'No, sir,' answered the mate.

'I can't help thinking,' continued Mr. Storr, 'that something must have happened in the night to account for my wife's and my own restlessness and dreams.'

'It's odd that ye should both have dreamt.'

The little man drew a step closer to the mate, and, after a swift glance round the deck, exclaimed, with a degree of earnestness that rose almost to agitation, 'Mr. Matthews, I don't mind telling you, there is something in the looks of several of the ten gentlemen which is making my wife and me very uneasy. The robbery of the arms-chest was very extraordinary. If a practical joke—purposeless; if the design of the thieves is a menacing one, where are the arms? And who are the men that did it? And what object have they in view?'

'There's nothing to be done, sir, but to keep our weather eye lifting,' answered the mate in a low cautious voice.

'Then you are suspicious yourself?'

The prudent mate responded with a grave smile.

'Where could they have hidden the goods?' exclaimed the auctioneer. 'Heavy muskets, and great cavalry pistols aren't easily concealed. Both my wife and I have particularly observed the people at your end, at table and on deck. They dress mainly in light, airy clothes, and we cannot discover that they are armed.'

'Good mercy!' cried the mate with a start. 'I should hope they're not, sir.'

'Can't Captain Benson do anything?'

‘What would you suggest?’ inquired the mate demurely.

This puzzled Mr. Storr. After a short silence: ‘I quite understand,’ said he, ‘the delicate position the captain is placed in. He couldn’t batten them down on mere suspicion. They’d claim heavy damages on the ship’s arrival and ruin the old gentleman and perhaps his employers. And yet—I fear they’ll make it an uncomfortable passage for us. Never to be able to go to bed without——’ Here turning his head, he saw Captain Trollope passing in his lounging walk from the companion to the rail. ‘Ay,’ said he, raising his voice, ‘a grand morning, indeed. But we shall need more wind, Mr. Matthews, if we’re to get round the Horn quickly.’

At half-past eight that same morning three chairs were empty at the cuddy table. The little captain came out of his cabin looking unusually stern, and the ash or grey of anxiety was mingled with the sea-red of his complexion. He ran his eye down the line of gentlemen on either hand, and missed the huge form of Mr. Mark Davenire. But Mr. Walter Shannon was in his place, and nearly opposite him sat Mr. Caldwell, grim and sulky, glancing here and there occasionally with a slow black eye, in which the light of day kindled no star. Mr. Matthews arrived trim and fresh from the hair-brush and wash-basin of his cabin, and took his seat, receiving several nods from the gentlemen, to whom he gravely inclined his head one by one.

‘Where is Mr. Davenire?’ he said to Captain Trollope.

‘Johnson tells me he’s not well,’ answered Trollope.

‘He has not sent for me,’ said the surgeon, on the other side of the mate.

Trollope began to eat as though the matter was of no consequence to him.

‘I hope your daughter is better this morning, ma’am?’ says the captain to Mrs. Holroyd.

‘Decidedly better, thank you. But the doctor has ordered her to keep her bed,’ answered Mrs. Holroyd, ‘till noon.’

‘Did any one hear an extraordinary wailing noise last night?’ said Mr. Dent. ‘My wife couldn’t sleep for the heat, and when I had unscrewed the scuttle I heard a most amazing blood-curdling sound of crying out upon the sea.’

The captain looked severely at vacancy through the rows of faces.

‘Did you hear the noise?’ said Mrs. Storr to Mrs. Dent.

‘No. Perhaps, because my bunk is the lower one.’

'I wonder if it was that noise which made me dream so badly,' said Mr. Storr.

'It *must* have been some sound in the cabin that set *me* dreaming,' exclaimed his wife.

'What sort of sound?' inquired the captain.

'My nightmare connects it with a noise of scuffling,' answered Mrs. Storr. 'That impression when I awoke was strong, and I asked William if he thought all was right in Mrs. Holroyd's cabin.'

'We couldn't have heard a noise through those bulkheads,' says the auctioneer, whipping his nose round to look at the cabin doors behind him.

'I can't understand,' said Mrs. Peacock, 'what is the meaning of all this conversation about noises. Why should noises happen in this ship—unnatural noises, I mean? Everything is perfectly safe, I hope, Captain Benson?'

The little man inclined his white head to her sideways, in silence.

'Don't you think, Mr. Dent,' said Mr. Burn very polite, but very oozy in his voice this morning, 'that the mysterious sound you heard last night was the voice of a great bird flying south? I remember one calm midnight at sea hearing a brain-chilling sound right over our mastheads. What do you think it was? About four miles of petrels making northwards, and talking all the wicked scandal of the place they were fresh from.'

'I was the big bird of last night, Mr. Dent,' called out Shannon, with a grin that ran his globular eyes into the shape of almonds. Matthews' cheeks, in spite of himself, broadened at this facial stroke.

'I didn't quite catch,' exclaimed Mr. Dent, looking with astonishment at Mr. Shannon.

'Why,' said Shannon, with an askew gaze at the skipper, whilst he let his face come back to its natural marks, 'they tell me that I walk in my sleep, and was found howling like a wolf at the end of the flying jibboom.' He lay back in his chair, and laughed under his waistcoat, but no sound escaped him.

'A sleep-walker!' said Mrs. Peacock, with rounded eyes of sincere horror. 'Captain, I would rather die than live in a house with one.'

'You have nothing to fear, ma'am, from Mr. Shannon's sleep-walking,' said the captain, frowning at that gentleman as he said it.

'No, but I say, though, are you joking, Shannon?' called out Weston.

'I woke and found myself perched on high, overhanging the sea,' said Shannon. 'It was night, and the stars shone brightly. I saw a little crowd of pale faces at the fo'c'sle rail, and I thought them spirits. The sight of them frightened me more than the discovery of the dangerous situation sleep had placed me in. I managed to slide in all right, and encountered a group of insolent sailors, who, instead of sympathising with me, cut a dozen scurvy fo'c'sle jokes at my expense. Had they kept watch,' said he with emphasis, looking severely at the captain, 'as seamen on the ocean ought to keep watch, they would have seen me coming along the deck and saved me from imperilling my precious life.'

The old skipper bit his food with a wooden face. The few ladies who were at the table viewed Mr. Shannon with every token of fear.

'I hope sleep-walking is no regular practice of yours, Shannon?' said Captain Trollope, a little distantly, as though an argument had earlier led to a slight quarrel.

'I may not walk again for years,' was the answer. 'The doctor knows how these things chance better than I.'

The doctor said he had heard of persons who walked regularly every night for six months. They were watched but not awakened. He had not, he said, much experience, and his information therefore was to be regarded as hearsay.

'He might set fire to the ship!' said Mrs. Peacock in a hollow voice to the captain.

Meanwhile it might have been observed that whilst this conversation went on, Mr. Caldwell merely toyed with the food he asked for. The expression of his face attracted the attention of Mr. Masters: from time to time he eyed him strenuously. Certainly it was a face to fascinate that morning, by the sheer repulsiveness of its looks. The eyes were bloodshot and dim: upon his swarthy, gipsy-dark skin lay a sort of weak greenish tinge, as though he sat under coloured glass. His coal-black hair and beard were a little wild, too, shaggy, unkempt, or disordered as of purpose, an effect which assuredly was remote from the desires of that man's soul. It was the expression he carried as he kept his head somewhat hung, which occasioned Mr. Masters' curiosity. The heavy brow was black as thunder with some devil's mood or humour. Sometimes he'd glance at Trollope or Shannon,

but rarely at the others. He drank thirstily of ale and feigned to eat. Masters, sitting beside Burn, whispered:

‘See Caldwell. That’s a face some next-world artist of the lower regions will paint upon the infernal gates. What’s the matter with him?’

‘I guess,’ oozed Burn, ‘he’s afraid of the moment when Miss Mansel will step forth and proclaim our secret.’

‘Warily now,’ says the other, whispering and looking down whilst he played his knife and fork, ‘what have you heard?’

‘Trollope’s answer this morning was——’

‘Oh!’ sputtered Masters, ‘consider where you are.’

It was just then that Captain Benson exclaimed, ‘Is not Miss Mansel well?’ and raising his voice: ‘Can you give me a reason, sir, for Miss Mansel being absent from the breakfast table?’

‘I have not heard that she is not well,’ answered the doctor, looking round at the steward.

‘Has she asked to have some breakfast taken to her?’ said the captain.

‘No, sir,’ replied the steward. ‘She was sleeping when I knocked an hour ago.’

There was nothing so uncommon in a passenger, particularly a female passenger, continuing to rest beyond the regular time of meals, as to excite notice. In those days the stewardess was not often met with at sea. The ladies had their maids, and they were helped by their husbands. If they were single women they did for themselves, though often assisted by the friendly amongst their own sex on board. They managed fairly well, yet it is hard in these days to realise a time of shipping, and even of palatial shipping—for assuredly some of the great square-riggers which voyaged to the Indies, or to the Australias with their cuddies and steerages filled with passengers, were as gorgeous in their inward array as they were gallant in their outward show—it is difficult now to conceive of a passenger ship without a stewardess.

Presently Mrs. Holroyd left the table. She was about to enter her cabin, when, turning to the captain, she said:

‘Shall I look in on Miss Mansel, and see how she does?’

‘If you please, madam,’ says old Benson, who was standing up.

‘They’ll outswear her,’ whispered Burn to Masters, ‘though Caldwell’s this morning is the most hanging face I

ever saw on a man. It will be three to one. And suppose they *believe* her. What can they do?’

The table was thinning, and this fact empowered him to whisper. He spoke swiftly, and was quitting the table followed by Masters, when a cry from Mrs. Holroyd brought him and all others who were on the move to a halt. Mr. Caldwell, still seated, turned his gloomy face heavily and slowly to look. Mr. Matthews jumped up.

‘There’s no Miss Mansel here!’ was Mrs. Holroyd’s exclamation. She stood in the doorway and addressed the captain, and her face was white with sudden astonishment and alarm.

‘What do I understand?’ said Captain Benson, coming from the head of his table. ‘Miss Mansel’s not in her berth, do you say, ma’am?’

He entered the cabin, and was followed by the surgeon and mate. A small crowd of people came to the door; amongst them were Mr. Caldwell and Captain Trollope. Miss Mansel’s cabin was empty. Being a single woman she had enjoyed the privilege of loneliness. She had used the lower bunk as convenient to enter and quit, and the upper had served her as a shelf. She had slept in her bed, *that* was certain; the clothes were tossed on one side as though she had released herself quickly.

Amazement held the beholders silent for some moments. Then the little skipper puffed out:

‘Where is she? Where’s the young lady? She’s in the ship, of course! Mr. Matthews, see if she’s on deck or forwards, or if she has found her way into the steerage.’

The mate, with a face of consternation, rushed out.

‘Miss Mansel disappeared!’ cried Mrs. Peacock in a half-screaming voice, crowding in. ‘What’s become of her?’

‘Where’s the steward?’ cried the captain.

‘Here, sir,’ answered Trickle outside the people at the door.

‘Gentlemen, make way if you please,’ said the captain. ‘There is nothing left to look at. The cabin is empty.’

Caldwell and Trollope lounged off, the others stood apart. Their excitement and dismay were too deep to permit them to quit the scene just then. Mr. and Mrs. Dent whispered together, Mrs. Holroyd went to her daughter, and Mrs. Peacock was heard to ask Mrs. Storr whether it wasn’t the captain’s duty to turn the ship’s ‘prow’ at once for Sydney,

as everything was going wrong, and she for one was certain that they'd never sight England?

'When did you last see Miss Mansel?' said the captain to the steward.

'Last evening, sir.'

'At what hour?'

'At about half-past nine I think it was, sir. She came out of her cabin and passed on to the quarter-deck. I was on some job, sir, and took no particular notice.'

'Did you call her, d'ye say, this morning?'

'Knocked on her door at a quarter to eight as usual, sir. Thought the young lady was in a sound sleep, as I got no answer.'

The surgeon at the captain's side was gazing round him with a very grave face. Everything seemed in its place. Dresses swung from pegs upon the bulkhead. The hat the young lady had been in the habit of wearing was in the upper bunk along with a bandbox or two, a parasol, an umbrella, and the like. The apparel she had removed on the previous night lay neatly folded on a chair. The surgeon's solemn eye wandered to it and fastened itself there; he exclaimed:

'Would Mrs. Storr step in?'

'Mrs. Storr,' said the captain.

That lady hurriedly left Mrs. Peacock.

'Mrs. Storr,' said the surgeon, 'do you think you will be able to tell us by looking round you if the young lady was dressed when she left her cabin?'

Mrs. Storr very carefully viewed the interior. She examined the dresses, and said, pointing to one, that it was a light summer gown, the girl had worn it since the stormy weather; that being so she considered that Miss Mansel would have put on that particular dress again this day. Then, after looking about her a little further, at the hat in the upper bunk and the clothes folded upon the chair, she gave it as her opinion that the girl had *not* left her cabin dressed for the deck, 'though,' she added, 'I don't see her dressing-gown, and I miss a flannel petticoat from those clothes there.'

A short silence followed this. The lady's statement seemed to convince the captain.

'She must be in the ship,' said he, and he gave Trickle and John, the under-steward, certain directions, whispering them.

'Until we *know*,' exclaimed the doctor in a low tone, that

his words might not reach the people in the cuddy, 'that the young lady is not in the ship, speculation is hopeless. Yet it is worth your while observing, Captain Benson, that Miss Mansel must have quitted her cabin of her own will. The appearance of the place warrants the idea.'

'I should hope she did, sir,' rumbled the little skipper, thunderstruck by the subtle dark significance of the doctor's words.

'A third chair was empty at table this morning,' said the doctor. 'Mr. Mark Davenire evidently does not require my services. It is nevertheless my duty, acting on your commands, captain, that I should look in upon him to see how he does.'

'Go, sir, quickly, if you please,' gasped Captain Benson. 'Perhaps *his* cabin's empty.'

The skipper remained in Miss Mansel's cabin in conversation with Mrs. Storr, her husband, and the Dents. A group of fellows were lighting their pipes on the quarter-deck under the recess. Already the news that the young lady passenger with the fine eyes had mysteriously disappeared was got forward, and by putting your head out of Miss Mansel's cabin door you might have seen through the cuddy windows the whole strength of the ship's company gathered in a heap about the windlass end. Indeed, Mr. Poole, on the poop conversing with Captain Trollope and Mr. Caldwell, was too much astonished and frightened by the report from below to give heed just then to the discipline of the vessel.

'Is it conceivable, James,' exclaimed Mrs. Dent, clasping her husband's arm with a gesture of distress and alarm, 'that the strange noise you heard last night could have been made by Miss Mansel?'

'It came from the sea,' answered Mr. Dent.

'I mean that,' said his wife.

'Gracious, madam, what would you have us suppose?' exclaimed the captain.

'I always thought,' said Mrs. Dent, 'that her face wore a melancholy, pensive expression, as though her heart was ill at ease. She admitted to me that she had found life in Australia too bitter and unsympathetic. No doubt, as a governess, she had proved a failure. The prospect of returning home, almost penniless, to begin over again, if she could obtain a situation, the odious work of teaching children may have preyed——'

'Would you suggest, Matilda, that she has committed suicide?' said Mr. Dent.

Mrs. Dent set her lips firmly, and slightly lifting her shoulders stared at the captain. The steward, followed by John, came to the door.

'No, sir, no signs of her,' was Trickle's remark as he encountered the skipper's eye.

'What was that man doing on my flying jibboom end in the middle watch this morning?' exclaimed the captain, stiffening his stump-ended figure, whilst he thought aloud, with his gaze fastened upon Mrs. Storr.

'There is some black mystery in all this,' said the little auctioneer, growing a shade paler, and rapidly striking his ankles one against the other.

'Will it turn out a romance—an elopement—but how preposterously I talk!' exclaimed Mrs. Dent. 'Yet why was not Mr. Mark Davenire at breakfast?'

As she asked the question the doctor entered.

'Well, sir?' said the captain.

'I don't find much the matter with the gentleman,' said the doctor. 'Says he feels slack with the heat, and certainly looks so. He'll be well enough to dine at table, he thinks. They get drinking in secret, these fellows,' he continued. 'There was a large flask in his bunk. Small wonder the likes of such gentry should find colonisation a fraud. 'Two turned in completely screwed last night.'

'I wish the whole gang of them was out of this ship,' blustered Captain Benson. 'Meanwhile, where's Miss Mansel?'

He stepped into the cuddy and stared around him with a look of deep bewilderment. Never in all his time had that white-haired son of ocean met with so eventful a passage as this—so far. It was a long blow to the Horn yet, and there were sixty or eighty days of brisk sailing beyond it, and if incidents of midnight alarms, mysterious disappearances, robbery, were to proportion themselves by the numbers they had already swelled to, what manner of story, wonderful, tragic, marvellous, with its hair-breadth dodgings of destiny, would the people of that barque have to tell should the waters of the Thames ever again reflect her lofty spars!

The captain, whilst he stood alone a minute or two in the cuddy, did not exactly reflect in this strain; he was a plain sailor-man, incapable of any flights of imagination or language, but he did most certainly heap various traditionary forecastle

curses upon the hour that brought the ten gentlemen aboard, and upon the three weeks' detention in Sydney, to which undoubtedly he owed the pleasure of their company. 'Where is the young lady? What's become of her?' he said to himself, as he sent searching looks through the cuddy windows at the groups who were smoking and conversing out on deck.

He went slowly up the companion steps, and when he had gained the top of the hatch he stood with his hand upon the hood, labouring somewhat with his breath. Indeed, nothing more distressing could present itself to the mind of this old sea-captain than the strange evanishment of a lady passenger, particularly a single lady, who would be regarded in a peculiar degree as the commander's charge. The mate came up the lee ladder, and approached slowly. He saluted with a flourish of his thumb, said he had searched in all directions, but saw no signs of the young lady.

'You had the first watch, sir,' said Benson, with a tinge of grey sifting into his complexion, and speaking somewhat brokenly. 'When did you last observe her?'

'I can't say that I took any notice of her at all last night, sir. I don't remember seeing her in the cuddy, nor do I recall her as having been up here.'

'Where have you looked?'

Mr. Matthews named the several parts of the ship he had explored.

The captain called Poole to him. Dismay was fixed upon this young man's face. He looked hollow and stupid and older by several years than when he had sailed from Sydney.

'You had the middle watch, sir?' says Benson.

'Yes, sir?' answered Poole.

'Did you see anything of Miss Mansel in your watch?'

'Nothing, sir.'

'No, sir, and why?' thundered old Benson; 'because in all probability she came on deck when you were forward instead of aft, which was your post, and she may, for all you know, have tumbled overboard whilst you——. Who had the wheel in the first two hours of your watch?'

'Johnson, sir.'

'Send him aft. Send aft the man who had the second trick. Send aft all the men who were at the helm from midnight till six bells of the morning watch.'

All the ship now, on a sudden, seemed to break into hurry and confusion; sailors ran aft to hear the news on the quarter-

deck, the ten— Mr. Mark Davenire was now one—came on to the poop. Everywhere you saw motions of agitation, a ceaseless dance of figures, and the light wind was filled with the humming of talkers.

CHAPTER XII

BENSON CALLS A COUNCIL

STRANGE was the contrast betwixt the human hubbub within boards, and the ship herself floating in the splendid tranquillity of that ocean morning with the white sunshine bright upon her silver sails, and glories of glass trembling in streams of fire into the water alongside. She was heading with plenty of southing in her easting for Cape Horn, but mighty slowly this same fine day. The *Queen* was beginning to badly want a freshening breeze. She had been blown north into a zone of soft draughts, treacherous and almost profitless. It was strange, however, that Mr. Davenire should have complained to the surgeon of the heat. The atmosphere was moist and delicious ; the sun, indeed, had fangs for the flesh at high noon, but there was plenty of violet shade under the awning, and all about the decks hung the shadows of sails, and it was as cool as a northern sea beach in the cuddy and cabins, with the snaking wind-sail gaping to windward, and the wide and open skylights and large ports.

But just now nobody seemed able to think of anything save Miss Mansel's extraordinary disappearance. The passengers forgot to talk of Mr. Shannon's midnight walk to the flying jibboom-end. Where was Miss Mansel? Had she made away with herself? Had she been made away with? How, when, why, by whom? So ran the cackle.

She had been rather a favourite, modest, good-tempered, good-looking. People tried to think of their last conversation with her, the last words they had heard her utter, trying to find some meaning of doom in them. Mr. Storr thought she had looked spiritless the preceding day, as if foreboding or contemplating something tragic, and this same gentleman suddenly recollected seeing her pass through the cuddy door on to the quarter-deck, which would be unusual if she meant to gain the poop; since none of the ladies ever sought the poop by way of the quarter-deck ladders. But he could tell no

more, for he had noticed no more, and what he had observed therefore was of no use.

The sailors who had stood at the helm during the dark hours came aft, and were questioned by Captain Benson. They had seen nothing, heard nothing. The look-outs forward had been rendered doubly vigilant by Mr. Shannon's dreadful yowling and mysterious boom-lark. But they, like the helmsmen, had neither seen nor heard anything. Once again, the ship was thoroughly overhauled. The captain and mates were then convinced that the young lady was overboard; whether by foul play or by her own hand, who was to say?

'What do you think of it?' said Mr. Burn, going up to Dike Caldwell, who leaned alone looking out to sea, combing down his beard with unconscious convulsive gestures, as though savage with fancies.

'Think of what?' he answered, dropping his hand and looking slowly round at the other.

'Of Miss Mansel's disappearance?'

'That it's a precious good thing for us.'

'Trollope's of my opinion; the poor little woman was frightened to death by the secret she had got hold of. She didn't know what to make of it, nor what to do with it. If she peached, she guessed it might cost her her life. You know they saw her leaning upon the table looking behind her white with fright before she went into her cabin. It's conceivable that the burden broke her brains down, and that she went overboard to escape—to escape—well, say *you*, Caldwell, for by all that's sweet your looks now as you stare might drive a stouter heart than that young woman over the side.'

'If she's not in the ship she's committed suicide,' said Caldwell, lowering his voice to a growl as the Dents and Mrs. Holroyd passed close in eager conversation about Miss Mansel. 'Why she did it is the angels' business. Well for you she's out of it, Burn, and on devilish easy terms to yourself, man. If it hadn't been for her clever resolve we should be under cover this fine morning, padlocked down every man, a pretty row of gentlemen in irons, the game lost, the money invested sunk, with what to happen after?' he went on. 'Who's going to tell me that her single evidence wouldn't have convicted us after inquiry, and when they had looked into such a detail as the robbery of the arms-chest, for instance?'

'It's deuced fortunate certainly,' said Burn, laying his fat figure against the rail with his back upon the water, and

crossing his arms whilst he took a survey of the groups on the poop. 'But it's luckier still,' he oozed, 'that she should have jumped with our secret safe inside her; she might have blabbed to someone—taking Mrs. Dent, say, into her confidence, desiring counsel before she went with her awful discovery to the skipper. In that case this thing would have been called murder.'

'No doubt,' said Caldwell, and lifting himself somewhat heavily out of his leaning posture, he trudged to a little distance and stood alone, once more looking out to sea as though Mr. Burn bored him.

Observing Mr. Davenire right aft, Burn lounged in the direction of the wheel. On the starboard side of the deck stood the captain talking to Mr. Dent, and Mr. Storr and Mrs. Peacock. Mr. Davenire sat listening. Burn went up to him.

'How are you feeling now?' said the fat fellow.

'Right. Can't a man keep his cabin aboard a ship without being ill?' answered the huge man, irritably winding his silver watch-chain round his thumb, and straining his ear with manifest impatience in the direction of the captain.

At this point Masters sauntered up, and sat himself down on the grating beside Davenire.

'It's a blessed stroke of luck——' said Burn. But he went no further, for, clenching his fist, Davenire lunged him a thump in the chest that knocked the ooze out of his throat into silent wind, looking, as he dealt the blow, at the helmsman.

The seaman, who stood within easy earshot, had turned with a start on hearing Burn's words, and flashed a glance keen as the blade in the sheath on his hip at Mr. Davenire.

'What! is it to be de box—is it to be de box you vant, by Gare?' exclaimed Burn, instantly seeing the other's meaning, whilst he fetched a breath and uttered a loud laugh that brought the eyes of the captain to the group; 'you'll drive my watch into my heart if you hit me so hard again.' He contorted himself grotesquely into a fighting posture, and the captain, watching him, breathed short, suspecting he was to witness a drunken struggle.

'I was saying,' Burn continued, letting fall his arms, 'it was a blessed stroke of luck that we should meet with even this light air; but as it is, hang me if I believe we shall reach Cape Horn next year.'

'It's undoubtedly suicide,' said Masters very softly. 'A cust pity. Had it been old mother Peacock yonder! or the excellent Miss Holroyd! but the only pretty woman in the ship! I was in love with her fine eyes. I should have been with her constantly, but you beggars were so infernally afraid of what I might say.'

This was said in syllables that slipped from his lips like oil. Mark Davenire started up in a passion

'Come forward,' he rumbled. 'Come forward! Gods, how you drivell!'

The captain followed with his eyes that man's heavy, big figure, and breaking from the people he was talking with, stepped to where Mr. Poole stood watching the ship, and said in a low voice, 'Go and see if the chief officer's asleep in his berth, sir. If he is not, my compliments and I desire him to come to my cabin. Also send the surgeon to me.'

The little man remained looking at his ship and along her decks, whilst the second mate went on his errand. He had no sense of beauty, no eye for colour or proportion. Yet the old sailor's heart swelled as his sight climbed the shining heights, and as he noted with a seaman's enjoyment how choicely the canvas clothed the craft, every clew fitting its yardarm with frigate-like precision of cut, every fore and aft cloth filling the spaces between the masts as the stretched wings of the great sea-bird measure the soaring hollow he drives aslant through.

His brow darkened as he encountered the gaze of Captain Trollope leaning against the quarter-deck winch, with the brim of his hat resting on his nose, and a big black newly lighted cigar forking up out of his teeth like the mizzen gaff from the mast it belonged to. A thrill of uneasiness and hate passed through him. His eyes again sought his ship, then went to that cool, self-possessed, gentlemanly figure that smoked, watching him. Never was a sea captain more utterly wretched and uselessly wrathful than that white-haired, high-hatted old master mariner whilst he stood viewed by Trollope, waiting for the second mate.

Mr. Poole showed himself in three ardent skips up the weather-ladder. Mr. Matthews, sir, was now going to the captain's cabin, and the surgeon, sir, was already there. Captain Benson heard the second mate, but seemed not to heed him. His gaze clung to Trollope with something of an eager enlarging of the nostrils in his putty-smooth inch of

rounded nose, as though he found cause for fresh misgiving in the mere disdainful, defiant, dare-devil coolness of that lounging shape, with its tilted hat and its folded arms. Why, the commander of a ship could *never* fail in obtaining the respect of his passengers whilst he deserved it! Did not he, Captain Benson, deserve respect? The close of every passage had always been a triumph and a celebration. Salvors and claret-jugs nobly chased, and important with compliment, glittered on his sideboard, or otherwise sparkled in full view of his sea-friends when he was ashore, and his little house at Erith was open.

He rounded with depressed head on the oval of his legs, and with his mind charged with inflaming thoughts, distracting with their helplessness as suggestions, he walked to the companion-way and sank to his cabin.

The doctor awaited him; the chief mate quickly followed. The old man put down his hat and seated himself. The doctor, with a professional eye, took note that the old man's nerves were giving him trouble. 'It may not be long,' thought he, 'before I am called upon to prescribe for Captain Benson,' and his mind swiftly ran for a few instants over the drugs in his cabin.

'I wish to confer with you,' began the skipper. 'I do not know what is wrong with me, but it is strange that I, who have followed the sea all my life, should find myself wanting in determination at—at—this time of day,' he added somewhat hysterically. 'I am troubled by the mysterious loss of the young lady. It is terrible to be unable to form a conclusion as to how she met with her end. If we could think of her as murdered——' he stopped and glared at Mr. Matthews.

'I don't think *that*, captain, really I don't,' said the doctor. 'What conceivable object would any living creature in this ship have in murdering her?'

'There it is,' gasped the captain. 'Things of the most extraordinary kind happen in this vessel, and you can't find motives for them. Why was my arms-chest robbed? What puts it into the head of a gentleman to terrify the ship forward by performing the antics of a baboon on my flying jibboom end? If the young lady committed suicide, what was her reason? If murdered, why?'

He barked out that 'why' with a start that drove him half out of his chair.

'I agree with the doctor, sir,' said Mr. Matthews, whose

plain, homely, weather-stained face wore a shocked look, a strained expression of anxiety. 'Could she have been murdered without noise? How was it done? With a knife? There are no traces of blood, sir. By strangulation? The cabin don't suggest it, sir. The bedclothes are turned over in a way that must convince us she got out of her bunk of her own will.'

'I want to match the lady's disappearance with the plunder of my arms-chest,' said the captain.

'In what way?' said the doctor,

'Is she in league with the people who stole the arms?' exclaimed the captain.

'If so, I don't see of what use she could be to 'em, for I'll kiss the crucifix in Mr. Poole's berth on this—that she's not in the ship,' exclaimed the mate solemnly.

The captain turned his bewildered face to the window.

'I would not make anything, sir, if I were you, of Mr. Shannon's adventure last night,' said the doctor. 'In my opinion, it was a genuine piece of sleep-walking.'

'If it was not, what could the man's motive be?' said the captain.

'Grant the act of somnambulism,' said the doctor, 'and there's an end of all motive. Sleep-walking people perform astonishing feats. I have conversed with the gentleman since. He has large, globular, rather dreamy eyes, and he assured me that he has walked in his sleep at long intervals since he was a child.'

'It's best to believe it, sir,' says the mate, 'if only to save ourselves the trouble of finding a reason for such sky-larking.'

The captain, preserving his bewildered face, continued to listen.

'The wonder to me is,' said the doctor, 'that some of the watch on deck did not observe the man. But Mr. Shannon appears to have used the sea professionally. Indeed, I gather from the conversation of most of them that they have seen, considering their years, what Daniel Defoe would call a surprising vast variety of life. It has occurred to me that he may have eluded observation by mounting the rigging and gaining the jibboom by one of the ropes. Could that be done?'

'By an expert seaman—yes, sir,' answered the mate. 'Though it 'ud be a long journey, even for him wide awake.'

Could a sleep-walker come down the fore-royal stay?' He shook his head gravely.

'But how he got there don't really matter,' said the doctor cheerfully to the captain. 'He may have walked on to the fore-castle when everybody was as sound asleep as he. I take it, sir, that you want to clear up mysteries.'

'What, sir, is your opinion as to the cause of the young lady's disappearance?' asked the captain.

'It will be thickening the business too much,' answered the doctor thoughtfully, 'to assume that *she* too was walking in her sleep, and so, somehow, fell overboard. No. We must surrender *that*, though I might have held to the notion but for Mr. Shannon. I am afraid it must work out as just an ordinary case of suicide.'

The little captain gazed sternly and gloomily at the cabin deck. After some silence he looked at the mate, and said, 'There is mischief hatching in this ship, sir.'

'It must be smothered then, sir, and the sooner the better if you will give me your instructions,' replied the mate with a half glance at the doctor, which was like questioning the commander's perfect sanity.

'I distrust every one of those ten passengers,' continued the captain. 'But I am at a loss to know how to deal with them. I can prove nothing. I can take no steps which I might afterwards justify. There are ten of them, sir—ten several suits at law—I hate the law, sir. I was never in a law court in my life. I have worked hard and am advancing in years, and am not to be sold up and professionally ruined by—by——' Here the old fellow fairly broke down, crimsoning till he looked throttled.

'You are eleven men forward, captain,' said the doctor. 'We are six men aft, nay, count Mr. Storr and Mr. Dent, and we are eight men aft. Nineteen to ten, nearly double.' He shrugged his round shoulders.

'But don't you know, sir,' burst out the captain, shrill with temper, 'that on board ship odds are not to be reckoned when the plot's deep and the rogues know their business.'

'What do you fear, sir?' said the slow-minded mate.

'We are a rich ship, and I fear the intentions of these men,' cried the captain, bouncing off his seat, and beginning to roll and blow over a few feet of his carpeted plank.

Mr. Matthews arched his eyebrows, following the motions of his skipper with such intensity of resolution to penetrate

his full meaning without further question that he ran a cast into one eye.

'You don't mean to say, captain,' exclaimed the doctor in a low, rather thrilling voice, 'that you believe these ten men intend to rise and seize the ship?'

'For mercy's sake silence, sir!' whipped out the captain in a choking sort of whisper. 'It's just *that*, and that job of the arms-chest is a piece of it, and that fellow on the jibboom end last night another. I can't fit in the young lady—I can't fit in——' He stopped, pressing his hand to his brow. 'But not a syllable of this,' he went on after a short silence, during which his companions had eyed him almost breathless, 'for I *may* be mistaken: in which case——' he broke down again.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said the mate. 'May I venture on an opinion?'

'You are here for that purpose, sir,' answered the captain.

'If you are afraid——' began the mate.

'Afraid?' popped old Benson at him, and the white hair seemed to stir, and the whole of the little man to bristle up into its fullest inches of wrathful muscle.

'If there is reason to fear,' said the mate, 'that these ten gentlemen embarked in the ship with a felonious design, they ought unquestionably to be secured before they do any mischief.'

'So!' said the doctor, with an emphatic nod of his head, folding his arms with a gesture of deep conviction.

'You are of Mr. Matthew's opinion, sir?' said the captain.

'He reasons indisputably, if things be as you suspect they are, sir,' answered the medical man.

'Thus it is,' exclaimed the little captain. 'You advise me to lay these gentlemen by the heels on mere suspicion; to keep them for three or four months locked up—on mere suspicion, and take the consequences of the actions at law which they would certainly bring against me?'

The mate, after chewing a minute upon this, exclaimed, 'I am here, sir, as you just now reminded me, by your commands to give my opinion, and that opinion is,' said he, warming up, 'that your duty is to protect the ship, the cargo, and the lives of the crew and passengers first of all.'

'By confining these men until our arrival in England?'

'Yes, sir.'

'On mere suspicion, you think?' cried the little fellow, strutting up purple to the mate as though he would beat him.

‘Yes, sir,’ said the mate.

‘And be ruined for life, professionally, financially, in all respects ruined,’ cried the captain. ‘What’s there to prove? What’s my evidence? If that’s your opinion, sir, I’m obliged to you,’ he added with a sarcastic sneer.

‘What’s to be done then?’ said the doctor.

‘I am restless and uneasy,’ answered the captain, rolling here and there, ‘and desired that my chief officer and you should know why. But there is nothing to be done, nothing that durst be done.’

‘Couldn’t you force a quarrel upon some of them, thin their numbers anyhow by locking up a few with good excuse for your usage?’ said the doctor.

‘I might as well request you to poison them, sir,’ answered the skipper with vehement disdain.

‘We’re to wait then, sir,’ said the stubborn mate, ‘till these ten men take possession of the ship?’

The captain sank into thought, the two watched him, occasionally exchanging a look.

‘I must think the thing over,’ said he presently. ‘You two will also think the thing over if you please. Strategy may be met by strategy. It is an amazing situation for the master of a ship to be placed in.’ He looked at his watch and exclaimed, ‘I would thank you for any advice. I never was at a loss before.’

And with these words he took his sextant out of its case, and went from his cabin, followed by the others.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PIRACY

CAPTAIN BENSON carried his sextant on to the poop. Mr. Matthews and the doctor walked leisurely down the cuddy. Four of the ten gentlemen were playing at cards at the cabin table. It did not appear that the disappearance of Miss Mansel weighed very heavily with them. One was Captain Henry Trollope. As the mate passed, Trollope, lifting his eyes from his cards, exclaimed: ‘When are we going to get some wind?’

‘There is a nice little air moving just now,’ answered Mr. Matthews.

Aren't these what they call the humbugging parallels?' said Mr. Peter Johnson.

'I believe they are, sir,' answered the mate, with significant coolness and irony, and a short but steady look at Johnson, who was a black-bearded, bald man of about five and thirty.

'One moment, doctor,' sang out Mr. Shannon, who, with Mr. Weston, completed the set. 'Have you succeeded in convincing Captain Benson that there *is* such a thing as sleep-walking?'

'Ask me if I have convinced him that you have ears to your head.'

'But the old cock's such a plaguy heretic. Every man's a liar in the opinion of that ancient child of ocean.'

Mr. Matthews breathed deep, and passed on, followed by the doctor, who was stepping on to the quarter-deck, when the mate asked him into his cabin for a minute or two. As the door closed behind them Captain Trollope winked at Shannon, who exclaimed in a low voice: 'They've heard the cry, but they can't get the scent.'

'I'm rather hoping,' said the mate, putting his hand upon his sextant case as though to keep himself in memory of his object in entering his cabin, 'that the captain's fears are unfounded. I have used the sea for many years, but never heard in all my going a-fishing of the passengers of a ship rising and seizing her feloniously.'

'All these ten men are not very pleasant company,' said the doctor.

'A few of them I don't like the looks of,' said the mate. 'Mr. Caldwell would skin his father for a guinea. I dare say Mr. Davenire's big head blabs more to his pillow than he would like the world to know. But Burn, Masters, Weston, seem to me at times to have the making of what they call good fellows in them. I think this,' said he a little eagerly, outstretching his forefinger; 'if there's any conspiracy it's been brought about *since* the ship sailed, and Trollope bosses it.'

'It's an extraordinary state of affairs, certainly,' said the doctor. 'But the more I think the more I fancy there's less danger than fear. 'Twixt you and me. Mr. Matthews, the captain has shown a degree of irritability of late, that—that—well, it's *not* a good sign, sir, and I say it as the medical man of this ship. He's in the sixtieth year of his age, and

has led a very hard life. For many years he's been burdened with the responsibilities of command, and I think you will find that he is outstaying the period when most men are forced to give up by age or illness. Sixty at sea corresponds with eighty on shore.'

'You're right in that,' said the mate, glancing at his watch, and then removing his sextant. 'It is a life to kink the spine of an elephant. Going to sea is a new birth, and many a young daisy comes back to his mother with the withered face of the monkey.'

'What advice,' said the doctor, 'should one be able to offer to a commander of a ship under such circumstances as these?'

'There it is,' said the mate.

'I believe a nerve tonic,' exclaimed the doctor, 'would extinguish a very large part of this amazing suspicion.'

'Well, I have got what I want from you,' said the mate, going to the door. 'I have observed his irritability, and my place as chief officer should not stop me from very privately seeking your opinion on that head. There ought to be a delusion somewhere in it,' he added, with a slow smile, 'for I've sat with those ten fellows at the foot for some days, exchanged minds middling freely with some of them, and never till just now got hold of a suspicion, I mean of the captain's sort.'

They left the cabin. The mate took his sextant on deck, and the doctor went below to his berth in the steeage to meditate over the above conversation with a pipe in his mouth, the fumes from which somewhat disguised the disgusting smell of drugs breathed into the atmosphere of the confined, oppressive crib by scores of dirty bottles on shelves.

It might have been observed as the mate cast a look around him, ere passing with his sextant to the cuddy door, that the four whist-players seemed silent and intent on their game, but the instant they were alone they murmured in conversation over their cards, and any one knowing what they had in hand whilst watching them might have sworn that their play was a pretence, and that they were debating or plotting in voices low and smooth as silk, with a frequent darting of the eyes up at the skylights, then at the cuddy front.

Meanwhile on deck, when noon had been made, it was a day of boundless splendour. The wind had shifted into the

north, and blew a little friskily ; it chipped ivory flakes out of the long blue ripples, and the whole breast of ocean in the direction of where the wind came shook in diamond lights and gleams under the glory of the sun. Far off, on the weather bow, close-hauled, was a small brig standing to the westward : she sparkled like a pillar of frozen snow, and soothed the vision by breaking into the everlasting leagues of sea-line.

But this fine weather, the pleasant noise of wind aloft, the grateful music of the fountain flashed by the cutwater off the bow, the cheerful stretch of white decks sliding from stately swaying shadow into brilliant sunshine, all the whiteness that was on high empearling the gushing air at every side of sail, the sense of being driven onwards at an agreeable rate of speed—for it was like yachting this day, the ship leaning a little over, and no motion save a long soft swell out of the west—all these good things failed to lighten the gloom that was upon the spirits of several passengers of the *Queen*. Captain Benson, whilst he took sights, was anxiously watched. Mrs. Peacock arose and approached him, but he gave her a short bow, and saying, 'Excuse me, ma'am,' bore his sextant a little further off.

In truth the ladies and Mr. Dent and Mr. Storr were shocked, and some of them horrified in various degrees, by Miss Mansel's mysterious disappearance. There had even gone a whisper of *Murder!* amongst them, and more than one pair of eyes belonging to this group would go to Mr. Davenire, but more particularly to Mr. Caldwell, as those two gentlemen walked the lee side of the deck, whilst the captain and mate were screwing at the sun.

All through dinner-time in the fore-castle little else was talked of than the girl's disappearance.

'Seems as if the fo'c'sle had got into the cuddy this bout,' said a hairy-faced man called John, sawing at a piece of pork upon a biscuit, which he used as a trencher. 'By the noble Joseph, mates, but it 'ud be good news for sailors to larn that the crew of a vessel had been asked by the skipper to protect him from the passengers.'

'I don't allow myself that she was drowned,' said Bill. 'You'll find it was an accident. Not even soocide, as they tarm it. These here young ladies get romantic notions. They come up on deck when they ought to be below to look at the steears and to watch how beautiful the white sails pull the

wessel along. They'd holler and run if they saw a rat, but don't onderstand proper danger, at least at sea. They get messing about on the rail, peering over the side to dream of their sweethearts, whilst they see nosebags, and love knots, and walentines in the fire that burns in the water passing along, till all in a minute over they go.'

'Her time was up,' croaked Tom. 'Her soul was under orders to sail. What does it matter how the call was obeyed—whether she fell overboard, or jumped overboard, or was chucked overboard, as 'Arry here thinks?'

'I think it, and I'll tell you why,' said 'Arry, who though a Dane by birth, shipped always under an English name, whilst he spoke the tongue much more fluently than most of his English mates. 'What did that man come out to the jib-boom for last night? He said he walked in his sleep. He's a blooming liar, and I'll tell him so if he likes to come here. Do sleep-walkers sing out as though they'd got a rat in their guts? What did he want to make all that noise for? My notion is it was to bring everything for'rad, so as the decks might be clear aft, all ready for what was meant to be done.'

'Ave 'e told the mate that, 'Arry?' said a man who had stopped eating to listen, and appeared much impressed by this view.

'She'd have hollered had she been man-handled. Joe was at the wheel while the caulker was cutting his capers for'rads, and he heard nothing,' exclaimed William, the sailor who was remarkable for the slow motions of his head.

'Have ye spoken to the mate about that there notion of yourn, 'Arry?' repeated the man who had stopped eating to listen.

'No, 'taint for me to interfere. If they wants advice they knows where to come for it,' answered 'Arry, pulling a piece of pipe out of his breeches-pocket and looking at it earnestly as though he would talk to it as Dana's Finn talked to the bottle of rum.

'But what's a-going to happen?' called out a seaman sitting on a small chest in the brightness immediately under the square of the fore-scuttle. 'When I was at the wheel, that fat chucker, Burn, I think his name is, steps up to that lumping sojer with a silver chain, with his mouth full of something which t'other had to punch down his throat, or I'm gummed if he wouldn't ha' out with it. Jest in time, thinks I. The beer bubbled into the fat chap's eyes, but he grinned hard

to it like a man seeing the meaning. There's something a-brewing, bullies,' said the fellow, getting up with a yawn, and stretching his arms. 'But it's no business of ourn. This is the shop for advice. If they wants to be properly directed, they can come for'rad and we'll tell 'em what to do.'

'It's a good dog,' grumbled a fellow who was half in and half out of his hammock, 'that comes when he's called, let alone coming before it.'

This seemed to embody the fore-castle view of the situation, so far as it was dimly understood by the men; and having eaten their dinner they smoked a pipe, and then tumbled up to their work.

The hours passed away quietly in the ship that afternoon. The breeze gushed steadily. The splendour rolled north-west, and there the sea ran in lines, trembling out of fire into foam. The wake swept away in a straight white furrow, prismatic with hues magical in their creation of contrasts, and the tail of it flickered out in a windy film like a cobweb in a breezy dance of bush.

The captain told Mrs. Peacock that the speed was seven knots, but somehow there was no spirit or impulse in brightness or swiftness to hearten the ship. Captain Benson throughout the afternoon kept the deck, and stuck also to his favourite fag-end of poop. Here he strutted, lonely and silent, with whispering lips, and a face that might have taxed the gravity of a dispassionate beholder by the singular expressions the state of his mind worked it up into. The ladies sat under the awning, reading or knitting; they seldom talked. Sometimes you'd see one or another dart a look at the sea astern, as though to some imagination of the drowned girl.

Miss Holroyd was on deck with the others. Some of the gentlemen endeavoured to engage the ladies in conversation. Burn strolled over to Mrs. Peacock, and courteously but wheezily talked of the weather, the beautiful appearance of the ship, the difference of the climate they were now in and the snow-darkened gales of the Horn. It would not do. Mrs. Peacock's face hardened into the woodiness of a ship's figure-head, and Burn, after a bit, strolled off whistling. Mr. Masters approached Miss Holroyd with a carelessness quite taking with its well-bred gaiety. He sat him beside her, and when he had congratulated her upon her recovery, he began to talk of Miss Mansel. His face then grew grave. Any fool could have seen the man was in earnest.

'It is horrible,' he exclaimed, 'to think that that fine young girl should be floating drowned in the sea yonder! Of her own accord! What could have caused her to take her life? Did you ever notice how pensive her eyes were? I have seen her look as though she saw things beyond what her gaze seemed fixed on.'

'Change seats with me, Edith,' said Mrs. Holroyd. 'You will find less draught from that sail in this chair.'

In a few minutes Mr. Masters joined Mr. Shannon.

Some of these ten gentlemen sought to divert themselves with deck-quoits. They played to leeward, but Mr. Caldwell's impetuosity and temper led to trouble. He flung with too passionate a hand, and the grummet when it left him usually skipped half way to the galley. It was hot, moreover, and then it was an aimless game, so they dropped it, and looked around them for other means of distraction.

'Captain,' said Mr. Shannon, marching round the skylight straight up to the old man, 'I have got a revolver in my cabin.' Benson started. 'Would you object to one of us slinging a bottle at your lee main yardarm and trying to pot it?'

'I don't think the ladies would like it, sir,' answered the captain, shortly.

'A revolver does not make much noise,' said Mr. Shannon.

'Mrs. Peacock has delicate nerves,' said the captain.

'What a curse the nerves are, eh, Captain Benson!' exclaimed Mr. Shannon, with a dryness that did not lack its twang of irony. 'Did you ever suffer from nerves, sir?' The commander began to blow, but remained silent. 'Fancy the master of a ship losing nerve,' continued the other, 'in one of those supreme moments——'

Mr. Davenire, who was leaning over the rail near the lee after quarter-boat, called out quickly, 'Shannon, come here and look at it,' and pointed.

The other went to him.

'What in mercy's name,' growled the big fellow scarce above his breath, with a face discoloured by passion, 'do you mean by talking to the captain in that way? Can't you let the old rooter alone? There are too many of us.' And he brought his great fist down on the rail.

Shannon muttered surlily that the captain provoked him with his insolent manner of objecting, and slunk forward.

The moon was dark that night, but the sea line ran firm and black against a sort of faintness, like the lunar dawn

itself in the clear obscure low down, and the stars were many, and some of them splendid. The wind poured in a steady hum out of the cloudless dusk sparkling to windward, and the mate, when they hove the log a little before eight bells, made the speed eight and a quarter knots.

Mr. Poole relieved Mr. Matthews at midnight, and walked the deck of the darkened ship, watching her as she rushed onward, a bulky leaning phantom, from truck to main tack, as pale as foam in moonshine. Just when he had walked out his first hour, the man at the wheel called to him and said that he felt unwell, and asked to be relieved. A ship that is shredding the black waters of the night at a little less than nine knots, under the heavy impulse of canvas to the royal yards, needs a surer grip than a sick hand can hold her with; many a league might be wasted on such a night as this by bad steering; the degrees of the disorder that governed the helm would be indicated by the curves of the wake, and now that the *Queen* had a fair wind and a good wind it was to be a bee-line with her keel, or it wouldn't be Mr. Poole's fault.

Thus thinking, he advanced to the rail at the break of the poop, and hailed the fore-castle. A man came aft and took the wheel from Bill. Bill complained of spasms, and before he let go of the wheel he had writhed at the spokes in many attitudes of pain.

'Go forward and turn in,' said the good-natured second mate. 'I'll send you a drop of brandy along out of the cuddy by the first chance I get.'

The man, bent nearly double, walked slowly towards the lee poop ladder, down which he disappeared; but he had not been out of sight a minute when Poole, who remained aft conning the fresh helm, saw a head and shoulders at the brink of the lee deck, and Bill, still bowed, returned in as great a hurry as his posture of anguish would admit of, whilst he dumbly waved his hand as though in torture. The second mate ran to meet him.

'What d'ye think?' gasped the seaman in a voice hoarse and horrible with suffering and surprise, 'the cuddy's full of men.'

'Eh?' said the second mate, sending a swift glance at the skylight without moving.

'There's some of 'em on the quarter-deck. Mind your eye, sir. They're armed.'

Mr. Poole rushed to the ladder and looked over. He saw

six men grouped close and seemingly waiting; they were just under the cuddy front. There was no light to know their faces by, but he recognised some of them by their shapes and stature, and at once called out, 'I say, Mr. Davenire, what are all you people doing down there at this time of night?'

When he had said this a voice in the group growled 'There's your chance,' and in an instant the great figure of Davenire sprang up the ladder.

A chill, sick thrill of horror ran through the young officer when he saw a revolver in the grasp of the man; a revolver of the old pattern, but much in use at that age, easily visible to the second mate by reason of its bulk of six barrels, as it swung at the dreadful fist of Mr. Davenire.

'Be quiet and I'll not hurt you,' exclaimed the huge fellow, grasping Poole.

'Help, murder! They're seizing the ship!' shrieked the second mate; the voice went to pieces in echoes aloft; it rang forwards like a boatswain's pipe.

'Jump and secure them in the fo'c'sle,' thundered Davenire, and swift as the shadows of birds flying down the wind the five on the quarter-deck sped, three to port and two to starboard, into the forward darkness all about the windlass and the galley and the foremast.

'Help! they're seizing the ship,' shrieked the second mate afresh, and the young heart of oak fell a-wrestling like a demon with his giant opponent; for some moments his strength of fear and rage staggered Davenire, who tottered to the very edge of his fall.

'You'll yell, you screech owl, will 'e?' he said; he shifted his arm and raised his heavy weapon as if he would brain the man. No! the intention was changed in the instant of its conception, and in another heart-beat he had gripped him choking by the throat, and was hauling him helpless as a child to the companion hatch.

The seaman had gone right aft, and now stood doubled up by cramp alongside the helmsman.

'Hold this wheel, Bill,' said the fellow, letting go the spokes.

'Back! if you move one little step I'll put a bullet through your head,' cried Davenire, keeping his hold of the second mate and pointing his revolver at the approaching seaman.

The fellow stopped, shrank, recoiled some paces. The eye of a loaded revolver cowed the man as the eye of the man subdued the beast.

‘Down you go! and keep quiet when you’re there.’

So speaking Davenire thrust the second mate headlong down the companion steps, with a short deep-chested shout to others who were below to receive and see to him.

He left the companion doors open. Bill had not grasped the wheel; the ship was coming to; her wake was an arch, and in a minute or less she would be aback, canvas hammering, spars straining, the light ones going. Davenire sprang to the helm, and with the shift of a few spokes brought the vessel to her course.

Meanwhile the fellow whom he had covered with his weapon had fled from the poop, and Bill with the colic was crawling like a tortoise through the gloom of the deck to leeward, so that in a minute Davenire was alone. He placed his pistol upon the grating behind him, within easy reach of his hand, and steered the ship, towering beside the wheel, making motions with the spokes as though he felt into the life of the vessel through them as the spider with advanced claw commands its whole dominion of silk to its nethermost hitch. Thus was it aft at that time—a great lonely figure of a man at the helm, a light shining in the companion-way, and the dim noise of a woman screaming, the ship rounding in milky bosoms of canvas to the stars, shredding south-eastwards with lonely decks.

Forward it had been a swift business. The port watch were asleep below, and three or four seamen of the starboard watch dozed on deck.

‘What’s this?’ yelled one of them, springing to his feet.

‘In with ’e, my livelies,’ roared the voice of Mr. Hankey, and that strongly-built gentleman, grasping his man, ran him flying into the forecabin. The others, half-dazed with sleep, were grasped by the conspirators, and rushed with the speed of wind past the windlass ends to the forecabin doors. Instantly these were closed, the scuttle secured, and the eleven seamen, counting him of the spasms and the cook of the barque *Queen*, were as helplessly imprisoned in their sea-parlour as ever they were certain to be at some future time for the several causes of drink, mutiny, and the like, in the lockup ashore.

'Ere, I say,' bawled a voice over the edge of a hammock, 'what the blazes have they gone and done with us?'

A pair of legs twinkled to the deck from another hammock; a seaman rolled out of his bunk. Tom jumped for the scuttle and tried it; there was a sudden surprising hurry of figures in this wild, uncouth interior, as it was to be viewed in this midnight hour by the dim flame of the flaring lamp. Curses deep and loud escaped a few throats, then some one sung out:

'Hold your gab!'

'What was it?'

'I thought,' says the man breaking into the silence that had followed his roar, 'I heard 'em shooting off muskets.'

'Lads,' says Tom, coming under the lamp and sitting down upon his chest with his arms folded in an attitude of resignation, 'I was born an old woman, mates, if them ten blushen passengers ain't gone and stolen the ship.'

A heavy groan broke from a corner.

'What's that noise?' exclaimed a sailor looking round.

'It's me, Bill; I've got the spasms,' said the hollow voice of the sufferer. 'The second mate promised to bring me a drop of brandy along, and I was coming for'rads when this here outbreak took place. Lor' a mercy!' he tumbled on to the deck and rolled over and over.

Bill was a good hand and a cheerful man. They all liked Bill. William had a drop of rum saved up in his chest. This he produced, and after Bill had drained it down they lifted him into his bed, and William rubbed his stomach, and then Bill said he felt better.

'They don't mean to drown us, I hope,' said 'Arry the Dane. 'By Peter, if I felt that, I'd hold that there flame under that there hatch and burn her out.'

'I don't think ye would,' sneered a man, 'not with me a-looking on. What! make sure of setting the ship on fire agin the mere chance of your being drowned! Yer know what fire feels like? There's a light. Burn your fingers.'

'They know how to secure them doors,' said a seaman coming back to his chest after testing the doors by shaking and letting drive at them with his shoulder.

'If I could have foreseen this,' said the cook in a broken voice, 'I'd have arsted the doctor for some arsnic, and I'd have made a pudden of it for them ten gentlemen, all for themselves alone. Why, I'm famished if this here job ain't agoing to cost us all our clothes and all our vages. What are they a-going

to do with us? I know; set us ashore at the point of them blistered revolvers on some desolate strip of rock where there ain't so much as a cocoanut tree to be seen, where they intend that we shall perish, and nothing but our bones remain, so that the truth never can come out as far as us men are concerned.'

Here Bill uttered a dismal groan.

'I'm smothered if they're going to make a cannibal of me,' shouted an active seaman, springing off the bundle he had been seated on. 'I shipped for the run to the Thames, and I wants my money and I wants my clothes. D'ye mean to say there's to be no blooming breaking out with us eleven men and the cook?' All on fire with rage the man seized the handle of a scrubbing-brush, leaped on to a chest, and beat with indescribable fury at the locked cover of the scuttle.

'Hark!' shouted a man, 'they're a-answering of ye.'

'Below there!' was heard dimly but clearly; it was Peter Johnson's voice, and there were no stronger lungs saving Trollope's in that ship. 'Below there!' was repeated in tremendous accents, accompanied by the hammering of a heel upon the hatch. 'Can ye hear me?'

'What have yer to say?' yelled the infuriated seaman, poising the broom-handle as though making ready for the man.

'We're ten men,' sounded the voice above in a duil roar through the planks, 'and every man's armed with a six-barrelled revolver. We mean you no mischief, but if you attempt to break out, then the first of you who shows his head at the scuttle or the doors is a dead man. Do you hear me?'

A general groan resounded through the fore-castle. He had been heard clearly enough. They knew that the sentinel spoke the truth, and guessed that men so perilously alert, so desperately reckless and determined, had at once made every provision of sentry, and would keep all promise of bullet and powder they made.

'They've got us, and they've got the ship,' said Tom; 'and the best thing we can do is to keep quiet.'

Saying which, with the coolness of a sailor used to adventure, he pulled out a plug of tobacco and lighted his pipe. In a few minutes bowls of glowing Cavendish were spangling the dusky interior like fireflies, and the flame of the lamp burnt in a ghastly blue in the fog of the smoke.

A silence, as though the ship herself slumbered, was in the cuddy when the shriek of the second mate in the grasp of

Davenire, had slung through the cool and steady pouring of the wind; immediately afterwards they heard Davenire's tremendous roar to his little company, and now it was that Captain Trollope and the three others who had the handling of this part of the ship went to work. But light is the work to be done when the workmen are savage with resolution, when every man is armed with a deadly weapon, and when those who are to be subdued are tranquilly sleeping.

Each man exactly knew his station and duty in this audacious piracy. Trollope, revolver in hand, sprang for the captain's cabin; Burn and Masters, after securing the cuddy door and removing the key, dashed for the berths of the Dents and the Storrs; whilst Mr. Patrick Weston, his twisted face purple with the passions of that hour, rounded to Mr. Matthews's cabin.

The mate had been awakened by Poole's loud cry over his head; he could not distinguish the words, but he heard a note of imminent deadly import in the high-strained voice. He sat up, his heart loud in his ears, then catching Davenire's hoarse cry, he leapt from his bunk, and was pulling on a few clothes when Weston drove in like an electric bolt.

'It is of no use, Mr. Matthews,' he shouted, lifting his weapon that the unfortunate officer might see it, 'we have possession of the ship, the men are under hatches—take the thing quite coolly. It's not so bad as a shipwreck.'

He stopped to listen to somebody screaming in a cabin opposite; almost then the noise was heard of a body tumbling violently down the companion ladder, followed by a roar in Davenire's voice, instantly answered by Burn.

The mate at sight of the revolver backed hard against the bunk, and cried faintly on hearing the noises outside: 'Good God, are you people murdering us?'

'I'm not here to *chat* with you, Matthews,' said Weston. 'Don't talk of murder. You are a very good fellow, a favourite with us at our end, you know, and you shall be well used. But give no trouble, I entreat you for your own sake,' he added with an ugly expressive look at the firearm he grasped.

The mate saw that look by the low flame of his bracket lamp, and stood motionless and silent, his jaw slightly dropped, his eyes starting. In silence also Weston stepped out of the berth, withdrawing the key from within, then locking the door.

'I am afraid Davenire's killed the second mate,' said

Masters, as Weston briskly approached him. 'There's too much of the beast in his strength; he flung the poor devil headlong down.'

'Where is he?' interrupted Weston.

Masters nodded at Caldwell's cabin.

'Is he locked in, anyhow?' said Weston.

'Ay.'

'A plague on all pity!' cried Weston. 'Where's Burn?'

The fat man stepped out of a berth as this question was asked, and the sound of a woman screaming in hysterics followed him.

'Is this part ended?' said Weston.

'Oh,' said Burn, 'it's only a locking-up joke,' and he jingled a number of cabin keys in his coat-pocket.

'How long's Trollope going to be?' said Masters.

'I wish that hag would choke herself,' said Weston, with a mad look. 'Who is it?'

'Mother Peacock,' answered Burn.

'I'm sorry for the Holroyds—doocid awkward work—found everybody stark, staring wide awake,' said Masters, and he exclaimed with an oath whilst he wiped his forehead, 'if it's over, it's well over, and I wouldn't have it over again.'

Weston glanced at him with an expression of disgust and suspicion.

At this instant Davenire's hurricane voice was heard at the wheel.

'Jump for it, Burn. See what he wants,' said Weston, and as the fat man ran with headlong hurry up the companion steps, Captain Trollope came slowly out of the commander's cabin.

A lamp always swung burning dimly all night long in the cuddy of the *Queen*. As Trollope emerged Masters sprang on a chair and turned on a full flame. Sounds of footsteps were now to be heard overhead; two or three of those who had secured the people forward had come aft, and you might have seen them looking through the skylight, their faces glimmering like goblins behind the bright black glass. Mrs. Peacock ceased to shriek, but just then a fist began to pound one of the after cabin doors, and the lamentable voice of Mr. Storr was heard.

'I do beg that you will not keep us locked up here, gentlemen. My wife is seriously ill with fright, and I shall feel obliged by one of you gentlemen sending the doctor to me.

I will go down upon my knees and swear by the faith of a Christian man that you will have nothing to fear from Mrs. Storr or me if you will allow us our liberty until you have transferred us and our luggage.'

Receiving no answer, he beat the door again.

'Isn't that Storr?' said Captain Trollope, who had come to a halt on hearing the little auctioneer's voice.

'What of the captain?' said Weston.

'I'm afraid,' answered Trollope, with a cool, drawing-room air, 'that he's dead.'

'By your hand?' exclaimed Weston, looking just a shade scared, as his sight went to the clumsy butt-end protruding from Trollope's side-pocket.

The massive shape of Davenire, with its inevitable twinkle of silver chain, filled the companion hatch as he descended.

'Well, how goes it here?' he exclaimed, looking round.

'The mate's snug enough,' answered Weston; 'the others need not be thought of. The captain's dead, do you say?' said he, turning to Trollope.

'Come and look.'

He returned to the commander's cabin, and was followed by Davenire, Weston, and Masters. Here, too, burnt a small lamp as in the mate's berth. It was a large, roomy cabin, the best in the ship: a table shone with marine brass instruments. In fact, old Benson was a bachelor, he owned a house ashore, but his ship was his home, and his notions of sea-comfort were excellently illustrated by the fine cot he swung in, the mahogany chest of drawers, the very convenient washing apparatus over against the beautiful marine barometer, the books, the three or four pictures, and the soft carpet.

Upon that carpet he lay now—poor old man! stiff upon his back, clearly dead; a short, grotesque, startling figure of a corpse to come upon, so absurdly clad as it was. His hat had gone round the world with him, and with the devotion of the limpet for the rock it was on his head now, though crushed, as if it had been resolved to go out of the world with him. He lay upon the deck in a pair of bed-drawers, and a coat which he was half in and half out of.

Davenire and Masters drew close and looked at the old face; it was swelled like a drunkard's, the eyes were turned up—God knows where. Every familiar expression was eclipsed or caricatured by distortion.

'I never hurt him,' exclaimed Trollope, answering the tragic question he heard in that silence.

'This is apoplexy,' said Davenire. He felt Benson's pulse. 'Dead as dog's meat,' said he, standing erect.

Masters pulled off the old man's hat. 'Here, Davenire,' said he, 'give us a hand to help him into his cot.'

Between them they raised the body as though it had been a pillow, and when it was abed it was out of sight.

'I'll tell you just how it happened,' said Trollope. 'I made a dash for his cabin, not knowing whether he had arms or not. I whipped open the door, and found him with his legs over the edge of the cot. I dare say he'd been aroused by the cry on deck and was getting up. When he saw me he roared out, "What do you mean by this? What do you want here? Get out of my cabin, you scoundrel. Where's Mr. Matthews? What—what——," and, half choking, he dropped from his cot and ran for his hat, which he put on, and then he began to struggle into his coat, whilst he made mouths at me. Such a nightmare of a face! I never heard so hollow and frightful a voice, never saw the colour of the flesh change as his. "We've seized this ship," said I, letting him see that I was armed, "though, poor little chap"—he went on speaking slowly with a melancholy glance at the cot—'small need for firearms when it's for a man to deal with the like of *his* snow-crowned inches. "We've seized the ship," I said, "and I guess we've simply done what you've been expecting. Now, Captain Benson, you shall have good treatment," said I, and I was going on when the sight of him stopped me; he took his throat in his hands and fell as if shot through the heart, breathing with a horrible noise. It did not last long. I lifted his head; then, seeing he was dying or dead, put him down again on his hat; and so you have it,' said Captain Trollope, pulling his moustache and again looking at the cot.

Davenire stepped to the side of the body and gazed at the face; he looked at it for a minute or longer, as though he brought a professional eye to bear.

'Oh, yes,' said he, wheeling round; 'Captain Benson will command no more ships in this world. The worst of these old hearts of fire is, they never will take their discipline kindly.'

CHAPTER XIV

THE FLOATING BODY

IN these same seas in which the *Queen* was sailing, in the year, in the month—nay, in the week in which that barque had been seized, a motherly, lubberly, old black brig was flapping and rolling along at the grey of day. She stole out in all her fat and homely proportions as the light grew, brightening upon her and sheeting the sea to her tall, black beam in a pale tremble of mackerel gleams and bright slate out of the far north-east. No beauty was she, yet as good as a line-of-battle ship for a drifting boat to fall in with; and this thought was in the mind of the mate, Mr. Hardy, as he stood at the starboard rail abreast of the little binnacle-box, and with folded arms surveyed the scene of ocean slowly opening to its most desolate recesses.

Mr. Hardy was a stout, short man, with an incomparable leering blue eye; his eyes leered, but he knew it not, and the effect was good when his business was solemn. He had the face of the born comedian—arch, dry, the whole fabric of the lineaments set slightly awry; he was burnt up by the sun, and his nose was so coated with adhesive membrane that, as the light broadened, the feature gleamed towards the rising sun as though it were sheathed in a purse of coating of finely wrought mail. He was wrapped up in a weather-bronzed monkey-jacket, and his head was protected by a round hat of colonial invention. His trousers, tight at the hips, fell like the mouth of a church bell to his feet, which were cased in shoes decorated with bows or rosettes. A sea-dog! Rubicund with the grog blossom, but a bit of a sea-dandy too, for perhaps no man afloat in that year of our salvation would have deliberately bought himself a pair of shoes with bows and gone to sea to stand fine-weather watches in them.

No sooner had the shadow of the earth rolled off the north-east corner of the deep than a whistle thrilled along the decks of the little ship, and in a minute or two a dozen of livelies, variously attired, tumbled up and tumbled along to receive the bucket and the scrubbing-brush, whilst the head pump rang through the drowsy morning air to the grip of the nimble hero who had sprung to it. But not all the

scrubbing-brushes then at sea, nor the many tons of holystone cruising about the world, could have whitened those decks, or made that little brig look sweet and young. She had very high bulwarks, painted green inside, but the green was faded, it was starry and cracked with the blisters of heat; she had a little caboose painted white, and whilst Mr. Hardy watched, the chimney of that mimic kitchen poured forth smoke. She had two lubberly jolly-boats, chocked under wooden davits—they were all of one family. Very strong, indeed, was their resemblance to their mother, and the old woman carried them as if she was often thinking of them. Aft the galley was stowed a fine whaling-boat. Right amidships betwixt the little old-fashioned binnacle-stand, and the low, flat, half-smothered skylight, stood a nine-pounder cannon securely seized to ringbolts. But aloft all was well; the invited eye was pleased; the sails were white and shapely, the masts carefully stayed, the standing rigging well set up, the ratlines ruling the shrouds as though newly placed. In short, you could not look long aloft without suspecting that some gentleman who had seen service in the Royal Navy might possibly be within earshot.

Strange that such an idea should occur, for that gentleman was not only close to, but actually coming on deck at that moment, and as Mr. Hardy took a step forward to obtain a critical view of the fore-royal, whose halliards, he was thinking, wanted another small pull now that daylight disclosed the brig, there emerged stooping through the shabby companion hood just before the gun, a hearty figure of a stouter bulk than Mr. Hardy, dressed in a naval cap, a suit of dunnagee, and a check shirt.

This person was Commander Boldock, R.N., a man with a huge face of scarlet flesh, in the midst of which sparkled two good-humoured grey eyes. His head was disproportioned; it belonged to a giant; his mouth, his teeth, his ears, whatever grew above his throat liliputianised the rest of him. His friends feared that he had water on the brain. The ill-natured, however, called it whisky and water. It was sure you saw by his hue at once that he loved his drop, and indeed this very morning you might swear that he had brought it with him out of his cabin, since the instant his immense face, brilliant with sweat, showed itself above the companion way, a faint scent of rum entered the light breeze and blew over the rail to leeward.

When he was on deck he returned Mr. Hardy's salute, then looked aloft at the spread of sail, then round upon the sea, then took a survey of the man at the little wheel, and, stepping over to Mr. Hardy, exclaimed in a hoarse deep voice that seemed to perpetually complain with an odd note of remonstrance :

'Light airs, light airs, nothing but light airs in these heavens.'

'And I don't see any more wind in sight,' said Mr. Hardy, leering at the weather horizon.

Commander Boldock, setting his legs apart, locked his hands behind him, and gazed at the little brig, and at the scene of 'washing down decks.' Presently he exclaimed, 'Mr. Hardy !'

'Sir.'

'How absurd to call this brig the *Wellesley* !'

'Ah, indeed,' said Mr. Hardy, with a dry leer at the hull.

'But as ashore, so at sea,' continued the commander, hoarsely and deeply. 'The lower you look the more high-falutin' you find 'em. When Queen Victoria—may Heaven bless her !'—the commander turned his face up to the main truck—'came to the throne, every cook-wench gave her brat the sovereign's name. Mr. Hardy, could you send your linen to wash to a woman who'd been christened Victoria ?'

'Do you put it as a question of the respect that's owing, without regard to the party's capacity of getting up linen ?'

'I was talking of this brig,' said the commander stiffly in his deep remonstrant note. 'Why should they have called her the *Wellesley* when they had their choice in *Ann*, and *Jane*, and *Susan* ?'

'What's that out there, sir ?' interrupted Mr. Hardy, peering and leering on a sudden over the edge of the taff rail at the sea on the weather bow, where the water was flowing with a look of blue silk shot with the morning lights.

The commander went to the rail and likewise peered and stared ; he caught the object in a breath—whisky or no whiskey, Boldock rolled the vision of a hawk in his sockets—and fell a-dodging it under the sharp of his hand.

'Why,' says he, after a minute or two, 'I do believe—I do believe—' then breaking off, 'Mr. Hardy, be so good as to hand me the glass.'

The mate unshipped a heavy long brass telescope off its brackets under the companion hood, and bore it with both

hands to the commander, who laid it like a piece of artillery upon the rail, and put his eye to it as though sighting some object he meant to destroy. He looked, puffed, removed his eye and dried it, looked again, and then cried out:

‘Why, by heavens, Mr. Hardy, it’s the body of a woman, and a white woman! And she appears to be gagged—what can that be over her mouth?’ He looked again. ‘Her hair is floating out from her head like ink from a galled cuttle-fish. Look for yourself.’

And whilst Mr. Hardy was looking, Commander Boldock told the man at the wheel to put his helm over so as to bring the object almost directly ahead.

‘Eh, Mr. Hardy!’ he exclaimed in his deep-sea voice, ‘Isn’t she a woman? Isn’t she white? Don’t she look alive?’

‘She positively breathes—but it’s the motion of the sea,’ answered Mr. Hardy, keeping his eye glued to the glass.

‘We’ll make a little call yonder and ask a few questions,’ said the commander. ‘Let the men knock off washing down. Stand by to back your main-topsail, and swing that starboard boat there over the side.’

The brig slowly drove down, and all the people who could see over the side kept their eyes fastened upon the floating object. It was strange to meet such a sight as that upon the wide sea hundreds of miles from land.

‘It’s a dead body,’ said Mr. Hardy. ‘A person must be dead to float.’

‘In 1832,’ said Commander Boldock, ‘when I was second of the *Venus*, we picked up a man off the Cape of Good Hope. He was alive and had been overboard two days, and in all that while he had floated on nothing but his own carcass. We afterwards proved the truth of his story by finding his ship in Table Bay. . . .’

‘It was wonderful,’ said Mr. Hardy, looking at the body on the sea.

Now came silence, which was presently broken by Commander Boldock ordering the topsail to be laid aback. The brig came to a halt, rolling clumsily upon the subtle under-swell of that beautiful morning ocean. By this time one of the plump quarter-boats had been lifted out of her chocks, and now dangled ready for lowering at the ends of her immensely thick wooden davits. A boat’s crew stood by; Commander Boldock and Mr. Hardy gazed over the side.

The body, as the long brass telescope had before determined, was a female's; and a very fine figure of a woman the commander thought it looked, as it slightly rose and fell with the light azure wrinkles of the water trembling in sobs to it. The loose arms waved with the motion of the water, as though that mid-ocean sleeper appealed for peace or help. The dark hair clouded off in a soft gloomy mass close under the blue surface. A gag of some sort concealed the mouth.

'I don't know that she can be alive,' said the commander, in his hoarse, deep, remonstrating voice, 'with that thing tied round her breathing apparatus.'

'Maybe her nostrils ride clear,' said Mr. Hardy, leering.

'Then go and bring her aboard,' said the commander, 'she shall have a chance for her life, and if she's dead we will bury her decently.'

The boat sank, the oars flashed, in a minute or two Mr. Hardy was alongside the floating woman. They used extreme caution, guessing that a tap from an oar or a sea put in motion by the boat might sink the body. Two sailors leaned over, and the lubberly tub of a boat leaned too, with a pretty sparkle of her bilge to the sun, as she raised it wet with the brine.

Grasping the body with their fish-hooks of fingers, the Jacks tossed it aboard soaking and streaming like a thunder shower. It was then laid in the stern sheets, and the boat made for the brig. Whilst this was doing, Mr. Hardy pulled out a sharp clasp-knife, and cut away the gag. She had good features, but she was ghastly to horror's own degree in that searching light, owing to the eyeballs showing like slips of china betwixt the lids, and to the lips being almost pale as the cheeks through compression of the ligature. The apparel was very scanty, consisting, so far as Mr. Hardy could make out, of a dressing-gown over a flannel petticoat, and a woman's ordinary night-clothes. Her feet were naked—very pretty little feet they were, Mr. Hardy thought; doubtless they had been slippers when the poor creature, for some murderous motive or other, had been sent adrift.

'It looks to me,' exclaimed Mr. Hardy, gazing up at the commander, whose immense roasted face, overhanging the rail, was reflected in the smooth water as though it had been the moon, 'as if there had been some piratical business on hand down here, sir.'

'Bring her aboard—bring her aboard!' exclaimed the

commander, stiffening his figure and sending a look round the ocean with a man-of-war's man's sniff. In fact the mere *thought* of it whipped fifty new pulses into his sturdy shape.

They unshipped the gangway, and with that sort of reverence which good sailors will exhibit towards the dead (and more particularly towards those of the dead who might have been mothers, wives, sisters, and sweethearts in this world), a few of the Jacks of the brig *Wellesley* handed the body aft, and with pains and patience down the narrow companion ladder.

'Trim sail, Mr. Hardy,' said Commander Boldock; 'then come below and let me have your opinion.'

The cabin of the *Wellesley* was worthy of her. It was dim and faded; it was like the back parlour of some old-fashioned London coffee-house; not hard to people with marine ghosts; indeed, they grew upon the eye of imagination as one looked, being alone in that little cabin with no sound to disturb one but the murmur of water outside and the squeak of a rat in the depths. Phantom salts in pigtailed and round hats would take their seats at that short black oak table agleam with use. They murmured tales in ghost-like voices of the vanished past; they rebuilt the old East Indian to the vision, and she floated large, lofty, and shining; they recalled the hurricane chorus of the fore-castle Saturday night, and they made you ask with Wordsworth, 'Where is it now, the glory and the dream?'

Two middling-sized cabins were seated under the wheel. The body of the woman was carried into the port cabin, the starboard berth being the commander's, and very tenderly laid upon a locker. The men who had brought her below stood off whilst Commander Boldock drew close to peer into the face that looked cold and hard as granite.

'This seems a case of murder,' said the commander, apparently thinking aloud.

'Beg pardon, your honour,' said one of the seamen, touching his forehead, a homely, middle-aged, good-natured sailor with a Limehouse look and a hand of yellow oakum dangling at his chin, 'that body's not been long in the water.'

'How do you know?' said the commander, whipping his great face round upon him sharp and eager.

'I'll swear it by the colour of the skin, sir.'

'Would you think she's alive, then, Adams?' said the commander.

'Yes, sir.'

‘What should be done, then?’ said Boldock complainingly. ‘If you have any knowledge of this sort of thing, turn to. I’d not have her die upon our hands after saving her life.’

The shoes and bell-shaped legs of Mr. Hardy fluttered in the companion-way, and down came the whole man.

‘Adams thinks she may be alive,’ said the commander.

‘She’s got to be dried and wrapped in blankets first of all,’ said Mr. Hardy, after taking a short but earnest view of the face, ‘and then artificial respiration might be attempted. What d’ye say, Adams?’

‘That’s it, sir. And perhaps a spoonful of rum to lie at the back of the throat wouldn’t hurt.’

‘Then heave ahead,’ said Commander Boldock.

It seemed a hopeless undertaking, but these bronzed and blunted children of the brine knew very well with Horatio Nelson that at sea nothing is impossible and nothing improbable—a maxim that should ever be the philosophy of British sea affairs. Commander Boldock looked on; Mr. Hardy and Adams did the work. They stripped to their shirts, for it was mighty hot in that little cabin, and first they dried her, and they then wrapped her up in a blanket, and then they got Adams’s prescription of rum betwixt her lips, and proceeded to artificially inflate the lungs. They rolled her on this side, then on that, then over, then back again. Adams seemed to know his business.

‘It might take two hours,’ said Mr. Hardy, with the sweat running like tears down his face.

‘Keep all on,’ said Commander Boldock, deeply interested; ‘I wish I could fist her as you do. I’ll tell you what, Mr. Hardy—under the good God’s eye we’ll warp her back to the mooring buoy she’s been cut from. The longer you live, the more you’ll find the miraculous in everything, for if that lady wasn’t floating in our course expressly to be picked up that breath might be kneaded into her, what was it doing in our road?’

‘She ain’t dead,’ said Adams.

‘I believe the man’s right, sir,’ said Mr. Hardy as he gently drove the body towards the bulkheads for Adams to drive back again.

‘If she comes to, it’ll be the gag that saved her life, sir,’ said Adams, feeling himself entitled under the circumstances to be loquacious; ‘it stopped the water from flowing into her mouth.’

‘Hard to realise a live body floating, though, all the same,’ said Mr. Hardy, letting go a minute to wipe his face.

‘She looks fresh,’ exclaimed the commander.

‘That’s my meaning, sir,’ said Adams, ‘I’ll swear by her colour she ain’t been more than four or five hours overboard.’

‘What she belongs to may be in sight,’ exclaimed the commander. ‘Don’t let go of her, Hardy,’ he continued, in his deep remonstrating voice, ‘until you’re both cocksure it’s all up. I’d like to hear her yarn, too; and what happiness to restore so pleasing a figure to this theatre of life! I’ll look in on ye again soon.’

He went out and trudged up the steps.

‘Jump aloft a hand, and report anything in sight,’ he called out.

A man sprang into the fore-shrouds, and as nimbly as though he had been hoisted with a run gained the royal yard, and stood holding by the truck carefully sweeping the sea. His white trousers trembled against the blue, and the figure all that way up looked like a toy sailor, something clean and brightly painted out of a box, just the object for a boy to fix in the stern sheets of his little boat; yet a real man’s deep bass voice floated down from the height after a few minutes, during which the diminished shape had been strenuously eyed by Commander Boldock. ‘Nothing in sight!’ Those high-perched eyes had sunk deep beyond the sensible horizon of the deck, and there was nothing in sight. The little brig was stemming quietly in the heart of the mighty Pacific solitude, the only object afloat perhaps for hundreds of leagues. The man stayed on the yard, and sought the remote liquid confines again for any gleam of star-like canvas that he might cast a light of satisfaction on that large bland moon of red face that continued upturned at him upon the quarter-deck. To no purpose. There was nothing in sight, and so down he came on the royal backstay, enlarging as he grew like a descending lark out of the speck it makes till he leapt, a man to the eye, off the bulwark rail.

Where the dickens, thought the commander, has that body come from? How long has it been in the water? Why was she gagged?

He took a number of turns upon his quarter-deck, deeply musing. Presently the scent of fried ham penetrated his nose, and the steward came out of the little galley bearing the cabin breakfast.

‘Send the bo’sun aft,’ called the commander.

A short man with strong whiskers and a whistle hanging at his neck came briskly from the fore-castle.

‘Watch the brig, Mr. Stubbins, will you?’ said the commander, in tones as though he were remonstrating with the man, ‘whilst Mr. Hardy tries to roll the breath of life into the body below. Do you know anything about the treatment of the drowned?’

‘When a man’s picked up drowned,’ said the botswain, who was very thick of speech, looking askant at his captain as though he suspected one more dry joke in this voyage, ‘ain’t it the treatment to bury him?’

‘It is clear you never walked the hospitals,’ said the captain.

‘Ay, sir, as a hout-door patient.’

‘Watch the brig if you please, Mr. Stubbins,’ and the commander went below.

It was hot in the cabin: the little yawn of skylight fetched no air in, the windows were scuttles of the diameter of a saucer. The commander found the atmosphere a little oppressive when he got to the bottom of the ladder; not perhaps because of the temperature, to which he was used, nor because of the heat, that seemed to be increased by the strong smell of fried bacon, but because of the adjacency of a body which might be dead. Even sailors know moments of squeamishness. Jack, spite of the harness cask and the bread barge, enjoys his qualms at long intervals as well as another.

The commander turned his back upon the breakfast table, and looked into the cabin where the body lay. The two men were at that instant bending over the woman with uplifted hands, in attitudes of rapt and ravished attention. A sound as of a sigh, very delicate and faint, reached Boldock’s ears. Good heavens! could it be the utterance of the brig strained by some passing swell, or——

Mr. Hardy turned, saw the commander, and exclaimed in a heavy whisper, ‘She’s breathing.’

Very slow was this return to life, and the bacon had long turned pale in the cabin before the nameless figure lay an unconscious but restfully breathing woman. It was not their man-handling that did it; it was wonderful, indeed, that the trembling flame of life had not been promptly extinguished by Mr. Hardy’s and the seaman’s well-meaning thrusts and

heave-hos and kneadings. Commander Boldock thought he understood how it happened she was alive.

‘In fact, Mr. Hardy,’ said he, whilst the three stood beside the bunk looking at the woman, ‘she never could have been drowned.’

‘So it should seem, sir,’ said Mr. Hardy, a little weak in the voice with his long and splendid labour.

‘This gag saved her life,’ said the commander, taking the thing off a locker and examining it. ‘It was made with devilish cunning. Look here at this amidship knob for filling the mouth. What’s the stuff? I believe it is formed of a couple of pocket-handkerchiefs stitched together. Yes, by George!’ continued the commander, turning the thing about. ‘And see here, Hardy!’ he exclaimed in a cry deep with excitement; ‘a name, man, a name! What is it?’

They peered together, Adams alongside looking on, and the woman breathing quietly, though you could *hear* her in that pause.

It was easy to read—‘Dike Caldwell.’

‘We’ll dry this gag, and carefully put it away as evidence,’ said Boldock. ‘It may help us to hang a man who is too wicked to exist in a world in which sailors live.’

‘Straordinary to me, sir,’ said Adams, ‘aving her ’ands free, she didn’t try and tear off the gag; the struggle ’ud have sunk her.’

‘Proof positive,’ said the commander, ‘that she was in a swoon when she was launched. She’s a fine-looking young woman, upon my word.’

He stepped close to the bunk and looked at her. The blood was beginning just a little to tincture the white lips, but their colour was still ghastly. Her eyes, however, had come to their bearings. The fringes were apart, and the sleeper seemed to look through them. The balls of vision were clear and bright. The mass of wet rags of hair streamed off from her head upon the bolster and blanket.

‘Upon my word,’ exclaimed Boldock, turning to the two men, his large sun-coloured face beaming with heart-felt satisfaction, ‘I would not have missed having had a hand in this job for all the pay I am going to get till I die.’

CHAPTER XV

MISS MANSEL'S STORY

AT three o'clock on the afternoon of the day on which the brig had fallen in with the body of the young woman, Captain Boldock was pacing the deck alone, frequently pausing, however, to direct a glance at the cabin through the skylight. The brig swam very slowly over the sea. Out upon the ocean the silence was wonderful, and the distance to the clear glass-like line seemed as far as all the way to heaven. Every time the *Wellesley* curtseyed the large white letters on her stern struck like lines of light into the space of smooth water, her haunches polished with their blows. You might have read her name in the water by looking over the stern. Commander Boldock watched the horizon rise and fall past the hairy face of the man at the wheel; he listened to the cannonading of the canvas aloft; he gazed moodily round the sea: he then made a step to the companion hatch, intending to descend, but was stopped by Mr. Hardy's figure rising.

'Well?' said the commander.

'She has taken the broth and the sherry, sir, and I believe she will do,' exclaimed Mr. Hardy.

'Is she rational?'

'Quite, sir.'

'Lor' bless me! And how does she talk?'

'As a lady.'

'Questioned her at all, Mr. Hardy?'

'Wouldn't take the liberty of doing it, sir. Left that to you.'

'Is she strong enough to support a conversation, do you think?'

'There could be no harm, perhaps, in trying it,' answered Mr. Hardy doubtfully. 'She's a deal bewildered, of course, as is natural.'

'I suppose she wouldn't object to my looking in on her?' said Boldock, with an expression of natural modesty improving his wide face.

'Poor thing! What's she to do? It can't be helped,' said Mr. Hardy. 'Of course she'd be glad if her hair was done up, and feel easier if she was properly dressed.'

How she is to be clothed,' he continued, 'supposing she lives, has been bothering me, sir.'

'What are her things?' inquired Boldock.

'A sort of dressing-gown that, when dried, may make a kind of dress, and what they call a flannel petticoat,' said Hardy, looking with his leer at the commander.

'I know what that is,' said Boldock. 'It is a good, serviceable garment for females. She'll have to make shift somehow. We must hope to speak something with a woman aboard. I'll go and see her,' he said, in his deep, complaining voice.

He descended with courage to the cabin, but when there his heart a little failed him. He was a bachelor. He had spent the greater part of his life at sea, knew little of women and their ways, and was nervous in their company. He made a slow step or two to the door of the cabin in which the girl lay, and looked in, and started on meeting the gaze of a pair of large black eyes. The girl was now so far recovered as to look a pale but living, intelligent, good-looking young woman, different widely from the white-lipped body they had rolled into life that morning. She was wrapped in blankets, and nothing was visible but her head, which rested upon a bolster. Mr. Hardy had tried to dry her hair, but to little purpose. It was still clotted with brine, and snaked in large, gluey tresses about her shoulders. Commander Boldock bowed, and the girl smiled, exposing a very good set of teeth.

'I am the commander of this brig, madam,' said he; 'my name is Boldock—Commander Boldock, of the Royal Navy. I have ventured to look in upon you to see how you are.'

'I am better and stronger, and shall feel quite well tomorrow, I am sure,' answered the girl.

'So! You are English? I like to know that we have saved the life of a fellow-countrywoman,' said Boldock, sitting down on a locker. 'You have been very miraculously preserved.'

'It is a dream,' said the girl, in little more than a whisper, rolling up her eyes.

'Can you recollect how it was, or why it was, that you were floating in the sea gagged?'

'Oh, yes! I have a perfect recollection,' answered the lady, letting her eyes fall from their upturned look to heaven, and fastening them upon Boldock's face. 'I have a perfect recollection,' she repeated, with a countenance of horror. 'It

was dreadful, merciless, monstrous—shall I tell you the story?’

Her emotion started the blood, and her cheeks got a little colour.

‘Not unless you feel equal to the job,’ said the commander.

‘But will you first tell me what ship this is, where I am, what part of the world we are in?’

‘You are on board the surveying brig *Wellesley*, a colonial vessel. She belongs to Sydney, and is the property of the Government,’ said the commander, ‘and I am in charge of her. We are bound,’ he continued in his deep voice, speaking as though feeling more and more aggrieved, ‘on a surveying expedition. We want to determine the place of certain shoals and a line of coral reefs that’s brought up more than one ship all standing. We are at present in the South Pacific, about a fortnight’s sail from Sydney.’

She listened eagerly, the intellect so brightening in her vision that when he was done, her fine dark eyes glowed upon him.

‘My name is Margaret Mansel,’ she began. Boldock bowed. ‘I am a governess, and went to Australia two years ago to seek a living, but could do no good for myself, so I sailed a week or two since for England in a ship called the *Queen*.’

‘A barque,’ said the commander. ‘Benson’s her master. I know them both.’

‘Among the passengers,’ said Miss Mansel, speaking in a low level voice, as though nursing her small strength of lungs, perhaps constrained to that leisurely measure of speech by the sense of being bound up with nothing showing but her head, for the human voice will flatten when the arms are helpless, ‘were ten men. They formed the greater proportion of the people the *Queen* carried in the cuddy. They were a mysterious lot, and from the hour of my first sitting with them at table, overhearing them and observing them, I distrusted them. It was always in my head that they had come on board as a gang—I could not imagine their motives. I understood that the captain suspected them, but could bring nothing home. One was a surly, brutal-looking man. His name was Dike Caldwell.’

‘Ha!’ exclaimed the commander, in a voice that rose from the depth of his soul.

'Why do you cry out?' asked Miss Mansel, trying to lift her head.

'Pray proceed,' said Boldock.

'Another was Mr. Mark Davenire,' the girl went on: 'a huge, dangerous-looking man. I fancy that the person they called Captain Trollope was the head of the company, but never could make sure, never could pick up any hint or catch any look to suggest an idea. They were very cautious, seemed not to know each other at first, walked and talked in couples, and their conversation at the table was all about nothing at all. One night the arms-chest was broken open, and all the arms stolen.'

'Oho!' said the commander, opening his eyes with such a sudden fiery sniff of his nostrils as rounded them almost to the ridiculous fancy of the grinning lips of a pair of carronades.

'We were all very much alarmed,' continued Miss Mansel, 'and the captain in the morning ordered the cabins to be searched. But no arms were found. The cabins of the ten men were ransacked, and the men themselves assisted, shouting with laughter, elbowing the two officers, and finding nothing but fun and horseplay in the serious business.'

The commander broke into her speech with a low whistle, whilst he bestowed upon her a train of significant nods.

'Is it not an extraordinary story?' said Miss Mansel.

'It promises to be the most extraordinary that ever was heard of at sea,' answered Boldock.

The young lady smiled wanly, but did not continue to speak.

'Don't distress yourself,' said Boldock; 'I will return in a minute, madam.'

He rose with his enflamed face full of good-natured sailorly concern, and stepping into the cabin drew a bottle of Madeira from a locker, and filled a wine-glass. He returned and presented it to the young lady, who, however, as may be supposed, was in no condition to release her arms. Boldock, swaying on his legs with the full wine-glass poised in his fist, gazed with embarrassment at Miss Mansel, who bit her lip and flushed deep with the sense of her state, scarcely knowing what to do with her eyes.

'There's but one way—if you'll permit me,' said Commander Boldock, and sinking upon his knees, he passed his arm with affecting tenderness under her head and wet hair, thus raising her lips to the glass, and so she drank. The wine

gave her animation. Boldock resumed his seat on the locker, and Miss Mansel proceeded.

‘I think it must be last night—I cannot be sure indeed. Can you guess how long I had been in the water when you picked me up?’

‘Not very many hours,’ said the commander.

‘Then it might have been last night at about half-past nine or ten: it was a close night, very hot under the awning; I saw the large sail that hangs upon the middle mast slowly fanning down upon the lower deck, and thought I would go there for quiet and coolness. I sat down at the foot of the mast: all was in deep shadow. Whilst I sat in thought two men came to the other side of the mast, lighted their pipes, and began to talk. I knew them by their voices. One was Mr. Patrick Weston and the other Mr. Dike Caldwell. They talked low but clearly. They were a little heedless with drink, I fancy. What I heard astonished, terrified, turned me into stone. I gathered that one of the ten called Hankey had plundered the arms-chest when everybody was on deck looking at a burning ship, and dropped the weapons through the window, overboard. They talked of the *Queen* having three hundred thousand pounds’ worth of gold in her, and *then* I understood the meaning of the presence of the gang in the ship. They spoke of the man Captain Trollope as being in command, and Mr. Weston said he was sick of waiting, and wondered why the ship was not to be seized that night.’

Commander Boldock whistled softly, keeping time to the brief fluting of his lips with a spread of large square-ended fingers upon his stout round knees.

‘What happened to me afterwards,’ said Miss Mansel, closing her eyes in a visible straining of her mind, ‘has confused my memory, but what I learned from the talk I overheard was this: that there was a great treasure of gold in the ship, and that this gang of ten men were on board to seize her. Presently one called the attention of the other to the shooting stars; I got up and walked into the cuddy, and stood a moment or two at the table to consider what I should do. I was very frightened. I am a great coward. I feared if these men knew that I had their secret, they would murder me. I asked myself, shall I go and tell Captain Benson at once what I have overheard? And then I thought, if he should not believe me? Or if he should not take any steps that night, or if he should be helpless to deal with

the wretches on my evidence, still they might get hold of the ship and kill me, or horribly ill-use me out of malice and revenge. So I went into my cabin without being able to form any resolution, meaning to think over what I had heard and let the morning bring its own judgment. Did I do right? Was I reasonable, Captain Boldock? Is this how a frightened woman would act?'

'You should have gone straight to the captain,' said Boldock. 'It would have been his duty to protect you. Why shouldn't he have accepted your evidence? There was the robbery of the arms-chest; that alone would have justified him in acting upon what you had overheard.'

'They must have known I had listened,' said Miss Mansel.

'Looks like it, certainly,' exclaimed the commander, in a deep and stormy voice.

'I cannot guess what the hour was,' continued the young lady, growing white with memory, 'when I was startled by a light knocking upon my cabin door. I was wide awake, had been feverishly wide awake. The least sound sent a chill through me. All the time I was wondering whether the ship would be seized that night, and what I should do with my tremendous secret. When I heard that knocking I called out, "Who is it? What do you want?" and a voice answered, "I am Trickle, the ship's steward, miss. The captain wishes to see you immediately in his cabin." Somehow I instantly connected the summons with what I had overheard, never reflecting that Captain Benson could not know that I had the secret of the gang. I jumped out of bed. At that moment I heard a strange wailing noise upon the water. The porthole was open, the sound seemed infinitely distant. I wrapped myself up in a dressing-gown and opened the door, and was grasped by the throat and gagged. I can recollect being gagged and the miserable sensation of suffocation, but no more, until I woke to life here.'

Miss Mansel ceased.

'This,' said Commander Boldock, 'is the most astonishing thing that has ever happened in my time at sea.'

He was proceeding, when he observed that the lady's eyes were filled with tears, which ran down her cheeks. She turned her face to the ship's wall. Boldock's feeling heart immediately saw what was wanted, and going to his cabin he returned with a large clean pocket-handkerchief, which he placed upon the bolster.

'I will send your clothes to the galley,' said he, 'and they will be dried and ready for you to put on before the evening. We must then consider how we are to manage in the way of attire. I believe you are without shoes? There's a man forward shall make you a pair of canvas slippers.'

He bowed to her. She was sobbing at the ship's wall and too much affected to look round. Picking up the few garments the poor young lady had been brought aboard clothed in, Boldock stepped on deck, where he found Mr. Hardy walking in the sunshine, and the men forward getting their supper on the fore-castle, for now was come the first of the two dog-watches, the happy ocean holiday hours of the pipe, and the song, and the dance, when, if it be a golden evening such as this, the fiddle will strike five hundred motions into the caper-loving leg, and fetch songs of rich sentiment, but rarely songs of the sea, from the simple aforemast hearts.

After the dark cabin in which poor Miss Mansel lay, how heavenly bright did this brig seem to shine as she lazily shook her wings at the westering glory! Her likeness under her was as glorious as fine brass, and so symmetrical was all aloft, so clean cut, well set, taut, so lively now with the lights of the afternoon, that the eye found the beauty of the super-structure in the hull, and the squab waggon swam to her water-line graceful with the spirit of her airy heights.

When the commander rose through the companion hatch, the man at the wheel clenched his teeth to repress a grin, which nevertheless grew till his flesh was a mask of wrinkles, and his eyes glittered like dewdrops on a cobweb. He had caught sight of the garment which the humane commander had thrown over his arm. Why should he grin? Do ladies find anything to divert them in a waistcoat? It will be believed that Jack is artless, and that he will smile out of sheer simplicity at a lady's dressing-gown. Nothing of the sort. When yonder Jack goes forward there will be a noise of rude laughter, and the joke will go round.

'Here, Mr. Hardy,' said the commander in his deep lamenting voice, 'pray call a hand aft and let him take these things to the galley. They should be thoroughly dry in about an hour, hey! The lady is in sad need of them, sir.'

Mr. Hardy, after a respectful leer at his commander, bawled for a sailor. A man came along, took the clothes with a motionless face, and went forward.

'I have been listening to an extraordinary story,' said

Boldock, beginning to walk with the mate, and without further words he told his companion all he had heard.

Mr. Hardy's leer was profound with silent astonishment.

'Why, then,' cried he, when the commander was done, 'that'll be the barque with the great consignment of nuggets. She was to have sailed a week after we did: detained for want of men; the old story no doubt, sir. The lady won't have floated long, and the ship therefore can't be far off.'

'There is nothing in sight from the masthead,' said the commander.

'What an audacious—well, bless my heart!' exclaimed the mate, fetching a deep breath. 'Ten of 'em. I felt, sir, I felt that the finger of the pirate was in it when I saw that she was gagged.'

'When the young lady has wiped her tears and clothed herself,' said the commander, 'she may be able to give us some idea of the intentions of the scoundrels. Her memory's a little thick. I believe my memory would be thick had I been gagged, half-suffocated, and flung overboard.'

'You will find, sir,' said the mate thoughtfully, 'that the murderers carried her quickly to the main-chains, and dropped her lightly into the water that the splash of the body shouldn't be heard. Otherwise she was bound to go down, sir.'

'Quite likely,' sang the deep throat of the commander. 'If I can discover where the rogues intend to carry the ship, I'll give chase.'

Here he stopped short in his walk, turned sharply round, and stared with intensity at his one quarter-deck gun; he then faced about again, and seemed to consider the number and appearance of his crew. He laughed low and rubbed his hands.

'These are days of peace,' said he, 'but I fancy there's prize money to be got all the same. Three hundred thousand, I think she said! What should I say to a salvage benefaction of five thousand? whilst you, I dare say, would be able to control your temper if they offered you two.'

The mate's leer was arch with mirth; Commander Boldock was not often designedly funny. But then he was better than funny: he was good and kind. If he fell in with a plain, homely, intelligent officer like Mr. Hardy, he knew how to use him. Fortune had launched him on the wide heave of the Pacific in a little rolling brig, with one

mate and twelve men and a coloured cook; the stage of ship was too small, the theatre of ocean too vast for lofty airs, and that sort of isolation which Benson of the tall hat and curled legs called dignity; so Boldock made a messmate as well as a shipmate, a friend as well as a companion, of the leering, comic-fronted, hearty, yet gentle-spirited Mr. Hardy; they walked the deck together, they exchanged recollections, and thus they promised to make their excursion to and researches in longitude 157° W. and latitude 34° S. as agreeable as good sense can contrive things at sea.

'It is a pity,' said the commander, as he and Mr. Hardy resumed their walk, 'that the young lady was not more fully dressed. We must get a full note from her of this extraordinary piratical project, and then transfer her to the first vessel that passes.'

He faced the forecastle, and lifted his hand in beckoning gesture. Several men started from their lounging dog-watch postures.

'Johnson,' called the commander. The man came aft. 'Can't you make canvas shoes, Johnson?' said Boldock.

'Yes, sir.'

'I wish,' said the commander in his pleading, aggrieved way, 'that you'd make the young lady we've rescued a pair of shoes.'

'If I can get the size, sir, I'll turn to at once,' said the man.

'It will be impossible to get the size. Suppose you measure an imaginary boy.'

The man touched his forehead and was going. 'Stop,' said the commander, speaking as though he was much hurt. 'You're very smart with your needle, I believe? The lady will want a cover for her head. Suppose you turn to and make her a round canvas cap, like a Turkish cap.'

'If it comes to that, sir,' said Johnson, 'I'd undertake, with nothing else to do, to fit her out in three or four days.'

'What would you give her?' said the commander, whilst Mr. Hardy leered at the seaman with interest and curiosity.

'There's a quantity of light duck in the sail-locker, sir. She shall have a jacket and dress, and two under garments.'

'You were a tailor before you were a sailor, weren't ye?' said Mr. Hardy.

The man, with a grin, said, 'Ay, sir.'

'Use what duck you please, and go to work at once; and keep all your watches below till this little job's ended,' said the commander.

'I shall want to measure the lady, sir.'

'Ay, ay, but not for shoes. Let me have a pair of boy's shoes by to-morrow morning.'

'I'll do my best,' said the man, and went forward, grinning with high delight. He knew he would be tipped for this work, and have nothing to do but stitch, blow high, or blow low, sleeping all night in whilst his watch loafed under the stars, or ran to the braces and up to the mastheads in the wet.

Whilst the sun continued to sink north-west, filling the heavens and the sea with burning gold, and whilst the brig continued to break her sluggish way onward, with a crow-like flapping of her canvas, as though she drowsily flouted the warm light breath that wanted power to steady the sails, Boldock and his mate stumped the deck together, talking earnestly over the story that the girl had related. By-and-by, and the sun was then like a vast rayless target hung up in a corner of the sky, over the water that sank in a shaft of flame for leagues under him, the coloured cook came out of the little caboose with the lady's clothes. Mr. Hardy took them, felt over them, and finding them dry, descended into the cabin with them; and there he acted with gentleman-like delicacy. He pulled off his hat, neatly folded the clothes, then knocked. He was told to come in. The sun was almost gone; the light was very dull down here; as he could scarcely see after knocking and opening the door, he smartly trimmed and lighted a bull's-eye lamp, which he hung open upon a nail. This made plenty of light, and Mr. Hardy, giving the lady a bow, asked how she did.

'I am very much better. I believe I have slept. What have you there? oh! my clothes. Are they dry?'

'They are, miss,' said Mr. Hardy, and he politely placed the neatly folded heap at the bunk side.

Observing the poor lady's anxiety to be alone, Mr. Hardy gave her another bow, and said he would look in upon her again in half-an-hour with a pair of slippers belonging to himself. She asked for a number of little conveniences; towels, a hair-brush, and so forth. All these things he procured, much pleased with the brightness of her eyes as they reflected the bull's-eye, and the looks of animation in her face, to the very chin of which rose the blanket, completely mummifying her.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MATE'S BOAT

ALL night long aboard the brig a smart look-out was kept. Boldock was of opinion that the *Queen* was not above thirty or forty miles ahead of the *Wellesley*; she was right ahead, he conjectured, by the circumstance of the girl having floated in a bee-line to the brig's cutwater. He was of opinion with Mr. Hardy that when the ten men rose to seize the *Queen*—the piracy, they thought, might happen this same night—they would not find the field an easy walk; they might be worsted, in which case there would be loss of life more or less considerable, and Boldock, whose imagination was tolerably active, figured the *Queen* rounding up into the wind and lying all aback, helpless, Benson shot down, her mates dangerously wounded, and piratic passengers and seamen of the barque bleeding about the decks in dying agonies.

So a smart look-out was kept for any shadow of ship blotting the stars of the horizon of that fine night, for any blue or crimson ball of distress spangling the dusk with a sailing constellation. But nothing showed, and when the dawn broke the sea stretched a bare breast, fallow to the sulphur-light north-east.

'This is a nice little air of wind,' said Commander Boldock to Mr. Stubbins, the boatswain, who had relieved Mr. Hardy at four o'clock.

It was now bright morning, the sun strong, a sparkling curl of wave upon the sea, and a wonderful plenty of little clouds of an oyster-like form and shell-like in their tints, scaling off a light and fairy shadow of vapour, coating the south-east sky into the aspect of a coast. The boatswain was of the commander's opinion. The breeze was a nice little air. There was more of it a-coming, and here Mr. Stubbins, under the sharp of his hand, gazed severely at the south-east shadow as though he should say he had used the sea for some years and knew a thing or two, and there was no use in the weather trying it on with *him*.

'We are pretty well off for small arms, I think, Mr. Stubbins?' said the commander.

'The natives 'll find us well off enough, I dare say, sir,' answered the boatswain with a grin.

'About a dozen of muskets, I think, and twice that number of cutlasses?'

'That's about it, sir.'

'You might like to hear me tell an extraordinary story of the sea,' said the commander, in his deep and plaintive voice. 'All hands should have the news. It may engender some deviation. But if we can recover a noble ship, the lives of a number of passengers, and a little mountain of nuggets from the remorseless clutches of ten broken-down gentlemen whose ideas of humanity are exemplified by their conduct towards the lady whom we picked up yesterday morning, all hands of us, Mr. Stubbins, will deserve well of our country.'

He then gave the boatswain the story. Mr. Stubbins listened with a face dull with wonder, head hung, as he nudged by the commander's side, mouth open, eyes askew, lifting at the jolly, hot, flaming countenance beside him.

'It's about the rummiest rooking job as ever I've heard tell of,' said the boatswain. 'Passengaires too! Cuddy adoin' the forecastle work! My, now! If Jack don't mind his eye, he'll lose his reputation. Ten bush-nippers of a company and not a sailor of the ship in the job. Well, all I can say is, let Jack mind's eye.'

The commander uttered three or four 'ha-ha's' like deliveries through a speaking-trumpet.

'And it ain't known, I allow, where they're going to carry the ship to, sir, if they succeed in seizing her?' said Stubbins.

'The lady said she heard them speak of an island. They pronounced the name. Unhappily she cannot recollect it. Also she heard them speak of a brigantine and one Saunders. That's intelligible. The vessel will rendezvous off the island to receive the booty out of the ship, which the scoundrels will probably wreck.'

'It'll be a wonderful piece of orderin', sir,' said Mr. Stubbins after a pause; 'something proper to make a man thoughtful in his prayers, if so be it should happen that the young lady the men think drowned dead should be the hinstrument of delivering them into the hand of justice.'

'Here comes a little more wind, Mr. Stubbins,' said the commander, and as he spoke the brig, with a groan through the length of her old frame, leaned to a shriek of dry bright blast, which had whitened each long blue curl, till the whole

windward ocean was running in delicate lines of snow out of that tender far-off shadow of cloud. The commander and the boatswain stopped in their march, looking aloft, watching and waiting. The brig was clothed to her trucks, all plain sail was on her, studding sails she did not carry. She sank her fat bilge, lifting t'other with a wet green glare of sheathing to wind'ard, and the troubled water dazzled into foam all around her, streaming off astern in splendid masses, revolving, eddying, soaring, sinking, bursting off the bow in storming showers of crystal smoke, over which the sun flung bows of many colours.

'An old ocean sweeper, Mr. Stubbins,' said the commander, as he put his head over the rail. 'Here is the sputter of a line-of-battle ship flying through the thunders of the Bay, and a speed,' he continued, in his most mocking, complaining note, 'of really not more than six.'

The breeze blew a steady wind, which presently headed the vessel. The windward thickness rose and went to pieces in small cloud, and the ocean ran in a regular curl of surge. The boatswain held on with his royals, and the brig ploughed along with good way. A seaman sat in the fore-topmast cross-trees to report a sail, 'but bless my heart,' said the commander to Mr. Hardy, who came on deck at eight o'clock, 'what's this old waggon going to do in the wake of one of the nimblest fliers that ever slipped down the well-greased ways of a shipyard? We are doing six, and in this wind the *Queen* is doing twelve. Just the breeze for her mould of hull if they're still heading her off Hornwards.'

'If those ten men seize the barque, sir,' said Mr. Hardy, 'they'll surely not attempt to carry her round the Horn?'

'They'll make for that island whose name the young lady unhappily can't remember,' said the commander.

'In that case,' said Mr. Hardy, 'they may shift their helm and cross our hawse within hailing distance.'

'What good would that be?' exclaimed the commander. Mr. Hardy leered at the gun. 'A nine-pounder!' said Boldock, folding his arms, advancing one leg, and eyeing the gun in the attitude Napoleon the First is usually pictured in.

'Weight enough there to bring down a mast, sir,' said the mate.

'The *Queen's* a witch: she sails two feet to our one, man; it would be touch and away with her whilst you were trying to bring that piece to bear. Our only chance in that

way lies in blood having been shed aboard—in fact, Mr. Hardy, in the ship being thrown into confusion by the demon of carnage. She comes to a stand, head to wind, all shaking. In *that* condition we may hope to sight her; in none other.'

He took an earnest view of the sea ahead after speaking these words, crossing the deck four times to master the liquid distance spreading in a deep blue line from the springing bows; then hailing the crosstrees, and being answered by the man aloft that there was nothing in sight, he went below to breakfast.

It was a little before eleven o'clock the same morning when the sailors witnessed a sight novel indeed aboard the *Wellesley*. First of all Mr. Hardy came up the companion hatch hugging an old folding chair to his heart. He opened and set it down in the great rolling shadow cast by the trysail, then through the skylight received a couple of pillows, which he placed in the chair with ceremony, patting and smoothing them. A little later the figure of the commander uprose, backing and staggering as he assisted the young lady to mount the steps. She moved slowly. She was weak, and needed the help of his strong and gentle hand.

She came out of the hatch into the flying sunshine with a frown at the brilliance, but a smile that showed her white teeth as she drank in the liberal rush of wind that whistled in her pale lips. The sailors forward stared; they had seen her lifted out of the sea a drenched and streaming body, ghastly with its gag and black lines of brine-glued hair: and now they beheld a fine figure of a young woman, clad in crimson, with a rope of colours round her waist. Her hair was coiled down upon her head, and its abundance was manifest spite of the round white canvas cap that gave a new character to her eyes, enlarging them and deepening their soft, luminous glow.

Yet poor Miss Margaret Mansel looked exceedingly pale, and any one could have seen that she was fresh from a violent shock or a dangerous illness. She had been admired by some of the gentlemen on board the *Queen*, particularly by Mr. Masters. She was without beauty, but her features held a grace which brought them near to it. On board the *Queen* she had been chiefly admired for her pensive expression, her habitual down and thoughtful regard, so that the faint bloom on her cheeks was often shaded by the long lashes of the upper lids. They had also considered her teeth and figure unusually good, and her hair very fine.

She was tall, and stood up bravely, holding by the companion hatch, to the admiration of Mr. Hardy, when she had gained the deck, and Commander Boldock let go her hand.

'I feel now that I am alive indeed,' she said, as she looked aloft with a bright glance, and then smiled at Boldock.

'It is ladies' weather—very charming,' said the commander. 'Let me seat you.'

He led her to the folding chair, and Mr. Hardy laid a rug over her knees. She smiled with gratitude at both men.

'This is a little ship after the *Queen*,' said she. 'Where is this fine wind driving us?'

'We are bound to a part of the ocean where there are rocks and shoals, whose position is improperly shown on the charts. That done,' continued the commander, 'we shall proceed to survey certain islands. We then return to Sydney. We are at present off our course.'

'It will be hard upon me,' said Miss Mansel, 'to return to Sydney. I have no money. The little I had was in my box in the *Queen*. All that I possess in clothes, books, keepsakes, and other things, was in that ship. I suppose they are lost for ever.'

'We shall not allow such considerations to be a trouble to us,' said the commander stoutly, a brave smile making his wide sunset of face as engaging as if he were handsome, 'on so bright a day as this, and with the memory of your deliverance as green as yesterday morning can let it be.'

She hung her head, touched by the rebuke, and her eyes filled with tears. But this, fortunately for the commander's sensibility, he did not observe. He was gazing earnestly at the sea ahead.

'It would be a prodigious satisfaction,' said he, 'if you could recollect the name of the island. Was it——?' and he named a great number of the islands of the Polynesian groups, including reefs and barriers.

'It was that of a person—it was—it was——' She strained her memory with closed eyes, and then said, 'It will come.'

'The necessity for your remembering it,' said the commander, bowing and smiling with an air of fine old-world quarter-deck gallantry, 'will give me the best excuse in the world for keeping you on board the brig.'

She glanced at her dressing-gown, and looked with some confusion away.

'Why,' said he, reading her thoughts and beginning to strut up and down within easy chatting distance, 'if I could get hold of their place of rendezvous we might fall in with the *Queen* herself. Then all your property would be restored to you. We may presume there would be somebody on board fit to take charge of the vessel to England.'

'If those ten men seize the ship,' said the girl, 'what will they do with the passengers?'

'Hum!' said the commander, 'if we are to accept their manner of dealing with you as a specimen of their method and skill, then if those ten fellows have successfully risen, I would not give much for any lives in their power.'

'You don't think——' cried the girl with a shudder, and then stopping, whilst she looked up at him with eyes of dismay and horror, her figure half starting from its resting posture.

'I think it may end in your discovering,' said the commander with a smile, 'that you are the best off of them all.'

'There were several ladies.'

'You are a lady, but that did not seem to appeal to them,' said Boldock, in a deep lamenting voice.

'The wretches! to throw me into the sea gagged and almost choked. What had I done?'

Boldock paused in his walk, and stared at the ocean in silence. Miss Mansel's words had roused the spirit of roast beef in him; she saw his face hard with that spirit of England which no nation can resist at sea. It was the working, burning, triumphant face of the boarder who waits for the instant of collision to spring into the chains.

'I sincerely trust,' said he, breaking with a jerk of his head out of his fighting mood, 'that you will remember the name of the island, or that we shall fall in with the *Queen*. I have seen a few men hanged.'

His gaze went thoughtfully to his weather main yardarm, and there rested, as though he considered height and scope of fall. His sight was still aloft, when a cry from the fore-top-mast crossrees made him start.

'Sail ho!'

'Where away?' bawled Mr. Hardy, running forward and leering up.

'Broad on the lee bow,' answered the voice high in the song of the wind.

'I see her, sir,' thundered Boldock.

He lifted the immense brass telescope off its brackets, and

resting it on the rail took aim at the working breast of soft dark waters on the port bow.

'It is no ship,' said he in a minute, 'but a boat with a shoulder of mutton sail. One of the *Queen's* boats for a million. If so, the ten men have her, and where is she?'

He handed the glass to Mr. Hardy. The girl rose to look, and the commander, seeing she needed support, gave her his arm.

The sail showed like a flash of froth on the blue, coming and going in the melting white curls about it, but once got by the eye it was easily held; clearly a small open boat, within three or four miles, and already sliding abeam. The brig's helm was starboarded, the mainsail hauled up, royals and top-gallant sails clewed down, and so, slowly running before the wind under reduced canvas, the broad-bowed waggon surged to the boat, whose occupants were seen to consist of several men, one or another of whom continuously flourished an oar with something white attached to it.

The brig was throw up into the wind, the boat was cleverly sheered alongside, her sail melting into the bottom of her as she rounded, with a seaman in her bow stretching out his hands to catch the rope's-end.

Miss Mansel shrieked.

'It is Mr. Matthews!' she said to the commander. 'He is the chief mate of the *Queen*, and the men are five of the crew of the vessel.'

'Then the ten have stolen the ship,' said Boldock.

There was a smart wobble of sea on, and the boat danced friskily alongside. The sailors sprang into the main chains and clambered with the silent hurry of shipwrecked men over the rail, Mr. Matthews staying to call out to Commander Boldock, 'Will you take this boat, sir?'

'Ay, she is a good boat; we'll hoist her aboard.'

'There's plenty of provisions and some wines and spirits in her, sir,' sung up Mr. Matthews.

'We'll have them, we'll have them all. Pray come aboard.'

Mr. Matthews, with a pale, funereal countenance, watching his chance, got into the main chains, and, with the leisureliness which spirits sunk to the suicidal degree will sober the limbs to, made his way over the tall bulwarks.

Meanwhile the five seamen, observing Miss Mansel, had come to a halt, and were dodging and ducking at her as they shouldered one another in twenty inimitable postures.

'Smite me dark if it ain't she herself, Joe!' said Tom.

'No, no! she's too tall, she ain't got the other's colour,' muttered Joe; 'she's what they call her factotum, her identical.'

'It's the girl who was lost, bet your blooming boots,' exclaimed a third seaman of the *Queen*.

Mr. Matthews dropped laboriously on to the deck. Instantly Tom called out:

'There's Miss Mansel, sir.'

The mate was slowly walking aft to the commander when, hearing these words and seeing the lady, he halted as though withered by a lightning dart. Miss Mansel made an effort to approach the astonished man, exclaiming, 'It is I, indeed, Mr. Matthews—Miss Mansel—none other.'

'Well, I *am* bubbled!' whispered Mr. Matthews to himself, in one of the deepest breaths his lungs ever fetched, and he went straight up to her. 'It isn't your ghost then, hey!' he exclaimed, taking her hand with a half-note, almost comic, of blubbering in his voice. 'Well!' said he, so astounded that his eyes met in a squint as he looked at her. 'This, to be sure, is amongst the miracles. *You* here! 'Tis enough,' said he, turning upon the commander and letting go the girl's hand, 'to make the whole previous business feel like a nightmare, out of which the second mate's going to call me to stand my watch.'

'I am heartily sorry for you, sir,' said Boldock. 'Mr. Hardy, let the men get the stuff out of that boat, and hoist her aboard. Stow her forward. She is a good boat. And you will tell me that they have seized the *Queen*, sir?' said he, turning to Mr. Matthews.

'Rose upon us this morning and sent every mother's son adrift,' replied the mate, with a bewildered look at Miss Mansel. 'But *how* do you happen to be here?'

The young lady had sunk into a chair, and the commander and Mr. Matthews stood beside her.

'They called me from my cabin, caught me by my throat, gagged me, and dropped me into the sea,' answered the girl, beginning to tremble.

'Who did it?' said Matthews.

'I believe—I could not swear—it was Mr. Davenire and Mr. Caldwell.'

'We found her floating,' said the commander. 'Such

things have been heard of, but a jockey would call them top-weight amongst the preservations.'

'Oh, the rogues, the wretches, the accursed villains!' cried Mr. Matthews, turning an enraged face towards the sea over the bow.

'How long have you been adrift?' said the commander.

'Since five o'clock this morning.'

'Where are the others?' asked the girl.

'I don't know. We were four boats. Poole, who was to leeward, slacked his sheet and went away, and the others followed, thinking, I dare say, that he had a sail in sight. The boats can't be far off.'

When Boldock heard this he went below and returned with a binocular glass, which he gave to a man, who climbed with it on to the main-royal yard and searched the bright shivering waters in all directions, but he could see nothing to report.

'A boat is little, and the sea is big,' said Boldock. 'All the people may be aboard a vessel whose topmast cloths are just out of sight of that fellow up there, and which, therefore, has no more existence to us than anything lying or not lying in the River Thames at this moment.'

He spoke with his usual deep note of remonstrance, and Mr. Matthews looked at him.

'Did Captain Benson take charge of the ladies?' said Miss Mansel.

'He is dead,' said Mr. Matthews, with a sudden face of utter gloom.

'Murdered!' exclaimed the girl in a light gasp.

'Why, no, I believe not. I'm willing to give the demons the benefit of *that* doubt,' answered the mate. 'As I was stepping over the side, I asked where the captain was, and the fellow Trollope, who was standing in the gangway with the scoundrel Davenire, answered quietly, "He's dead." "Shot, I suppose?" I said, with a look at him. "I declare by my soul before God," cried Trollope, so savagely in earnest that his face blackened with the blood that rose into his head, "that when I told him we had seized his ship he dropped dead of a fit on his cabin floor." I believe him,' added Mr. Matthews. 'Benson was the man to go off so.'

'He had a full neck, and his veins ran in fire,' said Boldock. 'I knew him. A good sailor.'

His nostrils dilated with thought as he stood in silence

watching the proceedings on the main deck. Tackles had been got on the yardarms, the provisions and liquor had been handed out of the boat, which rose and sank alongside ready for hoisting.

'What are they going to do with the *Queen*, Mr. Matthews?' said Miss Mansel.

'I have no notion. The moment the last boat got away they trimmed sail with the smartness of old hands, and stood away about south-south-east.'

'She is scarcely out of sight,' said the commander, straining his vision into the compass-bearing named by the mate.

'She is a very fast ship, sir,' exclaimed Mr. Matthews, with a melancholy shake of his head. 'But what in the name of mercy was their object in thrwing you overboard?'

Miss Mansel told him the whole story. He listened with an air of heavy despondency, often sighing.

'It was the captain's fault,' he exclaimed, breaking out quickly with something of fever in his utterance. 'He had reason to suspect the ten men; his arms-chest had been robbed; the yowling of the midnight joker at the flying jibboom-end was, to suspicion, a good full hint of what was coming. Why didn't Captain Benson have them all seized? Never a man, never a passenger of the ship, but would have stood by him had they made a difficulty on the vessel's arrival.' He stamped his foot, and cried out, 'I have lost so much that I value, so much that I can never replace!'

'So have I!' said Miss Mansel.

He cast a despairful glance at her gown. Indeed, the poor fellow's heart was so full that Boldock wondered he did not cry. The commander never thought the less of a man for weeping. He belonged to a school of stern sea-dogs which made nothing of shedding tears. Who that has read can forget that when the iron-visaged sea-chieftains of Nelson's fleet met in one ship, with Collingwood at their head, to receive the admiral off Trafalgar, many of them shed tears, and amongst those who wept most freely was Nelson himself? Do you doubt this? You will find a full description of the pathetic scene in one of Nelson's letters to his Emma.

'Mr. Matthews,' said the courteous, deep-voiced commander, 'you are wearied. Pray step below and take some wine and rest;' and he led the way, first calling to Mr. Hardy to give an eye to Miss Mansel.

Mr. Matthews sank upon a locker and bowed his head in his hands.

'I am of opinion,' said the commander, after contemplating him for a moment or two, 'that a glass of bright red Jamaica would do you more good than wine.'

'I would thank you for it, sir,' said the mate, looking up.

Boldock went to his cabin and returned with a bottle, took two glasses from a rack, and into each poured a second mate's nip. Water was then added, but before the mate drank, he in a broken voice thanked the commander for receiving him and his men, and for the gentlemanly and handsome usage he was now giving him. The commander bowed and smiled, and drank the other's health, and leaned against a stanchion, poising his ruddy tumbler, which came and went in blood-red flashes in his hand as the swing of a sun-dart in the skylight struck it.

'My course,' said he, after a pause, 'won't, I expect, be the course of the boats. Your second mate seems to have gone away north. The utmost we can do, I think, is to keep the brig under easy sail, and watch for any signs of your people.'

'I am afraid there's very little chance of ever falling in with boats by following them in a great open sea like this,' said Mr. Matthews.

'And in a bulky old bottom like this,' said Boldock. 'Something under seven is about her handsomest, short of a hurricane of wind driving in fury over her stern.'

The mate looked slowly round the little old-fashioned interior. The noise of men singing out could be heard, the steady tramp of sailors walking away with a rope. Mr. Matthews asked several questions concerning the brig and her voyage. The commander drained his glass and put it down, and said in his deep lamenting voice; 'How was it, as chief officer, the captain being dead, that you weren't put in charge of the ladies?'

'We had thoughtless scoundrels to deal with, sir. They were armed with revolvers; they hurried us anyhow into the boats, which they had victualled and equipped. I had scarce time granted me to ask that question of Trollope about Captain Benson. We ought to have kept together. I was the last to leave, and found five seamen only in my boat. When I shoved off I saw Mr. Poole going away to leeward, the others in chase. They were a mile off then. My men said there was no use heading north. We had better stick to the track

of the Australian liners. I was nearly mad, sir, and had they thrown me overboard, I should have felt obliged to them.' He took a steady pull at his glass, and said a little vacantly, 'That's about it, sir.'

'Where can they intend to carry that ship?' said the commander, in a musing, lamenting voice. 'An island is in their scheme: the lady heard them name it. Unhappily, the name's gone clean out of her head. You say they went away to the south'ard?'

He again entered his berth, this time to fetch a chart of the waters they were afloat on. He spread it and pored upon it, the mate's nose drawing close to his flaming countenance as he too eagerly overhung the tracing.

'It might well be,' said the commander, standing erect, after a long look during which neither man had spoken, 'that the situation of this island is known only to those men. They will have given it a name, of course. Wilkes skipped a good deal, though no expedition was more admirably managed. I myself have charted two considerable reefs in the direct lines of Wilkes's navigation, where, according to him, all was blue water with no soundings.'

'My notion's this,' said Mr. Matthews. 'I thought of it whilst in the boat, and it's confirmed by what Miss Mansel overheard: they'll sail the *Queen* to some rock or island in a little-visited sea, and after getting the treasure ashore, they'll wreck the ship. Meanwhile, the brigantine they talked of will be in attendance or expected. If in attendance, I reckon they'll transfer the chests at once to her. There'll be jealousy and suspicion, and throats may be cut.' The commander rolled up his eyes hopefully. 'It is a vast sum,' continued the mate. 'Two hundred and eighty thousand pounds' worth of ore and dust. It sickens my soul to think of such a conspiracy, and we so blind—Benson so blind.'

He smote his forehead and struck his thighs, and gave way to many other gestures expressive of helpless wrath.

'I'll step on deck,' said Boldock, 'and see what my people are about. Meanwhile, I recommend you to lie down and sleep.'

CHAPTER XVII

THE WATCHES

THE *Queen*, heeled by the breeze, was slanting south close hauled ; on the far sea astern winked a tiny star of sail, one of the boats ; the others were out of sight. The hour was five bells in the morning, half-past six.

It was plain that the ten men had prearranged their duties, for as the ship washed onwards, her yards handsomely braced forwards, bowlines out, jib and staysail sheets well aft, everything suggesting the mariner's hand, you saw Mr. Walter Shannon in his shirt-sleeves at the wheel, hanging by the spokes in a sort of dodging posture, shooting quick looks out of his full eyes at the weather leeches ; the wake ran away from him straight as lines of railroad ; indeed, he steered well. Also you saw Captain Henry Trollope walking the weather side of the poop ; he paced as Captain Benson used to, but he lacked the skipper's nautical looks. He stepped like a sentry whose box stood by ; his large moustache and erect carriage gave him too military an air for the satisfactory equipment of a deck whose familiar occupant had rolled to and fro on Benson's curved legs, and dangled arms like empty sleeves. Also in the door of the galley you saw the figure of Mr. Peter Johnson calmly leaning. He conversed with Mr. Paul Hankey and Mr. Alexander Burn. He was stripped to his shirt, his sleeves were rolled above his elbows, smoke from the galley chimney blew merrily over the rail ; in a word, Mr. Peter Johnson was cook of the ship, and had already commenced his duties by lighting the galley fire, filling the coppers, and attending to the calls of the breakfast hour.

The great form of Mark Davenire stood under the break of the poop ; alongside him was the handsome, dissipated-looking, worn Mr. Sampson Masters. They constantly gazed aloft to judge if all was right with the sails, and their talk concerned the shining fabric towering in spires over their heads. On the forecastle were to be seen Mr. Dike Caldwell and Mr. Isaac Cavendish ; they trudged to and fro, often glancing in the direction of the star-like sail. Caldwell carried his hands deep set in his pockets, and made a surly figure as he stepped with his head slightly hung.

Whilst they trudged, Mr. Weston came out of the fore-

castle through the small hatch, and, calling across to Caldwell, 'I think those fellows below mean to give trouble,' walked aft, often looking up at the ship, and continuing so to gaze, as though the whole interest of the voyage now lay in the sails and rigging, till he gained the side of Trollope, with whom he entered into conversation.

On a sudden, up through the forecutter there sprang on to the forecutter the lively shape of Harry the Dane. He was followed by the slow man, William. Caldwell and his companion stopped when they saw these men. Harry looked at them for a moment or two, then aft, as though uncertain at which end of the ship to let fly the contents of his mind; he then roared out with several mutinous gestures:

'What's me and William been kep' aboard this ship for? I ask you two gents what's me and William been kep' for?'

'Because we want you,' said Mr. Caldwell, looking at him darkly.

'Ay, that's all right,' shouted Harry the Dane, 'that's your way of thinking. But I'm a respectable sailor, and so's William, and d'ye think we're to be converted into blooming pirates, with the sartinty of being hanged if e'er a man-o'-war should fall in with us, simply because you want us?'

'What's the matter?' bawled Captain Trollope, coming to the rail at the break of the poop.

'Here's this little sailor wants to give trouble,' Mr. Caldwell called back.

'There's more'n one, there's two,' cried William huskily to Captain Trollope, putting his hand to the side of his mouth. 'What have you kep' us on board this ship for? *We're* no blushen pirates. Why didn't yer let us go along with the rest?' he cried, with butting motions of his head at every word. 'Jer think I'm a-going to be hanged to please the likes of you?'

'By Peter, dat's it!' shrieked the Dane in an ecstasy of passion, bringing his hand with a wild sweep to the sheath-knife on his hip, whilst his little eyes flamed through their prog-webs at Mr. Caldwell.

'Lay aft!' shouted Captain Trollope; 'I can't talk all that way off.'

'Lay aft!' yelled Harry, flashing his looks along the deck to the poop. 'Who's *you* to tell us to lay aft?'

'Come along,' said William.

They went aft.

‘Step up,’ said Captain Trollope. ‘What’s the matter with you?’

‘We’re ’spectable sailors,’ said the Dane. ‘You want to make pirates of us. S’elp me Judas, if I’m going to be yard-armed ’cos it suits you to keep us!’

‘Look here, you two men,’ said Captain Trollope, frowning savagely at ’Arry; ‘I don’t know what you mean by talking of pirates and yard-arming.’ William sounded a harsh laugh deep in his throat. ‘But understand this: if you turn-to quietly and help us to navigate this ship, you shall be rewarded by a gift of gold out and away handsomer than your whole ship’s company would have taken up in money on their arrival. If, on the other hand, you give trouble, we will fire a bullet through each of your scurvy brains, and fling your scabby bodies overboard.’

‘There’s no mistake about that,’ said Mr. Weston.

Here Mr. Davenire and Mr. Masters came on to the poop.

‘You are forcing me against de law,’ said the Dane.

‘What do you know about the law,’ inquired Mr. Davenire, approaching him by a stride and towering over him. ‘Cut forward, you cuckoo, or I’ll break every bone in your body.’

Harry looked, and perhaps felt, like a stoned adder. He recoiled to the head of the ladder and stood ready to make a run for it. William said, husky and slow:

‘If we turn-to, will you give us a paper signed by the principals in this business, saying as how we was forced along with yer against our wishes?’

‘What are you afraid of?’ said Captain Trollope.

‘Of a man-o’-war,’ hissed ’Arry.

‘There’s no man-of-war down here,’ said Captain Trollope. ‘We shall be out of this ship in the inside of a fortnight, the booty distributed, and every man on his own hook—I hope.’

‘How much are we going to get out of the job?’ said William.

‘If it’s put so, I’m done,’ shouted the Dane. ‘Touching it ’ll be hanging. Gi’ me that paper William asks for, and I’ll work for you.’

‘You shall have it,’ said Captain Trollope, after a pause. ‘Now go forward and keep quiet, and do what you’re told. This is to be a laughter-loving ship. No groans are to be heard aboard the *Queen*.’

The Dane looked fierce. William dropped the corners of his mouth in a surly grin; both went forward and lay over

the windlass-end in earnest talk. Those who observed them seemed to think that William was trying to persuade 'Arry, and that 'Arry was endeavouring to convince William.

'They'll come to it,' said Trollope, swinging off in a walk abreast with three others.

'I never quite grasped your object in keeping them, Trollope,' said Masters.

'Oh, heavens!' groaned Davenire; 'how often has it been explained?'

'Not to me fully and sufficiently, anyhow,' said Masters, with a touch of defiance in his voice; 'somehow you beggars have always kept me on the skirts and fringe of you—me and Burn. You've secrets unknown to us.'

'That's so, by thunder!' said Davenire coldly, 'and so much the better for you, Masters.'

'See here, Masters,' said Captain Trollope, with a sidelong look at the young fellow, whose face was glowing with sudden temper, 'I thought you understood that if the brigantine isn't at the island when we arrive, we must anchor. A hundred causes may delay her. Now, something might come along and sight us, a whaler, a full-rigged passenger ship blown out of her course, an American man-of-war on a surveying expedition. We're not in a condition to invite questions, Sam. If the brigantine don't turn up sharp after our arrival, we must land the gold. Every man Jack 'll want to go ashore with it, I suppose. That was taken for granted. We're not sweethearts, you know. We don't trust one another body and soul.'

'Ha, ha!' laughed Weston.

'Ha, ha!' laughed Davenire.

'But the ship must be watched whilst we're all ashore, and so it was necessary to detain a couple of hands.'

'But after?' said Masters.

'You can't look into futurity, Sam,' said Davenire.

'If the brigantine don't turn up?' said Masters.

'We've got this ship and we've got this ship's longboat—look at her,' answered Trollope, pointing to the great carvel-built boat under the bows abaft the galley.

'But if you keep this ship anchored whilst you wait for the brigantine,' said Masters, 'the something that you don't want to come along may question you, and what then?'

'I say, Masters, what a cust short memory you've got,' said Weston. 'When our programme was drawn up, wasn't

it arranged that we should keep the ship till the brigantine showed, landing the gold to secure it, then weighing, but holding the island in view.'

'Yes, I remember,' said Masters.

'Drink has hollowed his head into an eggshell,' mumbled Davenire into Trollope's ear.

Trollope stopped and whistled. 'By George!' said he, 'we've forgotten old Benson.'

'No ceremony, I hope,' said Davenire.

'An old sailor—a gentle toss, and the song of the bubbles he makes shall be his requiem,' exclaimed Captain Trollope.

'A very pretty fancy,' said Mr. Weston. 'Shall we bury him in his hat?'

'And make a Quaker of a Churchman?' said Masters, who, speaking those words, paced off to the wheel and stood beside Shannon, looking at the card.

'A thundering pity,' said Davenire, 'that that young nipper was ever brought into it. He's got a heart. I believe he mourns for Miss Mansel. If betrayal be possible, expect it in him.'

'He'll not land where I do,' said Trollope. 'Davenire, see to getting the body over. Better shove through with that job before eating.'

Old Benson rested as they had left him. He slept well. Never more could he be vexed by head winds, by slow deliveries of cargo, by bad sailors, and, which used to affect his hard heart most violently, the loss of the least ribbon of sail, the flight of the least yarn of rope overboard, the robbery by a midnight hand of a simple cock or hen from the coops. He had been a mean man, he had saved with odious energy; not a few of his dollars had he got by cheating his sailors; he had been a foremast hand himself, well knew how hard and distressful was the life of the forecastle hand, and it was his favourite saying then that the man who ill-uses a sailor is no sailor himself. He tried to prove that notion ridiculous when he got aft, and he succeeded; for assuredly his Jacks suffered severely at his hands, though a better seaman never looked to windward.

There he lay, and in the corner of the cabin rested his hat, and close beside it his goloshes. Davenire, Hankey, and Weston entered the cabin. They stood looking at the ashen face, the white hair, the lifeless arms.

'There's no weather left there,' says Davenire. 'See his cheeks. He might have died a milkmaid.'

'How shall we shift him?' said Hankey, looking uncomfortable. 'I wish you hadn't called me to this job, Davenire.' He grasped one of his stiff black whiskers, as though to keep his head straight, turned suddenly of the colour of mottled soap, and ran out of the cabin.

'Yet he smiled when I named it,' said Davenire. 'He's left his liver in the bush. You and I will suffice. Let's roll him up as he lies.'

They were two very powerful men, and between them, with comparative ease and with no expression of disgust or dislike, they got the body on to the floor, unhooked the cot, made a hammock of it for funeral needs, and in twenty minutes staggered out, bearing their large parcel of death between them. They carried it through the cuddy on to the quarter-deck, and put it down to breathe and take a look round.

'What have you there?' bawled Caldwell from the forecastle.

'A missive for old Poseidon; will you be postman?' shouted Davenire in answer.

'By Peter, I believe it's a dead body! I believe it's de captain,' said Harry the Dane to William, as they stood together at the forecastle door. 'And that son of a sweep is making sport of his clay. I could sheath my knife in him. Captain Benson was my skipper.'

'Captain Benson wasn't the sort of man whose death 'ud move a fo'c'sle to groans,' said William calmly. 'I know a man who came out with him two voyages ago. Grub grew shockin' arter a fortnight, and there was nigh a mutiny. I allow,' said he, continuing to speak with calmness, though huskily, 'that that there skipper's a man sailors aren't a going to deplore the loss of.'

'Lend us a hand some of you to heave it overboard,' shouted Davenire.

'Hang it all!' cried Burn in his oozy voice from the rail at the break of the poop; 'a little reverence might be shown, I think, if it's only hats off and a spell of silence whilst you toss it. He was captain, and he was a man.'

'Come down here and do the blistered work yourself,' answered Davenire sharply, with a dangerous look, and he crossed the deck to gain the poop by the other ladder.

Down came Burn with a run. He flung his hat upon the

deck, but Weston remained covered. The two seamen came aft quickly, and Harry said, 'Is that the captain?'

'Yes,' said Weston, stooping to pick up the death-load, whilst Burn gripped it by the feet. The Dane, pulling off his cap, stepped to the remains, and made the sign of the cross upon the canvas, crossing himself afterwards, and looking round to William to uncover. The seaman did so.

'You pig, he was a Protestant,' roared Cavendish.

'I believe you're right, Burn,' said Weston. 'These things shouldn't lack reverence.'

So saying, he whipped off his cap, and then others standing about the deck watching these proceedings, bared their heads, but Caldwell and Davenire kept their hats on, and Shannon stood hatted at the wheel.

'Over! So!'

The body sped from the edge of the rail, but by an extraordinary oversight these men, who were neither sailors nor soldiers, had omitted to weight the sea-shroud, and the cot, sousing into the white water alongside, shot up half its own length abreast of the empty lee foremost davits, and spun astern. So poor old Benson's last cruise was not up yet! Some of the men smiled as they leaned over the side watching the white flake of cot travelling off into the windy distance. It was blowing a fine sailing breeze, and again and again the weather bow shot a large smoke of coloured crystals into the wind as it shouldered the blue heave into foam. The wide Pacific heaven was full of white rolling clouds, and the blue between thrilled with the joyous light of the young morning. The sea was running in white lines, and in all that vast spacious breast at that instant nothing was in sight but Captain Benson. But in a breath the white thing flashed out of the vision, and the poor old skipper was gone for ever.

'It's deuced unlucky that this wind should be heading us,' said Trollope, waking out of some moody fit of musing and addressing Davenire, who leaned to leeward next him. 'If it draws another point more easterly, we must 'bout ship.'

'When are the watches to be settled?' said Davenire.

'Whenever the men like. Suppose we say now at once,' exclaimed Trollope. 'It's not the custom, I believe, but it'll be convenient in our case, for some must keep the deck whilst the rest eat, and a watch should be set.'

He beckoned to Caldwell, and called to the rest. Mr.

Johnson stepped out of the galley to listen and observe what passed. Eight of the ten assembled on the poop, Johnson being forward and Shannon at the wheel.

'Lay aft, you two men,' sung out Trollope to the seamen, who loafed with an air of discontent and uncertainty in the fore-castle door. 'We're going to divide ourselves into watches, and want you with us.'

'We're too few for 'em,' said William, moving at once, 'and they means to reward us.'

'By Peter!' muttered the Dane, following in his wake, 'I'd not stir a hand for the villain if it wasn't for that tam big scoundrel, who is stronger than any travelling giant that ever I saw in my native land or elsewhere, and who would smash me like a cockroach soon as look at me.'

When they got upon the poop ten men stood together. Trollope removed himself a little way, and said, 'The two seamen shall know how it stands with us. I'm captain, not because I'm a sailor, but because I'm a navigator.'

'As good a sailor as that little chap there, Trollope,' said Davenire, pointing to the Dane.

'Stop till I brag, sir,' exclaimed Harry with a shrug, very pale and very uneasy as he gazed at the hard, resolved faces about him.

'Mr. Davenire is mate,' continued Trollope, 'and Mr. Shannon'—he looked round at the wheel; Shannon nodded, hearing him—'will head the starboard watch. Every man stands his trick saving myself. Should Mr. Shannon have the helm, I stand his watch. Now, gentlemen, will you divide yourselves, or shall I choose out two watches?'

'Choose us out,' said Caldwell.

So to the port watch there went Mark Davenire, Dike Caldwell, Peter Johnson, Isaac Cavendish, and William. The starboard watch was composed of Walter Shannon, Paul Hankey, Patrick Weston, Alexander Burn, Sampson Masters, and Harry. Trollope, by heading the port watch, balanced the working strength of the two parties. In fact, the ship was as strongly manned as she had been under Benson, saving that these men were by no means *all* of them sailors.

'Toss for first watch on deck,' said Trollope.

William grinned; even Harry seemed to find something to interest him in all this.

'Heads for the port watch,' called Davenire, pulling out a half-crown; he spun the coin ten feet high, caught it with a

smack of fists that sent a shudder through 'Arry the Dane, and it was for the port watch to keep the deck.

The cuddy had a strange, forlorn look. Open doors swung with the rolling of the ship; you saw the insides of the cabins—the tumbled beds—the loose attire; and then again there was the emptiness of them. It was plain that several of the passengers after the first shock of seizure and imprisonment had begun to pack up. They had idly dreamt of transference. The aspect of the berths proved that the people had been abruptly interrupted in this work of preparing for another ship.

Some of the colour and light of the old hospitality of the barque, however, came into the cuddy when Weston and Burn went to work to drape the table for breakfast. They made a good show with what they found. Possibly they had served as waiters amongst the other apprenticeships life had put them to. The rolling sunshine flashed in glass and silver; one almost watched for Captain Benson to come out of his cabin and stand sternly gazing into the air till the ladies were seated. The astounding audacity of this piracy seemed to strike Burn for the first time now, for after looking up and down the well-dressed table, he said, fetching a deep breath, whilst he brought his fist in a blow to his side, 'It's scarcely believable even yet, Pat. So help me Jehorum! To think of the true skipper twisting like a teetotum in his shroud astern, and Trollope in his place—Trollope,' he repeated oozyly and slowly, 'cool as that filter. It's the biggest thing in the lists, don't you think?'

'It's big enough, anyhow,' answered Weston, testing his sight by shutting one eye in his twisted face whilst he looked through the cabin window in the direction of the galley to see if any breakfast was coming along. 'I'll tell you what, though, they talk of bringing the gold up out of the hold and stowing it aft. I shall protest. Bring up your gold by all means, gentlemen, and let's know that we have it; but to *leave* it aft—exposed, that's to say, in chests accessible—there's no lack of carpenter's tools aboard, you know, Burn—we are ten very honest men, but——'

He wagged his head slowly, grimacing horribly, whilst he kept one eye shut.

'I say, though, d'ye know, after all,' exclaimed Burn in a low, ghostly voice, 'suppose the second mate was drunk and made a fool of Hankey—suppose there's no gold——'

‘Chaw!’ said the other, but one could see he winced at the notion. The sensations of the moment flitted in pulsing nerves and working muscles over his wrung face. ‘By thunder!’ he continued, with a look up at the skylight, ‘the sooner we make sure, the better. For suppose the hold all wool—oh, my precious eyes! What idiots we shall be!’

They were interrupted in their conversation by the arrival of Mr. Hankey with a large dish of ham.

‘I say, Burn—I say, Weston,’ he exclaimed, grinning betwixt his whiskers as he put down his burden. ‘Help a fellow to fetch the breakfast along, will ’e? You know I wasn’t prime chop just now. That old captain——’

The others did not wait for him to proceed. Presently the cuddy table was furnished with a very good breakfast. This was to be expected at the hands of gentlemen who were so well acquainted with the ways of the ocean as most of the ten appeared to be. Needless to say that such a ship as the *Queen* must be well found in all respects. Her larder was a great cave under the steerage, bearing the singular name of lazarette. Heaps of excellent provisions and drink for the cuddy use were there to be found; every man of the ten knew it; who of those ten would not know that such a ship as the *Queen* must sail out of Sydney Bay with a richly stocked lazarette?

But just at present there was no occasion to look curiously into the after bowels of the vessel for stores. Plenty for the day was to be found in the steward’s pantry, and to a handsome meal got out of that pantry the starboard watch sat down—Trollope in Captain Benson’s chair, Peter Johnson, despite his being in the port watch, in Mr. Matthews’ familiar place, whilst Davenire watched the ship above, and the two detained seamen sat in the galley drinking hot coffee and eating rashers of bacon and fine white biscuit.

‘Ain’t this good enough?’ says William.

‘I’ll not swing for another man’s theft,’ answered ‘Arry. ‘But I likes to have fried bacon every morning for breakfast.’

‘It’s just that sort of evil-doing,’ says William, masticating slowly, ‘that a man can put up with any amount of. I shall serve these gentlemen. I’m not going to worrit myself about any blooming consequences. What’s it to you or me who’s in charge? If Benson, we gets no bacon. If another, we gets bacon and money to carry ashore—se they promise; and I’ll chance it.’

Harry ate in silence, but the severity of his countenance was relaxing, and it looked as if William would not take long to make him chance it too.

Aft they breakfasted royally, and Davenire occasioned a great shout of laughter by putting his head into the skylight and sniffing, and then roaring out, 'I wish my money hadn't come down heads.'

'We'll leave some for you, Mark,' cried Weston.

'I love these compliments to my cooking,' exclaimed Mr. Johnson, lifting a delicate slice of pink meat out of a fine, large cold ham, virgin till then, and discovered in the pantry.

'Hankey, you've washed about in these waters before, haven't you?' said Masters, calling from nigh the bottom of the table to the hard-faced, stiffly-whiskered gentleman who sat near Trollope.

'What of it?' replied Hankey.

'What chance d'ye give those women for falling in with a ship?'

'What's the good of asking such questions?' exclaimed Captain Trollope. 'I say, Shannon,' he went on, addressing this gentleman, who had been relieved at the wheel by Isaac Cavendish, 'after the others have breakfasted we shall break the gold out and bring it aft.'

'All right,' says Shannon, with his mouth full.

'You'll re-stow it after you've looked at it, won't you, Trollope?' said Weston.

'Not where it is.'

'Where is it?'

'In the main hold.'

'Well, supposing it is there,' said Weston—at which words Trollope grimly eyed him, stopping his business of chewing to do so—'you'll put it back again, won't you?'

'What do you mean with your "supposing it is there"?' said Trollope.

'Just the same as if I said "supposing it isn't there,"' answered Weston dryly, with a gradual distortion of features coming upon him.

'I propose,' said Trollope, beginning to eat again after a pause, 'that we bring the gold aft here and stow it in one of these cabins.'

'I protest,' said Weston.

'What are you afraid of?' said Hankey, with a sneer.

'Of the ten of us, Paul. Shall I be answerable for even

this?' and Mr. Weston held up his right hand, working it and his fingers as though he manipulated tools such as gimlets, saws, and the like.

'Aboard the ship,' said Trollope, 'the gold's as insecure in one place as in another, supposing we're all scoundrels, as Weston would like to think.'

'This is a big thing,' said Weston. 'A huge risk goes along with it. I am for having things so done that every gentleman when he shakes hands with his comrades shall feel grateful for honourable usage. Now, it is honourable that Trollope should have had the foresight to provide scales for the weighing of the gold and the dust, so that no man shall afterwards feel that he's been robbed of a pennyweight. But if you go and stow these cases aft, how can you tell but that in some middle watch I may lock myself up with the chests and a lantern and the necessary tools, and help myself to a blamed sight more than Trollope there would serve out to me?'

'We all trust you, Pat,' said Masters.

'See here,' said Trollope, speaking with decision, 'I hope I have a motive for everything I do, and that it's for the good of all. Suppose a fire should happen: suppose one of the twenty perils of the sea should oblige us to go away in the longboat in a hurry. I may tell you this ocean's not very well known; we may strand on a reef any hour; the ship then breaks her back, the wool drops out, and the gold goes to the bottom. Anyhow, suppose the necessity of a sudden escape from the ship, Weston—the gold's handy—' he pointed with his thumb over his shoulder. 'We can pass it over the side without delay. If we can save ourselves, we may save *it*, and by so doing achieve our one purpose.'

Weston was silent.

'Who'll keep the key of the cabin the gold's stowed away in?' said Peter Johnson.

'It goes with the wheel,' said Trollope. 'The man who comes to the helm receives the key.'

'Good!' said Shannon.

'But don't you think,' said Masters, standing up, 'that before we wrangle about the stowage of the gold we had better first of all find out if it's in the ship?'

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GOLD

THE ship had broken off three points whilst the gentlemen of the starboard watch breakfasted. When the port watch came on deck after eating, Trollope bawled the order along for all hands to put the ship about. Shannon undertook this task; Trollope pulled at the ropes with the others. There was a fine sailing breeze. The soft foam broke in clouds from the weather bow, and the *Queen* was slanting nimbly through the sea, exhibiting some noble qualities of looking up, and, spite of bowlines, of preserving a ruled line of wake, snatching, too, at this hour a speed of eight knots out of an antagonism of wind that was choking all life of legs, though not of motion, out of a certain squab, square-ended brig, rolling leagues out of sight astern.

The men on the whole had a good idea of their stations. It was plain they had talked in Benson's time over this little business of 'bouting ship: again and again with tongue and eye they must have worked out this evolution; they went to their places quickly, and all were ready after a few sharp calls of correction. Mr. Peter Johnson, as cook, worked the fore-sheet; William and Harry—both men scarcely knowing how to look with surprise and amusement—were, as experienced seamen, placed where knowledge was most wanted. Mr. Shannon took up his position at the head of the weather poop ladder, and looking round in the direction of the wheel, motioned to Mr. Alexander Burn to put his helm down.

At all times 'bouting ship in a breeze of wind is a time and scene of excitement. Here was not, indeed, a full-rigged ship, but to the landlubber's eye she was sufficiently complicated aloft to make the evolutions of her yards, the rush of blocks, the sweep of braces, the snapping leap of the released bowline, the headlong shaking of jib and staysail sheets, the shearing boom of the thunder-making spanker, a nightmare of confusion. But these men knew what to do, and Captain Benson himself never put his ship about with a sharper eye for the moment of command than Shannon.

'Full for stays!' he had sung out to Mr. Burn, and then, whilst the white brine gushed at the cutwater with a pleasant

roar of freshening wind aloft, he had made that quiet motion with his hand to the fat man, and round came the barque, shivering into the breeze, and upright as though startled and bridling. She was on the port tack soon, the yards braced fore and aft, bowlines triced out, sheets of fore-and-aft canvas flattened in by jigger and song, maintack bowsed down to that moving chorus 'Whisky, Jolinnny.' William's throat howled in this music, and even Harry the Dane felt as though he was going to enjoy himself.

'Deucedly well done, Shannon,' exclaimed Trollope, mopping his face as he stepped on to the poop.

A number of the fellows sprang up the ladder and congratulated Shannon, whilst the two seamen went the round of the deck, coiling up the ropes.

'She's a noble little ship. The spirit of the racehorse is in her,' said Shannon. 'Look how she leans *up* to the wind, shearing through it with a weatherly swing of stem that you may hear hissing like an escape of steam. Look——'

'Oh, no poetry, Shannon,' broke in Caldwell. 'You've done very well. Don't spoil it. We're all waiting for you to tell us to lift the main-hatch, Trollope,' he added, turning his gloomy, malevolent face towards the man he addressed.

'I've not done, by thunder!' exclaimed Shannon, who had continued to stand in a theatrical posture, with his left hand pointing at the sails, whilst his right was pressed upon his heart. 'Can't one stop, even for a minute, in this headlong degrading rush after filthy lucre, to admire with thankful hearts so superb a painting as this? Observe, Caldwell, how the joyous wind, blue with the heaven it gushes out of, is spiriting every sail, till the whole fabric aloft is a song, trembling in impulses of life into this gallant little vessel. So——'

He let fall his arm, and glanced here and there in search of a face of appreciation.

'Such rot as that sort of thing is!' exclaimed Caldwell. 'I pay a shilling for a seat when I want it—never until.'

'Shall we break out the gold?' said Trollope.

'Certainly,' exclaimed Davenire, in his towering way. 'The sooner the better. Here's Masters all at once taken a spirit-crushing notion into his head, got a fit of it, like a sickness, all about Hankey being made a fool of by Poole.'

'Bosh!' shouted Hankey. 'Let's justify the second mate.'

He sprang off the poop and others followed. Trollope and Davenire were detained by a loud shout from the wheel.

'I say,' bawled Mr. Burn, swinging his stout shape off the spokes, 'are you beggars going to break out the gold?'

'Yes.'

'I must have a hand in that job,' cried Burn.

'There are too many of us,' exclaimed Davenire, in a low voice of disgust.

'Hi, there! one of you sailors lay aft to the wheel for a spell, d'ye hear?' sang out Trollope to the two seamen, who were close together coiling rope over pins.

The Dane's posture was instantaneously mutinous. It is wonderful with what eloquence a sailor can express his feelings with his figure. With a silent swing of the head he can raise the darkest of the passions aft! He can be speechlessly insolent to the very temptation of murder! William hung back a moment, then came along on sturdy legs, and took the wheel.

'Nothing off, my lad,' said Mr. Burn, in a cheerful, oozy voice, and he bowled forward, gaining the quarter-deck by the steps in a couple of jumps.

Captain Trollope descended with cold dignity.

'You'll find it a tight jam of wool,' said he, 'and no machinery to lift it with. Off with those hatches, any way.'

The ten gathered about the main-hatch. It was a moment awful with expectation, suspense, and crowding sensations. They lifted the tarpaulin and raised the hatch cover, and all drew to the edge and stared with furious anxiety. The wool came high, but not flush with the hatch; a number of water-casks were stowed on top of it, athwart. The men bobbed and peered.

'What did that fellow Poole say?' exclaimed Burn.

'It's down there somewhere,' said Hankey, and quick as lightning, putting his hands on the coaming, he dropped on to the wool. Johnson, Weston, and Masters followed.

'Lend's a hand to shift these casks,' shouted Hankey; 'if it's anywhere, it's behind here.'

Davenire jumped into the hold. The casks were seized and rolled to leeward. They had been the midship casks of the row, and abaft them you would have seen the shaft of the mainmast but for a sort of bulkhead of fresh white plank, solidly affixed to a floor. It looked, as the men saw it, a bulkhead. Hankey dropped on his knees and crawled into the

gloom. In a minute he shouted. His shout rang loud and triumphant.

'It's all right, bullies! Just as Poole described it. It's no bulkhead, but a big locker. There's no door. You'll have to break it open. Fetch hatchets—bring the right sort of tools along.'

This he roared out of the gloom in which he knelt, staring with joy at the glimmering white wood casing. He had crawled a distance of about twelve feet; the upper deck did not admit of a man standing erect by the height of his head and shoulders; where Hankey knelt the dusk was a little thick, spite of the splendour of the day in that wide square in which some of the men were standing, and down which some of them were looking.

'There'll be no need to break out any wool,' called Shannon.

'Let's have a look,' said Trollope, and he dropped into the hold and crawled along to Hankey.

'Why,' said he, 'it's built in clear space. I had thought it was in the heart of the wool.' Two'll knock this planking to pieces. You and Davenire, Hankey.'

'Right!' said Hankey; 'we shall want room for a swing.'

Weston and Caldwell handed down axes, hatchets, a heavy hammer, and other tools, and Davenire crawled with them to Hankey. Trollope regained the deck and stood at the edge of the hatch where he might command the ship, but where, too, he was able to see what passed below. The rest of the fellows stood in a body on the wool, watching—a huddle of seven staring men, wild with eagerness, torn with impatience.

'Let fly, Mark!' bawled Burn, and crash at the instant sounded the sharp iron in Davenire's mighty grip. Crash! went Hankey's hatchet. They fell to it like insane woodmen. Indeed, they had no choice. The wool rose above the floor to which the bulkheads were secured; they must split and hew and hack to come at the inside. It was an extraordinarily stout structure, the planking like a deck, protected by heavy iron clamps at the corners of the square, and by flat, iron bars screwed to the wood. Behind, and on either hand, rose the wool, a jam of ghastly dull bales as far aft as the steerage bulkhead, as far forward as the fore-castle bulkhead. It was all wool, saving that space under the main-hatch, and that corridor created by the men to the nugget locker.

The noise made by those ten men was that of a ship going

to pieces. The fellows in the hatch watched them, stooping their heads with their hands to their knees in the posture of cricketers. The most of them could not make up their minds, spite of the solidity of the casing, and they gazed breathless, scarce speaking. The ear caught the silence in the hold *through* the crashing noises of those hatchets, and the voice of the wind aloft, and *in* that silence you heard the passage of the ship, the soft wash of water, whiter than the wool the men stood on, the yearning thrust of the weather bow, fountaining the blue heave in white salt as high as the cat-head, and the dim chorus of the vibrant shrouds faint aloft as a concert of jews'-harps.

Not the stout bottom of the ship herself, sheathed with twenty-four ounce metal, could long have withstood the resistless hurricane blows dealt by the excited men. The chips flew, the planks crashed, the seams yawned, crackled, and with resistless hand Davenire prized them open; by the time the two men had beaten out the foremost bulkhead they were exhausted. Davenire, swaying by the arm of Hankey, both, as they stood in their shirts, drenched as though they had just been hooked out of the sea, peered into the gloomy hollow their axes had revealed, and both beheld a number of large chests of different sizes packed one on top of another, and secured by chains.

'There it is plain enough,' gasped Hankey. 'Let the others come and look. I must drink or die.'

He crawled into the light of day, followed by Davenire, who, merely saying to the others, 'You can see it for yourselves,' pulled himself on to the deck; then he and Hankey went into the cuddy for a deep drink of brandy and water. As they entered the door, they heard the sound of hurraing in the hold.

The men's joy was, indeed, unbounded. In those chests lay a fortune for every rogue of them all. The produce of that ore wisely invested would end all further obligation to drive cabs, to act in small theatrical parts, to serve before the mast for a shilling a month, to gamble and cheat at cards, and to do a very great many other things which these ten gentlemen, in their severe, and sometimes horrible, experiences, had been forced to turn their attention to.

Eight of them squeezed in the narrow passage to look, and Hankey and Davenire, coming out of the cuddy refreshed, stood at the edge of the hatch looking down, still breathing

deep and hard. Trollope crawled into the full glow of day, and looked up at Davenire.

'Well,' said this giant of the silver chain, 'is it all right?'

'The boxes sound hard as gold itself,' answered Trollope. 'The chains, I expect, are padlocked to the floor, and the wool blocks them.'

'File 'em, file 'em!' roared Hankey, and as quick in action as in idea, he ran into the fore-castle, overhauled the carpenter's chest, and returned with a couple of heavy rasps, which he flung to Trollope, who handed them in; Hankey then sat down, with his legs dangling in the hatch.

'Queer place to stow gold,' said Davenire at his side.

'Poole gave me the truth,' said Hankey. 'There's a reason for most things—even for our being here: I reckon they could account very rationally for boxing the ore up against the mainmast.'

The hissing of the rasps grew audible.

'It's going to take them all the morning,' said Trollope, springing on deck out of the hold. 'You can't handle the boxes till the chains are cut.'

'How many do you make?' said Davenire.

'Eighteen,' murmured Hankey. 'It'll all have to be tumbled out and weighed. And I'm sometimes wondering how I'm going to carry my dollop ashore.'

They found the filing tough work in that sweltering hold. Hand after hand seized the rasps and drove the grit of the iron with fresh blood and breath into the thick links. They consoled themselves, however, with reflecting that it would be easier to free the cases thus than to break out the heavily pressed wool.

Captain Trollope went into the cuddy to look at the clock. It was twenty minutes to twelve. He started, and stepped quickly to Captain Benson's cabin, and taking the old man's sextant out of its case, went on to the poop.

'Beg pardon,' said William at the wheel, 'am I to be kept standing here all day? Seems to me I've been steering the blooming hooker a month.'

'You shall be relieved,' said Captain Trollope.

'She's no jammy steer, either,' said the man, sullen with fatigue. 'Where's that 'Arry gone and 'id himself? Couldn't he come aft and relieve a man?'

Just then the small figure of Harry rose through the fore-

scuttle with a pipe in its mouth. He was about to seat himself with his arms folded.

'Lay aft, you Harry, and relieve the man at the wheel,' roared Trollope, with a voice of tempest.

The fellow looked idly a minute, then putting his pipe into his breeches-pocket, came along to leeward very slowly.

'*Don't* you mean to work?' said Trollope, approaching him fiercely.

'Oh, yes, I said I mean to work,' answered the Dane. 'I'm not going to tear my shirt. We're all gallus pirates now aboard here. I can be hanged along with the rest of yer, without a-gitting more share of the plunder than what's in promises.'

'Go aft and take that wheel, or I'll kill you,' said Trollope, with his eyes on fire.

'Was that so?' yelled the Dane, whipping out his sheath-knife, and leaping three feet high as he sprang backwards.

Trollope was upon him in a heart-beat. The torment of his iron grip dropped the knife out of the Dane's grasp; the thing flew overboard like a gleam of light through the open rail at Trollope's kick; and now it was for Harry to howl for mercy. He was not spared.

'I've had to handle you foreigners before,' shouted Captain Trollope, as he kicked and beat the man from one part of the deck to the other. 'This is what is good for you. The wages you sign for starve the English seaman. The British fore-castle is full of you. You will eat any beastly meat and drink any beastly drink, and when you have saved English money enough you go home.'

All the while he was shouting these words he was thumping and kicking Harry most unmercifully. The Dane's nose streamed, and one eye was sunk in a great liver-coloured swelling when Trollope rushed him breathless to the wheel.

'Stand you here, and obey orders!' he roared in the beaten wretch's ear. 'Flourish another knife and we'll drop you alive overboard.'

'I know the law. I will have my revenge. I needs but to wait,' muttered Harry, trembling from head to foot with a sort of drunken shivering.

'You should have come afore,' said William, and that slow and sturdy man, bestowing no more sympathy on the Dane than that remark conveyed, trudged forwards, and was presently to be seen smoking his pipe on the fore-castle, watching

the doings aft, and no doubt wondering when they were going to cook some dinner for him.

‘What’s been the shindy up here?’ said Davenire, looking at some bloodstains on the deck and at Harry, whose face, lying between the spokes of the wheel, was shocking with swelling and marks of blood, and dreadful with the convulsive motions of fifty wicked passions.

‘That smothered bit of a foreigner there tried to knife me,’ said Trollope, with his eye at the sextant, giving a cool toss of his head in the direction of the wheel.

‘We don’t want anything of that kind here,’ said Davenire in his sternest, deepest tones, advancing his head with a scowl at the Dane, as though he would rend him limb from limb. ‘Pity we kept the little hedgehog. There was half a score better to choose from.’

‘You treat me properly,’ whined Harry, ‘and I will do my bit as a sailor and a man. If you mean to murder me, be quick. It was always cruel to be slow at such times.’ Here the little man sobbed.

‘Mind your wheel,’ shouted Trollope. ‘You’ll have the ship aback in a minute.’

He continued to observe the sun. Davenire watched him in silence. They were still at work in the hold with rasps, but three or four of them, Shannon, Caldwell, Masters, had come on deck for the fresh air, and stood talking at the coamings. Mr. Peter Johnson was forward in the galley. He had been in and out whilst they were sweating at those invincible chains below, and he hoped that a dinner of boiled beef, preserved potatoes, with plenty of garnishings from the cold delicacies of the cabin stores, would be ready for all hands by one o’clock.

Captain Trollope made the hour noon. The ship was on the port tack, glancing off to the south’ard and west’ard. There was still a fresh breeze to heel her shining frame. The Dane was now taking pains to steer, albeit he had but one eye to see with just at present.

Trollope said, ‘Aren’t they through those chains yet?’

As he asked the question, Hankey hailed him from the edge of the main hold. ‘The boxes are freed,’ he sung out. ‘What’s to be done next?’

‘Look here, you fellows,’ said Trollope, going to the brass rail and holding up his sextant. ‘I want to work out my sights. I suppose you’d like me to have a knowledge of the

ship's situation? Will all hands of you come on deck and leave those boxes alone till I've done with my figures?'

This was a request that was made an imperious command of by general necessity. Every man was interested in the navigation of the ship. They all came tumbling out of the hold on to the poop. Peter Johnson alone remained forward. To illustrate the keenness of their sense of honour, they all went right aft as far away from the chests as the deck of the ship would permit; and gathering about the wheel, and observing the Dane's condition, and hearing the story from Davenire, they entertained themselves with a hundred jokes at the expense of the cowed little seaman, who durst not quit his post, yet could scarcely command the helm for fear.

Indeed, they looked a savage, wild lot, sweat-darkened most of them, in shirt and trousers, their aspect rough with their labour below—labour it had been; and the crawling in and out from the boxes had given scarecrow looks to most of them. Very different had been the easy, rather smart figures they made in Benson's time. Mrs. Peacock would not have known Mr. Shannon and Mr. Burn. All looked of the bush, very bushy indeed. Mr. Hankey's stiff black whiskers were filled with particles of wool.

By-and-by Trollope came on deck.

'Is it all right with the ship?' was the shout.

He gave them one of his stern military nods. Just as he showed himself, Johnson, with his head thrust through the galley door, shouted, 'Any of you chaps going to get the cabin table ready for dinner?'

'I vote we eat before we look,' says Masters.

A groan of dissent attended this. Caldwell, gazing gloomily and contemptuously at the speaker, said: 'I thought you were the one of us all who doubted the existence of the gold.'

'Look, then, and be shot!' answered Masters, blushing with a sudden rush of temper. 'I'll——' he was walking off, then, with a snap of his fingers, said: 'No, hang me! I'll be in it with the rest of you,' and came back to the little crowd.

'Shall we bring up the boxes one by one, and examine them here?' said Davenire.

'That'll do, won't it, Trollope?' said Hankey.

'When looked at, where are they to be stowed?' said Burn.

'Now, you know that's settled,' exclaimed Trollope, rounding upon him angrily.

'I'm for leaving it where we found it,' said Burn.

'It'll shift if unlashed; the boxes'll burst. The dust'll run like sand. Let Trollope be boss,' said Shannon.

All this while it blew a steady wind; the sea ran in a light, regular heave, the swing of the ship was rhythmic, and the Dane held her to her course; she needed little or no looking after; the men were able to devote their whole attention to the gold. Their confidence in one another, however, was so inconsiderable, that when they had agreed to bring the chests on to the poop, the whole of them moved as one man towards the main deck.

'See here,' says Trollope, taking up his station beside the hatchway, 'two of you will hand out the chests—suppose we say you, Davenire, and you, Hankey. You've got the muscle for that sort of breaking-out work.'

'There are eighteen chests,' exclaimed Peter Johnson, leaning over the hatch with his foot on the coaming.

'Big and little,' said Mr. Cavendish. 'Eighteen.'

'We're all agreed they're eighteen,' exclaimed Weston. 'I counted them four times, and made eighteen.'

'Good! Shove ahead with your programme, Trollope,' said Caldwell.

Some of the men jumped below; some remained on deck with Trollope. It was agreed that the whole of the boxes should be brought aft before one was opened. Presently Shannon and Burn, with grinning faces, handed one up.

'Feel the weight of it,' oozed Burn; 'feel it, Trollope. Och, murder! that I had it in England safe.'

The chest was small, but its weight was as persuading as a glimpse of its contents would have proved convincing. One by one the boxes were hove up to the eager group above, big and little. Not much was said. When the last box was got the men tumbled up out of the hold, and all hands examined the chests by the brilliant light of morning. They were bound with iron straps and cornered with iron; all were extraordinarily strong. Every case was branded with a small diamond that had the letter C over it.

'They're chock-a-block,' said Davenire, fanning his red-hot face, 'and as heavy as the hearts that have lost them.'

'Nothing could be heavier,' said Hankey. 'What tools are wanted?'

The men could scarcely support their suspense, anxiety, impatience. Trollope alone stood cool and resolved. He was

for having everything done *his* way. Caldwell scowled at him, Weston and Johnson glared in the wrath raised by their consuming eagerness to examine the contents at once.

'Why not open them here?' shouted Burn.

But they obeyed Trollope, nevertheless, and as rapidly as their weight allowed, the chests were conveyed aft, and placed in a row beside the skylight.

The Dane watched from the wheel with one flaming eye of hate and astonishment; the other was a discoloured rag of eyelid and swelling. What was in those cases, he wondered? Was it for *them* they had seized the ship? He had been a common sailor under Benson before the mast: how was he to know what the ship's cargo was composed of? William sat on the forecastle with his arms folded, sucking his pipe, watching these proceedings with a posture that denoted slowness of perception and laboriousness of thought. The ten men ranged themselves abreast of the chests. Hankey brought chisels and hammers from the forecastle, and Captain Trollope called upon him to open the first box.

All the base emotions and sensations of human nature might now be seen sporting in the nine faces which watched the tenth man at work. It seemed as though some diabolic magical influence breathed by those boxes of gold had loosed the full beast in each man; all that was spiritual and intellectual disappeared; nothing was visible but the animal. With the skill of a carpenter Hankey drove his chisel. The iron bands yielded, the lid was lifted, and then the beast in every breast sent forth an exultant roar. These were gentlemen who did not need to look very close or long to know what a nugget was. But no man offered to touch the flat flush surface of broken ore, yellow, pale, dull, more like the dried runnings of yellow soap broken into twisted bits than the metal that glitters in the golden pound and sparkles on white arms and whiter necks.

'See that big knob there, Caldwell?' said Masters, smacking his lips with affected admiration. 'How many murders could a man get done for the worth of that lump?'

'Rat you and your moralising!' answered Caldwell, turning his gloomy eyes slowly upon the other.

'How much drink is there in a pinch of it, Samson? That's your question,' said Weston.

'Shut him up and nail him down and try the next,' said Captain Trollope.

This was done. One after another the chests or cases were opened and examined, and carefully reclosed, their own spikes and screws securely re-sealing them. Every box was filled with nuggets or dust. One needed to look far back into the annals to parallel this triumphant, this splendid, this most audacious piracy. The sole existing drawback was—the magnificent booty was still afloat. The sea abounds in risks. Even as this thought occurred to Trollope, beautiful and promising as that Pacific morning was, he instinctively ran his eye along the windward horizon. What was to happen 'twixt *then* and the landing of all that gold?

When the last of the boxes had been examined and carefully re-closed, every man Jack of the men went over them again, bending, peering, probing with eye and nose, so to speak, to make sure that the lids were as safely fastened and each case as tautly iron-girt as when it had been lifted out of its place below. Then, one by one the cases were lifted and conveyed into the cabin that had been occupied by the Storrs'. Here they were stowed and secured with a sailorly touch against all risk of fetching away.

The last man stepped out, Captain Trollope locked the door, and, swinging the key on his forefinger, exclaimed—

'Now, lads, I hope I've advised wisely. Look, now. In a moment of disaster all this gold means but a jump. But in the hold where it was—hey?'

'You're always right, Trollope,' exclaimed Hankey, pulling the wool out of his whiskers. 'But suppose the other cabin keys should happen to fit?'

Some of the men started and looked strangely around the cuddy.

'Try 'em!' growled Davenire.

The keys had been replaced when the people were liberated to enter the boats. They were quickly removed and tried: not one key was like another, and the men breathed again.

'You'll find that poor little beggar with the bunged eye dead at the wheel,' said Burn. 'Give me the key, and I'll relieve him whilst he has life to crawl forward to die.'

Trollope, grinning behind his moustaches, said, with a glance at the cabin clock, 'It happens to be your watch below.'

'Is it the port watch that's come round again?' said Caldwell sourly. 'Give me the key, I'll take the wheel.'

He received it, pocketed it, and disappeared.

'Gents,' said Burn, looking with his fat drinking smile

round him, 'there should go a generous salvo of champagne to this discovery and confirmation. What say ye, Paul? I'm for drinking your health, Paul, in the very choicest that this ocean cellar can yield our table.'

'If you don't lay the cloth, some of you,' said Mr. Peter Johnson, 'what I have cooked will not digest, and I shall be shamed.'

'Start!' was the shout—'all hands!'

Trollope went on deck, but the rest of the men ran about the cuddy and prepared the table for dinner swiftly as hunger and bounding spirits could contrive. The poorest joke was answered with a roar of laughter. Never did mortal hearts beat higher.

'What are you thinking of?' said Burn to Masters, who was standing at the foot of the steps looking on.

'The sea begins to toughen its run, don't it? and I was wondering whether the women have been picked up,' answered Masters.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DUEL

A MERRY company went to dinner that day on board the barque *Queen*. None merrier was probably afloat in any hour of that year. Eight seated themselves. Captain Trollope insisted upon keeping the deck; Caldwell remained at the wheel.

Before they sat down some of the gentlemen saw to the wants of the two seamen forward. Burn and Weston carried to the forecastle a quantity of meat and ship's bread, some cabin delicacies, and two bottles of champagne. They found the brace of sailors in the gloomy forecastle, sitting close beside each other. The Dane held his head in his hand and was evidently in pain, and William was saying that everythink must come to a hend, even this blazed voyage wasn't a-goin' to last for hever; for his part, he thought it not unlikely, now them covies had found what they had embarked for to steal, that they'd get the boat over and scuttle the ship, leaving them aboard to tell no tales—this was he murmuring when Burn and Weston entered with their burden of good cheer. The two seamen sat quiet, astounded by the sight of the wine, then William smiled, but

no determinable expression could visit Harry's ploughed-up face.

'Here it is—what they call fizz. It'll blow that eye of yours open, 'Arry. Cheer up, my lads, and don't forget to bless us when you're toasting us,' Mr. Burn cheerfully said, and then they went back to the merry dinner table in the cuddy.

Davenire took Trollope's chair. No one appeared to regret that Mr. Caldwell continued to steer the ship. The only man at the table whose spirits seemed to flag was Mr. Masters. The light of noon striking through the skylight played in spokes of glory over the faces and forms of the diners. The billow had swelled, and the leeward swing of the wind-jammed ship on the slant of the sea was grown somewhat sharp. Yet there was no more weight of wind, and the *Queen* was comfortably carrying the sail she shouldered her way along under.

'Sam, you're pensive,' sang out Hankey to Masters, after several bottles of champagne had gone the rounds, and after there had been a great deal of talk and a great many loud laughs. 'I shall believe to the end of time that you've left a wife in the bush.'

'The bones of a wife simply,' said Peter Johnson.

'Something living, something fair to look upon, something seductive in memory, so that the further you go the sweeter it seems,' said Hankey. 'I knew a man who ran from his young wife, a beautiful girl. He thought he was tired of her, and of home and the baby, and so sloped with the true spirit of a gentleman. But memory continued to appeal, as it is at this moment appealing yonder,' said he, with a nod at Masters, 'and the appeal grew so eloquent with the warmth, the shape, the sweetness of what it submitted, that he returned after much stubborn wandering to find her——' He drained down a whole glass of champagne.

'What?' said Masters.

'She had had the small-pox,' answered Hankey. 'Is there any more wool left in this whisker, Weston?'

'Masters is dull with thoughts of the women in the boats,' said Burn. 'If they're not picked up, he thinks they'll be upset in the sea.'

'Why should the ladies be your particular concern, Masters?' exclaimed Davenire: his cheeks were hot with wine, and he spoke with an arch sneer. 'Time was when

you may have been a beauty, but the friction of the edge of the grog-cup, the constant friction of that beaded edge, has put a worm-eaten profile upon you. The outline is drink-worn. I think of Byron's verse when I look at you :

“He who hath bent him o'er the dead!”

He huskily chanted the familiar lines with a somewhat thickened voice, and then with sudden severity, as though the sense of command was on him in speaking, he added : ‘The women have ceased to trouble themselves about you. I wouldn't, if I were you, trouble myself about the women.’

Masters looked at him, revolving his wine-glass in silence.

‘D'ye know, Shannon,’ said Cavendish, ‘that sleep-walking joke of yours was admirably carried out. How did you reach the flying jibboom-end?’

‘I walked straight out of bed on to it,’ answered Shannon. ‘The look-out was asleep. There wasn't a soul awake forward. I had counted on that. I waited till Poole walked aft, and then slipped into the bows.’

‘Do you mean to say,’ called out Burn, whose face had a sunset flush, ‘that you walked on to the jibboom end o' purpose, wide awake?’

‘O' purpose, ay.’

‘What for?’

‘To give 'em a clear deck aft.’

‘Change the fired subject!’ shouted Davenire. ‘The past is astern. Keep it sunk there—keep it sunk there.’

‘What did you sham walking in your sleep for?’ said Masters, staring at Shannon, with a defiant lift of his shoulder at Davenire.

‘I'm fond of practical jokes,’ answered Shannon, taking some cue or other from the looks of the great man in the chair.

‘Is there no mention of the gold in the ship's papers?’ called out Weston.

‘I felt all along,’ said Burn to Masters, in a level voice of displeasure, ‘that you and I, Sam, were not in it with the rest of 'em.’

The others took no notice. Hankey told a story, and so the subject was got rid of. They had found a number of cases of champagne in the lazarette, and had brought some up before sitting down. The quality of the wine was excellent. It had been Benson's own private venture; he had hoped

during the outward and homeward run to sell this wine through Trickle at a considerable profit. It was not to be supposed that the hospitality of the ship went to the length of providing champagne. The owners gave you a glass of Marsala for nothing with your dinner, and if you wanted anything else to drink, you paid for it.

The men brought up wine, and drank freely, but not one man got drunk. They sat long, Davenire alone going on deck to relieve Trollope, whilst William was bawled for that Caldwell might get some dinner. They sang songs, they told stories, they recited poetry. Hankey got upon a chair, and was diverting his audience with some theatrical exhibition, when the ship lurched, and he fell upon the table amongst the dishes and wine-glasses. The crash was stupendous, and the man was slightly cut.

'Some one call the Dane to clear this mess up,' said Trollope.

Harry came along with a little briskness. It might have been fear, it might have been the champagne; whatever it was, his legs were heartened, and his motions exhibited once more the proper and essential nimbleness of the sea. He had bound a red handkerchief over his eye, and stood a moment in the cuddy door, gazing at the festive scene. He saw many bottles and much broken glass, and when his appearance, as he swayed in the cuddy door, was greeted with a loud laugh, he concluded that all hands within were drunk. This exactly was what the company supposed of him, and the merry-makers rather fancied him in consequence.

'Bear a hand, 'Arry, you Dane,' cried Trollope, 'and bring a bucket and a brush and get rid of this mess, and you shall have more wine for swiftness and for laughter, for the good of your eye and for the ease of your aches.'

The man, understanding in part only, went out, and returned with a brush and bucket. Some of the gentlemen helped. In a few minutes the table and deck were cleared, and the Dane turned half a bucketful of brilliant broken glass over the side.

'Come back here, now, till we make you drunk,' roared Weston.

'What is it, gentlemen, that you want of me?' said Harry, standing in the door.

'Here you are,' said Shannon, holding up a bottle of champagne.

'I will take him forward,' said the Dane.

'No. You will drink him down here,' shouted Weston, who was the most excited of them all.

'Gentlemen, you may make me a pirate, but you cannot make me a beast of myself,' said the little Dane, fondly fancying that this as a stroke of morality would please.

'Catch him!' howled Trollope.

Shannon, Johnson, Cavendish, and Hankey sprang for the man amid a roar of laughter. The Dane shot with the speed of an arrow forward, and vanished in the forecabin. The revellers, however, did not go further than the cabin door, and when they returned to the table, Masters, after drinking another glass of champagne, rose and went on deck.

Now all astern the ocean was a bed of rolling splendour, and some plume-like clouds had been fashioned in the wind and were flying down the sky. Davenire walked the weather deck with the conscious dignity that often comes from uncertainty of tread. He was mighty red in the face when he looked sunwards. William hugged the wheel, sending an occasional surly glance aloft. Forward the ship was all alone, a sight strange to see; a single figure would have given her the look of life she wanted. By 'one soft impulse' was she to have been 'saved from vacancy.' But 'Arry lay hid. Yet not the less was the wind aloft a pleasant summer music, soft now, as the graceful fabric sloped her leeward bends to the sea-flash, rising again into loud flutings and sharper whistlings and a pleasant drumming in every hollow as she hove her delicate mastheads to windward, sending a sudden light of white water and white canvas into the blue breeze.

Mr. Masters, passing out of the cuddy by way of the quarter-deck, gained the poop, and stood at the lee rail clasping a backstay, with his gaze fastened upon the magnificent lights shaking and feathering under the sun astern. Davenire caught sight of him, but pursued his dignified walk to and fro without giving him heed. They were singing a jolly song in the cuddy, a rattling good song, with a hurricane chorus for a dog-watch in the north-east trades, outward-bound with a shipload of home-sick hearts. Masters did not seem to hear the chorus, yet it should have fitted his mood. The two lines the most distinctly roared out were :

'Then cheer up, Sam, don't let your spirits go down,
There's many a gell, that I know well, who's waiting for you
in the town.'

On a sudden Davenire, breaking into a grunt of a laugh, as though some fancy bred of the song had tickled him, crossed the deck.

'Our find this morning don't seem to have given you much soul, Sam,' said he. 'The chaps want to sing you into sweeter spirits. Why do you bother yourself and us about the women in the boats? You don't kill *this* sort of cattle with paper knives, do you?'

'I'm all right. What's wrong with me? I was glad enough this morning. One can't keep one's jollity fixed as though it was a weathercock you can nail,' said Masters, folding his arms and turning his back upon the sea to lean against the rail.

Davenire thrust his immense hands into his breeches-pockets, and listened to the singing with a half smile and a face crimsoned by the light.

'Since Shannon didn't walk in his sleep,' continued Masters, 'what on earth was his object in going out to the flying jibboom end and howling there? On the very eve of the attempt—it might have been death to us.'

'He answered you below,' replied Davenire, looking at him without turning his head, and speaking deep with sudden sullenness.

'He said he wanted to clear the after-deck—what for?'

'What a fool you are!' exclaimed Davenire, stiffening his figure and looking Masters full in the face.

'What do you mean by that?' said Masters, letting his arms fall.

The big man grinned a grin that swiftly vanished. The bright light lay dull upon the wine-glaze in his eyes, but he was by no manner of means tipsy.

'There's something happened,' said Masters, speaking steadily—unhappy man! his brains were fossilised by years of liquor; there was nothing in an afternoon's drench of champagne to stagger him—which Burn and I of all the fellows know nothing about. I insist on my rights as one of you. What's this secret?'

'Ah! what?' rejoined Davenire, with a slow, exasperating smile.

He was too big and dangerous a man for the light frame of Masters to meddle with, and he knew it whilst he sneered.

'Does it concern Miss Mansel?' Masters asked.

'Dash it, go below and ask Caldwell for the story. He

hasn't got my tenderness of conscience and memory,' answered Davenire, swaying with uncertainty upon the heave of the plank, and often, with his hands buried in his breeches-pockets, inclining towards Masters as though he would fall upon him.

'It was understood that there was to be no foul play, nothing murderous, you know,' said the young fellow, speaking with a pale face, 'in this plundering job. If you mean to tell me——'

'What?' exclaimed the other, pulling his hands from his pockets, and folding his immense arms upon his table-land of chest.

'Was Miss Mansel made away with by any of you?'

The rousing chorus of 'Cheer up, Sam,' swept through the skylights, and died out over the sea in the wind.

'What right have you to question me in this fashion, pray?' said Davenire, with a dull flash in the glaze of his eye, like a signal of lightning and storm in a hot corner of heaven. 'Whatever happened benefited *you*, anyhow—left *you* with a free conscience and the privilege of finding *your* share of the booty without any rust of blood upon it. Hey! Ain't that enough for *you*?'

He rolled his big form as though he was about to throw himself into a fighting posture.

'Did Caldwell do it?'

'Go and ask him, you——' But whatever the ugly word was to have been, Davenire swallowed it down, contenting himself with looking it, and strolled off to windward with a haughty gait of conscious booziness. Then, lurching aft, he planted himself alongside William, on legs wide apart, and seemed to listen to the singing in the cuddy.

Masters watched him; presently he walked to the foremost skylight and looked down at the fellows sitting at the table: his face was deadly white with passion, but it was not fear. The first man his eye fell upon, sitting immediately under the open frame, was Mr. Dike Caldwell. They were singing some other chorus just then, and Caldwell, with wine-reddened eyes lifted to the skylight, and red lips stretching and shutting and gaping as he sang, was keeping time to the air with an empty glass. When he saw Masters looking down, he nudged Weston, and both stared up, continuing to sing, and grinning. Masters walked to the companion hatch.

'Rout some of those chaps up, will you?' shouted

Davenire from the wheel. 'They'll be getting drunk and lying helpless in the cabin. Tell them the breeze is freshening. You can't send champagne bottles aloft to furl royals.'

Masters heard without heeding, and entered the cuddy. Trollope was in the act of rising. When he saw Masters he exclaimed :

'Here's Sampson with a face as cheerful as a skull.'

'A death's head for this table,' called out Shamon in a voice broken by falsetto notes. 'Tis time we should be reminded of our mortality.'

'What do you want with me that you stare like that?' said Caldwell, looking up at Masters, who had walked to his side. Then turning to Weston, he said very audibly, 'Has he gone mad?'

'It was understood,' said Masters, in a voice so strained as to be a pain to the ear with its tension of nerve and stretch of passion, 'when we engaged in this adventure that there was to be no bloodshed. Caldwell, you murdered a girl.' 'Burn,' he almost shrieked, 'I have found it out from Davenire; that's the secret; the rest of 'em know it. This damned villain murdered a poor helpless girl.'

In silence Caldwell sprang to his feet and, lurching back, aimed a blow at Masters; the heavy fist caught the young fellow on the side of the head and knocked him, with a stupid look on his white face, against a cabin bulkhead. But for the swing of the ship at the instant of that blow it would have been fair between the eyes, and a crusher.

'None of that; not amongst gentlemen; not in this time of luck,' yelled Trollope, seeing Masters pulling off his coat. 'There's wine in this. Sleep over it. Turn in, Masters. You're no match for that man, whose soul in wrath is a fiend's. Turn in.'

Breathing hard and fast, with a look of hellish malice in his scowling black face, Caldwell was waiting to plant a second blow—waiting till the other had freed his arms. The rest, seeing what was to happen, sprang from their seats, and, clamorous with wine and good intentions, tumbled between the two.

'This isn't the Highway, Dike!' shouted Cavendish.

'Clear out, Masters, and cool your blood at the head pump!' bawled Shamon.

'If it's to be business between you, let us remember that we are gentlemen!' said Hankey.

'Isn't he a little particular for a man who left his knife in a baker's body at Ballarat and forgot to call for it?' roared Davenire in thunder through the skylight.

'He was in love with the girl,' said Burn, heavily elbowing Caldwell against the table to keep him off his friend. 'You can't fight in this way. He's no match for you, Dike—D'ye know that, that you keep all on squaring? He'll give you satisfaction—hey, Sam?—we're all men of honour—'

'I'll fight him with my fists—I'll fight him with handspikes—with pistols—I'll kill that savage beast with any weapon he chooses to name!' screamed Masters, whose ear was bleeding.

This was a sudden tragic reality; it struck into the fumes in the men's brains, and cleared them as a blast of wind shoots smoke from a room.

'Who says Sam was in love with the girl?' exclaimed Captain Trollope. 'He didn't know her before we sailed, and he may have spoken to her twice since.'

'He mustn't call names,' said Hankey, looking darkly through his coal-black bristling whiskers at Masters. 'Savage beast is tall language, north or south.'

'A savage, murderous beast,' cried Masters, 'to throw a defenceless girl overboard—you black-hearted dastard. I say, you fellows, *think* of it: a young girl helpless in the grip of that ruffian—d'ye see the picture, you fellows?—Shannon there howling at the jibboom-end to make a clear deck for this murderer—'

'I say, Trollope,' exclaimed Caldwell, grinding the words out of his swollen throat through his teeth, 'I'll not kill this mannikin with my hands; it shall have a chance; I'll shoot it.'

'There were two in the job,' roared Davenire in the skylight. 'I was t'other, Sampson.'

'You shall answer for it, you butcher, when I've done with him,' answered Masters, levelling his fist at Caldwell.

Davenire, framed to the waist by the skylight, swayed, hands on hips, with a sudden roar, as if he would split his sides.

'I suppose it must be as you say, Caldwell,' exclaimed Trollope, eyeing Masters with a face of cold, contemptuous pity.

'Masters, turn in, man, and sleep it off,' cried Shannon.

Making no answer, Masters stepped straight into his cabin, the door of which he shut behind him. Shannon laughed, imagining that the young fellow meant to carry out

his recommendation. Some of the others stared at one another a little oddly and blankly. Caldwell stood by the table, leaning upon it, breathing heavily. He looked up at Davenire and exclaimed :

‘What does the whelp want to bully *me* for? It was done for the general good—for *his* good, therefore. What was the woman to him? Or is the whining idiot tired of his life?’

Just when he spoke these words, Masters emerged from his cabin: he may or not have heard this speech of the gloomy, black-browed man; he grasped his revolver, a portly weapon of six barrels, and swinging those sinister muzzles depressed to the deck, he said to Caldwell, in a cold voice, and with a pale but steady face, ‘I am ready for you whenever and wherever you please.’

‘Oh!’ said Caldwell, with a violent start, while a distinct tinge of green sifted into the colour of his cheek. ‘If you are ready and want it at once—Trollope, I’ll leave you to make arrangements whilst I go and load.’

He entered his berth. Those who watched him did not observe that he exhibited that steadiness of air which they might have expected at such a moment in a man of so determined and fierce a character as Dike Caldwell.

‘They must have it out on the poop,’ said Trollope to Shannon and the others generally. ‘But, I say, Masters, what d’ye want to go shooting around on a sudden like this for? What happened was an unholy, horrible obligation, I admit. But it had to be done. Not every man would accept such a burden of memory. I certainly wouldn’t shoot the friendly hand that’s helped us to this issue.’

‘I will, though,’ said Masters quietly, making his answer more emphatic with an oath, ‘and if he does not do for me, I’ll do for *him*,’ he cried, with a wild stare up at Davenire. ‘Good God, men, was there ever a more unmanly murder? Don’t you see how the demons managed it? They dragged the poor girl from her bed—did you throttle her?’ said he, looking up at the skylight. ‘I admire the uses you put your strength to,’ he added, with a scorn beyond words in his worn, faded, yet handsome face.

Davenire withdrew his huge shape in silence, and silence also fell upon the rest of the men till Caldwell appeared. He had taken as long a time again as the other in loading his weapon, a piece exactly after the pattern of Masters’; when

you pulled the trigger the barrels revolved, and for convenience and precision it was about as good to take aim with as one of those memorable blunderbusses which Hankey had committed to the deep.

'Where's it to be, Trollope?' said he in a low voice, hanging his head, which obliged him to lift his eyes to the tall man he addressed, so making the full countenance repulsive by undue exposure of what the lids were ever wary to conceal. Such a slow, sullen, dusky eye as it was! like a drop of ink upon red blotting-paper, with all sorts of red veins radiating from the pupils. Those eyes might have incarnated his memory. They had the very look of scores of inhuman, out-of-the-way, brutal, desperate experiences.

'Better fight it out on the poop since it must be,' said Trollope, speaking with irritation, as though to a sudden prompting of disgust. 'Twelve paces, I suppose? Signal, a falling handkerchief. Where shall I find a piece of chalk?'

That was quickly got from under the break of the poop where the black log board was kept, and the whole body of the men mounted the steps, every man mute.

'It seems a thousand pities,' burst out Burn, affected by the glorious sunshine and the noble, inspiriting wind into which he had stepped, 'for two of our lot to start shooting like this now that we're through with the job.'

Masters glanced at him with a determined eye, but held his peace.

Trollope ruled a line with chalk, and walked twelve paces from it along the weather deck, then stooping, ruled off at his toe, and so the two fellows had their ground ready. Davenire towered beside the skylight, looking on with a grim red face. The others broke into little knots, not choosing, perhaps, to mass themselves as though they had assembled to witness an execution. The splendour of the afternoon was now upon the barque's quarter, so that the one who faced aft must be at an enormous disadvantage: this had not been considered, nor was it perceived till Trollope placed the men. But before the objection could be remedied by a shift of ground, William at the wheel called out:

'Are you two gents agoing to let them pistols off?'

'Yes,' said Trollope. 'Are you afraid of noise?'

'Somebody catch hold of this wheel,' said William. 'I never shipped for no blooming target.'

There was a dull sound of laughter when it was perceived

that William stood as good a chance of being shot by the man looking aft as his opponent.

‘We must chalk for you on the quarter-deck,’ said Trollope, ‘the light’s altogether unfair up here.’

They went down the weather poop ladder, Masters leading, Caldwell closing the file. Trollope measured twelve paces in the lee gangway; this was the best place for the proposed murder: the elevation of the cuddy front protected the sight from the great glare on the quarter; there was shelter here, too, from the wind, for the flash of it under the main trysail (main trysails were then carried) cleared the rail above the head, and left a sort of gentle eddyings, such as you get under the lee of a parapet even when it blows great guns.

Just at this time the head and shoulders of Harry showed themselves in the fore-scuttle.

He stared like a ghost, one eye bound up, the other flaming amazement. What was going on? he wondered. He counted ten men, and two of them had pistols. They were in the lee gangway, where they bury the dead at sea. By Peter! he thought, I believe they are afraid of being caught and hanged, and two are going to blow the others’ brains out, and then execute themselves. What will they do with me? What with William? He stared, rigid with alarm, a mutilated bust of a man, concealed to his armpits in that fore-scuttle.

‘How many shots?’ said Burn, standing beside Masters when the men had been placed.

‘As many as will kill that scab,’ said Caldwell, obliged, by the constriction of the muscles of his jaws, to hiss the words.

‘Oh, no, we don’t want any massacre here,’ exclaimed Shannon, who was looking on with an uneasy face. ‘I vote for one shot only. If they miss, let them shake hands.’

‘Stand aside, Alec,’ said Caldwell, motioning Burn away with his pistol.

The spectators of this duel grouped themselves upon the main hatch, clear of the most distracted aim, as you may suppose; Trollope pulled out a white handkerchief and held it up.

‘Are you ready?’ said he.

‘Ready,’ said both men in one breath.

Masters turned his handsome decayed face up with an instant’s look of appeal, of adoration even, then his eyes went

to his opponent; *he*, in that pause, stood rounded in the back like a cat stretching itself; he was hunched with savage resolution. The spirit of murder was in his scowl, in his gaze, in the set of his lips. You feared foul play as you watched. Would he anticipate the fall of the handkerchief by one second of time in justification of his looks?

The foam was simmering softly as it swirled from the bow like one white arm of a swimmer, and ran in the brilliance of sunshine itself to the wake. How distinct was that shrewd song of salt in the deep silence that was upon the men now, whilst Trollope, looking from one man to the other, held up the handkerchief! All sorts of birds seemed to be singing in the rigging, from the shivering trills of the lark high up on the trucks down to deepening wood-notes of piping in topmast and lower shrouds, where the wind was splitting.

The handkerchief dropped from the hand of Trollope; the revolvers blazed at the same instant; the combined noise of those old-fashioned pieces was louder than the report of a four-pounder. Masters sprang backwards, exploding a second charge right into the deck, then let fall his pistol. He made a flourish with his hand to his heart, looked round to Burn with a smile, and fell on his face.

Caldwell hunched, stood unhurt.

'Is he dead?' said Davenire anxiously.

Burn tenderly turned him over. The young fellow groaned twice, and in that second groan expired.

'You plugged him with a barbarous fine aim, seeing what sort of ground it is,' said Trollope to Caldwell, as he knelt by the dead man. 'Look here.'

He put his finger in a hole in the cloth exactly over the heart.

CHAPTER XX

THE CORPSE

'HE was your chum, Burn. See to him. We'll keep him till to-morrow. There may be life in him,' said Trollope, rising from the side of the body.

He stood a minute or two contemplatively viewing the face of the dead; then, with a cold, hard expression of coun-

tenance, and a little wag of head as if he should say 'A pity a pity!' and that was all, scarce meaning it, perhaps, he passed on to the poop.

Burn and Hankey raised Masters and carried him to his cabin. They pulled a blanket over the corpse, and when they came out Hankey exclaimed:

'Nine of us now! What a fool to forego his whack!'

'He was too sentimental, always,' said Burn. 'I have known him some months. All his talk was about the girls. Drink and romance unsexed him. He had the makings of a fine spirit, and has died girlishly.'

'Why no, hang it all!' said Hankey, 'scarcely girlishly, Burn.'

'What did he want to lose his life over Miss Mansel for?' said Burn, stopping at the cuddy table to look about for more champagne. 'He was that sort of man who would do a thing like that. A fine young chap, Quixotic with diseased liver; but I loved him!'

He stretched forth his hand and took up a bottle a quarter full of brandy. Hankey left him. Davenire stood at the skylight watching Burn drink. He seemed amused by his expression of face. The other did not know he was watched, and grimaced with emotion at his trembling glass.

None of the others returned to their merry-making. They lighted their pipes and wandered about the decks, here and there one with a little stagger. Caldwell had relieved William at the wheel; but the ship was wildly off her course, or up in the wind, nearly in irons again and again, in the short time he grasped the spokes. His hand shook, he mumbled violent words as he drove the helm this way, then that, trying to fix a shiver in the weather leech of the main royal, leaving top-gallant sail beneath full and steady as alabaster—to no purpose. He yelled out, 'Some man relieve me,' and Shannon took the wheel.

But the ship ran away with him, and Hankey found his eye a little too fixed to keep the lubber's point straight at the mark. So, without references to watches on deck or watches below, Harry was shouted for, and the Dane, still ostentatiously bandaged, came rolling along the deck.

Thus it stood with the nine men on the afternoon of that day. All, saving Burn, had good sense enough to know that they had drunk deep enough if their lives and the gold were to be worth the flame of the rope-yarns with

which some of them lighted their pipes at the galley fire. But Burn had a friend to mourn, and Burn usually went for his tears to the bottle. He began to cry when Davenire called down to inquire if he wanted satisfaction for his friend's death, and some while later was seen to be with his senses gone and his face down amongst the glasses, his arms spread-eagled most ludicrously upon the table, as though he sought to hug all the relics of the banquet and the drink to his heart.

The fact was, Trollope, whose head was perfectly cool, spite of his having drunk champagne enough to drown a cat in, having occasion to enter Benson's cabin, observed a slight fall in the mercury in the barometer. He surveyed it curiously and anxiously, then returned on deck.

'Caldwell,' he exclaimed, 'you have the key?'

'Yes,' was the answer.

'Give it to the Dane. It must go with the wheel, man.'

Caldwell, with a pipe in his mouth, gloomy and muddled and vicious, lurched over to Harry, and pulling out the key of the Storrs' cabin, said, 'Take it.'

'What do I want with that?' said the Dane, looking at the key as if it had been the revolver he had lately seen Mr. Caldwell kill a man with.

'Put it in your pocket, and give it to the next person who relieves you,' growled Caldwell.

'I do not want anything to do with keys and dot like,' said Harry, forgetting the purity of his English in his alarm. 'Who was locked up where that key belongs? Was he a dead man? I don't like to meddle with it,' and he violently shook his bandaged head.

'Take this key, you blistered little foreigner, before I cram it into your gullet!' shouted Caldwell, furious in a moment, forcing the key into the breast of the Dane's shirt.

'It was unholy!' yelled Harry. 'You have no right to make me do it. What was the key to me? He was bloody for all I know, and I may be hanged for murder as well as piracy,' and whipping the key out of his breast he flung it, in an ecstasy of terror and superstition, overboard.

'Keep your hands off him, Caldwell; you'll dismast the ship,' roared Trollope, rushing towards the helm.

'He shall lose his ears,' exclaimed Caldwell, looking furiously at the Dane. 'Is there a pair of shears aboard? Fetch 'em—who'll fetch 'em?'

'An insolent scoundrel, so help me!' said Trollope, scowling at Harry, but generally addressing the four or five men who had assembled aft. 'Yet being done, isn't it best as it is?'

'So it is,' said Weston, 'though 'Arry must be hanged within the next hour.'

'The key was going to be a trouble,' said Trollope. 'I think you need only stoop sternwards at the cabin door to send it flying. I am satisfied. Nevertheless, I should advise this Danish mule of a man to be careful.' He darted a fiery glance at Harry, then grasped Caldwell by the arm, and the knot of men moved some distance forward.

'There is a slight drop in the glass,' said Captain Trollope. 'Should this breeze freshen, we are carrying too much sail. Look at that fellow below dead drunk upon the table; and he's one of our nimblest hands aloft. It won't do to lose any more of ye, so precious as we all are in one another's sight, by furling the lighter canvas.'

'I'm game to help stow anything you please,' said Shannon, with a slightly tipsy leer aloft.

The ship was at this hour slanting through the rolling seas, a sunny poem of lustrous heights and shapely bends and gleaming metal, lovely as the lights of that spacious firmament could make her. Close-hauled as she was, the weather leeches of the lofty topmast sails often half-a-back to the tremulous weather spokes of the uneasy Dane, she was curving a large sea of foam off her port bow to a melody of speed to which the rattle of the reel would have been as castanets; only that these broken gentlemen of industry never thought then to heave the log. Still she could bear what she had.

Shannon's leer aloft had but too forcibly expressed the general condition. The cool-headed Trollope—one saw in this how wisely the fellow had been chosen captain of the prodigious adventure—spoke no more of the weather nor of shortening sail: instead, going below to Benson's cabin, he sought and found on a book-shelf a volume relating to these Pacific waters, with which he returned to the deck, and studied the work alone right aft; but his gaze was as often upon the windward sea as upon the page, and once he interrupted this mixed study of print and ocean by requesting Davenire to see Burn into his bunk, and to start the rest into getting the cabin table cleared.

After this some of the men grew wearied of roaming

about the decks, or of overhanging the rail with their waterish eyes fixed upon the sea-line, and sitting down, they fell asleep, one in a chair, a couple lovingly side by side against a skylight, a fourth flat on his back with a flag for his pillow. Peter Johnson, who had his senses in very safe keeping, came out of the galley with a long cigar, and walked the deck with Trollope. William, forward, leaned against the rail of the forecastle, watching affairs aft; sometimes his slow gaze sailed up the clouds of canvas to their waving point, then it would leisurely travel to the weather horizon, and then fasten itself upon the forms of the sleepers.

‘They can’t do better than sleep it off whilst it’s fine,’ said Trollope. ‘Good gracious, what a horrible snore that man has!’

They stopped opposite the huge form of Davenire, who rested with his back against the companion. His head had fallen on his shoulder, his hat was off, his mouth was open, his hands lay lifeless upon the deck, knuckles down.

‘We may want to shorten sail before dusk comes,’ continued Trollope, as they passed on.

‘What says the glass?’ asked Johnson.

‘A fall,’ answered Trollope.

‘There seems no weather in this sky,’ said Johnson, first looking up and then searchingly around the horizon. ‘A bell’s mouth isn’t a cleaner edge than that circle. How far off d’ye make this island?’

‘At noon, seven hundred miles, about. But it’s blowing nearly dead on end for us now. I shall hold on through the night on this tack as we want southing. If the wind shifts, so much the better.’

A sailor would have laughed to hear that tall, military-looking, moustachio’d gentleman spouting the sea-tongue as glibly as any youngster fresh from a first voyage.

‘I’m rather bothered by these reefs,’ he went on, stopping abreast of the after skylight to pick up the volume he had brought from Benson’s cabin. ‘They’re represented here as right in the road of the island, approaching it from the north.’ He put his finger on a tracing upon thin yellow paper. ‘See here what the compiler of this volume says. “The Proudford Bank:—These shoals, lying north of Halloran Island, latitude 35° 3’ south, longitude 160° 17’ west, form part of a large number of dangerous islands which have at different times been reported on what has been called the volcanic

region of the South Pacific. Lieutenant Jones obtained enormous depths in their vicinity. Captain Wilkes is reported to have carefully sought for them." The fact is,' said Trollope, keeping his finger upon the chart in the book, 'they are what the Yankees would call sorter doubtful, hence I am for plenty of southing and westing, so as to make the island from the southward.'

'You are perfectly right,' said Johnson, after a careful examination of the little chart. 'I suppose Saunders knows these waters?'

'Don't see how a man can know them better than the charts will allow,' answered Trollope, closing the book and placing it upon the skylight. 'That brigantine is the one element of uncertainty in this business. I confess if she is not at the island on our arrival, I shall be at a loss.'

'What's her name again?' said Johnson.

'The *Rival*.'

'Let me see,' said Johnson, clasping his hands behind him, whilst he leisurely marched beside Trollope, 'Captain Saunders, a mate, and three men.'

'No: we cut out the mate that night when Caldwell came in and said he couldn't get the advance out of Jacobs. D'ye remember Jacobs following, and the shindy of tongues that then happened?' Trollope continued laughing quietly, with much enjoyment of his memory. 'I see that rat Mo', pointing with his yellow forefinger, and dull, filbert-long nail, black to the quick, at Dike, and swearing he had a hanging face, and he wouldn't trust him. And I see Dike's sweet look whilst he steps up to the little Jew, and putting his hands upon his shoulders, squeezes the beggar down on to his knees before him.' . . .

'Well, Saunders is Jacobs's creature,' said Johnson. 'If the *Rival's* not at the island, it'll be a bad look-out for Mo.'

'There'll be nothing for it,' said Trollope, 'but to keep dodging off and on till the brigantine heaves in sight, though we should have to bother with this ship for a month. We *must* have the brigantine; failing her there's the longboat, it's true. But how do you fancy the idea of nine of us adrift in that boat yonder with near three hundred thousand pounds' worth of gold in the midst of us?'

'Eleven,' says Johnson.

'Who are the other two?'

'Harry there, and that chap on the forecastle.'

‘Oh, they shall carry the ship home,’ said Trollope. ‘Nine of us, Peter. Two hundred and eighty thousand pounds’ worth of nuggets in the midst of us. Would that longboat swim with it all, and stores and drink for a run to—where? No! It must be the brigantine or this; if she’s not at the island, we’ll give her time to find her way there. Then, should she still fail us, we must land stores and comforts, plenty of materials for an undiscoverable island home; some of us must stay to sentinel the booty, and some will go away in the longboat to find a vessel in the place of the *Rival*.’

Mr. Johnson began to whistle. He whistled continuously some old waltz tune, keeping time to it by sbakes of the head, which grew more and more emphatic as he realised the situation painted by Trollope; the whistle then died on his lips, and the two men talked of Masters.

By six o’clock all the sleepers except Mr. Burn awakened, and they found themselves exceedingly refreshed. There was promise of a lifeless sunset. The sky rose pale to the mastheads. The gold of the sun was faint, and the light he made misty. The breeze had slackened, but still held the barque on a taut bowline. The falls of water alongside had a greasy note, sure sign of a spell of quiet.

Trollope did not know what to make of it. He went below, and again looked at the barometer, and found no further fall. The fellows, saving Burn, were upon the poop. The starboard watch had come round, and Mr. Hankey had relieved William at the wheel.

‘The glass is no liar,’ said Captain Trollope to Davenire, and one or two others who stood near, whilst he looked up at the canvas soaring in sheets of light fallow into the yellow sky. ‘We’ll ease her of her small sails and that big main course before it comes on dark. What d’ye say?’

They answered by going to work. They clewed up the royals and foretopgallant sail, and took in some staysails, the gaff-topsail, and the flying jib. William and Harry furled the canvas of the fore: Weston and Hankey made a very good figure at the main; seven men then got upon the main yard and rolled up the big sail, coaxing with a pleasant chorus the central cloths into a frigate-like bunt, which Davenire, huge in the slings, slapped with admiration.

This unusual labour of going aloft, of tossing upon footropes, and lifting the dead-weight of canvas had extin-

guished in the gentlemen one and all the last lingering inspiration of champagne. They were now perfectly sober, quite sensible, disposed to be thoughtful.

'Is Masters dead, Trollope?' said Caldwell, speaking in a low thick voice, and looking unusually sullen and gloomy whilst the motion of his dark eyes showed inward disquiet.

Trollope stared a moment and said, 'Yes.'

'Go below and make sure, will you? I couldn't look at him,' said Caldwell.

'What's the good of putting me on such errands?' said Trollope irritably.

'If he's dead he must go overboard,' said Caldwell fiercely. 'Why are we keeping him? That sort of dead blood rots through a ship: it holes her bottom and you'd call it rats.'

'He shall go overboard at dark,' said Trollope.

'Is he dead?' repeated Caldwell, endeavouring to subdue without success the growl in his voice.

'Shannon,' called Trollope. Mr. Shannon, yellow in the sinking sunshine, arrived. 'Go below and see if Masters is dead,' said Trollope. 'Caldwell's in doubt, and anxious about him.'

'You killed him. Why don't you go yourself?' exclaimed Shannon, the faint smile with which he had approached vanishing.

'Don't say I killed him,' snarled Caldwell, 'I shot him in self-defence.'

'So you did,' said Trollope. 'Oblige me, Shannon, and go below.'

He went with a face of aversion: the expression in his damp pale blue protruding eyes made him look sick. Whilst he was absent the sun set; his going this evening had something of a strange weird hurry about it. There was no solemn and majestic withdrawal of the trailing skirts of red splendour. A thin, moist, yellow effulgence, like coloured steam, filled the western sky and went quickly. A calm then seemed to roll out of the west over the brows of the swell, polishing them; the topsails aloft gasped and beat, as though being alive, they suffocated in the sudden stagnation.

'It was more like an eclipse than a sunset,' said Davenire.

'It will be a black night,' exclaimed Trollope. 'Look how the bend of the sky approaches, and d'ye see those scale-like

clouds up there?' he added, pointing up where a little before it was all faint blue.

'He is stone dead,' said Shannon coldly, stepping out of the companion way. 'It may comfort ye, Caldwell,' he exclaimed to that gentleman who was leaning over the rail, 'to know that he sleeps in beauty. All the sins of his life have gone out of his face, and he's the innocent son of a good mother.'

'We must bury him,' said Caldwell, who had turned quickly on hearing Shannon.

'At dark,' exclaimed Trollope with determination.

They had not long to wait for that, however. By eight o'clock it was a dead calm and black as thunder with fog. The ocean was full of fire, and close alongside the mystic lights rose and swayed, dissolved, fluctuated, sheeting out again in flashes brilliant as distant lightning; these fires played in a hundred shapes. You saw them through the steam of the fog, and the silence in that brooding blackness made them wonderful and awful.

The sheen of the skylights hung in the thickness in a faint silver, the binnacle was a crown of light, and down upon the quarter-deck the light streamed in lines through the windows in the cuddy front. The deep gloom, the occasional long-drawn yearning sob of water alongside, the sometimes strange cry falling from the invisible heights where the fanning canvas strained the sheaves or jarred a parrel, the sense of isolation, of infinite remoteness, of the ship's littleness as a speck in that black void boundless as the imagination chose to make it, filled the gentlemen with sensations of superstition. They were all agreed that Masters's body ought to be sunk at once; so Cavendish, Hankey, and Weston went to work to bury it. Softly entering the berth he lay in, they pulled the blanket from his face: he looked like some fancy of manly beauty in marble. It was true that death had smoothed the sin out of his face. The light of the next world was on it, and he looked to be smiling at some finer sight than tongue could utter.

The three stitched the poor fellow up hastily, and did not omit to attach a heavy weight of iron to his feet. This done they bore the dismal burden on deck.

Caldwell stood near the main-hatch, never imagining they would be so quick. When he saw them coming into the square of light in the cabin door, he uttered a low yell of

surprise, and hastily walked away on to the poop, muttering curses as he glanced behind him.

‘Overboard with it,’ said Trollope, who was standing in the gangway, ‘but decently, boys. He was one of us.’

They put him over feet first and let him go. The body dropped with a soft splash and vanished in a vivid flash of sea-fire whose track those who watched thought themselves able to follow to a depth of fathoms.

‘It’s shuddering work,’ said Hankey. ‘It’s gone beastly cold, han’t it?’

He entered the cuddy and mixed a glass of brandy and water, which he drank. The time passed slowly. Some of the men sat down to cards, but they could not play. They lighted pipes and cigars and went on deck, and mooned about the poop conversing in tones subdued by the black silence that was all about them. They could not somehow on this first night of piratic possession settle themselves down into true sea routine. From time to time the figure of one or another might have been seen in a posture of drinking at the cuddy table; Davenire was one of these when, something after nine, Weston came below for a draught.

‘Mark,’ says Weston, ‘I’ve been thinking over that key at the bottom of the sea; suppose a fire—any sudden trouble: should we be able to force that door as quickly as Trollope fancies?’

‘Let’s try an experiment,’ said Davenire.

He locked the door of the cabin in which Mrs. Peacock had slept, and then, putting his foot and shoulder against it, strained.

‘Shall I help?’ said Weston.

‘I can manage it,’ answered Davenire in a voice of suffocation, and at the instant of his speech the door driven by his irresistible muscle and weight of ‘beef,’ as sailors say, flew open. This satisfied the two men. They returned to the table, and whilst they drank a tumbler of cold grog apiece they talked cheerfully of their prospects.

On deck the silence of the fog-blackened sea was soul-subduing. It forced the men to speak in low voices. A cough startled, a laugh would wake an echo in the invisible heights. Old splicers, old spouters, hearts whose backs have been curved to the shape of shells by years of leaning over yards and kneeling upon decks, would have made nothing of such a night as this. They would have found nothing to awe

them in it. They would have seen nothing terrifying in the soft green sheets of fire which ran in folds from the ship's side every time she leaned, lighting up the fog, as fire lights up its smoke. But our nine friends were not Jacks in a professional sense. They were educated men, they were gentlemen born and bred. Two or three of them claimed to be, did afterwards prove to be, 'highly connected.' They were men of sensibilities, of taste, cultivation. Some were very well read. They were just the sort of people to be moved by this vision of wonderful lushed blackness in the midst of which they hung, floating on fire.

'Where's William?' said Trollope, who sat upon the foremast skylight, smoking his pipe.

Shannon roared out the name. The man answered, and came aft.

'What do you think of this weather?' said Trollope.

'Why,' answered the man slowly, 'I can't say that I've been a-thinking of it at all.'

'Is there wind in it?'

The man, standing in the cuddy sheen, turned his head about with a leisurely motion, as though seeking for the wind.

'There's no look of wind,' said he, 'but I don't say this muck ain't going to draw up presently and fall down again in water.'

'Would you advise that the ship should be left to lie under such canvas as she now has?'

'See your tawps'l halliards clear, and there'll be nothen to hurt,' answered William.

Just then a sort of howl came from a figure that stood solitary at the rail on the port side looking into the sea. Trollope started up. A second cry of deepest horror broke from the man. It was the voice of Caldwell.

'It was your own doing. S'elp me God, I neither sought it nor wanted it! I never would have laid a hand upon the girl either.' Here he broke off as though realising that he was raving, and then fell to shouting in a hollow voice, 'I say, look here, some of you fellows, isn't such a sight enough to wrench the brains out of any man's skull? Why the blazes couldn't the weight and winding-sheet have been properly secured?'

By this time Trollope, Shannon, Davenire, William—Harry was at the wheel—all in short, who had heard the

man's voice, had gathered at the rail and were looking over. What was there to see?

The body of a man floating restfully on his back right under the very spot Mr. Caldwell overhung; the lambent fires flamed about him, and distinctly expressed his shape. They scarcely wanted light to determine his features by to know that he was Masters. The clumsy granny-knot had slipped, the soaked sheet had bellied with water to the plunge, and the body of the dead man had risen within twenty feet of the spot where they had dropped him. Any one could have found the sight awful though the body had been a stranger's, some floating sailor. The ship sat motionless, save for the light heel of her by the swell. The body of Masters lay as though painted, and the man seemed to have been given up by the sea as if he had been made quick again by the call of God. The lights that revealed him were the most mysterious that nature kindles. The blackness and the silence were of the tomb, and the men found the spectacle terrific.

'You devils told me he was dead,' said Caldwell, staring at the body, and tilting his hat back, and running the length of his wrist and knuckles over his forehead. 'I'd never have asked you to bury him, if I'd known he meant to come back.'

'Don't talk like a fool,' said Trollope, with a voice that clearly denoted the horror that chilled his own hardy spirit. 'You know, as all know, that the weight slipped, and the leap of the body plunged it out of its sheet. Why should it be there if that's not the reason?'

'Who buried him?' cried Caldwell. 'You were one of 'em, Hankey,' he roared. 'Fire your cobbler's fingers! Get me a boat-hook, someone.'

'What for?' shouted Hankey. 'He's off his head.'

'I'll have you shove that body clear of my sight,' cried Caldwell. 'You're responsible for its being there. Jump into the chains and thrust it clear—drive it hard. It'll swim into the blackness out of this hellish glare upon the water.'

'I'll see you hung first!' said Hankey, and he went and sat down upon a skylight.

'I say, Weston—you, Cavendish!' shouted Caldwell in the voice of a man whom madness is mastering, 'you helped to bury him. This is owing to your clumsiness, you know. Why did you so contrive it that he should come up just here,

exactly under where I now stand?' And then he groaned out, 'Get rid of it, some one, for me, get rid of it, some one.'

'He'll take to drink after this,' whispered Johnson to Cavendish, 'and then there'll be one less.'

'His brains seem all abroad,' answered the other.

'It's a beastly thing to lie alongside of a ship all night,' said Davenire to Trollope with a sick shiver running through his powerful frame.

'You know,' Caldwell began in a raving way, flourishing his clenched fist, 'this was contrived. It's a measly practical joke. Will nobody shove him clear?'

'Why don't you shove him clear yourself?' said Johnson.

'There'll be no shoving of him off, as you gents call it,' exclaimed William, who lay comfortably over the rail, the only cool head of them all, surveying the body. 'He ain't a raft. You give him a shove: he'd just float out of your reach and then lie still and look up as now, and what are you going to do arterwards? Tain't a job for the longboat, surely?'

'Fetch me a handspike,' cried Caldwell to the man. 'Quick now! You know where those things are kept.'

The sailor in silence rolled away into the foggy blackness forward.

All this while the water lightning was sheeting plentifully, the body floated distinct in the undulating and fluctuating motions of this ghastly effulgence: the breathlessness of the calm was a wonder, as the position of the corpse showed. It rested alongside, just under where Caldwell had been flourishing and shouting, in the same place it had made its tremendous appearance in; only a practised eye might have suspected either in keel or corpse a subtle imperceptible sneaking motion that must be good for Mr. Caldwell's nerves presently if he would exercise some patience.

Not he! Whether it was drink or the state of his health, or some defect of reason now suddenly developed through the violent shock to his whole frame of sensibilities, he continued to shout at the floating figure and at the people about him with the delirium of sickness. One after another the men drew away, and walked the decks in couples, shocked by the sight alongside, disgusted by Mr. Caldwell's lunatic language. Assuredly he was no favourite. Had he chosen to cast himself into the sea, it is questionable whether any hand amongst those broken gentlemen, his very good friends and

brother scoundrels, would have gone to the trouble to lift a coil off a pin to throw into the water after him.

William came aft with a capstan bar. It was so black that the man had to stand close to be discerned.

'Is this what ye want?' said he.

'Yes,' cried Caldwell with a curse, snatching it out of the seaman's hand. 'Why didn't you bring it sooner?'

William was just able to make out that the ruffian who was clearly off his head at this time had lifted the heavy bar of timber and was poising it. With a skip and a yell that seaman of slow motions fled. Never in all his going a-fishing had William gained the fore-castle of a ship from the poop in fewer and swifter leaps.

Scarcely had he finished when Caldwell, shouting senseless unspeakable phrases at the corpse as though it lived and heard, sprang on to the rail and dropped into the mizzen-chains. The men came in a rush to the side to see what he would do. He stood close to the sea, and its marvellous lights touched him, and they could faintly distinguish him in the smoke of the fog. But the corpse was the clearer revelation because of the bed of burning lights it slept on.

The half-crazed man thrust at the body; the handspike was too short, its weight too great even for *his* grip, maddened as it was by passions into the grasp of a giant. Lifting it clear of the rigging, he took aim and darted the beam at the body: it struck it full in the chest, and the corpse turned over and disappeared.

Then up came Caldwell shouting, 'Where are those hogs of undertakers? Do they want a lesson in funerals?' He laughed horribly, and rushed to the rail to take another look. 'Gone!' he roared, 'and there was no one to do it but me. Here, one of you—fetch me—fetch me——'

Trollope sprang to the man, saw him spin round and sink speechless on to the deck.

'Can this be another case of Benson?' said he coolly to Davenire. 'If so, *he* shall be well shotted. But let's get him below and drain some brandy into him anyhow.'

CHAPTER XXI

THE NAME OF THE ISLAND

THE surveying brig *Wellesley* on a certain afternoon at seven o'clock was on the port tack, moving bodily to leeward on a taut bowline. The air was very light; the sea ran in wrinkles. The brig made no wake, but if you looked over the side you saw the water there polished by her corpulent bilge.

Commander Boldock stepped out of the companion hatch and looked around him. Mr. Hardy and Mr. Matthews paced side by side the very short scope of quarter-deck. A number of seamen filled the round bows about the windlass ends. Any one glancing through the flat skylight would have observed Miss Mansel at the little table reading.

'There is no further fall in the mercury,' said the commander, touching his cap in response to that quarter-deck civility or duty in the others. 'What d'ye think it's going to be, Mr. Matthews?' said he in a voice whose deep complaining notes were now familiar to the mate of the *Queen*.

'The sky grows a bit shrouded, sir,' answered Mr. Matthews, looking straight aloft, as a boy balances a pole on his nose.

'And I observe that the horizon don't look so far off,' said Mr. Hardy, leering at the ocean.

'The barometer is like a woman's temper,' said Boldock, beginning to smile and broadening his smile as he continued; 'whether it rises or whether it falls, though you can't guess what's going to happen, you're bound to know that something's coming along.'

'True, sir,' said Mr. Hardy with cheerful alacrity.

'You were speaking of that gold, Mr. Matthews,' said the commander. 'How was it stowed?'

Mr. Matthews explained.

'Will the scoundrels be able to find it?'

'They'd come at it, sir, if they had to pick out the wool fleece by fleece.'

'A little abaft the main hatch!—a strange place. I should have built a safe in the lazarette,' said Boldock.

'It was done by orders of the consigners of the gold and

dust,' said Mr. Matthews. 'I believe they are thirteen in number; I heard so in Sydney.'

'A good number,' said Mr. Hardy dryly.

'One's a middle-aged man, who has been a sea-captain. He was up at the diggings and coaxed ore enough out of the soil to set up forty merchant masters for life with a coach and pair apiece and a footman behind their chairs at dinner. He designed the compartment for the gold, named the place, insisted upon that place, had unreasonable arguments with old Captain Benson, who was for stowing the gold in his own private cabin.'

'What!' cried the commander, 'that some sailor should be tempted aft with a jack knife to cut his throat! Think of trying to sleep with nigh three hundred thousand pounds in gold under your bed. I had thought better of Benson's judgment.'

'That sea-captain, whose name I recollect is Bummell, is pretty nearly a crank as it is,' said Mr. Matthews. 'The find so elevated his wits that they passed out of his head.'

'Lifting his hair as they went, no doubt,' said Mr. Hardy, with a laugh and a leer.

'At the present moment,' continued Mr. Matthews, 'he thinks himself a prodigiously rich man. The news 'll take long in fetching him, and mark me, gentlemen, Bummell, on the mere merits of the first report, will go raving mad.'

'I suppose, sir,' said Mr. Hardy, addressing Mr. Matthews, 'that nothing was known amongst the passengers of those ten gentlemen who have run away with your ship?'

'Nothing that ever I got to hear,' answered the mate of the *Queen*. 'The fact is they composed nearly *all* the passengers. The rest were ladies and one or two gentlemen; one Dent, a colonial merchant, a bit of a fool; one Storr, an auctioneer, going home after a brief career of bad bargains—so he told me.'

'I believe,' said the commander, expanding his chest, and speaking in his deepest and most remonstrating voice, 'that I can tell you pretty accurately who those ten gentlemen are. First and foremost, you are to take it that they are a company of scoundrels, capitalised by a syndicate of scoundrels, because if they are the men I guess them to be, they won't have had money enough to buy their passage. The gold-find has crowded the country with crews of desperate men from England, from California, from the islands, from ships' fore-

castles, and from ships' cabins. You'll find that these men, being gentlemen by birth and speech, as Mr. Matthews informs us, are fellows who have been on a cruise after fortune for a good many years. I have met several such people in Sydney and in other places in the colony. They had acted in stage-plays, they had gone a-sailing, they had tried their hands at cards, billiards—but what does it matter what they did? They ended as blackguards and ruffians stiff with drink. Yet I am bound to say that even in their hiccoughs you heard their quality. These robbers of the *Queen* met one another at the diggings and other places, heard of this magnificent consignment of gold, got a crew of ten of themselves together, and found people who had doubtless been convicts to advance the necessary funds subject to certain conditions, but what they are I am blessed if I can imagine!

Whilst they thus conversed it darkened around, and a scale-like layer of clouds shaded the dimness that had gathered over the mastheads. The brig was heading off to the southward and westward, that is, she should have been heading off had she been making any way but lee-way through the water. But when it darkened and thickened the wind sank out in a gasp of air in the topsails, the water flowed in oil and began to shine richly and wonderfully with fire. The brig now lay sleeping in a marvellous silence that was full of mystic light.

Commander Boldock and Mr. Matthews had left the deck before the water brightened and the sky blackened, and were sitting at supper with Miss Mansel, when Mr. Hardy came halfway down the steps to report that a dense fog had settled upon the sea.

'Well, sir,' says the commander, turning his immense, red, kindly face round upon his mate, 'supposing you ease her of her royals and flying jib, and roll up your mainsail. If you don't like the look of this fog, you might ease her of the fore-topgallantsail.'

'Ay, ay, sir,' answered the mate; 'it's a grease calm, and the water is like a bowl of snapdragon.'

The commander smiled at Miss Mansel, who inquired what Mr. Hardy meant.

'He means that there's plenty of phosphoric light in the sea,' answered the commander, with a glance at a cabin window, as if he thought to catch there a sight of the brightness.

‘There is nothing more beautiful,’ said Miss Mansel, ‘than the fires of the sea.’

She spoke with listlessness, and was by no means yet recovered. She was still very pale, and when thoughtful an expression of fear, faint indeed, yet determinable, haunted the lines of her mouth and the light of her eyes. Yet, on the whole, she looked amazingly well for one who not many hours before had been throttled, gagged, and left to float upon the sea in a swoon. Her white throat bore certain dark marks, which were probably the impression of Mr. Caldwell’s fingers. She looked a very comfortable figure of a fine young woman in her dressing-gown: the white cap was off her head, her hair was now thoroughly dried, and rose thick upon her pretty head under the light of the little swaying lamp. The eyes in Commander Boldock’s toasted face often rolled upon her, and Mr. Matthews, sitting opposite, viewed her with the kindness of an old friend.

The table, though furnished with the homeliest of sea-suppers, presented, nevertheless, a hospitable appearance. There was room for a fourth, and then the cabin would have been comfortably full. The coarse white tablecloth shone with the salt it had been washed in, as the sand of the beach shines with the froth that dries in it. It was furnished with wine and rum in decanters, a ham, and a piece of cold salt beef. The commander’s glass always seemed about half full. Mr. Matthews drank water barely coloured with rum, Miss Mansel a glass of Boldock’s Madeira.

‘Do you think the boats will have outlived the weather this day, Captain Boldock?’ said Miss Mansel.

‘Sailors were distributed amongst them, I believe,’ answered the commander, looking at Matthews. ‘I shall expect to hear they have been picked up.’

‘It must be frightful to be out in an open boat in the wide ocean in a dense black fog throughout a long night,’ said Miss Mansel, shivering as she looked up at the sky-light.

‘Young men have stepped ashore after such experiences,’ said Mr. Matthews, ‘and have been mistaken by their mothers for their own grandfathers.’

‘It ages so?’ cried Miss Mansel.

‘There’s a wrinkle in every hour,’ said the mate.

‘And spectres fly over the boat in the wind and dye your hair grey,’ exclaimed the commander, laughing.

'Poor Mrs. Peacock, who was going home for her health!' said Miss Mansel.

'Ay! ay!' exclaimed Matthews, rolling his eyes up into pure whites. 'But the Storrs will feel it most. He was a selfish little cuckoo was Mr. Storr. He'll miss his warm bed, the lights of the cuddy, the poop to stretch his legs on.'

'Things are not up to the hammer with him,' said the commander, 'and I shouldn't be surprised if he finds the party in the boat a slow lot.'

He emptied his glass and filled it again, and immediately it was half full.

'I wish I could recollect the name of that island,' said Miss Mansel. 'Sometimes it seems at my tongue's end.'

'That proves it's in your head, which is a good sign,' said Mr. Matthews. 'Who's the navigator amongst them, do you suppose?'

'I should say certainly, Captain Trollope,' answered Miss Mansel, in a voice of fatigue and weakness.

'I might believe him that big villain with the silver chain,' said Mr. Matthews. 'But, in any case,' says he, addressing the commander, 'it may ask a trick of seamanship above their parts to carry the barque to the island Miss Mansel forgets the name of.'

'I cannot see how they are going to dispose of all that weight of nuggets and dust,' said Boldock, whose crimson was deepening its dye as though the influence of the rum was not within, but shone upon him in colour through his tumbler without. 'Take a piece of gold worth a hundred sovereigns—it's a considerable weight. Here, sir, we have ten men who are going to step ashore with plunder in precious ore to the value of twenty-eight thousand pounds apiece. How will they do it?'

Mr. Matthews shook his head gravely. 'They'll not land where there are Customs, anyhow,' said he. 'Pity this part of their project didn't reach your ears!' he said to Miss Mansel.

'I begin to think I see the fire in the water,' said Commander Boldock.

He rose, made the young lady a bow, and went on deck. Mr. Matthews followed him. It was pitch black with fog, a calm, heavy and profound, as though the sun and moon were dead, and the earth beginning to rot; and this image, indeed, was suggested by the fires in the sea.

'By George, Hardy!' said the commander, going to the rail and looking over, 'we seem to be afloat on the reflections of a blazing volcano.'

Mr. Hardy was hungry, was sick of the fog and the sea-flames, and, being relieved, went hastily into the cabin to eat and drink. The commander, after glancing at the phantom glows alongside, looked aloft and then around; then, pulling out a big meerschaum pipe, which he loaded with tobacco out of a great fur-purse, he struck a match, which burnt as steadily in that ocean calm as a candle in a bedroom. Neither he nor Mr. Matthews gave any further heed to the wondrous show of roaming and swimming lights and glows, vanishing in the impenetrable blackness within a biscuit toss. They were seasoned hands, pickled from toe to topmost hair, used to wonder at nothing, unless it were some monstrous and amazing piracy such as this on board the *Queen*, happening, so to speak, under their noses, or the recovery from the dead of a young woman, floating to Boldock's very cutwater, a silent, but an avenging messenger, nevertheless.

On board the little ship, as has been said, the watches were headed by the mate and the boatswain, but Mr. Matthews during the day had begged the commander's permission to stand watch and watch with Mr. Hardy that he might feel he was making some return for the hospitality and kindness shown him and his men. The humane commander had consented, glad to secure the services of so valuable a person on his quarter-deck, but he insisted that Mr. Matthews should rest through this night; therefore, when Mr. Hardy had supped, he came on deck, and Mr. Matthews, at Boldock's request, went below to turn in as soon as ever he chose.

Boldock had just filled and lighted a second immense bowlful. When Hardy rose through the hatch, he found his commander standing at the skylight, gazing down at Miss Mansel: he puffed out great clouds, which blackened the fog in his neighbourhood; his posture was meditative; the light of the cabin lamp was upon his figure, and revealed him; he stood a confused shape amidst an intolerable blackness. Mr. Hardy viewed him awhile in silence, then stepped to the wheel and took a look at the binnacle. His cough caused the commander to start and back away to the rail, against which he leaned, sucking his great curled meerschaum.

Mr. Hardy approached and stood close; now that they

were at the rail the fires alongside rendered them visible to each other.

‘I never remember a blacker night than this,’ said the commander.

‘Nor I, sir.’

‘I believe it signifies nothing but fog, nevertheless.’

‘I think,’ said Mr. Hardy, ‘if wind was at hand we should be able to smell it coming along over this grease-calm.’

‘And the silence is as remarkable as the blackness,’ said the commander. ‘You should be able to hear a baby hurrahing a mile off.’

In the pause that followed no sound was to be heard save the noise the commander made in smoking his pipe : the suction of his lips was like the drawing of corks and the gurgling of liquor.

‘Hardy,’ said he presently, ‘did you ever allow your thoughts to run in the direction of matrimony?’

The mate of the brig answered with a laugh.

‘That question,’ said Boldock, in his deep lamenting voice, ‘usually excites merriment, particularly amongst middle-aged bachelors. But I don’t know why it should. Marriage is the most awful of all events. It means population, and what does that signify but the passions, the struggles, the griefs, hopes, religions, deaths, and aspirations after death of poor humanity?’

‘One does sometimes laugh in the wrong place, sir,’ said Mr. Hardy, in a voice of respectful apology. ‘I have laughed in church, sir; but then, to be sure, I was a heedless young man.’

‘It must be a nice thing to have a nice wife,’ said Boldock.

‘A nice wife?’ said Mr. Hardy.

‘A nice wife, certainly,’ exclaimed the commander. ‘A lady that would make a comfortable home for a man. A man wants a comfortable home. I feel the need of it all the while I am ashore, and yearn for it all the time I am at sea. I do not like lodgings. There is a coldness, an indifference, an insensibility to your feelings and wants—to wants, I mean, which are not to be supplied by anything in the philosophy of latch-keys and shaving water.’

‘I have no great opinion of marriage,’ said the mate; ‘the billing and cooing season is commonly reckoned the best part; but then comes the family, and then in a little while, sir, you

may calculate how long the couple have been married by measuring the distance one walks behind t'other when out for a stroll.'

'Every man wants a home,' said the commander, after a succession of cork-drawing sucks at the heavy amber mouth-piece of his pipe.

'Seems to me, sir, a man wants a good deal that he can't get. There's nothing I'd like better than a home myself. But it's too expensive.'

Boldock hove out a sigh that had the strength and volume of a groan, a sail flapped aloft, a sheave on some rusty pin squealed like a rat to some sudden drag.

'At all events,' said the commander, 'I am sick of the sea, Hardy, and shall abandon it before long.'

'I wish I could see my way to take that view, sir,' said the mate, looking at the lights in the water.

'It is pleasant,' said the commander, 'to think of settling down ashore when one is at sea. I picture a white-faced cottage with a red roof. That red roof shines amidst the trees. I've a fancy of being able to see my house when I'm a long way off from it. In imagination, Hardy, I stand upon a lawn like velvet, and snuff up the most delicious smell of flowers, and listen to the silver tinkling of a little fountain of water. When I step into the house I enter rooms furnished with objects which delight me: pictures of engagements at sea, antlers and bows and arrows from savage places; an immense leather arm-chair with plenty of stern-sheets in which I sit, in slippers and shirt-sleeves, with a pipe in my mouth and a book on my knee, listening to the humming of the blue-bottles and the bees out of doors.'

'That sort of home takes a deal of keeping up, sir,' said Mr. Hardy, continuing to leer at the sheeting and clouding lights alongside, in whose images and wild fanciful drawings as the gleaming stuff met, dissolved, trembled off in fibres and darts from the brig's side, the poor fellow might have witnessed illusions not less hollow and hopeless than the dreams which had sometimes haunted his lonely quarter-deck look-outs.

The commander, finding his pipe out, went below. The cabin was empty. Boldock seated himself at the table, and presently a sailor arrived with a kettle of hot water, which he placed before the commander on a three-legged rest. The same sailor produced from a locker a bottle of rum, a lemon,

and some loaf sugar, and then, with a flourish of his thumb at a lock of hair and a thirsty, lingering look at the bottle, he went up the ladder and vanished.

Boldock mixed himself a glass of hot rum and water, and regretted that Mr. Matthews had retired, as he loved company. A great many thoughts sported in this stout sea-dog's brain, but it is certain they did not concern the business of the brig. Probably his mind never once glanced at the reef he was bound to. He sat smiling and smiling. The little sea parlour was speedily aromatic with the scent of hot rum and lemon. To many nostrils, especially to those of the ocean-going amongst them, nothing is comparable for deliciousness to this noble smell. Boldock sat sipping his grog with smiles which deepened as the liquor in the bottle sank, till he heard the brig's bell tinkle four. So it was ten o'clock in the South Pacific, much about where the *Wellesley* was, an amazing black night, and the water quick and splendid with the lightnings of phosphor.

Boldock drank three glasses. He was no more affected by the liquor than the brig's figurehead would have been had the draughts been poured over it as it leaned in blue coat and cocked hat under the bowsprit of the vessel. He thought he would fill another pipe and watch the weather in company with Mr. Hardy for half an hour or so, and was in the act of putting the rum bottle away in the locker when the door of the cabin occupied by Miss Mansel opened, and the young lady, habited in her dressing-gown, her feet loose in a pair of Mr. Hardy's slippers, stepped forth.

The commander shot erect on turning and seeing her. He was startled. It was an apparition. She was new to the ship, if not perhaps to his recent reflections, and habit in him was astonished. Her dark eyes were peculiarly black and brilliant. Her face was very pale. She would have looked ghastly as death itself to a third person's eye in contrast with the broad red moon of countenance sparkling with perspiration which the shoulders of the commander supported.

'I hope I haven't woke you up?' said he. 'I believed I moved quietly. The brig's like a churchyard to-night.'

'Oh, Captain Boldock,' Miss Mansel cried, 'it is a dream! The name of the island has come to me in a dream. I woke up pronouncing it.'

'Quick!' exclaimed the commander, 'or you may forget it again.'

'Halloran Island—Halloran Island—Halloran Island!' she said, approaching him by a step as she repeated the name. 'Don't tell me you don't know it,' she added, stretching out her hands, 'for it's there you'll find the ship and all they've taken from me.'

The commander's countenance wore an expression of stupor. He clenched his fist, and, letting it fall upon the table, exclaimed, 'To think that I should never have mentioned it, running over them all as I believe I did. Halloran Island! Upon my word! Why, Miss Mansel, do you know that that island is charted as within an easy day's sail of the reefs I am going to survey?'

'That's extraordinary! Is it far off?'

'About seven hundred miles. You shall see it on paper,' said Boldock.

He entered his cabin, and returned with the chart and overhung it.

'Here we are to-day,' said he, pointing to his last pricking-off; 'and here,' said he, 'looking quite close to, d'ye see, is Halloran Island. Probably if it hadn't been under my nose, as it were, I should have named it.'

'It is certainly the island the men named,' Miss Mansel exclaimed, gazing with earnestness at the indication on the chart.

'It's a very convenient island for their business,' said Boldock, looking up, and, as he spoke, beckoning to Hardy, who stood peering down through the skylight. 'It is uninhabited. It is out of the road of ships. The shoals barricade it from the north. The uncertainty of their situation will not permit ships to approach.'

Mr. Hardy's flowing trousers fluttered on the steps.

'Here's the island the scoundrels have carried the ship to, Hardy,' said the commander.

'Halloran Island! Not out of our road either. Very curious indeed, sir,' said Hardy.

'It came to me in a dream just now,' said Miss Mansel.

'Likely as not the scoundrels will cast the ship away on one of these reefs,' said the commander, putting a square-ended forefinger upon the chart, 'when they've transported the gold into the brigantine.' Then, folding his arms and leaning against the table, he looked earnestly at Mr. Hardy, and said, 'I propose to head straight for Halloran Island. I

shall expect to find the ship there. There will be several chances in this business.'

'I am certain you will find the ship there,' said Miss Mansel.

'We are a very slow brig,' exclaimed Mr. Hardy. 'If the fellows are ashore and sight us, and the *Queen* is in readiness, they will be off, carrying the gold with them, and if that happens any further search would signify the whole face of the waters.'

'This is a business that will demand foresight and strategy,' said Boldock, turning his head, with stately gestures of importance, slowly from Miss Mansel to his mate and back again. 'We must certainly bag these ten desperate villains and recover the gold. We must get all the honour, also the prize money, which is the bread which honour makes very good butter for. Several notions are in my head. I will smoke a pipe on deck and talk the matter over.'

'We are not moving,' said Miss Mansel.

'Neither are they,' said Mr. Hardy.

The commander put his chart away, and when he re-entered the cabin Miss Mansel had withdrawn. Thereupon he thoughtfully loaded his capacious pipe and joined Mr. Hardy on deck.

CHAPTER XXII

THE AMERICAN CAPTAIN

DAWN found the brig enveloped in thick fog, but when the sun rose the whiteness grew brilliant, and Mr. Hardy guessed that neither the top nor sides of the smother were very far off. A light wind was blowing. The fog rushed with it betwixt the masts and through the rigging in streams and lines of steam. The rippling water was like steel. It feathered in winks of foam and vanished close to, as though it washed under the foot of a wall.

Not long had the fog grown bright when the commander made his appearance on deck.

'A little wind,' said he, sniffing at it; 'and fair,' he added, glancing aloft at the yards which came and went in the rolling clouds of vapour like the sail of a boat in the run of the surge.

He stepped to the binnacle, and looked at the brig's course, then hung his jolly red face over the side to judge of the speed.

At that instant the sound of a gun was heard. The commander started and swept the surrounding blankness with his gaze, then stepping over to Mr. Hardy he said, 'Did you hear it?'

The mate's answer was taken out of his mouth by the sound of another gun, distant indeed, but clear and unmistakable.

'Good gracious!' exclaimed the commander, 'who can be firing in this fog? What is he firing for? Another gun, by thunder, Hardy! Why,' he cried with his head thrown back and his nostrils large in the mist, 'it positively sounds like an engagement. Can it be a ship ashore? What shore is there down here for a ship to strand upon?'

'D'ye think something's got scent of the *Queen* and——'

'Why,' interrupted the commander, 'you can't see a ship her own length off. Who'd plough up that vapour there with useful round shot on the chance of the enemy being hidden in it?'

'The sun, sir,' cried Mr. Hardy.

'Another gun!' exclaimed the commander.

As the mate spoke a glorious beam of light shot through a break in the flying silvery stuff and flashed up the brig, dazzling out her skylight and bright work into squares and stars of streaming splendour. Then, as if that spoke of glory had been the magician's wand that commanded the evanishment of this blind, soft, unsubstantial show, the vapour opened, it seemed to be torn, it fell brokenly into lanes and highways and avenues, with lumps of shimmering coast between. In a few minutes, and to the noise of artillery, the skirts of that vast field of fog majestically floated past the brig over whose beam and bow the blue sea opened, brilliant with the newly-risen sun.

'Why, *that's* what it is, sir—a fight!' cried Mr. Hardy in a voice that yelled with excitement.

The commander was thunderstruck. He stood motionless, He never could have believed that with his own sight he should witness in that year and in those waters the spectacle he beheld. Not above a mile and a half on the bow lay two vessels, broadsiding each other with small guns. One was a black barque with heavy black tops and large topsails. She

had a colour at her mizzen gaff, was painted black with a line of reddish metal that flamed wet as she lightly rolled like something sun-touched, clearly a man of war. The other was a smart brig, showing no colours, black too, with raking masts, and very sharp bows. They were manœuvring with spirit when the old *Wellesley* swarmed out of the fog, the brig trying to get to windward of the barque, and the barque slowly swinging her sails into swinging light and shadow as she braced her yards to defeat her opponent's efforts.

'My glass, Hardy!' cried the commander; and levelling those substantial tubes of brass at the two vessels he gazed thirstily.

The flag floating languidly at the barque's peak was Mexican. The brig had the appearance of a Yankee. The heart of Boldock beat with a pulse of fever when his great telescope brought one or the other of the vessels close to him. Red fire gushed from their sides, satin white clouds of powder smoke drifted betwixt their masts, and shone upon the sea like fragments of the fog that stately in bulk and pace was passing away into the blue heaven of the northern horizon. All the Jacks of the brig had got scent of the show, and the forecastle was filled. In fact, what with her own complement, and Matthews's people, the little brig forward was loaded with eighteen men. Thus crowded, and all hands showing, she was doubtless eyed with anxiety by the contending vessels as something dangerous coming to the assistance of one or the other of them.

Boldock stood on till he could see the flash of the water as the black balls skimmed the surface. Mr. Matthews came on deck, and was presently followed by Miss Mansel.

'What is it?' cried the young lady.

'A fight between a Mexican man-of-war and a smuggler, no doubt a Yankee, but I can't swear,' answered Boldock.

'Undoubtedly a Yankee, sir,' said Matthews, looking through the glass. 'Four guns of a side,' he went on with some spirit animating his usually slow manner, and casting a little red upon his yellow face; 'and the Mexican has five, and two large swivels on her quarters, and she seems to be full of men.'

'Those two vessels,' said the commander, 'must have been hammering at each other when the fog thickened down and hid them. It has only just lifted, and it can't be

supposed that both vessels could have been instantly prepared for action. The brig is well handled. Look! Ha! ha!’

As he spoke and laughed, crash! down came the mizzen-top-mast of the barque, and with it her colours rushing like a stream of light with the fall of the gaff.

‘Well aimed!’ roared the commander, clapping his hands. ‘Go it, little ‘un! I hate those Spaniards. When an army of Spaniards ran away they left the field of battle covered with guitars. That was two centuries ago. See how cleverly the brig luffs upon the bows of the barque to rake her with her popguns.’

‘The Don’s seizing his flag in the mizzen-rigging,’ said Mr. Hardy, with his eye at the glass.

With the naked sight it was easy to see a little figure ascend a short height of rigging, and make fast a flag. It blew out more like a distress signal than the arrogant earnest of triumph it was intended to be. The vessels were about three-quarters of a mile off, and Boldock halted his brig with her topsails to the mast to view that little picture of passionate warfare. Little it was, and beautiful, and memorable as a mid-ocean sea fight, because of the toy-like looks the distance and the mighty breast on which they were contending gave the combatants.

‘The Mexicans,’ said Mr. Matthews, ‘used to keep a few ships in Californian waters to deal with the contrabandistas. A good deal of contraband otter hunting was carried on. They demand a license for that, and lay a high duty upon every otter shot. What that barque is doing down here I can’t imagine, unless she comes from round the Horn on a northern passage.’

The vessels continued to fire at each other some time without any visible result. Their sails swelled, their glossy sides blazed, they manœuvred round and round each other, trimming their canvas with gallant dexterity as they shifted their helm for the new strategy. Their guns somewhat becalmed the air of the waters about them, and the reflected light in their canvas was dashed with the red flashes of their spouting artillery. The barque’s broadsides were clearly very wildly aimed. The brig’s, on the other hand, were repeatedly seen to take effect. The white chips flew out of the barque’s black side. A good deal of cut rigging hung loose about her, like the pulled hair of a woman in a back-alley scrimmage. Presently down fell her main-topsail with a rush to the cap,

with such a tug at the topgallant sheets that the lighter yard and sail above came down with it.

‘Hurrah!’ shouted the commander, clapping his hands as though he was at a theatre, some whiskered faces on the forecastle looking aft at him, and grinning with all their might at his demonstrative enjoyment. ‘Topsail halliards shot away! What’s he going to do now? Almost had enough of it, eh! Flash, bang! Go it, little ’un. He’ll be a Yankee. He’s bound to be a Yankee. Who but the Yankee has the spirit of Old Bull? Oh, I do hate the Yankees for beating us at sea, but I honour ’em for their pluck, I have the deepest respect for them as sailors, and I love them as the people who are designed by Providence to show humanity the road.’

His lamenting voice had scarcely ceased when the barque was seen to square her fore yards and drift slowly away before the wind from her little rakish opponent, whose canvas fluttered as though she meant to follow; then, to the conquering note of a single gun fired in seeming scorn at the mangled barque, the American colours rose slowly to the trysail gaff end, and there blew out; and the brig, her white breasts of canvas panting as she faintly curtsied, came rounding with lifting jibs and slightly leaning heights towards the *Wellesley*.

‘Keep your topsail aback!’ cried Commander Boldock, almost apoplectic with excitement. ‘Hoist the ensign, Mr. Hardy.’

‘He might be willing to relieve you of my men, sir,’ said Mr. Matthews.

‘No,’ said the commander. ‘We must keep them till we find if the *Queen’s* at Halloran Island. Shan’t you want men for her?’

‘True,’ answered Mr. Matthews with a grave bow, ‘I had not thought of that,’ and he added, ‘I was thinking of your larder, sir.’

‘I will fill up from the *Queen’s* stores; if not, there is plenty for all,’ said Boldock. ‘Here she comes. How swiftly she slides through it! Miss Mansel, pray observe her charming entry, the delicate curves aft, and the eager look of her, with her hawse-pipes like nostrils, and her jibs like the—like the——’ but here the worthy fellow missed stays in his imagery, and getting into irons, held his purple face turned in silence upon the coming brig, which indeed made a very beautiful

sight, as she floated like a shaft of light down upon the *Wellesley*.

Her canvas was cotton white. It was cut to a hair. Here and there it had been holed by the Mexican's shot, and you saw stars of blue sky in the lightly breathing milky softness. She was built for speed, and her lofty raking heights, and great squareness of yards, and man-of-war like hoist of topsail along with the low, level, clipper line of her, without an inch of spring, without a hair's breadth of sheer, forward aft, made Boldock think of the *Middle Passage*, and silently recall what naval men call an 'affair' in the red-hot mouth of an African river sliding in measureless miles in a dark and greasy volume, full of alligators, past haunts of black folk, whose grandchildren are at this day gentlemen of colour, culture, and substance in Jamaica.

The brig drew alongside within easy speaking distance, and backed her foretopsail. She showed no signs of injury from the fire of the barque, save a few severed ropes, a few holes in her canvas, a few white discs in her side where the foeman's balls had crashed. But the sun shone in stains of blood upon her decks, and in red water gushing through the scuppers to the strokes of an amid-ship's pump. Her crew seemed mainly white men, dark, and bearded, in wide-brimmed hats of grass or straw, and half-boots. They were black with powder and their struggles at the guns. She had a short raised after-deck, on which stood a man in a blue cloth coat, and a bandage round his head, on top of which was a great sombrero hat. He too was as black with the toil of slaughter as the grimiest of his crew, and looked a formidable fellow with a long goatee beard, whose end fell nearly to the brass clasp of his belt.

'Brig ahoy!' shouted Boldock, mounting the bulwark rail and holding on by a backstay. 'I perceive that you are an American, sir. I congratulate you upon your very handsome management of your enemy.'

'Durn him!' answered the man, coming slowly to the brig's side, and singing out in a mild voice, slightly flavoured with nosiness, 'why couldn't he have let me be? I'm a man of peace. I'm a commercial man. He began it—rot him!'

'Will you come aboard, sir?' shouted Boldock, impulsively, 'and give me the pleasure of your company at breakfast?' The man raised his hat as a signal of acquiescence.

'I don't think,' continued the commander, 'that your friend will give you any more trouble,' and he looked at the barque, which was slowly making her way northwards, her maintopsail yard still on the cap, her spanker in a heap on deck, her rag of colour hanging by ropeyarns in the mizzen rigging.

It was something after nine. They had not thought of breakfasting on board the *Wellesley* whilst that sea-fight was going on. Now the order for the meal was given, and the coloured cook went to work, and the grateful smell of fried ham and coffee came and went in the pleasant breeze. In about twenty minutes' time a boat put off from the American brig, and the man with the bandage round his head stepped on board. He had washed his face and changed his coat, and on the whole looked slightly less formidable than when first seen. Commander Boldock received him at the gangway.

'Pray what ship are you, sir?' said the man, darting sharp inquisitive looks all about the decks and at the crowd of men in the bows.

The commander informed him.

'Oh!' said he, with his face relaxing. 'All sailors, no matter what colour they hoist, must be deeply obliged to you gentlemen.'

This was true and handsomely said, accompanied as it was by an inclination of the figure which the bandage could not rob of a certain pleasing sailorly grace. Indeed, viewed close, this American proved a forbidding, but decidedly handsome man: long aquiline nose, bright grey eye, full of intelligence, and his shape was as good as a padded guardsman's.

The commander thanked him, and hoped his injury was not serious. He answered that his forehead had been grazed by a splinter; it was a trifling affair of sticking plaster.

'Any killed, sir?' says the commander.

'One poor fellow cut right in halves, two men shot dead, none wounded, unless you call my forehead a wound,' answered the man in a slightly nasal drawl, and a mild voice that was curiously out of character with his military looks.

'You are her captain?'

'I am her master, and my name's Congreve.'

On this Boldock introduced him to Miss Mansel, and Mr. Matthews coming up, the four stood in conversation till breakfast was announced.

The American captain was full of the recent fight, and could talk of nothing but the Mexican, whose skipper had probably taken fright on observing the two brigs in amicable conversation, for the barque was now sliding away northwards under full heads of canvas, and Mr. Hardy, inspecting her through the long brass telescope, exclaimed that they were rigging out their studdingsail booms.

'I peppered her yesterday before the fog hid us,' said the American captain, who continued to look with interest and curiosity at Miss Mansel, to the extent indeed of seeming to address himself entirely to her; this perhaps heightened her attractiveness by causing her colour to mount; in her white canvas cap perched upon her mass of dark hair, and in her crimson dressing-gown, whose brilliancy of tint did not seem to have suffered much from immersion, the young lady looked exceedingly well this morning. Boldock stared at the Yankee, as if he would take his eye. 'She did me no mischief whatever,' the captain went on. 'We ceased blazing when the smother came, but all through the night we could hear her. That was the most wonderful thing, Miss. A real sensation for dull spirits, I can assure you. Within a dozen ships' lengths of us lay our enemy. Sometimes I had a mind to fire, but never could be sure of the direction of the sound. We kept all silent aboard of us, for I'm a man of peace. Fighting's not in my line. I don't do business in blood.'

'Otters, sir?' suggested Mr. Matthews.

'I'm a free-trader,' answered the Yankee, gravely, whilst he eyed Mr. Matthews askew.

He then put before them a description of his position throughout the night with real dramatic power. Miss Mansel thought of some of the ten gentlemen whilst she watched and listened. His bandage did not, indeed, improve his appearance, but his eyes glowed and occasionally rolled with fierceness upon the white square of canvas growing blue in the distant blue air whilst he talked of the black midnight hush, the masked lights, the breathless whispers amongst his own people, no noise alongside but an occasional slushy gurgle of water, sometimes a low laugh aboard the midnight-hidden ship, once the crowing of a cock, then at intervals the faint chirruping of a boatswain's whistle, once or twice a dim thumping noise as of a hatch cover being beaten.

However, breakfast was now served, and Miss Mansel, the Yankee, and Boldock descended, Mr. Matthews begging leave

to remain on deck. They took their seats. The Yankee, uncovering, showed a bandaged head of hair, slightly touched with iron. He gazed about him with curiosity and interest, and very often did his glance go to Miss Mansel. The commander filled the head of the table, and his jolly red face shone like a lamp upon the repast. It was a good sea meal for so little a ship; in addition to the bacon and ham and beef of the stores Boldock had provided the table with certain delicacies of his own laying in. A no more courteous and gracious host ever floated upon salt water than this hearty sailor of the Queen's service, and in a few minutes Captain Congreve was making an excellent breakfast, very much at his ease indeed.

'I am sure,' said he, bowing to Miss Mansel as he touched the bandage, 'I did not know there was a lady aboard when I accepted the captain's invitation. I had not observed you, Miss.'

'I wonder you had nerve left to see anything,' said Miss Mansel.

'Wal, I had not the nerve to see you,' said the Yankee skipper, smiling at the girl, whilst his long goatee worked with a piston-like fall and rise to the steady chaw, chaw of his jaws, 'otherwise I would not have come. Now, captain,' said he, looking round at Boldock, 'who could sit in the presence of ladies thus turbaned?'

'Are you from round the Horn?' asked the commander.

'I am a light ship, bound to the Islands.'

This was said with much significance. Boldock changed the subject.

'Have you chanced to fall in with a fine-looking barque within the last twenty-four hours?' he inquired.

'With no other barque than the vessel you found me alongside of,' answered the Yankee captain.

'No boats?'

'Ne'er a boat. I'll take another helping of that bacon, Miss.'

The lady loaded his plate. The table was a very little one. The Yankee could easily have helped himself, but he liked to be helped by Miss Mansel. Boldock's breathing grew a trifle laboured; his broad face, however, preserved its welcoming looks.

'Pray, Miss,' said the Yankee captain, 'might you be this gentleman's sister?'

'No,' answered the girl, flushing. 'Shall you or I, Captain Boldock, explain how it happens that I am here thus attired?'

'Is any explanation needed, d'ye think, Miss Mansel?' said the commander.

'Case of shipwreck?' inquired the Yankee.

'Worse,' said the girl; and, finding that Boldock did not intend to relate her story, she told it herself.

Captain Congreve listened with flattering interest, putting down his knife and fork and leaning forward that not a syllable should escape him. His eyes rested with admiration upon hers. Boldock watched him, observing the motions of her lips.

'Wal,' said he, when Miss Mansel had made an end, 'I've heard some queer yarns in my time; never the like of this—never. Afloat for several hours—picked up by this here *Wellesley*—the ship stolen by ten men—by hell, captain!' he cried, with a sudden amazing fierceness that terrified Miss Mansel and considerably startled Boldock, bringing his fist down upon the table with a force that ran a sound of breakage through the crockery, 'it'll be out of my road, yet, to avenge this young lady, it'll give me the greatest pleasure to accompany this one-gun craft in search of the *Queen*, and, finding her, to yardarm or otherwise destroy, as the lady may desire, every scoundrel man-jack of the whole biling ten!'

The commander bowed stiffly. 'We are a brig full of men,' he replied. 'I believe we shall be able to manage, sir, thanking you all the same.'

'Whar are the lobsters carrying their plunder to?' said the Yankee.

The girl caught Boldock's eye and looked up, with seeming carelessness, at the little skylight at the moment the commander replied, 'If you can give me that information I shall feel very much obliged to you.'

'Will you describe the barque?' said Captain Congreve.

Boldock did so.

'If I fall in with her I shall board her,' said the Yankee, 'and if I find these ten men in her I'll hang 'em.'

'Justice will be better served by your clapping them in irons and carrying the ship to Sydney,' said the commander.

The Yankee skipper, with a dark, scowling face, drank half a cupful of coffee and, lying back, began to talk to himself.

Miss Mansel heard him mumbling in astonishment over her story. He mouthed it and turned it about on his tongue like a dreamer, pulling at his long streamer of beard, now eyeing her and now Boldock. He then exclaimed :

‘I may have the luck to fall in with her. They’ll not be bound down this road. You’ll find ’em travelling north and west. About twenty-four hours ahead, air they?’ he muttered. ‘Sorry, now this chance has come along, that I parted with a prime navigator.’

‘How did that happen?’ said the commander, drumming on the table with one hand. He had finished his breakfast, and had not eaten much.

‘Let me see,’ said the Yankee, curling a turn of his goatee around his fist, ‘it will have been last Friday morning ; a fine day, pleasant air of wind out of the east, the vessel under all plain sail. So. Wal, at about half-past eight we made out suthing on the weather-bow. She looked to be crippled. She lay sorter helpless. I put the glass to my eye and found her a small brigantine, with her mizzen-topmast gone and an English flag of distress at her fore-royal mast-head. I luffed and went for her, and hailed, and found her the Colonial brigantine *Rival*, so many days from Sydney, but how many I must look at my log to tell yer.’

Commander Boldock was eyeing him strenuously ; Miss Mansel’s gaze was rooted on his face. The Yankee seemed gratified by the interest he excited, and proceeded :

‘Three men were on board ; one hailed me from the fo’c’sle deck, and in a most lamentable voice asked me to help them, as they’d been washing about the sea for some days and didn’t know where they were. I sent my mate and a crew to see what the matter was with the vessel, and when they came back the mate gave me this yarn. He said that the brigantine belonged to Sydney, and was bound to Chatham Island to meet a ship to receive certain commodities out of her with which they were to proceed to Valparaiso. The master’s name was Saunders.’

Miss Mansel violently started ; Commander Boldock grasped the edge of the table with both hands. His face was as crimson as blood with excitement and interest. He glared with impassioned and devouring anxiety to hear more. The Yankee captain was now noticing the effect his story was producing, and paused—a pause of distraction to the lady and the commander—whilst he turned his long, handsome,

forbidding face from one to the other. He then said to Boldock, 'Might you be acquainted with this brigantine?'

'No, sir,' answered Boldock.

'What was the matter with her?' said Miss Mansel.

'Why,' answered the Yankee, 'it seems that a few days before my falling in with her, her master, whose name was Saunders'—here he looked suspiciously at Boldock—'whilst standing beside the helm talking to the man at the wheel, tumbled down. They picked him up and carried him below. They didn't know what was wrong, only that he'd lost his voice, and all motion was gone out of his left side.'

'Hum!' said Boldock, swaying his form unconsciously in a succession of agitated bows.

'I went on board to look at him. He couldn't speak, and was scarcely able to see, but with his right hand he managed to scrawl on paper a request that I would send some one to carry him home to Sydney, that he might die there and be buried alongside his child. I couldn't spare my mate, but luckily for this here Saunders, I'd got a man in my fo'c'sle that had been second of a coaster. He onderstood all about the sun nigh the same as you and me. So I put him into the brigantine along with a few comforts for the sick man, and we parted.'

Miss Mansel, darting looks of mingled amazement and pleasure at the commander, left her seat, and, slightly bowing to the American, entered her cabin.

'I hope,' said the American captain rising, 'that I have said nothing to hurt the lady's feelings?'

'All tragical tales of the sea,' answered the commander courteously and gravely, having rallied his wits with that sort of intellectual nimbleness which the sea-captain peculiarly stands in need of, 'affect most people as surprises. I, who have been to sea nearly all my life, never heard such a yarn as this of yours, for instance, but that I am shocked—more or less. A little ship washing about helpless—three men never knowing what's going to befall them from hour to hour—the master dying or dead of paralysis in the cabin! Such a tale should easily move the tender heart of a young woman.'

The Yankee watched him whilst he delivered these words in his odd deep voice of lamentation.

'Pray, sir,' said he, 'will you kindly tell me how long Miss Mansel has been in this brig with you?'

The commander replied.

‘Can you inform me if she has any relations, any connections in Australia or England? Is she English or colonial?’

He approached Boldock by a stride to hearken.

‘She is a stranger to me, sir,’ answered the commander, with a hardening face.

‘You have no interest in her, then?’

‘She is a lady passenger on board this brig, and under my care.’

‘You’ll not take what I’m going to say in an onkind sperrit, I hope,’ began the Yankee, with a look at the cabin Miss Mansel was in. ‘I’m woundily taken by that girl, and that’s a fact. Never saw such eyes in my life. Would she be willing, d’y’e reckon, to come along with me?’

The commander, who had been seated till now, sprang out of his seat and turned his immense face, red as a storm at sunset, upon the American.

‘Oh!’ said the Yankee quickly, ‘don’t let there be any misunderstanding between us; what I’ve got in view’s a life partnership. As commander of this brig, it’s in your power to make a man and woman husband and wife by reading your marriage service before ’em.’

‘I decline to discuss this subject,’ said the commander, and turning his broad shoulders upon the skipper, he went up the steps. The Yankee immediately followed.

‘You’ve treated me very handsomely,’ he exclaimed. ‘I hope I’ve not offended you?’

‘I will not believe that you meant any offence, sir,’ responded the commander. ‘Suppose now we proceed on our respective voyages!’

He took the man’s proffered hand and walked to the gangway, and raised his hat to the salutation of the sombrero when the boat was pulling for the American brig.

The Mexican was a mere smudge of pearl in the far blue. The water was shivering to a strengthening breeze, and the English ensign at the *Wellesley’s* peak rippled with the musical note of a brook in a wood in a summer month.

‘Mr. Hardy,’ said the commander, walking aft, ‘get way upon the brig, sir.’

‘Ay, ay, sir,’ answered Mr. Hardy.

‘Will you step below and get some breakfast, Mr. Matthews?’ said the commander.

‘Thankfully, sir,’ answered Mr. Matthews.

The order was given, and the brig’s yards were swung.

‘Hardy,’ said the commander, standing beside him, ‘I spoke favourably of the Americans this morning. I recall my words. They no longer march, in my opinion, at the head of civilisation.’

‘I never should have thought of putting them there, sir,’ exclaimed Mr. Hardy, with one of his leering looks at the commander. ‘The right place for ’em is where the noise comes in. The band don’t lead: the pioneers walk first.’

‘But all the same,’ said the commander, looking at the American brig, which was now slowly sliding away on the *Wellesley’s* quarter, ‘our friend yonder has given me a wonderful piece of news, and I guess, to use his phrase, that our ten friends of the nuggets will find themselves handsomely cornered. Yes, Hardy, you may dip to him.’

CHAPTER XXIII

HALLORAN ISLAND

IT was the tenth day since the seizure of the ship, a red afternoon, islands of white vapour in the sky sailing very slowly over their shadows in the sea southwards. These noble masses of vapour hung bulked in lofty terraces far south, and made fresh beauty for the dark blue ocean.

In the midst of that wide space of waters floated the *Queen*, with her bowsprit pointing towards the coast of cloud. The wind followed her; it was a light wind, and she blew slowly onwards, not wholly the same graceful fabric that Benson had commanded. Indeed, you had but to look aloft to see that mischief had been done her, that she had either come through a hard struggle of weather, or that her beauty had been wrecked by some half-drunken snob at the helm.

A seaman, however, would at once have ascribed the loss of the barque’s foretop-gallant mast to storm. He would have observed other signs of the ship having been severely strained. The nine gentlemen and the two sailors had cleared away the wreck, but now, without her crown of top-gallant sail and royal forward, and her milk-white wing of flying jib, she looked another ship.

It was four o’clock in the afternoon. Eight gentlemen were on deck: Shannon was at the wheel, but he, who ought

to have been preoccupied by the business of steering, was as busy as the rest of them in sending looks searching with hope and fear at that line of blue waters which washed the terrace of vapour.

'Foretopmast crosstrees!' bawled Captain Trollope, stepping with old Benson's glass under his arm down the poop ladder, and walking a little way along the quarter-deck. 'Don't you make out any signs of land yet, Dike?'

That scowling gentleman sat airily perched high aloft on the crosses of timber which Trollope had rightly named in hailing. Savage impatience had carried him up the shrouds with the late captain's binocular glass, through which he was staring at the ocean ahead when Trollope shouted.

'Yes,' he answered, letting sink the glass from his eyes whilst he turned his face, the blacker for the shadow of his hat slowly aft in his sulky way to answer; 'and had you waited another minute I'd have reported it.'

'Land ho!' shouted Captain Trollope.

'Where away?' bawled the fellows on the poop, coming in a rush of excitement to the rail at the break.

'How does the land bear, Dike?' cried Trollope, looking up.

'I wish it had been any other man up there,' shouted Shannon from the wheel. 'What centuries that hedgehog takes to answer a question! Why didn't he die when he had that fit? He's not too good to die.'

'Foretopmast crosstrees!' roared Trollope. 'Don't you hear me ask you, how does the land bear?'

'How am I to give it you in points?' answered Caldwell. 'All that I know is it's there,' and he shot out his arm indicating a place on the sea about three points on the lee bow.

Hankey sprang off the poop, and, running forward, danced aloft. The canvas of the topsail swelled against a soft vast white cloud. Above stood the naked head of the mast, clearly exposing the forms of Mr. Caldwell and Mr. Hankey as they jockeyed one arm of the cross-trees pillion fashion, their legs swinging, their shapes sharp as inkstreaks against the cloud.

'Land in your eye, is it?' cried Weston, rushing off the poop on to the quarter-deck and gazing up at the men.

'Solid enough to get married on, bet your dollop on that. Solid enough to build a church on, and be buried in!' yelled Hankey. 'Hurrah!'

He had taken the binocular glass from Caldwell, and in the ecstasy of that hurrah he knocked his companion's hat off.

'Plague take you for the clumsiest hand in the ship!' growled Dike.

The hat, being of straw, fluttered lightly to the deck. Its descent was watched by the people below with a sort of horror. Nothing so suggests the fall of a man from aloft as the dropping of his hat. His head might well be in it, you think. Caldwell came sluggishly as a bear down the rigging, leaving the glass with Hankey, whom Trollope now hailed.

'I say, old chap, do you see any sign of the brigantine?'

'That's just what I'm looking for,' answered Hankey, standing up and holding on by one hand, and carefully sweeping the horizon of the waters with the lenses.

'Brigantine in sight?' shouted Shannon from the wheel.

Nobody made answer till Hankey, looking down, sang out, 'I see nothing like a sail, but there are many tips of white clouds which are deucedly bothersome, and I won't swear that one or another mayn't be a ship yet.'

Caldwell sprang like a toad off the rail on to the deck, picked his hat up, and put it on his head.

'It's the land and your island, Trollope,' said he, with a note of gloomy congratulation in his voice. 'I make you my acknowledgments. Your skill as a navigator is exquisite.'

Trollope touched his cap and wound his moustache with half a smile, half a sneer.

'But there's no ship,' continued Caldwell, 'and unless Saunders has hidden his vessel away behind that blotch yonder, he's missed his road or gone down in the gale.'

Several of the men, catching at Caldwell's hint, gathered about Trollope and shook hands with him, and were noisy in admiration of his navigation.

'It's a little early to suppose that because we don't see the brigantine that she's gone down, or that Saunders has missed the road,' exclaimed Trollope presently, turning upon Caldwell; 'why, man, the blessed island itself isn't in sight yet from these decks.'

'Who wants to depress us?' said Davenire.

'I am the first man to see the island, all the same,' said Caldwell, and with a look dark with liver, nerve, and temper, he turned to the rail and stared away out to sea.

Hankey, with the binocular in one hand, came down

the rigging whistling. He walked aft with a cheerful face, and putting the glass upon the skylight, said to Trollope, 'Your skill amazes me. The island's yonder, true as a hair—land, anyhow, a small, pale, firm scar, but no ship, though the rim of the ocean shows like the teeth of a saw with heads of cloud.'

'So it does,' said Burn. 'That yonder, right astern there, might be a frigate's topsail.'

'If there's no brigantine,' said Trollope, seating himself within easy hearing distance of the wheel, whilst the others drew about him, all saving Caldwell, one sitting on the deck, another lounging upon the skylight, 'you'll have to come into my scheme. Shall I tell you why? Because, as the monkey said when he ate his tail for dinner, it's a case of necessity. You'll draw lots as to who goes in the boat and who stays with the chests.'

'I'm opposed to burying the gold and leaving it in somebody's custody, I don't care whose,' said Weston.

'There's about forty hundredweight of the stuff,' said Trollope, speaking coldly and in a level voice. 'Do you suppose, Patrick, that the man or men who stay whilst the longboat seeks a substitute for the *Rival* are going to build anything capable of floating that mass of ore?'

'No,' said Weston, 'but this has been a huge risk, a tremendous, audacious adventure, for which some of us may yet suffer. Be that as it will, there's a fortune for me in my share, and I dislike the notion of leaving it in the charge of any man.'

Caldwell grunted approval at the rail. Johnson and Shannon at the wheel seemed to be of Weston's mind.

'But, my dear fellow!' exclaimed Trollope quietly, but with the decision in his voice of a resolved, irritable spirit deep down, 'you don't mean to say if the brigantine don't turn up, that you'll load that boat there with the gold?' He nodded in the direction of the fore-part of the barque, where the longboat stood.

'I mean to say that I don't like the idea of leaving my fortune behind me in charge of another man,' said Weston, speaking quickly.

'She'd float gunwale deep,' exclaimed Davenire.

'I've measured her, and allow that she'll carry six tons comfortably,' said Weston.

'What's going to be said by anything that may speak

us?' said Cavendish. 'A vessel sees a ship's longboat adrift full of men; she bears down out of mercy—what then? With eighteen highly suggestive chests stowed in the midst of us, hey? A rather loquacious ballast for a keen eye to talk to over the edge of some tall humane ship's side.'

'You can always up helm. No need to speak anything unless you choose,' answered Weston.

'You're wasting words,' said Trollope calmly. 'Besides, you fellows who oppose us haven't, somehow, yet named a port for the longboat to steer for.'

'You could contrive that. I'll nail my colours to your decision *there*,' said Weston.

Trollope made no answer, but, with a face of grave contempt of Weston's talk, sat watching that beautiful romance of nature—huge clouds gilt by the western sun, changing in form and gaining in splendour as they sailed in majesty in the wind.

'Why,' called Shannon from the wheel, 'can't we use this ship if the brigantine don't turn up?'

'This ship!' exclaimed Davenire. 'It's nothing to you that a hue and cry may have been raised. Have you figured the passengers and crew picked up—chaw!'

'Suppose, since we are in the humour for supposing,' said Mr. Cavendish, 'that all the hands of us hold our jaw till the island's uphove, and we find out whether the brigantine is there or not?'

This was good advice, and the subject was dropped, but the fellows continued to send eager glances round the sea. They had got both anchors over the bow on the preceding day. This they had contrived under the direction of William and Harry the Dane, no man of them having much knowledge of a ship's ground-tackle. It was essential to the vessel's safety that they should be able to bring up instantly; they were in dangerous waters—they believed they were: they had not made the island from the southward, but from the northward, and some leagues to the north, vaguely and unsatisfactorily placed upon the chart, extended a number of dangerous reefs and shoals.

Presently Trollope, slinging the glass over his neck, walked along the deck and mounted the fore-shrouds. The men watched him, guessing his purpose. He climbed to the height of the cross-trees and first looked for the island, which he immediately saw—a blue film far away off on the edge of the ocean. He then sought for any signs of sunken

shoal or visible reef. The sea stretched a pure unbroken breast to its confines, but except the glance of the feathering ripple, there was no appearance of white water, of broken waters, of waters darker or lighter of hue through commotion the whole mighty distance round.

Captain Trollope stayed awhile aloft; he was a scoundrel, but a man of imagination and taste, and could not fail to enjoy the magnificent prospect of sea which trembled and sparkled in its countless miles of brine far beneath him and away to the distant blue slope, scarcely clothed with cloud. The air up here blew with a refreshing coolness. The oblique glance of the sun painted half the squares of the canvas to the mainroyal a delicate crimson, which paled in the other half into grey. The vane at the masthead burnt, and all the tarry shrouds and backstays were tipped in each turn of strand with gold. The ocean was a sheet of gold under the sun, and many dark shadows of cloud seemed to sleep upon it like islands. Trollope thought one looked as firm as land, and watched it anxiously till he saw that it moved. He gazed down and beheld lines of blue, swiftly turning into light, curving, numerous as the strings of a harp, from either bow; the swelling cloths of the maintopsail and topgallant-sail concealed the northern horizon—he judged that the ship's speed was about five knots, and that the island might be above twenty miles distant.

It would be impossible for them to make it by daylight; he resolved, therefore, to sail another twelve or fifteen miles, and then heave the ship to till dawn. Yet he stayed first to intently survey the liquid path of the ship as far as the glasses carried his sight, then most carefully he ran along the horizon to where the mainsail blocked it on either hand. He saw no ship, nothing but swarming mockeries of sail, graceful as feathers and deceptive by lingering.

It will be terrible, he thought, as he slowly descended the rigging, if Saunders is not at the island, and on gaining the deck he, without answering several questions put to him by the men, passed straight to the captain's cabin, and opened the book of sailing directions, in which was a tracing of Halloran Island. The delineation, however, was too small to convey any idea of bays and natural harbours, or little curvatures of coast. Closing the book, he consoled himself with the reflection that not until next day, when they should

have sailed round the island, could they certainly know whether the brigantine had failed them or not.

The wind shifted, and came with a trifle of freshness out of the sunset, when sea, sky, and cloud were a smoky red with the fires of the west. They trimmed sail, clewing up the mainroyal, which the Dane furled, and the barque drove onwards clothed in purple. Mr. Storr and the colonial merchant had left excellent pocket telescopes behind them. The nine gentlemen had also found a very handsome field-glass in Mrs. Peacock's cabin. These and old Benson's telescope and binocular were in much request this afternoon and evening, particularly when the island sprang on to the rim of the deep like a coloured bubble, fast growing out of blueness into green; but the shift of wind had dissolved the clouds. Other forms of vapour were shaped in the breeze, they flew high, and the horizon ceased to madden the strained sight with disappointments.

Now, whilst there was daylight in the sky, and the island was a measurable object about fourteen miles off, they could, with the glasses, judge of its character and extent, and their spirits sank. It looked rich in wood and seemed about two miles long; it sat low, and the length of it was white with the throb of surf, though some of the men thought it was coral beach. But where was the brigantine? That was the question that damped their souls and put out the fire in their hearts. They could not distinguish the least appearance of anything resembling a vessel on this side.

'If we are to heave-to without looking round the corner,' said Davenire to Trollope, 'till the morning, the night's going to be mad with anxiety.'

'The evening is already upon the water,' answered Trollope. 'It darkens sharply in these latitudes. We must heave the ship to within the next half-hour. I'll not trust myself with less than a ten-mile offing, and when we are hove-to I shall want a cast of the deep-sea lead.'

Burn had drawn near. 'Why,' said he, in his oozy voice, 'wasn't some night signal arranged for? Suppose we send up a ball or two on chance.'

'Saunders may have none,' answered Trollope. He mused a moment or two, then added, 'But whether he has or not, your idea's not bad, Alce. I wish you were always so clever. Davenire, Saunders might do this: stand out if he sees the rockets across the island, and answer with a flare.'

'What d'ye think,' said Caldwell, who leant against the rail listening, arms folded, head sunk, dusky eyes slowly turning to one or another, 'of Alec's rockets bringing something troublesome down upon us—something floating into shape right down upon us out of the dark, before we could fill on the barque and get away?'

'What's going to be troublesome?' said Trollope.

'Is there never a man-of-war cruising hereabouts?' growled Caldwell.

'Dike's right,' exclaimed Trollope, after reflecting, 'though I'm not afraid of his man-of-war. If our signal should be seen, a ship might ooze out of the dark and ask questions. Some scurvy old whaler, perhaps; but here we are, the piratically seized barque *Queen*, quite easily described by the very basest of all mother's sons out of Nantucket or Whitby, name ourselves as we will, and there's that island to top discovery off with.'

This indecision and uncertainty was the result of numbers. Masters, it is true, was dead, but nine men remained, and every man had an opinion of his own, and every man likewise knew his brethren in this business to be thieves and rogues, and worse. It was extremely hard to guess how the fellows would work out their own surprising conspiracy, how, in short, they were going to safely convey ashore to places of concealment, but of civilisation too, so large a mass of precious ore as was contained in those eighteen chests, weighing, as one of them had pointed out, over two tons.

The evening was dark and moonless, and the water was crackling and glancing under the steady gushing of the westerly wind when they hove the barque to, the island bearing then about eight miles distant, a scarcely determinable heap of shadow in the windy dusk. They furled the mainsail and the main-topgallant sail, and left her to lie under her topsails, the foresail hauled up. They showed no lights and kept an eager look-out. It was just the sort of night when a ship would show suddenly: plenty of stars streamed between the clouds, and a sort of fat dusk was upon the sea.

'We want to speak nothing but the brigantine,' Caldwell had said in his surliest tones, and he was right.

They were up and down all night; scarcely a man of them could rest. Again and again you'd see one or another shape of shadow turning his glass round the midnight sea, and one would suddenly cry, 'Isn't that something like a vessel out

yonder?' and then another would answer after a pause, 'All's clear water that way.' Once Shannon said to Caldwell, 'Look here! Make up your mind there's no brigantine arrived. Didn't Saunders have nearly all day down to sunset to view us in? Do you think, if he's at the island, he's not keeping a look-out northwards as well as southwards? He'd have been out to meet us this afternoon. He's either gone down or missed the bearings of the spot.'

'Go and hang yourself!' Caldwell had answered.

Trollope had talked of heaving the deep-sea lead, but they thought the hand-lead scope enough when they viewed the tub and discussed the job of the manœuvre; one man starting with lead and loud yelp at the spritsail yardarm or cathead, and the fakes drearily passing from hand to hand in melancholy cries to the quarter-deck, where, of course, there would be no bottom. They made no bottom with the handline, and this satisfied the gentlemen.

The lamp burned dimly in the cuddy throughout the night. They saw to their comforts: champagne and sherry, and stronger drinks still, plenty of soda-water, of which there was a good stock aft, cold ham, canned tongue, corned beef, and biscuit; boxes of cigars and tobacco were on the table. Thus they contrived to kill that night frightful with suspense.

It was in the middle watch, at about a quarter to one, that William came aft and stood at the cuddy door looking at the table. Mr. Burn leaned upon it sound asleep, Caldwell and Davenire sat wide awake drinking cold whisky and water; Trollope smoked a cigar opposite them. The rest were above on the look-out, or at the wheel. William saw plenty to eat and plenty to drink, and, having a question to ask, he stepped in and pulled off his cap.

'What is it?' said Trollope, starting up, and Burn at the same moment awoke and stared with confusion around him.

'There's nothing to eat in the fo'c'sle,' said William, 'so I thought I'd tell yer.'

'That's your fault. You need but speak. Help yourself,' said Trollope, pointing to the table with his cigar.

The man put two bottles of beer into his jacket pockets, and took up a large piece of ham and a tin of biscuits. He paused and, addressing Trollope, said, 'Now that we're off this here island, d'ye mind letting me and 'Arry know what's next a-going to happen?'

'We expect a brigantine,' answered Trollope, looking at

Davenire. 'We must keep this ship cruising here till she turns up. Meanwhile the chests will be taken ashore for safe keeping. If the brigantine don't turn up within a reasonable time, we may use this vessel or the longboat—'tis an open question yet with some of the gentlemen—for the purpose of securing the services of a craft in the room of the one that has failed us.'

He spoke drawlingly and coolly.

'Go and tell your mate,' snarled Caldwell, 'that we're agreed to nothing, that nothing is settled, that nothing shall be settled until we've sailed round the island, and taken a good look at it by sunlight.'

'So!' said Trollope, with a nod at William, but with a flush in his cheeks as he glanced at Caldwell.

The inside of the forecandle was black in the bows; there was no virtue in the beam of the smoking and stinking flame under which Harry was sitting to touch that eclipse. The little man flourished another knife he had found, when William entered, and squaring his elbows at the cheer his shipmate put down upon the chest, he said, with his eyes sparkling, for the damaged eye was now well:

'What are they going to do with us?'

'Can't get to 'ear,' answered William.

'I tell you what,' cried the Dane; 'I don't feel like ever seeing my nation any more.'

'I don't think yer will,' said William. 'But,' said the man, masticating as leisurely as a cow, 'this is good enough while it lasts, ain't it?'

'I hope they'll give me a chance to see my way to do for that man Trollope,' said the Dane. 'If you ask what I should like to pray for most, it is that.'

'Try your knifing jokes on, and see what 'ud happen; a whip at either main yardarm, and you and me a-dangling at the blocks—pretty ornaments—jewel-blocks! Not that you mayn't do what you bloomin' well please, so long as I'm to wind'ard.'

The Dane made no answer, and silence reigned in that gloomy forecandle.

The break of day found the nine men on deck, William at the wheel, the Dane on the forecandle head, gazing at the island. Shannon, who usually handled the ship when the required manœuvre was at all complicate, swung the main topsail and got way upon the vessel. When the sun rose

the morning was one of true Pacific splendour, a vast breast of radiance weltering from sea-line to sea-line, a sky spacious and high, with pearl-like cloud, marvellously netted and like white jewellery of some sort, infixed or let into the blue dome. A bright wind was blowing out of the west, and the sea-line ran to the island as clear as the rim of a tumbler. The swell of the night had drifted the spot about twelve miles distant over the bows, when the helm swung the ship's head fair for it. Every glass was levelled; not a feather-tip broke the pure sweep of the flashing horizon.

'What's the good of his going aloft with that scowling face of his?' said Shannon to Hankey, whilst they watched the somewhat ungainly shape of Dike Caldwell shaking the fore-shrouds as he made his way to the top. 'There's nothing to be seen by looking, and there's nothing to hope for by waiting. There's no *Rival* at that island, abaft or before. She ought to be here, and her not being here will mean brimstone by-and-by; for, now it's come to it, there's not a fiend of the lot of us who can make up his mind.'

Hankey drew out his whiskers, and watched the island without answer.

As they drove, the land grew into a heap of brilliant green very richly wooded; they saw two or three little natural bays, but no brigantine was in them, and the island seemed as lifeless as a shoal. The surf was plentiful, and the sea broke with great force against the western point; the white brine spouted as high as the topmost heights of the island itself, and fell into the sea with a constant mighty roar, which rolled in thunder to the men's ears as the ship sailed along. They so steered as to give that westernmost foaming point a berth of a mile and a half.

William, as a sailor with careful eyes, had been sent on to the bowsprit to watch the water for shoals or change of colour. The rest of the men stood at the braces ready to trim sail for the rounding of the island. Some of them were almost breathless. They could hardly speak for anxiety. Shannon, who controlled the motions of the ship, studied the island constantly through a telescope when the western point, glorious with mountain-high brine, was abreast. Occasionally through the silence along the decks would break some such question as:

'What do you see, Shannon?'

'Any signs of her, Walter?'

‘I tell you you’ll see nothing,’ growled Caldwell, who had come down and was standing at the mainbrace. ‘You should be able to make out the mastheads of the *Rival* across the island from our topmast crossrees, and those who are expecting to see her will be sold.’

He seemed to spit the words at those whom it concerned, nor could it be said that his looks had improved, whether in intelligence, openness, or sweetness, since that night when he fell upon the deck in a fit after seeing the body of Masters rise.

Nobody answered him; a few looked at him; he was hated by all, but feared by them too.

Onwards drove the ship; the southern slopes of the island were now slowly opening, and upon the little heights of hummock or hill the soft vegetation of those latitudes—tufted, plumed, spire-like—was to be seen in the lenses trembling in the rushing breeze, a lovely sight against the morning sky of the east.

‘Round with those yards,’ shouted Shannon. ‘Down helm.’

The men swayed at the braces with yells of disappointment.

‘Belay this—belay that—well all!’

They had the breeze on the quarter: the barque had slowed her pace, the men stood to port with lifted glasses, those without them gripping the rail or grasping a backstay. This side of the island was as lifeless as t’other; right amidships of it you noticed a snug little natural harbour, and there the *Rival* undoubtedly would have found a berth.

‘That dog Saunders has betrayed us, that’s all,’ said Mr. Weston, plunging his fists into his breeches-pockets, and kicking the deck with a vehement swing of one leg.

‘She foundered in the gale,’ said Hankey. ‘So much the better, Trollope, ain’t it? It’s only the tender man of honour,’ he added, with an offensive grin at Caldwell, ‘would have that sink of villainy, Mo’, partake freely of the plunder we risk life and liberty for.’

Dike Caldwell scowled at him.

‘What d’ye mean to do?’ said Peter Johnson to Trollope.

Captain Trollope was looking darkly at the island. His face expressed deep disappointment and perplexity.

‘I had hoped to find her here,’ said he. ‘She ought to have been here. She was a good sea-boat, and Saunders as a navigator was at least as capable a man as I. There’s the

bald fact, anyhow,' said he, with a theatrical gesture of his hand towards the island. 'You know my views.'

'State 'em clearly once again,' said Davenire, towering up close against Trollope, with his fingers in his waistcoat-pockets, whilst he swayed with the heave of the deck.

'This is what I want to do,' said Trollope, and the eight men, the Dane being at the wheel, gathered about their leader to listen, probably for the twentieth time, to proposals which they had surely long ago got by heart.

CHAPTER XXIV

ANCHORED

THE scene in this hour of the memorable morning when the barque *Queen* rounded Halloran Island in search of the brigantine *Rival*, was this: the vessel was moving slowly before the wind with her yards almost square; the eastern sky was splendid with the morning right over her bows, and the glory in the water coloured the foam-bells at her stem; abreast, on the port beam, was Halloran Island, within two miles, all points of it quite visible—a beautiful green spot, but clearly lifeless; still on the bowspirit-end sat William, gazing ahead for rocks and discoloured water, and on the poop on the port side the gentlemen were grouped—an eager, excited band of men, half mad with the sensations of the hour. Never before had their faces shown so much life. Even Caldwell's glances were darting.

'I say,' said Davenire, breaking into the opening of Trollope's remarks, 'that island is fast slipping astern, and we shall lose it behind the sea whilst we stand here arguing, if we don't mind our eye. I vote that we heave the ship to.'

'Not yet,' said Trollope, with a look at the land.

'It seems to me,' said Davenire gruffly, 'that nothing a man can say aboard here will find assent. Why not now? The wind's west, and the island bears north.'

'I've brought you to this island, and I'm captain still, I believe?' exclaimed Trollope, reddening and speaking with desperate effort to keep his temper.

'It must either be one man to decide for all, which I don't think will be found tolerable amongst some of us, or things will have to be put to the vote,' said Weston.

‘I’m for heaving the ship to here,’ said Davenire, in his heavy voice and strong manner, ‘whilst the island’s in sight, and whilst we talk over what’s to be done.’

‘Put it to the vote then,’ said Trollope, coldly.

Three were with Davenire, the rest with Trollope. Davenire, with a face savage with discontent, leaned his huge bulk upon the rail and stared at the island that was sliding on to the quarter.

‘Had not we better get some breakfast before we begin to talk?’ said Peter Johnson.

‘Ay,’ exclaimed Burn, ‘this is a hungry place, and a whole ham shan’t fill me this morning.’

‘But I’m not going to light the galley fire, and boil coffee and other things for you beggars whilst you’re talking about matters which I’m as much interested in as any of you,’ said Johnson.

Here was another difficulty.

‘Shall we all go forward in a body and light the galley fire, and boil the coffee in a body, arguing our souls blue in a body, whilst we do everything *ong bloc*?’ said Caldwell, with a sarcastic sneer.

‘Those who want breakfast may get it for themselves,’ exclaimed Cavendish. ‘There’s plenty of beer and liquor and grub below. What d’ye want to light the galley fire for?’

‘You don’t mean to run that island out of sight, do you, Trollope?’ said Davenire, turning abruptly.

‘No. But if I did, I could pick it up again.’

‘This sort of talk isn’t *planning*, hang it all!’ exclaimed Shannon. ‘What’s to be the scheme?’

‘You ought to know mine, confound you!’ said Trollope warmly. ‘I give this brigantine one clear week. Inside of that week I cruise in this ship, keeping the island aboard. Then, no *Rival* appearing, I anchor close in, land the gold, and draw lots as to who shall go away in the longboat to procure a small vessel.’

‘That was not the original programme,’ said Davenire.

‘I don’t care about that,’ answered Trollope.

‘Where are you going to procure a small vessel?’ asked Weston.

‘Put dust in your pocket and go away north. You’ll find what you want amongst the islands,’ answered Trollope.

‘Who’s going to navigate us north?’ sneered Weston.

‘I will,’ answered Trollope.

This subdued the others somewhat ; they looked at one another, then Davenire said, ' Aren't we going to heave this ship to ? '

Trollope seemed to measure the distance from the island, and then said coldly, ' Do what you like. '

The fellows, under the direction of Shannon, brought the ship to a stand : the island was then about three miles distant north-west. When the topsail had been laid to the mast, the nine gentlemen again assembled on the poop.

' I know,' said Mr. Hankey, walking in short excursions very restlessly whilst he addressed the others, ' that there ought to be unanimity amongst us, and we started with a real scheme. But I don't fancy we ever seriously contemplated the failure of the brigantine. '

' All along,' broke in Trollope, quick as lightning, ' my scheme involved the longboat, providing the *Rival* failed us. You chaps must know that,' he added, looking around him.

' See here,' said Caldwell, in his gloomiest voice, speaking with his head bowed, but with his dusky pupils uplifted and dwelling upon Trollope, ' suppose the *Rival* should turn up when the longboat has gone away ; what's to stop the fellows who are left in charge of the gold from embarking, and making off with the whole plunder ? '

' There must be some confidence, man, even among *us*,' answered Trollope, quietly but sarcastically, ' else you'll be keeping this job absurdly and helplessly in irons. '

' I'll tell you plainly, gentlemen, one and all,' said Weston, lifting his hat, ' that I've got not one atom of confidence in any man of us here, and least of all in myself. '

' I spoke of cruising a week,' said Trollope. ' We might extend the cruise till cocksure no brigantine was coming. '

A number of the men shook their heads.

' What's to become of the barque ? ' said Burn.

' Harbour her in the island,' answered Trollope.

' Till the longboat returns ? ' exclaimed Johnson.

Trollope viewed him in silence, foreseeing his objection.

' It would be the same thing as if the *Rival* should turn up,' continued Johnson, addressing the men generally. ' The longboat's gone away with a party of us, how many Trollope there will tell. ' After a pause, during which several pairs of eyes had been directed at Trollope, Johnson proceeded : ' A few of us are left on yonder island, along with the chests, and I suppose William and the Dane keep in the ship ; is any man

here so darned idiotic as to suppose that when the longboat returned with a little vessel, supposing such was to be conveniently found and purchased within the next twelve revolving moons, they'd find this barque still quietly harboured yonder, and the party ashore faithfully guarding the gold ?'

Caldwell roared out a laugh.

'I begin to think,' said Captain Trollope, looking at Davenire with a mixture of scorn and regret, 'that since my scheme is to go for nothing, the next and only thing to be done is for each man to take his share and act independently of the rest.'

'You mean that every man shall walk about with a couple of hundredweight of ore in his pockets,' said Weston.

'It's you who force the alternative, or, something worse, the total failure of the whole adventure,' cried Trollope, rounding upon him fiercely.

'Don't attempt to bully me, Trollope,' exclaimed Weston, his twisted features pale and repulsive with dangerous temper ; 'I'm not for wasting time, humbugging about in cruising, trusting my gold ashore in the charge of others. I'm for putting the chests in that longboat yonder, freighting her with meat and drink, and going away without loss of time for the nearest civilised coast.'

Trollope stalked away from the group and went below into the cuddy. His cool manner of going seemed to disconcert some of them. Cavendish, with his grinning confidential looks and little eyes, said to Weston, 'Where's there a near civilisation to steer for ? The longboat's not a brigantine. You can't make a port in such a boat as that without exciting much more attention than you want.'

'The boat's not going to swim with all those chests and ourselves and plenty of food and drink in her,' said Davenire, going to the rail at the break of the poop, and looking at the boat with his hands in his pockets.

'She'd be gunnel deep, anyhow,' said Burn, 'and my precious stars, what a freight for a seaway !' he exclaimed, rolling up his eyes.

'Trollope's breakfasting,' said Shannon, 'so shall I.'

The whole of them descended into the cuddy, and covered the table with the remains of cold meat and bottled beer, and fell to, arguing with vast excitement, and often you heard a menacing note of temper in one or another's voice.

Harry stayed at the wheel ; William had long before slid

in off the bowsprit, and now came aft with the mess kid for some breakfast. Davenire threw half a ham into the kid, another a handful of biscuit. Trollope gave him a couple of bottles of ale, and told him to go on the poop and get his breakfast with Harry, whilst they were eating below.

The nine men seated at table plying knife and fork continued to argue; many corks were drawn during that sitting. Their plans had been well laid, but they had not in reality provided for the failure of even one detail. If everything turned out exactly as they designed everything *should* turn out, then indeed they would be a wonderfully clever, triumphant gang of thieves. But they were not sailors; most of them had used the sea in aforemast capacities, but when they came to it as criminal schemers they were confounded by the omission of a single feature of their programme. Observe that down to the very day when they lifted the hatches and discovered the gold, not a man of them could have sworn it was on board! Observe, too, an oversight which no sailor would have been guilty of: all the quarter-boats had been used to send the crew and passengers adrift. The barque's davits were empty! There was no boat in the ship but the longboat!

The absence of the brigantine, again, created for the conspirators another huge difficulty, despite Mr. Weston's opinions. It was certain they could not use the *Queen* to carry the gold to a port. What would be thought of such a crew in such a vessel, even if the news of the piracy had not preceded them! It was doubtful—and all of them save Weston seemed sensible of this as they sat arguing, whilst they ate cold meat and drank bottled beer—whether the longboat would swim with such a burden as they intended to put into her. Supposing her sufficiently buoyant for their purpose, where were they going to land so vast a bulk of gold? How was each man going to carry away his share? The brigantine and her captain would have solved these distracting conundrums; unhappily the *Rival* was not yet in sight.

When they had breakfasted they lighted their pipes and went on to the poop. They had argued incessantly, and they argued as they went up the steps and gained the deck. Mark Davenire sat down upon a skylight, and after looking at the island, called to Trollope:

'Shall we reach in and get the boat over that some of us may go ashore and see what sort of a place it is?'

'Why not?' answered Trollope. 'I like the idea.'

'Stop a minute,' said Shannon, who sat upon the deck sucking a short black clay pipe, 'who's to be left in the ship while the boat's ashore?'

'Let's discuss that point whilst we're reaching in for the island,' exclaimed Davenire.

'Ay, but you're not going to answer the question by swinging the topsail-yard,' said Shannon, in a voice irritating with insistence and opinion. 'I, for one, shan't leave this ship unless all hands of you go along with me.'

'Then let all hands go ashore,' exclaimed Davenire, following with a frown the flight of a cloud of smoke from his lips.

'Who'll tend the ship?' said Shannon.

'The two seamen,' answered Davenire.

'With all that sail set?' shouted Shannon jeeringly, and he fell back upon the deck, flourishing his inch of sooty clay at the canvas with a great noise of forced ironical laughter.

'Trollope kept the two men expressly to watch the ship whilst we were ashore,' said Caldwell, cutting a pipeful of plug tobacco on the rail.

'Yes; but with furled canvas, and royal yards on deck, and topgallant masts housed or struck,' answered Trollope, dropping his words slowly between puffs at his pipe.

'This is going to be a deadlock, isn't it?' said Hankey.

Their helplessness, begotten by utter absence of faith in one another, had so absurd a side that some of the men saw it, and a loud laugh followed on Hankey's words. In fact, their posture of mind was exactly expressed by the attitude of the ship as she lay upon the wide sea, with no other motion than such as she got from the long undulations of the swell. The yards of the main were aback, the vessel's head was about north, and her drift was something easterly. The loss of her foretopgallant mast, too, with the mutilated look it gave her, was like putting the moral of the missing brigantine into the picture of the idle barque.

Silence fell upon the men. They sucked their pipes; they looked at one another—at the island; then Trollope, folding his arms, said in his cool, contemptuous way, 'Well, gentlemen, what is your pleasure? We can't lie rotting here like Coleridge's painted ship.'

'No,' oozed Burn; 'I've been turning the thing over, and there's nothing for it, in my opinion, but Trollope's scheme.'

'You'll have to come to it,' said Trollope, grim with conviction and temper barely kept under. 'If there's to be no

confidence whatever, the sooner we run this ship ashore yonder the better ; for then every man can take his whack and go into a corner of the island with his loaded revolver upon his pile, and starve whilst something's turning up, and be found years hence by whalemens, skeletons of men, hugging mounds of earth.'

This did not produce the effect which should have attended so fine a speech, delivered as it was in heightened notes of indignation and contempt, accompanied by one or two theatrical flourishes of the arm.

William had relieved the Dane at the wheel, but the little seaman remained with his mate, and sat on the grating behind him, watching the gentlemen. Beside the wheel stood the mess-kid and the empty bottles of beer.

'I would like to put my knife, by Peter ! between that gutterman Trollope's shoulder-blades whilst he talks,' said the Dane in a soft whisper. 'But, for all dot I could kill him, I own he talks gallus fine.'

'They don't seem to know what to do with the ship,' muttered William, who merely grasped a single spoke, for the helm needed no attention. 'You lay they'll fall out among themselves. Them covies don't make much of human life. That there Caldwell 'ud not only kill a man soon as spit, but open him to see what he was made of soon as light his pipe.'

They were silenced in this soft speech by the loud tones of Mark Davenire.

'See here !' he exclaimed, holding himself erect, expanding his vast chest, and starting with a declamatory air, 'it's quite certain that we don't possess the confidence in one another which Trollope would excite. We ought to go ashore upon that island : it is wonderfully fine weather ; but this is the sea, gentlemen ; if we are to keep the sea in this ship, cruising for a fortnight, according to Trollope's programme, I should like to know that my share is safe ashore, preserved from all peril, easily accessible and visitable. But I want to see the island, and the whole of you, I have no doubt, wish also to see it. How is that to be contrived consistently with the flattering opinions we entertain of one another ? Well,' said he, with a glance at the green spot of land, 'we must sail in as close as the ship's safety will permit ; we must sound for an anchorage ; we must stow every sail in the ship after letting go the anchor, and then go ashore.'

'The whole of us ?' said Caldwell.

'The whole of us,' echoed Davenire.

'Let's agree to it, and make an end,' said Caldwell, with a villainous look at Trollope.

'I say, though,' said Shannon in a silky voice, 'would you trust the ship with the gold in her to those two men?'

Davenire drew close and answered softly, 'How are two men going to lift the ship's anchor?'

'They could slip the cable,' said Hankey, drawing close and whispering.

'But we shall keep an eye upon the ship,' said Davenire after a moment's reflection; 'and we have the longboat, and there are ten of us for the oars or sweeps. They never could make sail and get away so fast but that we should be faster. But they'll attempt nothing of that sort,' continued he in a low voice, just turning his head to look at the two men, 'for they know how we should serve them the instant we regained the ship.' Then erecting himself afresh, and speaking strongly, he cried, 'If it's to be as I say, hold up your hands.'

Every arm except Trollope's was lifted.

'You'll come with us, although you don't assent?' said Caldwell.

'I'll go with you because you won't leave me behind you,' was the answer. 'And these are your thanks!' He walked to the rail as though burdened with emotion, and looked at the sea.

'Let's swing the yards, boys, and praise the pigs in our songs for this rag of agreement, anyhow,' cried Cavendish.

They got way upon the ship, and the helm was shifted for the island.

It was about eleven o'clock in the morning, very hot, the westerly wind scanting, and the sea of that deep, pure, thrilling, melting blue which the Pacific there takes when over it bends such a heaven as then spanned the sparkling recesses. Trollope took no part in the manœuvres. He picked a telescope off a skylight lid and turned it slowly round and round the horizon; this he did again and again, clapping the glass under his arm between whiles, and walking the weather-end of the poop with a lord paramount air. William steered. It was a leading wind for the island. The barque leaned a little and drove the water from her bows in ripples. Now that there was some sort of passing unanimity amongst them, a different sort of spirit was manifested generally: they talked without

passion, they ceased to argue, they stood leaning over the ship's side smoking and watching the island or the water sliding past in a tender tremble of prismatic bubbles.

Suddenly Davenire, starting up from as lazy a loafing posture as ever a south country 'longshoreman could fall into, called out :

'Trollope, by the way, didn't you say we ought to sound as we go in?'

'You've taken charge, haven't you?' answered Trollope, slightly turning his head without looking at the man, then lifting the glass to his eye.

'I'll sound for ye,' shouted Shannon; 'where's the lead-line?'

He got it and jumped into the main-chains, leaning in the bight of a rope which he cleverly hitched to the lanyards of the shrouds. He swung the weight with a steady hand and the eye of a salted splicer; and whilst he hauled the line, dripping, out of the bottomless blue and coiled it away upon his hand, he sang in high cheerful notes :

My name d'ye see 's Tom Tough : I've seen a little sarvice
 Where mighty billows roll and loud tempests blow ;
 I've sailed with gallant Howe, I've sailed with noble Jarvis,
 And in valiant Duncan's fleet I've sung Yo, heave ho !
 Yet more you shall be knowing :
 I was cox'n to Boscawen,
 And even with brave Hawke have I nobly faced the foe.
 Then put round the grog ;
 So we've that and our prog
 We'll laugh in care's face and sing Yo, heave ho !

The fellows looking over the rail laughed heartily at him and his song. He told them to send down a bottle of beer, and continued to heave the lead. But his cheerful song ceased, he could find no bottom, and he began to look up with a long face at the row of heads.

'It may be steep-to all round,' said he.

'What's steep-to?' asked Burn.

'Fathomless to the wash of the surf, man.'

'You must strike ground, Walter, you must striko ground.' bawled Davenire in thunder.

'Is the lead armed?' Peter Johnson called down.

'No,' answered Shannon.

'What's the good of arming where there's no soundings?' growled Caldwell.

'Arry', yelled Johnson, 'spring for a lump of fat my son; ye'll find plenty in the galley.'

In a few minutes the little Dane handed a piece of fat down to Mr. Shannon, who primed the hole in the bottom of the lead.

'For luck's sake this time!' he sang out; the long metal cone flew to the bow, and, as the gods would have it, the line slackened without weight right up and down under him.

'Land ho!' he roared. 'I can't give you the leadsman's cry—here's the red—what is it?—ah, seventeen fathoms.'

All the while, Trollope coldly and obstinately paced old Benson's piece of quarter-deck. Again and again the men glanced at him, but he made no sign, seemed not to hear, exhibited no visible interest in anything but the horizon.

'What says the arming?' exclaimed Caldwell.

Shannon was looking at it when that black, scowling fellow spoke.

'The sweetest lot of little shells you ever saw in all your born days,' answered Shannon, squinting at the fat in the lead. 'Shells and grey sand. Hand's down a knife some one.'

He carefully scraped off the shells and sand, and the knife was handed up, and the mess of fat, shells, and sand on the blade passed from one to another and viewed with deep interest. Such children does the sea make of men! such trifles will the monotony of the ocean render fascinating!

Thus did the villains approach the island, the barque floating with erect spars, so light had the wind fallen. Mr. Shannon continued to heave the lead. When they came into fourteen fathoms the land was a mile off, but they durst venture no closer, and the whole of them, saving Trollope, turned to and clewed up the canvas. The barque lost way with her head at west.

'Let go the anchor!' roared Davenire to William.

'Stand clear of the cable!' bawled William, who had undertaken this part, and a moment later, after a chipping noise of hammering, the anchor dropped from the cathead, and the heavy chain cable roared smoking after it through the hawse-pipe.

There remained, however, a great deal of work to be done before they could venture to hoist the boat out. They furled every sail, a light task for ten men in a small barque on that fair morning.

Trollope would not put his hand to a rope. Whilst the men were aloft he went into Benson's cabin to look at the

barometer, and found a steady glass. Then he returned, and for the fiftieth time chased the line of the sea with the best telescope in the ship. He never could tell at what instant a sail might rise. Had that gentlemanly scoundrel thought proper to put up a prayer, it would have been for the brigantine and Saunders. He looked at the ship growing naked aloft; denuded of the beauty of her wings, her foretopmast showing like a stump; she looked strangely as she lay at the bight of her cable, rolling monotonously on the swell of the sea. Trollope watched the men furling the mainsail, and desperately feared them. He knew that a multitude of counsels would lead to failure. The mighty robbery, the trouble, the anxieties, the perils, the murder! would end in nothing. The gold would go to the bottom, or it would be retaken, or it would be left to lie worthless as the soil it rested on, in the island yonder. Why didn't the men come in to his scheme? It would be their only chance after giving the brigantine all time in reason.

He eyed the fellows, as they swung on the footropes, with a murderer's malice.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon before the ship was snugged and the longboat got over. Every man armed himself. The boat was equipped with a large lugsail and six long powerful oars. Whilst they ate in the cuddy before going ashore, Burn said:

'Suppose something should come along whilst we're away and hail this ship, what's the answer to be?'

'If idiotic thoughts will enter into your head, pity you can't keep 'em corked up there,' answered Davenire. 'Think, you owl! Here is a sea of glass, and there is nothing in sight, and we are going ashore for a few hours only. What, unless a comet, *could* come along and hail this ship?'

'Even if William and the other should intend treachery,' said Johnson, 'they could do nothing with the vessel in this weather.'

'I shall have a word to say to them,' said Davenire.

'Do you mean to let the vessel lie at anchor here all night?' said Trollope, speaking in his usual place at the head of the table where he had sat a listener, silent and savage.

'What would you fear?' asked Caldwell.

'Most of you know more about ships than I,' answered Trollope. 'What would *you* fear?'

'Fifty things,' exclaimed Shannon lightly. 'It may come

on to blow a gale from the south'ard. A large ground swell in a dead calm might set us ashore in the night. We might all get drunk——'

'What do *you* fear, Trollope?' here broke in Davenire.

'The first of the risks Shannon named.'

'It's going to be a fine night,' said the huge man a little contemptuously; 'to-morrow we'll carry the gold ashore and end all peril there so far as this ship is concerned whilst we wait, if you choose, for Saunders, and discuss the safest measures to take.'

He gazed about him with a lofty air of triumph, and a hum of approval broke from the men.

Trollope's leadership seemed on a sudden to have come to an end. What shape was this adventure going to take under Davenire?

CHAPTER XXV

BOLDOCK'S PROPOSAL

ABOUT three weeks after the American captain had visited the *Wellesley*, that lubberly colonial brig, with her squab boats hunched at her motherly davits, was rolling most uncomfortably upon a large pea-green swell, whose lofty folds, as they swung in stately procession, seemed to be wrinkled by a breeze of their own making. The sky was hung with soft dark masses of storm-cloud, broken and departing. The heavens between were a faded green, and here and there upon the horizon they were painted grey in slanting patches by the falling rain.

It was about nine o'clock in the morning. The brig was under single-reefed topsails and foresail, and the thunder this canvas knocked out of its heart against the masts seemed to fetch a faint echoing growl from the dark canopies afar. Nothing, not even a lightship, built of wood and sheathed with metal, ever rolled more abominably than this same brig *Wellesley* becalmed in a heavy swell. She dipped her fat sides to the rail. The rush of polished brine was within hand's reach. You looked for the whole ocean to roll aboard; then, groaning shockingly in every timber, with yells in the wrenched rigging, and a furious beating of helpless canvas aloft, over she'd tumble, deep down to the other rail, leaping

halfway back as if in affright, springing her round bows out of the heave whilst the brine roared white from her headboards, then tumbling bodily over again amidst volleys of snaps and jerking and straining noises.

This had been going on for some hours. It was impossible to walk the deck. The seamen staggered and rushed if they let go. Presently the commander, tightly gripping the handrail, rose with a wary eye to his neck and limbs through the little companion-hatch, and stood in it whilst he looked about him. Mr. Hardy was hanging by the main royal backstay, almost abreast of the red-faced officer. The wheel leapt like something living and vicious in the strong grasp of the helmsman; but even as the commander rose the brass-work ornamentation upon the binnacle-box was smitten into several stars of glory by a watery beam of the sun; Commander Boldock looked up to see what made that light, as though surprised, then, watching his chance, came out of the hatch and drove over to the side of Mr. Hardy, clutching at the stay with fingers like fish-hooks.

'This is awful,' he groaned, in a voice whose note of lamentation was quite serious.

'Awful indeed, sir. If there'd only come some wind to steady the old beast——'

'I am sorry for Miss Mansel,' said the commander; 'she's very much alarmed. She fears that every kick this bucket gives will be the last. I've tried to comfort her. The fact is, Hardy, women ought never to go afloat.'

'I don't think it would much hurt if they never did,' said Mr. Hardy, leering at a soft shadow of violet vapour, against which the foresail, as it beat, shone with a wonderful brightness.

'I hope those fellows will have managed to keep their ship alive during the late weather,' said the commander. 'It will be very vexatious should we ultimately discover she has gone to the bottom, gold and all. Not that the all will so much matter perhaps as the gold.'

'Mr. Matthews gives a good account of the men's smartness as sailors, considering who and what they are,' answered Mr. Hardy. 'Some of them could furl a sail as nimbly as a bluejacket. There were ten of them, and, plus one, that's the number the ship sailed with out of Sydney.'

'It's the most audacious, rascally piece of work I ever heard of in all my life,' said the commander, with a suggestion

of secret admiration in his voice. 'Are the good old times returning? Are we to have the pleasure of beholding the Jolly Roger flying again? Mr. Hardy, d'ye know I should rather have liked to be a pirate!'

'They had rare times.'

'All the best colour the story of the sea has it gets from the pirate,' said the commander. 'He was not a well-bred man, and had no feelings that you could wound; an agreeable person, therefore, to sail with. I remember reading of Captain Edward Low that "he was born in Westminster and had his education there, such as it was, for he could neither read nor write." That passage impressed me. The *for* is very fine indeed. Low was a noble creature; so was Teach, with his long beard platted in ribbons, lighted matches behind his ears, and his belt stuck full of pistols, which he diverted himself by firing off under the table into the knees and shins of the company as they sat at dinner.'

'Then the high jinks ashore, sir.'

'That was the part to earn and live for,' cried the commander. 'Rooms hung with silk, the floors clothed with thick carpets, the tables loaded with massive silver plate, the cellars crowded with the choicest vintages which the wine-grower could possibly send afloat for pirates to capture, lovely young women like Mary Read and Ann Bonny to sing, play, and dance to the gory exquisites, as they lay smoking silver-mounted pipes on soft velvet sofas.'

'It actually got to that, sir?'

'It's not in human invention to figure the gorgeous and sumptuous life those villains led ashore,' said Commander Boldock. 'It passed briskly, and they swung ten at a time, beaconing the seaboard with tarry remains. Don't you think boys forget the hanging part when they talk of wanting to be pirates?'

Instead of obtaining an answer the commander observed that Mr. Hardy stooped to dodge and peer and bob at the horizon, where, following the direction of the mate's stare, Boldock saw a white gleam of sail coming and going at the edge of a small squall of grey rain passing slowly.

'Yes, I see her, sir,' exclaimed the commander, not waiting to be addressed. He made a bolt for the companion, and cleverly grasped it; he was safe in the embrace of that cover, and took the long brass telescope off the brackets to view the distant sail.

No seaman was ever more expert in the art of the glass than Boldock, but so wild was the rolling of the brig, so treacherously swift the antics of the distant sail, that many minutes passed before the commander pinned her. He then correctly judged that she was a vessel in distress, first by the circumstance of her having lost her foretop-gallantmast, next by her showing not a rag of cloth save a foretopmast sail which looked to be very ill set. She was a barque, and Boldock thought he saw a spot of colour at her gaff end. But she was then four or five miles off, labouring helplessly, and apparently as wildly as the brig, and her figure was lost in the shadow cast by the clouds which hung over her.

'See what you can make of her, Mr. Hardy,' said the commander.

The quaint sea-dandy, with his leer and his shoes and bows, made a plunge for the companion-cover, and swung into it as the commander swung out. He peered and peered. Whilst he looked the sun shone a little brightly and lighted up the ocean in the direction of the barque. Mr. Hardy continued to gaze, then, starting with a cry of surprise, he exclaimed :

'I beg your pardon, sir, but I caught sight of the hull of that ship just then, and if she's not the *Queen*, then I'm Prince Albert, sir.'

'Let me look again,' said the commander hoarsely.

Long and thirstily did he stare ; his table of red face with one eye screwed up hung immovable at the telescope. The sun continued to throw his morning brightness on the ocean, and the colour of the blue betwixt the clouds was growing purer. After a little the commander looked round at Mr. Hardy with an expression of passing suffocation in the cast and colour of his features. They stared at each other.

'Upon my word !' exclaimed Boldock in that sort of voice which he would use in church, 'I believe you are right. I caught the length of the hull distinctly when it was hove high ; a barque, painted green, answering unquestionably to the burden of the *Queen*. Why should it not be she ?' he roared out, overmastered by excitement. 'She should be somewhere hereabouts. We're inside of two days' sail of Halloran Island. Step below, Mr. Hardy, and give my compliments to Mr. Matthews, and ask him to come on deck.'

Whilst Hardy was gone Boldock kept his telescope upon the distant barque, which sometimes sprang her spars into the lenses, and once or twice a strip of greenish hull. The

sunshine brightened her flag; it was red, but Boldock could not make out whether it was a distress signal. Now arrived Mr. Matthews, who had kept watch from four till eight, and, having breakfasted, had turned in for a snooze.

'Keep in the companion-way,' said the commander, standing outside, 'and take this telescope and look at yonder vessel, and tell me what you think of her.'

Mr. Matthews was scarcely wide awake—he had tumbled out of his bunk with a seaman's hurry. After a great deal of manœuvring with the unwieldy telescope he caught the object. A grin of amazement that worked the flesh about his lips into a hunchback's wrinkles widened his mouth. He looked again, and then in tones firm with conviction he said to the commander, 'That barque down there, sir, is the *Queen*.'

'Blow my sweet wind,' murmured the commander, with a look of stupefaction. 'It is always the wrong weather at sea. Why doesn't some air come along?'

'Most undoubtedly the *Queen*,' repeated Mr. Matthews, who continued to seesaw with long brass tubes as they rested on the edge of the cover, himself standing inside.

'Forward there!' bawled the commander.

'Sir,' answered a voice.

'Send the *Queen's* men aft.'

'Ay, ay, sir.'

The five of them presently arrived, staggering and lurching like drunken seamen on the slope of the deck as they walked.

'Here,' said Boldock to the first of them, who happened to be Tom, 'get you inside that hatch, my man, and look through that telescope, and tell me what ship that is.'

The instant Tom caught her he howled out with his eyes still at the glass, 'Blowed if she ain't the *Queen*!' All allowance was to be made for great excitement. If that ship was the *Queen*, the men's clothes were on board of her, their certificates of discharge; seven pounds of tobacco belonging to them were in their chests, and a few pounds in money.

'Out you come,' said the commander. 'Next man.'

One after another the five stepped into the hatch, and after dodging, and ducking, and mowing, and sweeping with the immense telescope, declared that the barque yonder was the *Queen*. They then went forward and looked at her in a little crowd upon the fore-castle.

The heavens were clearing, the horizon opening, the atmosphere brightening, the colours and lines of the barque stealing out clearer and sharper.

'If she's not the *Queen*,' said Mr. Matthews, 'this brig's not the *Wellesley*.'

'Are the scoundrels who stole her aboard her?' exclaimed the commander.

'She looks to me to have broken adrift from her moorings,' said Mr. Hardy.

'Moorings! Where would you moor her?' said Boldock.

'Off Halloran Island.'

'And why not?' cried the commander, instantly seeing the point. 'There has been a lot of dirty weather of late.'

'That foretopmast staysail looks as if they'd been tending her at anchor,' said Mr. Matthews.

'But if there are people aboard,' exclaimed the commander 'why do they let her lie without a rag save that staysail?'

'They may be waiting for wind,' said Mr. Hardy.

'Will they show fight, I wonder, when we bear down?' asked the commander, and his nostrils enlarged whilst he glanced at his one gun. 'I rather hope so. They're all armed with revolvers, you tell me, Mr. Matthews? I'll lead the boarders, Hardy.'

'You'll not find me far off, sir,' said Mr. Matthews. 'Nearly all that I own in the world,' he exclaimed, with a pathetic gesture at the barque, 'is in yonder vessel. I blush to own it. I blush to think I should have been such a fool as to lead for years the life of a dog for no more than what you may pack in a sea-chest.'

Mr. Hardy lightly groaned.

'Are you talking of the *Queen*?' cried Miss Mansel's voice at the foot of the companion ladder.

'Ay, that is right!' answered the commander, putting his great red face into the companion, 'we've fallen in with your ship. We're waiting for nothing but a little wind. For gracious sake, mind, Miss Mansel! We are rolling frightfully. Hold on like grim death till I get at you.'

'He sank down the steps, and clasping the young lady firmly around the waist, half carried her to the top of the steps, where they stood together, he bolstering and shoring her up most affectionately, whilst she looked at the barque, but not with the glass, for that was beyond her. The sea admits of situations which the land provides no apologies for. Her

robe still consisted of her dressing-gown, her hat of the white cap of sail cloth.

The truth is, the dressmaker forward had proved a failure. 'His fits would give any woman fits,' Boldock had said, bursting into a loud laugh when Miss Mansel, attired like a windsail, arms crooked out with tightness, and without a waist, stepped from her cabin. 'He shall be sent to Paris. The French love originality in cut. The dressmaker of the *Wellesley* will charm them.' So the young lady was obliged to stick to her dressing-gown, though she contrived some underclothing for herself out of the seaman's misfits. The man was greatly mortified by his failure, and was much laughed at forward. He was unusually profane for two days, and was heard to say, with several imprecations in the old style, that 'if ever he was caught cutting out for another woman, might he be cut himself!'

The commander, bolstering the young lady in the hatch, peeped around at her to observe the effect the barque produced. Again he admired the brilliancy of her eyes. The exertion had coloured her cheeks. She saw the white light of the sail in a moment, and cried, 'Is that the *Queen* ?'

'None other, Miss Mansel,' said Mr. Matthews.

She stared astounded, then, looking round into the commander's face, said, 'What are you going to do ?'

'I can do nothing till some wind comes and this horrible swell goes down,' answered Boldock.

'Will you have to fight to recapture her ?'

'I hope so. But I don't fancy, from the figure she makes, that her people are in a fighting state of mind.'

She asked a few more questions; the commander then assisted her below, and saw her in safety to her cabin.

Then followed a brain-distracting spell of suspense and expectation. When the afternoon came, the swelling folds of sea had sensibly sunk, and at about four o'clock a small breeze blew from the east. Boldock instantly made all sail, and with an amidship helm and square yards, and his one piece of artillery loaded with grape, steered on a straight course for the barque.

It might now be seen that the vessel's main royal yard was down, but the long topgallant mast was standing. She continued to lie exactly as she had lain all day, under her ill-hoisted wing of staysail, but already the colour at the gaff-end had shaken its folds out to the wind. By aid of the glass Mr.

Hardy perceived that the union jack was reversed. It was the mute sea-cry for help, in short, and it was easily guessed there would be no fighting.

Curiosity burnt in bosoms of all hands. She was the barque *Queen* that had sailed from Sydney; her five people forward on the brig's forecastle knew her, swore to her; and twenty good dramatic reasons, each one a powerful imaginative yarn, well calculated to make a literary reputation, had been invented by the sailors to account for her lying wallowing there with the loss of her foretopgallant mast and flying jibboom.

At this hour it was no longer dangerous to move about the brig's deck, and Miss Mansel was seated in a chair, secured to the quarter-deck capstan, and Commander Boldock stood beside her, with his long brass telescope under his arm. The barque rolled slowly, with a stately swing of her lofty spars, She flung wet flashes from her gleaming sides, and submitted the model of a beautiful clipper hull to the charmed eyes of the seamen as she buoyantly climbed aslant the now fast lessening heave of sea.

Two figures stood upon her poop right aft. Boldock viewed them through his glass.

'Seamen apparently,' said he. 'Two only.'

'Her longboat's gone,' said Mr. Matthews. 'She's without a boat of any kind.'

After a little the stern of the barque slanted into sight; the swell hove it, and there, under the counter, in long plain white letters, were the words '*Queen, London.*'

'It's 'Arry!' roared Tom on the brig's forecastle.

'It's William!' shouted a second seaman of the *Queen*.

The brig passed slowly under the stern of the barque, and rounded-to to leeward, and whilst this manœuvre was being carried out by Mr. Hardy the following conversation passed:

'Ho, the barque ahoy!' roared the commander.

'Hillo, hillo, sir!' answered Harry, with a quick, eager flourish of his hand, springing on to the taffrail to talk, then catching sight of Miss Mansel, and staring *and* staring with his hands on his knees, as though he had been slain in that posture by lightning.

'Are any of the gentry who stole your ship aboard of you still?' shouted Commander Boldock.

'No, sir, thank God,' answered William, and some man on the brig's forecastle laughed.

‘Are you two men alone?’

‘All alone, sir,’ shrieked Harry.

‘How long have you been in this condition?’

‘We was rolled off Halloran Island four days ago,’ cried William, in his slow but powerful voice, ‘and we’ve been a-washing about ever since, looking out for ships.’

‘Mr. Matthews,’ said the commander, ‘you had better get your boat over and take your five men and resume possession. Make sail and report her condition, and keep within hailing distance of me.’

It touched the spirit and memory of old times in this jolly red-faced gentleman to talk thus. It was like convoying. It was like taking possession of a prize. His wide, crimson face beamed with cordial enjoyment as Mr. Matthews, soberly touching his cap, answered, ‘Ay, ay, sir.’

The *Queen’s* boat was lowered, without difficulty, over the brig’s side. The five seamen entered her. Mr. Matthews, bareheaded, shook hands with Commander Boldock, looking, as he did so, at Miss Mansel. The young lady said, ‘May I go on board with Mr. Matthews?’

‘I will, with your permission, when this swell slackens, put you on board myself,’ answered the commander in his lamenting way.

She bowed and slightly coloured; probably the trifling flush was excited by the expression on Mr. Matthews’s face as he returned and walked to the gangway. He got into the boat without difficulty, and gaining the ship’s side, sprang into the main chains and gained the barque’s deck. He ordered the men to hook the boat on and hoist her at once. She was now their only boat, and incalculably valuable therefore.

‘Have they taken the gold?’ he said to William, who with Harry stood by to receive him.

‘Every ounce of it, sir.’

‘What have they done with it?’

‘Took it ashore, sir.’

After a pause, during which emotion worked briskly in the honest fellow, he said, ‘All right, my lads. Help the others. I’ll hear your yarn presently;’ and whilst the men went to work with the boat he entered the cuddy.

He had expected to witness a scene of disorder—broken bottles, broken mirrors, broken lamps and panels—illustrations of drink and a vindication of the enlarged human beast. For a number of days had he sat in the society of the ten

gentlemen, and had darkly guessed at their ideas of merriment when they should be let loose, with plenty of wine for their heads, and well-stocked cabins to sack. And yet, but for a few empty champagne bottles on the deck, a little straw, a wine case or two, and a litter of unbroken glass and decanters on the table, the interior looked as it did in the days of the nimble Trickle. Naturally, the mate's first thoughts concerned his own property, and after a wild stare, this usually sober-headed man rushed into his cabin.

Everything was as it had been when he was turned adrift. The very bed he had started up from when Mr. Weston walked in upon him, revolver in hand, was exactly the same as though he had but just now quitted it. He opened a locker with a trembling heart and beheld his desk; and lifting the lid he drew out a leather bag of money. He counted the contents. Whilst he counted, the men above sang joyously at the boat's falls. He counted ten bank notes and a number of English pounds. 'They have not touched a farthing,' he said to himself. He put away the purse, and his face was warm with delight. Hard-earned, friend Matthews, as you know, is the money that is got by going to sea. His sextant was untouched. Every rag and every stick of his little property had been spared. 'I can't say, after this, they weren't gentlemen at root after all,' he thought, as he stepped forth. Yet he could not believe that he was awake when he recollected how this beautiful barque had been seized one midnight by ten men, but not by any means unexpectedly; no, he was bound to think *that*—which consideration carried him to old Benson's cabin.

He found the cot gone, and some of the tools for navigating the vessel were missing. Otherwise the interior looked much as of old. He peered into the cabins which had been occupied by the Storrs, and the Dents, and the other passengers. Here he found traces of industry. Portemanteaux had been opened. The contents of a trunk belonging to Mr. Storr were scattered upon the deck. The ten gentlemen seemed to have wanted clothes, he thought, and probably a little ready money. They were kind to leave him his savings.

This inspection occupied but a few minutes. Going on deck he found the boat at the davits, and ordered the well to be sounded. There was water enough in the hold to demand a short spell at the pumps. When he had satisfied himself on the ship's condition, he mounted the poop and hailed the brig, which lay within easy earshot.

‘The ship seems all right, sir.’

‘Have they taken the gold?’ shouted Commander Boldock, getting into his main rigging to talk whilst the rolling of the two vessels kept the two gentlemen bowing to each other.

‘The two men report so, sir.’

The commander tossed one hand, and looked round at Miss Mansel. ‘Where is it?’

‘Ashore, sir.’

‘Then we must lose no time, Mr. Matthews. I will send four of my men aboard of you. Make all plain sail upon your ship, but not more than will enable me to keep company.’

Mr. Matthews roared out, ‘Ay, ay, sir.’

The commander was addressed by Miss Mansel. He presently cried, ‘Have you been into the cabins?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘How is Miss Mansel’s?’

‘I should say by the looks of it exactly as she left it,’ answered Mr. Matthews.

This stroke of news appeared to make Commander Boldock entirely happy. Miss Mansel waved gratefully to the ship. Even as it was with Mr. Matthews, so was it with her. Every farthing’s worth of her property in this world was in her cabin. She viewed the barque with the pensive gaze which Mr. Matthews had so often admired. Memory arose in her, and her countenance changed again and again as she sought to give mould and substance to that black time when they had throttled her and set her afloat. Great God! did any woman ever undergo such an experience? She trembled whilst she remembered and looked at the barque, and then her eyes met Captain Boldock’s.

‘It scarcely seems rational,’ said she, smiling with sudden sweetness, ‘that I should rejoice so over the recovery of my poor few effects—a hat, a dress or two, a parasol. Oh, dear, Captain Boldock, in the face of the mighty robbery of gold! And yet I dare say,’ said she, with her pensive look coming on her again, drooping her lids so that the commander was able once more to admire the length of her eyelashes, ‘the loss of my luggage would be a greater blow to me than the loss of the gold to the owners of it.’

Boldock courteously and cordially assented.

‘When do you think I shall be able to go on board?’

‘To-morrow, I hope.’

‘Not before?’ she exclaimed, with a start and a blush,

looking round at the sun that was now hanging low nor'-west, the swell rolling in blood under him, and the sky filled with a thousand scarlet clouds of effulgence.

'I hope you are not in a very great hurry to leave the brig, Miss Mansel?' said the commander.

'I should be shockingly ungrateful if I was,' she answered.

The commander said no more, and seemed intent upon what was doing in the barque. Six men had gone across to the *Queen* in one of the brig's motherly quarter-boats. Two had returned, and the boat was hoisted, and Mr. Matthews was now with a good working crew, eleven men in a word, of whom one was the brig's boatswain to serve him as a mate. They made sail quickly, but the ship wanted symmetry. She could no longer glow in beauty to the evening sun. A star was trembling in the east, albeit the west was still red with light when the two vessels began to move.

'I'll hang a lantern at my gaff-end,' shouted the commander to Matthews, 'and you will follow in my wake and be careful not to run me down. Let a bright look-out be kept, and hang a riding-light somewhere forward where we may easily see it.'

This being said, the commander, offering Miss Mansel his hand, conducted her into the cabin to tea. The tea-things had been set by a sailor, who was gone. The naval officer and the young lady were alone. Miss Mansel removed her canvas cap, and sat down upon a locker in front of a sea-going battered teapot that had once been a very pretty shining thing, and poured out two cups of black tea, one of which she handed to the commander, who, as they had no milk in the brig, used a little brandy instead. The dark table a-gleam with use was furnished with marmalade, biscuits, and potted shrimps, of which Miss Mansel and the commander partook.

'Our meeting with the barque is the most extraordinary encounter in the history of the world,' said Boldock. 'But though she had ten times the value of the stolen gold safely stowed away in her now, I should still regret our having fallen in with her.'

'But why?' inquired Miss Mansel archly, and her eyes, catching the hectic of sunset lingering upon the skylight and dyeing the flashes of the swinging lamp, looked unusually bright and vivacious.

'Is she not going to remove you from this brig?' said the

commander tenderly, but with the tenderness that breathes in the lowing of a calf.

The young lady turned pale.

'Miss Mansel—but rather let me call you Margaret,' said Boldock, taking hold of his coat with both hands, as from some half-conscious desire to gird himself tightly for a business that was growing heroic, 'I'm a plain sailor, not used to 'bouting ship when the wind's fair. I think I can see a fair wind in your eyes, Margaret, or I give you my word of honour as a gentlemen that I should not be troubling you with this speech. I am in love with you.'

'Oh, Captain Boldock!'

'I am in love with you,' repeated Boldock, rising, and sliding along the locker to her side. 'You are the first woman who has ever engaged my affections. I am not a rich man, but I can support a wife ashore by going afloat, and I ask you to be my wife when, God being willing, the two ships, after this extraordinary traverse, shall have brought up in Sydney Bay, where the barque's bound to return for repairs and men.'

The young lady did not answer. She slightly trembled when Boldock put his full arm round her waist. Yet this proposal was not unexpected. For some time she had known that he admired her, and she was perfectly sensible of the abundant attentions he had paid her. He was a hearty, rough seaman, but an officer in the Queen's navy and a gentleman, and the spirit of kindness and good-nature dwelt in his wide red face.

'You see, Margaret,' said he, 'that when you go on board the ship we shall be separated. I must keep to this command. Bad weather may blow us asunder. Nothing is impossible at sea. Therefore, before I take you on board I want you to say that you will be my wife on our return to Sydney. Will you, my dear Margaret? It wants but very little consideration—will you?' His natural and characteristic lamenting voice sounded with fine effect in this passage.

'I have often said that if ever I choose a husband it should be a sailor,' murmured Miss Mansel, keeping her head hung.

'But I *am* a sailor,' said the commander.

'I know you are,' she answered, beginning to laugh.

'I wish,' thought the commander, who kept a hold of her waist, 'that she would shift her helm and head on a straight course. It's a fair wind. Everything's all clear, the road buoyed, the very pilot aboard.' He drew himself a little away

so as to obtain a good view of her eyes, and putting his hand under her chin, he raised her laughing face.

'Now, tell me, my dear, that you will be my wife,' said he, 'and then I will give you a kiss.'

'Can I speak to you a moment, sir?' sang down the voice of Mr. Hardy in the hatch.

'What the devil's the matter?' roared the commander, entirely letting go of Miss Mansel when he caught sight of Hardy's shoes, and a second later of Hardy's leering eyes, on the ladder.

'The mate of the barque's hailed to know whether you would like one of the two men to be sent aboard with the full yarn of the landing of the gold, and how the barque dragged and was blown off.'

The memorable exclamation of old Mr. Shandy rose into the commander's head. He was in a passion at the interruption, and said, 'No, sir. Inform that ox-faced mate that I can wait. Tell him to keep a bright look-out aboard his barque for the longboat, as it's not impossible that the fellows will put off in her from the island.' Then, softening his voice, he exclaimed, 'How's her head, Hardy?' and then added, 'Well, keep everything piled upon her, and see that the chap astern don't run the old bucket down.'

The shoes with their bows disappeared, and the commander re-addressed himself to his pleasing task, with, it must be admitted, a slight glance at a decanter of rum on a swing tray, as though a little refreshment just at this time would be rather helpful. He slid on the locker once more to the young lady's side, and again put his arm round her waist. Her face was a bright red, almost as red as his, but she looked pleased and happy.

'You'll give me your answer now, Margaret,' said he.

'You know nothing about me, Captain Boldock,' she answered. 'You sailors are so reckless. How do you know that I shall make you a good wife? How do you know that I have not relations who might be a disgrace to you?'

'Nonsense, my darling!' lamented the commander. 'I know as much of you as you know of me, and so the yards are square between us in that way, anyhow. Now, my dear, I'm waiting, for I'm longing.'

He projected his lips into that sort of shape which the mouth usually takes when it salutes the brow or cheek of another. Half laughing and half crying and rosy red, the girl

laid her head against as honest and warm a heart as ever beat in a man's breast.

'I will be your wife,' she said, and Boldock instantly kissed her.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SEAMEN'S STORY

THE night passed quietly. It was a bright moonlight night, and the two vessels, clothed in cold splendour, floated, one in the wake of the other, like two icebergs over that large desolate breast of breathing waters. In the morning it was very fine, and the heave of the sea almost gone, and when Commander Boldock went on deck he found the barque within pistol-shot of his quarter. He hailed her, and Mr. Matthews, jumping into the main rigging and leaning off the shrouds with one hand on a ratline, made answer.

'Will you do me the kindness,' shouted Boldock, 'to back your topsail and send your boat for the lady and me, as I propose to do myself the pleasure to breakfast with you?'

Forthwith the necessary manœuvres were executed, and Commander Boldock and his betrothed were transferred to the barque. The boat was then hooked on, the yards swung, and the vessels proceeded on their course.

After Miss Mansel had been supported over the side she hid her face and cried for some moments vehemently. The horror of recollection was too great. Her heart was broken down by it. Mr. Matthews arched his eyebrows and sent a dry look at Trivett, the boatswain of the brig, when the commander began to soothe the young lady. William and Harry came a little distance along the deck and stared.

'She was overboard and was drowned,' said the Dane, 'and, by my knife, there she is!'

'There's people,' growled William, whose face was stupid with surprise and superstition, and divers forecastle emotions, as he surveyed the girl whilst she stood weeping a minute in the gangway, 'as can't get drowned. My grandfather knew a Dutchman who was always a-falling overboard from vessels he 'longed to when in dock. They'd hear the splash, sing out, fetch the drags, and arter an hour or two of sweeping and creeping up 'ud come that blistered Dutchman, quite

unconscious of course, but with so much of life in him that arter he was rubbed and dried his first words was always "Anoder half-pint"!

'Good!' said little Harry, grinning with all his teeth. 'I tell you what. I have seen a ghost. By Peter, she is a fine girl! Look how she stands up at the side of that old cock with the red steak face. By Peter! There was business to be done there. Observe me, Bill. Yonder's a splicing job.'

Miss Mansel, drying her tears with one hand, the other being clasped by the commander, was conducted by her sweet-heart and Mr. Matthews into the cuddy. She then broke away and vanished in her cabin.

'A very handsome little interior,' said the commander, straddling at the foot of the table, his hands behind him, and turning his crimson face about in admiration, as though he was in a picture-gallery. 'I hope you found your effects intact, sir?'

'Intact to a shilling, I am happy to say,' said Mr. Matthews.

'Very airy and cheerful after the cabin of the brig,' said Boldock, breathing deep. 'Any damage?'

'They pillaged some of the passengers' cabins, but you'll find Miss Mansel hasn't suffered. They had done their worst with her. They'd do no more.'

'The bur-luddy villains!' exclaimed the commander, making the sentence tremendous by force of emphasis and slowness of delivery.

'Those two men,' continued the mate, 'tell a queer yarn of the fellows' doings at the island. Will you have them aft at once, sir, or wait till after breakfast?'

'We'll breakfast first,' said the commander, who was exceedingly hungry. 'I am one of those unfortunate people who can't shift without ballast.'

They made the rounds of the cabins. The commander found much to say on what he beheld. The main hatch covers were then lifted, and they entered the hold, where for some time on their knees and hands they remained, viewing the wreck of the massive casing in which the gold had been stored. When they returned on deck a very good sea-breakfast had been served by a Jack of the brig, one of those useful seamen who can cook and wait as well as hand and steer.

As the commander and his companion entered the cuddy the door of Miss Mansel's cabin was opened, and the young

lady made her appearance. Boldock started. He could hardly credit his sight. He had been so used to see Miss Mansel in her dressing-gown that now she was prettily dressed in serge trimmed as gaily as a yachting costume he scarcely recognised her. She had put on a hat, a charming hat, with an ostrich feather coiled round it. The gentlemen rogues had left her cabin untouched. All her toilet conveniences remained, and she had used them to her inexpressible refreshment and to the distinct improvement of her charms. So there stood before the commander a well-dressed, well-shaped young lady, with fine, dark, pensive eyes and blushing cheeks, and white teeth showing as she smiled—and she was to be his wife. ‘Good heavens!’ he ejaculated in the impulse of his surprise and delight. He took her hand, and raising it to his lips kissed it with admirable courtesy, then introduced her to Mr. Matthews as his betrothed.

‘I had thought as much, sir,’ said the mate, with one of those dry, nervous smiles which twist the mouth towards the cheek. ‘I heartily congratulate you both,’ and he bowed with the grace of a sailor bending at the handle of a pump.

No more was said on the subject, and they sat down to breakfast. The talk naturally concerned the robbery, the proceedings of the thieves, the chances of capturing them and recovering the gold.

‘I must have those nuggets, Margaret,’ Boldock said, with his immense face full of life and hope. ‘The salvage award shall mount into hundreds. It shall buy us a home and furnish it too, and there should be a very good balance for the spree that’s called ashore the honeymoon. Your share, I hope, Mr. Matthews, will enable you to give up the sea.’

The poor man rolled up his eyes with an expression of devotion.

This, where they were sitting, had been the theatre of the great ocean theft. Yonder was the cabin out of which they had dragged Miss Mansel. Yonder was the cabin in which the mate had been aroused to learn that the ship was seized.

‘How could old Benson have been such a fool as to let it happen?’ said the commander. ‘Was not the robbery of the arms-chest hint enough? Within an hour of that robbery I’d have had the whole of those fellows in irons, and chance the issue.’

But Mr. Matthews shook his head, and, indeed, if the

commander had been in charge of the barque, it is extremely probable that he would have allowed the ten gentlemen to work their will as Benson had, and for Benson's reasons.

They went on the poop. It was a beautiful warm sunny morning. The ocean undulated in long blue flashes of light from line to line, and a pleasant breeze was blowing, the speed of the two vessels being about five knots. The brig was rolling away out on the bow, and when the commander saw her his head rolled too in contemptuous sympathy. 'The run and lines of a pudding-dish,' he mused. 'She is fit to be a collier, and she brings all Sunderland into this beautiful scene. Suppose now,' said he to Mr. Matthews, 'you call the two men aft.'

The sun did not yet render an awning necessary. The young lady was shaded by her parasol, and she sat next to the commander, and Matthews stood beside them, whilst William and Harry the Dane, in respectful sea-postures before Boldock, related their yarn.

William began: 'The day afore we made the island I showed the gents how to get the anchors over the bows. Next day we made the land. There was a whole swamp of jawing; every man had his own opinion. I could see that him they called Trollope was no longer to boss the job, though I allowed he was the best of the gang, the properest to head that there tidy little procession.'

'Was he?' hissed Harry, swiftly and fiercely.

'One at a time; and William now jockeys the yard-arm,' said the commander.

'They agreed to sail close in to the island and go ashore in the longboat, and take a look around them,' continued William. 'They had no confidence in one another, and they must all go together, or remain together, and wherever the gold was, there they all must blooming well be—begging pardon,' said the man, touching his forehead in his slow, merchant-service way. 'They sailed in till they got seventeen fathom, then all the sails was furled, and the anchor let go. There was nine of 'em.'

'Nine!' exclaimed Miss Mansel.

'I forgot to mention,' said Mr. Matthews, 'there had been a duel.'

'Who fought?' asked the girl.

'Mr. Masters and Mr. Caldwell,' answered William.

'Caldwell shot Masters through the heart, this man tells me,' said the mate, 'and the body was flung overboard.'

'May they all serve each other so,' exclaimed the commander, with a pious motion of his eyeballs.

Miss Mansel was looking away to sea. She so held her parasol that Boldock could not have seen her just then, had he wanted to look at her. She was blushing, and yet her face wore a slight look of distress. But before Boldock could bid William proceed, she had rallied, and the parasol was in its former place.

'They got the boat over in the afternoon, and the nine gents went ashore in her,' said William. 'They were armed; I seed some of them inspecting their revolvers when they was in the boat. Before they put off, Davenire, the big chap with the silver chain, steps up to me and 'Arry here, and says, "We're going to leave you in charge of the ship, and we have confidence in you. If you should attempt to play false, by——" and here he swore an oath long as a bowline all about the Eternal, and so help him,' said William, looking with his slow gaze into the commander's wide expanse of countenance, "we'll secure the pair of you to that mast there, and blow your hum-hum brains out."

'So, that was their language. Quite like old times!' exclaimed the commander. 'Fire away!'

'When they was gone,' began Harry, who had been moving impatiently on either leg, darting frequent looks at Miss Mansel, with that sort of smirking, self-satisfied air which a certain type of conceited sailors will put on in the presence of women, though they should be ladies mast-high above their condition.

'I said one at a time!' thundered Boldock.

Harry's jaw fell. William went on after a leisurely look around the horizon, as though he scanned the sea for thought and words. 'When we was left alone, 'Arry here was for slipping. Yes, I says, says I, and git our brains blowed out. He says, they'll think the chain parted. What do they know about cables? Well, it wasn't done. This 'ere little 'Arry had been already knocked about till he was nigh killed by that there Trollope.'

The Dane in an agony of impatience and recollection struck his hip a slap that sounded like the report of a pistol.

'After they'd been on the island a couple of hours they puts off and comes aboard again.'

'Did they beach the boat?' said the commander.

'There's a sorter natural harbour on the south side of the island, and the boat lay there in charge of one man whilst the rest was ashore.'

'Well,' said Boldock. 'Shove ahead! You're confoundedly long-winded!'

'It's I can be quick,' yelled the Dane, snapping his fingers.

'Reel it out, then; reel it out!' cried the commander.

The Dane began to talk very fast, and Miss Mansel fell a-laughing.

'They comes aboard,' continued the Dane, 'and Davenire, stepping up to me, gives me a slap on the back like to have broke my spine, and yells out "You're both good men. Trustworthiness means beer and cuddy stores aboard this ship, and as much gold as shall fill each man a pocket-handkerchief." Then, calling to William, "What," says he "would you advise us to do with the boat?" As neither me nor William cared, and as we didn't want the job of helping to hoist her aboard, I says, says I, "It's a-going to be a fine night, and she'll lie all right astern if she's looked after." William up and says the same.'

'Who was a going to keep all on hoisting of that there longboat in and out?' said William.

'That fired Trollope,' continued the Dane—'beg pardon, lady,' he exclaimed, with an airy bow that fetched a rumble of laughter out of Boldock—'was for having her inboards. "The only boat!" I heard him say. "Suppose a sudden gale, and the likes of that." Most of 'em was opposed to him. They'd sorter taken a kind of hatred against the man. I went into the cuddy with a mess-kid to get some supper from them, and they was quarrelling and arguing with wine in their heads. By Peter, I liked it! When I returned with the kid I says to William, "If they keep all on they'll be massacring of each other!"'

He looked at Miss Mansel as if he expected she would be struck with the word.

'You forgot to tell the gentleman about the brigantine,' said William.

'When they found,' whipped in Harry, 'that there was no brigantine neither off nor at the island, they looked silly to a man, one and all. They had fetched glasses out of the passengers' cabins, and worked away at the island and all around it with their faces blank as a sailor's dumpling. It was clear

to most of them they was going to do nothing without a small vessel. I heard the man named Weston arguefying that the longboat was big and strong enough for them to go away in, gold, stores, and all, for a coast, but the general feeling was that the brigantine ought to have been there; as she worn't there they didn't know what to do, 'cept to wait for her, to give her a chance of turning up, either by cruising in this here vessel, or by anchoring and all hands living ashore.'

'Look alive with your yarn, my lad,' said Matthews kindly.

He had heard all this before. But Harry was upon a job he enjoyed. He was talking before a girl. The fine dark eyes of the young lady dwelt upon him, and Harry was one of those sailors who take great care to make it eight bells with the sun.

'Ay, ay, sir,' hissed he with his rapid utterance, and forged ahead thus:

'Next day the gents kept quiet. They did nothing but smoke their pipes, watch the sea for the brigantine, and stare at the island. Me and William kept forward, wondering how it was going to end. It was nice weather, but they was loonatics to let the longboat lie afloat; had they lost her they'd have been forced to use the ship to carry the gold to a coast with, and without a boat aboard we stood all hands to have been drowned.'

'Why didn't you advise them to lift the boat aboard?' said the commander.

'I never thought of the drowning part till afterwards, sir.'

'It was an easier job,' said the commander, speaking in deep notes and complainingly, 'to loaf on the fo'c'sle head with a pipe in your mouth than to run aloft with a block, or to help with a drag on a tackle.'

'That's about the time of day, sir, with the fo'c'sle of the red flag in these times,' exclaimed Mr. Matthews. 'A pipe and a long loaf at the windlass end, and then a walk aft to order the captain to up hellum for home as everything's wrong with the blooming old hooker.'

William's face rippled with enjoyment of the mate's plain speaking. A sailor relishes the truth about his calling when applied to another, and William understood that the mate's remarks were meant for the Dane.

'On you go!' said the commander, who was growing impatient. 'Pay out, pay out!'

'On the third morning, it being fine, still weather,' con-

tinued Harry, 'a sail showed in the south. The sight drove the gents mad. They rushed aloft with their glasses, and them that hadn't glasses yelled to the others for news. By Peter! then it *was* a brigantine as sure as it was blue water she floated on. She was heading west and glided on. The gents swore she'd missed the island, and I heard that scow-banker Trollope tell Davenire that it was Saunders groping for it, and that he must be helped. What followed? We up anchor, made sail, and stood out in chase. It was some hours before we drawed near enough to distinguish the craft, and then some of the gents who knew the *Rival* says it wasn't her, and some was for speaking the brigantine, and taking their chance of what might follow. This led to a quarrel between Captain Trollope, as they called him—but *he ain't* no captain—and that there Davenire, and blowed if they didn't square up and go for each other. It was a beautiful sight to these eyes,' cried the Dane in sudden fury, making many passionate gestures as he spoke, 'for I waas sure the giant dot waas goodt for a travelling cage in my country would kill the other. But the skunk——.'

'This man is not fit to be trusted with a story,' interrupted the commander. 'Pick up the yarn, you, now.'

William, wiping a little tobacco juice from his lips, said:

'The two gents had a bit of a stand-up affair. T'others interfered. One got knocked down. Burn was his name; a gent,' said William pointing, 'who was all day long a-drinking bottled beer under that there skylight. I reckoned upon some shooting, like as afore, but they was too knowing for that sort o' larking this time. There was a great deal of talk, and yells to the big chap that he should apologise, and I see 'em shake hands arter they'd found out that the brigantine wasn't the vessel they wanted. We anchored and furled everything, and lay for three days doing nothen. Me and 'Arry, keeping forward, without any excuse to go aft, couldn't get to hear what was to be done. One day the gents came off with a skull they'd picked up, with a hole in it, and a bird's nest inside. "Think of hatchin' of ideas after death," the gent Weston said, and there was a great laugh. They made a deal of this skull, then chucked him overboard. Once when I went into the cuddy to ask for something to eat, Captain Trollope, who sat at table with three or four others, looked at me hard. I thought he'd speak to me alone afterwards. I'll swear that gent meant treachery to his mates, and it 'ud have come to a

scheme with him, and we might have saved the ship and the gold, hadn't they on a sudden formed a resolution. They loaded the longboat with cabin stores, and went ashore with her. Next day they put the gold into the boat, and took it away.'

'Pause now,' said the commander, 'and give me your attention, my lad. They took the gold away. Did you follow the boat with your eyes?'

'I watched her, certainly.'

'And I watched her,' said Harry. 'I wanted to see,' continued the little Dane, 'if they meant to stow the gold somewhere where it could be found, if they came to harm without carrying of it off, and William and me being alone in the barque, I runs aft for a glass.'

'An intelligent act.'

'Yer dornt tell the gen'man it was me as arsted yer to run for a glass,' said William.

'There were several glasses, and you fetched one, and you were two men, No matter,' said the commander. 'Did they get ashore all right?'

'I watched them,' said the Dane, 'make for their regular landing-place, and hand the gold out. It was white beach where they landed, sheltered by a wing of land and a lot of wood, and bright green grass came growing down quite close to the glare of the grit. The chests were very heavy, and it took all hands to move two of 'em at a time, and they never would go but a little distance, then return for the other chests, as if they couldn't bear to leave 'em even that short way off. I watched till they was lost among the trees; but put me off that island, and I'll give ye the bearings of their track, though where they hid the gold I can't say.'

'You'll find, sir,' said Mr. Matthews to the commander, 'that they've stowed it in some cave or natural hollow which won't be hard to find. Observe that they took nothing to dig with to the island.'

'How romantic all this is!' exclaimed Miss Mansel.

'And yet,' exclaimed the commander, attempting in vain a poetical expression of countenance; 'if you look at the sea around us, how bald you find it! How, then, should romance live in this barren plain, which is as blank as the air it looks up at? But heave ahead with your yarn, my lads.'

'Who's to go on, sir?' said William.

The Dane proceeded: 'They came off in the evening and feasted in the cuddy, and made a night of it. They took

care not to get drunk, all 'cepting Burn. They mostly slept on deck and kept a sharp look-out; 'twas for the brigantine, I allow. There was nothing else to watch for. Next day they all went ashore again, and remained again till sundown. I could see 'em on the hills among the trees walking about, looking through the spy-glasses they'd taken. They couldn't fear for the ship. The weather kept wonderful fine. Besides, they knew we onderstoodt dot if we slipped, the boat 'ud be alongside afore we could have hoisted a rag of canvas, and then they'd have blowed our brains out.'

'They certainly would ha' done that,' said William, with a sudden distortion of face, that at least proved the fellow's slow intelligence possessed some small capacity of realisation.

'It grew plain to me and William,' continued Harry, 'that them gents meant to give the brigantine a good chance, the ship lying at anchor, and themselves spending the days ashore along with their gold. Davenire asked William, afore going into the boat one morning, to let go a second anchor if sarcumstances obliged. William said yes, he'd do that to save the ship for his own life's sake.'

'I must interrupt,' said Mr. Matthews; 'when the boat went ashore with the gold, how deep did she float?'

'She showed a side like a plank, sir,' answered William; 'she was sunk so deep, when the nine of the gents got in on top of the chests, that I allow it settled their resolution then and there to give the brigantine a good long chance, and to keep the ship at anchor, to use by'n-bye, if that there Saunders, as I'd hear them call him, didn't tarn up.'

'They'll never attempt to carry away the gold in the boat then?' said Matthews to the commander.

'No.'

'But I always felt it. I knew that boat's capacity. Nine men. They'd need to go flush with stores; they'd see to that; they're not gentlemen to go afloat with a view to perishing of thirst, anyhow,' said Mr. Matthews. 'They'll not trust the treasure in her, and unless the brigantine has turned up since this ship was blown or rather rolled away from the island, the gold's ashore and ready for us to re-stow.'

'What did they mean to do with you two men,' said the commander, 'if the brigantine had arrived?'

'My opinion is,' answered William gloomily, 'that arter they'd put the gold aboard they'd have marooned us on that island and scuttled the barque.'

'Likely as not,' yelped in the Dane, with a snarl like a whistle running through his words, 'they'd have tied us back to back, and chucked us overboard with our arms free to strike out. I see that bloody pirate Trollope leaning over the rail along with two or three other of the gents, wagering how long we was going to keep afloat.' His wrath was so great, but then its justification was likewise so considerable, that neither the commander nor Mr. Matthews thought proper to rebuke the little man for his evil speech in the presence of a lady.

'How came you to be rolled off the island, as I've heard you express it?' said Boldock.

The Dane and William looked at each other, and William spoke.

'It was shortly afore sundown, four days ago, with the roastingest hot look in the face of the west that ever I took notice of in all my time. The gents had been ashore all day, and was still ashore. They seemed sick an' tired of keepin' a look-out for the brigantine, and had left the vessel without taking any glasses with them; so I reckoned from the heap that lay on the cuddy table. We lay about a mile out, and by looking through a telescope I could see 'em plain, sitting, walking about, talking. I was constantly a-watchin' of 'em in this way, reckoning I'd light on where they'd hid the gold.'

'But how was the ship rolled off, man?' said the commander.

'All of a sudden, whilst I was looking westward at the flare there, and the light upon the water, I saw the sea in trouble and a-moving. It had been calm down to this, a nice air of wind out of the south, and a small natural heave of swell. The trouble in that water came along in seas.'

'Rollers,' said the Dane.

'Rollers then,' exclaimed William. 'We was riding head-on, and the first bowed us cathead under. She rose roaring on top of the next lump of brine with a leap that knocked me down and parted the cable. In the shindy and fear I didn't know the cable was gone. The island was a sight. It was smoking with salt. The rollers flung themselves hundred of feet high into the air in white water, which fell with a noise like bolts of thunder upon a mountain. That curve of land which protected the 'arbour smoked too, I can tell yer,' said William, speaking a little fast with some

excitement of memory and some enjoyment of his own powers of narration. 'It was raging white water in the 'arbour itself, but all so thick with the mist of spray, though now it was blowing but a light wind, that I couldn't see what the men were doing of. I reckoned, however, that their first idea would be to haul the boat high and dry to save her. There was nine, and it was to be done quickly among 'em. I sings out, "Shall we let go the second anchor, 'Arree?" That was arter I saw we was adrift, and he yelled out, "It 'ud never hold her in this sea. Let her go. It's our chance of getting away, Bill, without risking our lives," and I don't believe myself that a second anchor *would* have held the ship. I never saw such a swell, never heard of the like of it. It was got up like magic. Every blow seemed to drive the ship by her own length astern, leaving her sunk in a walley, and to clear the land we hoisted the foretopmast staysail. This coaxed her head off, but it was wonderful she didn't founder in the trough afore she came starn on, by which time the island was on the quarter, the sun going down, and darkness a-settling over the world.'

'To cut the yarn short,' said the commander, 'the ship drifted, the night came down, the rolling sea broke upon the island, and when next morning came you found yourselves alone?'

'Yaw, sir,' answered the Dane.

'How long did the commotion last?'

'Till past midnight.'

'But when day broke the island was still in sight?'

'When day broke he was thick with a middling breeze right off the island, and our helm was amidships,' answered the Dane.

'Did it continue thick all 'day?'

'It turned to rain and blew fresh, clearing at night, and then next morning the horizon lay fair, but there was no island.'

'Was it the intention of the men, do you think, sir, to recover the ship?' said the mate. 'They had the gold, their arms, plenty of provisions ashore. They had their boat there. They might hope the barque would go to pieces, and carry these fellows down into silence with her.'

'But wouldn't they fear,' said the commander, 'that she'd fall in with a vessel and report the whole story?'

'They are nine armed desperate men, sir,' said Mr.

Matthews, 'and what's to be fallen in with down here that's going to be of much help to recover a treasure against such determined devils as those fellows?'

'May I say what I think, sir?' cried the Dane, lifting his hand and snapping his fingers.

'Speak,' said the commander.

'I allow,' said the Dane, 'that when they found the ship going or gone they fell to arguefying, as before, as to what should be done, and as every man had an opinion of his own, nothing *was* done,' said Harry with a triumphant nod.

'Any way, something's now done,' said the mate dryly, 'and that's your yarn, my lads, so you can go forward.'

'What do you say to a decayed toothful of grog apiece for these fellows?' said the commander.

'Shall I take them into the cuddy and give it to them?' exclaimed Miss Mansel, starting up. She was eager the men should get it, and thought the mate reluctant.

'I will save you that trouble, Miss,' said Mr. Matthews, with a smile of suspicion; and as he had no steward to call to, he told them to follow him into the cuddy, and then he gave each man a wineglassful of rum.'

Whilst this was doing Miss Mansel talked with Boldock about the story the men had given them. The brig was about three-quarters of a mile ahead. The barque was reduced to her topsails and courses and spanker, and yet the brig's boatswain, who was keeping a look-out on the *Queen's* poop, found it difficult to stop the clipper from forging ahead of the clumsy wagon on the bow. Bright was that picture of morning in the Pacific; clouds in breasts of satin, jewelled in their skirts with the light of the sun, were sailing over the pure blue sky; the long lazy Pacific heave was in the sea, that cradling heave which the whaleman knows as he dozes on the look-out at the masthead. There was nothing in sight except the brig. The ocean rippled merrily with the life and spirit of the breeze. The salt sang in the short wake, and the white canvas sank in and out in breathing bosoms, flinging a refreshing coolness of eddying draughts down upon the hot decks.

'And you expect to be off the island to-morrow?' said Miss Mansel.

'By to-morrow night I do, my love, certainly, clipped as our plumes are, if this breeze keeps on blowing.'

'Suppose the men are ashore? It will be horribly

exciting. They are all armed. What will you do?' said the girl, gazing with the concern of her heart in her agreeable eyes as she fixed them upon the commander's face.

'We will anchor and go ashore and make the men prisoners, then look for the gold, find it, stow it, and sail away for Sydney,' answered Boldock in a certain large comfortable manner he was sometimes used to put on after his third glass of hot rum and water.

'What was that extraordinary sea which liberated the ship?' said Miss Mansel, after a pause, during which Mr. Matthews had rejoined them.

'What would you call it?' said the commander, turning stiffly in his chair to look up at the mate.

'An earthquake, I should say, sir.'

'I can imagine nothing else,' observed Boldock. 'We must have been within the area of any storm that could have set such a swell in motion, and therefore have felt it.'

'It's not the first time,' said Mr. Matthews, 'that I've heard of these unnatural agitations. My father had command of a "South Seaman," and he used to tell of picking up the survivors of the crew of a vessel that had gone down bodily, all standing in just such another commotion as those two men have described. It lasted long too, as though the rollers were the work of one marine spasm after another.'

'Everything's possible at sea,' said the commander.

Just as he pronounced these words the figure of a man, dwarfed by distance, could be seen frantically gesticulating on the taffrail of the brig. A binocular glass lay upon the skylight, and the commander, with wonderful agility, jumped for it.

'It's Hardy,' he cried, 'he's pointing on our lee beam.'

'Sail ho!' shouted a voice on the *Queen's* forecastle.

'The longboat, sir, by thunder!' yelled Mr. Matthews, looking through the ship's telescope.

Miss Mansel shrieked with excitement.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE FIGHT

AWAY far down on the edge of the sea glowed a point of light. In the binocular glass the commander levelled, it shone as the topmost sail of a ship whose keel was sunk to the height of her topgallant yards, behind the horizon ; but in the ship's powerful telescope that far-off dash of lustre hung near and brilliant, a large lugsail and a gunwale of ship's boat under it, with a row of dots as of heads of men glimmering in the warm transparency 'twixt sea and sky.

'It's this ship's longboat,' exclaimed Mr. Matthews in a voice strained by all sorts of sensations into a high note. 'I will swear to her, distant as she is.'

'Very well,' said the commander, coolly putting down the binocular glass. All excitement was gone from him. His nostrils were large, determination had fixed the expression of his face. The spirit of roast beef had started, but not from its grave, in that sturdy resolved shape. He said, letting fall his intoning tricks of speech, talking indeed rather rapidly, with a pulse of decision, however, in every word :

'There is nothing more probable than that she should prove the longboat. We are within, comparatively speaking, a few hours' sail of the island ; if that boat left it yesterday and headed north, as she appears to be doing, she was almost certain to fall in with us. But for all that, Mr. Matthews, it is a stroke of fortune of which we must be able to give a good account. Sir, you will give me leave to take command of this vessel ?'

'Oh, why, most certainly. Anything I can do under you——' said the mate, bowing and bowing.

'First and foremost, we have not so much as a peashooter in the ship. Signal Hardy, speak him—quickly, if you please. If that boat discovers, as she is sure to do by your topgallant mast being gone, that we are the barque *Queen* in company with a brig, she'll make tracks, sir, and we may have some difficulty in catching her.'

A small ensign run aloft at the gaff-end was signal enough to Hardy, who immediately threw the brig in the wind, and the barque slowly floated on to her quarter.

'Mr. Hardy,' roared the commander, 'I am going in chase

of that boat in this ship. Send the arms-chest and ammunition aboard! See to the cutlasses, Hardy.'

'Ay, ay, sir,' shouted the man as he stood on the rail, holding by the vang with the foot of his trousers trembling.

'I may have to deprive you for the time of the services of three of your men. Send six in the boat. You will have plenty to work the brig with. If I should run out of sight of you, make for Halloran Island and heave to and wait for me.'

'Right, sir,' bawled Hardy, and a minute later all was hurry and bustle in the little vessel.

'Is she the longboat, do you think, Mr. Matthews?' said Miss Mansel, standing beside the mate, who was again viewing the still distant object through the ship's glass.

'I am certain of it. First of all she is a ship's boat. The coincidence of a second ship's boat being adrift down here would be too extraordinary. Everything tallies. We are fast closing the island. She could have left it but a few hours, so to say. All is happening in one small space of water, and you may take my word that Captain Benson's old friends are yonder!'

'Amazing!' murmured the girl; 'what will Commander Boldock do? How will he be able to catch them if they try to escape?'

He approached at that moment to make known his intentions to Mr. Matthews, and talked with one hand affectionately but lightly lying on Miss Mansel's shoulder.

'We must catch those fellows by a ruse,' said he. 'When we are armed we will shift helm for the boat. The bo'sun Trivett must coax them on board by the statement I put into his mouth. You, sir, will keep out of sight with the men. William and the Dane will stand by to show themselves on the forecastle. The scoundrels must be on board before the rush is made. Then out you pour to the signal of my shout.'

'If the rogues should refuse to come on board, sir?' said Matthews.

'Our brains are not one-barrel machines,' answered the commander, his manner tinged with the contempt which at such a moment a naval officer might justly entertain for an ox-faced merchant mate capable of asking useless questions.

He withdrew his hand from Miss Mansel's shoulder, and stepped over to Trivett, the boatswain of the brig, whom he addressed in a very earnest decisive manner, talking with plenty of theatrical gestures, whilst he frequently looked in

the direction of the boat. When he was done with the boat-swain, whose face glowed with a genial intelligence of his commander's meaning, he hailed the forecastle, and William and Harry came aft. Them also he addressed in firm tones and dramatic gestures.

'Do you understand me?' he said.

'Just think I do, sir,' answered the Dane, whose face was wrecked with a grin. In fact the little sailor saw much to amuse him in Commander Boldock's appearance. And though on the eve of a business that might cost him his life, this wasp of a man could laugh. The Danes are no cowards. Cowards! A more gallant, heroic-hearted people than Nelson's 'Brothers of the English,' you shall not find, though the world be searched for them.

'We'll be armed, I suppose, sir?' said William, to whom the humour of this passage of his life appealed but faintly.

'Certainly,' exclaimed Boldock.

This had been said whilst the boat of the brig had been coming to the barque with the arms-chest. The oars swept the lubberly fabric alongside. The chest was promptly got aboard along with the brig's store of cutlasses, and a quantity of powder and shot for the pistols and muskets. Three of the men re-entered the boat and returned to the brig, which forthwith proceeded on her course to Halloran Island, in obedience to certain instructions which had been despatched by the commander to Hardy. Boldock's next act was to order the quarter-boat, out of which the mate and the five seamen had been rescued, to be lowered by the tackles as she swung at the davits that she might be invisible to the long-boat; but as she hit the ship's weather side at every heave of the swell, she was lowered into the water, and left to float at her painter.

The boat was dead to leeward, and crept northwards slowly with a flattened sheet. Her people were without glasses. The commander knew that. All the glasses belonging to the ship were aboard. They would therefore be unable to judge of the character of the barque until within eyeshot, and the commander was in no hurry to help them by bearing down.

The arms-chest was opened on the quarter-deck, and the crew summoned aft, when pistols and cutlasses were immediately served out.

'You'll keep off the forecastle cut of sight, men, all but William and Harry there. Mr. Matthews will be in charge

of ye. When I roar out you'll run out. Down with 'em if they resist, even if it comes to your splitting them in halves, otherwise shed no more blood than you can help. I want to carry those gentlemen sound in limb and wind and appetite to Sydney. Do you understand me? You'll shed no more blood than is to be helped,' the commander said, gazing with stern significance at the little Dane, whose countenance showed darkly in the crowd of sailors with evil intentions and the passion of revenge. 'Remove his cutlass and give him a handspike, Mr. Matthews,' he continued, irritated by the mutinous piratic scowl of the Dane, differing extraordinarily from his recent face of ruining merriment. 'We don't want to approach this business in the spirit of murder.'

'I will shoot him through the brains all the same,' hissed Harry to a seaman as the body of them went forward. 'Give me your pistol, Joe. S'elp me Cott, you shall have twenty dollars out of my pay for the use of it when we gets wherever we're a-going.'

The commander went on to the poop with a cutlass strapped round his waist, and a loaded pistol in his pocket, leaving the mate in charge of the men forward. Miss Mansel stood beside the boatswain viewing the boat that looked like the reflection of a moon sliding over the blue water. Trivett, glass in hand, exclaimed, 'I count six people in her, sir.'

'Give me that telescope,' said the commander.

Again he looked at the boat.

'So,' said he, after a minute's silence. 'Six, as you say. She floats too light for the gold. They have left that ashore in charge of others, and are in search of a ship. The gallant, roving hearts! One grieves to be the instrument of arresting so noble an undertaking, and spoiling the most splendid adventure in the annals of freebooting.'

Nobody was to be seen at the fore end of the ship except Harry and William, who walked in the waist awaiting a signal from the commander. The *Wellesley* had already measured a wide space of water, and her intention of final farewell and departure could not be mistaken.

'Up helm!' said the commander; 'we'll float down upon them, Trivett, without touching a brace. They shall not see a man but yourself and the helmsman aft.'

The barque's head slowly fell off towards the longboat.

'My dear,' said the commander—Trivett started—'I think you had better go below; and pray be careful not to show

yourself until we have polished off your old friends. To think, too,' he continued, turning up his great red face and rolling up his honest eyes, 'that all this should have come about through *you*, love, whom they think of as drowned at the bottom of the sea!'

He gently took the young lady by the hand, and led her to the companion. She went down the steps, but he remained in the hatch, hidden and gazing.

The boat continued to hold a course for the *Queen* as though her occupants had made up their minds. It was certain that they had by this time recognised her. Boldock, standing in the companion way, commanded her with his glass, and was able to distinguish the faces of the men. They were six, as the boatswain had said. He who steered was a fine, rather handsome person, with a large moustache. The powerful telescope brought them within a hand-reach of the commander, albeit the boat was still a mile off. One who sat near the steersman was a fellow of huge bulk. His immense figure dwarfed the man next him. Miss Mansel had again and again described the ten men to Boldock, and he immediately said to himself when the lenses perfectly magnified the forms and faces of the fellows to his vision, 'That big devil is Davenire, and the gentleman at the tiller is Captain Trollope;' and a third man he instantly knew by recollection of the girl's description, a black-faced, hung-head man, who lay over the weather gunwale, looking right into the commander's eye under the shadow of his hat. But Mr. Weston, who was sitting in the bows, Mr. Hankey beside him, and Mr. Shannon, who was seated with his back against the mast, his arms folded, the correctest copy imaginable of a shipwrecked figure, Boldock was unable to identify from memory of Miss Mansel's sketches.

'Down helm now, Trivett,' said he after a long silence, during which the boat had drawn almost within musket-shot of the barque's bow. 'They evidently mean to resume possession of the vessel. Now play your part well, and we may nab every man Jack of them without shedding a drop of blood.'

He passed down the steps, and going through the cuddy, halted beside the open door, where he could hear, but also easily retire when the moment for concealment should arise. The barque was thrown up into the wind by Trivett, and came to a halt upon the fretting waters, swaying regularly.

At this hour the brig was a large, square, pale shadow upon the horizon in the south-east.

Suddenly the boat dropped her lugsail, and rocked her naked mast, with the whole six men in her standing up, staring under the sharp of their hands, all in attitudes of debating and considering.

‘Go now on to the fo’c’sle, William, and you, Harry, and be steady with your yarn if they should hail you.’

The two seamen ascended the forecastle ladder, and showed themselves.

‘Harry the Dane, ahoy!’ roared the thunderous voice of Davenire. ‘An hour ago we saw that that vessel was our barque. Was it the heavy swell carried you off?’

‘Ay, sir,’ answered the Dane, with a flourish of his hand.

‘Who are those people aft there?’

‘Two sailors put aboard us by yonder whaler, sir,’ answered the Dane.

‘Don’t you tell any lies,’ roared Caldwell. ‘That brig’s no whaler.’

‘Ho, the boat ahoy!’ shouted the boatswain Trivett from the head of the poop ladder. ‘Begging your pardon, if you’ll come alongside, I’ll tell you she is a whaler, and give you her master’s name, and the quantity of oil she’s got aboard, and where she hails from.’

‘All that’s devilish easy to invent,’ shouted Davenire. ‘Are you four men the only people in that ship?’

‘Boat ahoy!’ shouted Trivett, ‘won’t ye draw a little closer so that we can talk? What are you afraid of? I thought you was castaway men, and bore down to pick you up.’

On this the six gentlemen held a short consultation, often directing their eyes at the barque with many marks of suspicion in their looks and gestures. Then Weston threw an oar over on one side and Shannon an oar over on the other, and to a very slow beat of blade—every face, the rowers’ included, turned towards the *Queen*—the boat warily approached until she was abeam, within comfortable talking distance.

‘Wouldn’t that brig help you to more than two men?’ shouted Trollope to the forecastle. ‘If she’s a whaler she’s full-handed.’

‘*He’ll* explain, sir,’ replied Harry, pointing at Trivett on the poop.

‘She’s the *Irish Girl* of Hull, sixteen months out. She

fell in with this vessel this morning,' cried Trivett, who fairly looked the character of the rough whaling mate or superior spouter's seaman he was personating, as he stood in a sailor's careless attitude a foot in a coil of rope, a hand on a backstay, dressed in a sleeved waistcoat, well-worn cloth breeches, and a greasy grey felt hat. 'Captain Button could only spare us two men, but seein' your boat comin' along he counted on my finding in yer the extray hands we require to navigate this beautiful and valuable ship, which I may tell yer is flush to the hatches with wool.'

'How long have you been aboard?' howled Caldwell, with his hand at the side of his mouth.

'Not yet 'ad time to take a look around,' answered Trivett. 'This here ship wants men. There's no going below aboard eight hundred ton when there's only fower to a crew. Ain't that a sextant case in your starn sheets?'

Yes, it was a sextant case, and inside it was a sextant that had belonged to the late Captain Benson. When the longboat had gone ashore with stores the men carried with them this sextant, a boat's compass, and a chart of the South Pacific, but they had not thought of losing the barque, or surely they would have provided themselves with one or more of the glasses on board, and at least one of the ship's chronometers.

'If that's a sextant,' continued Trivett, bawling down at the boat that was right abreast of the ship, sinking and falling and rocking her naked mast, that stood up like a lightning-withered pine, whilst Mr. Shannon and Mr. Weston kept their oars overboard scarce paddling, however, to hold their little fabric in position, 'there'll be a navigator amongst you, and——' He changed his manner, and feigning a sudden air of suspicion with such admirable dexterity as would have delighted the commander had he been watching the fellow, he shouted: 'But what *are* yer and where do yer come from? What ship did yer belong to? You've got the looks of passengers. I should like to hear your yarn afore you come aboard.'

This was going beyond what the commander had indicated in his instructions to Trivett. The red-faced officer standing in the cuddy doorway listened in an agony of impatience, which, growing insupportable, forced him to sneak along the deck fast as a crouching and dodging posture would admit towards the forecastle, whilst he signed to Harry and William

not to appear to see him. He exclaimed in a low voice to Harry, who had lounged to the head of the fore-castle ladder on observing the commander coming, 'For the life that's in ye both, don't look down nor seem to heed me; sing out this.' He dictated the words, and Harry, who acted with an adroitness that was not to have been hoped for in William, shrieked in his high notes:

'We haven't had time yet to tell the story. That there man knows nothing about you. But I'll go aft and give him the yarn whilst you wait, if you like.'

Something in this speech appeared to decide the six gentlemen. They talked together for a few minutes, looking earnestly at the ship. Every man then saw that his loaded weapon was handy to his grasp, when the six should leap as one for the chains. Weston and Shannon dipped their blades, and the boat approached the barque; the four, who stood up idle, intently watched the movements of the men who were visible on the vessel.

The commander having gone forward decided to remain forward. He backed into the gloom of the fore-castle and stood, cutlass in hand, panting with impatience. The fore-castle lamp was out; the slide of the scuttle was drawn, the great heap of the furniture of the windlass, the foremast, and the like, just abaft the fore-castle front, eclipsed the light of day upon the narrow entrance, and the seamen were scarcely visible one to another as they stood waiting. Even now, though the gentlemen in the longboat had clearly formed their resolution, they paused when within a few strokes of their oars to listen.

'Are you going to board me afore you gives me some account of yourselves?' sung out Trivett, and his voice breaking the silence accentuated the hush in the ship to the listening ears in the boat.

'You shall have our yarn in a few minutes,' cried Davenire in his tremendous voice. 'Give way.'

The boat drew to the main-chains, and heedless as to what became of her in their rage of resolution to re-possess themselves of the ship, fired too with suspicion of their reception as every black soul of the six was, they sprang with tiger-like leaps into the chains and gained the deck in a dozen heart-beats.

Not a moment for breathing and for looking round was permitted. Roaring at the top of his voice, 'Now then, Mr.

Matthews! Now then, my hearts! We must nab every one of these fellows. But don't hurt them if they offer no resistance!' Boldock rushed out, flourishing his cutlass, followed by the mate and the whole body of seamen.

'An ambush!' yelled Hankey; and Shannon sprang to the side as if he would jump overboard, then faced about, levelling his pistol.

'Throw down your arms. We don't want to hurt you, but we must take you,' bawled the commander, making straight for Caldwell.

The six men fired a volley slap at the approaching seamen, rushing headlong at them.

It was to be a desperate, unfair fight: six enraged entrapped men against overwhelming odds. Caldwell, black in the face with the devil that was in him, flashed his second shot at the commander. The ruffian missed his aim; he had been more fortunate with Mr. Masters. His opponent's rush gave him no time for a third bullet, and he hurled the heavy clumsy weapon—a deadly missile—with the full strength of his nervous arm at Boldock's head. The pistol struck the uplifted cutlass, and snapped the blade short off as though it had been a carrot. Dropping the useless hilt, Boldock, who was now in the right fighting fury, was checked by the force of the blow; he received Caldwell as he sprang at him, and in a breath the two men were locked.

It was a fierce wrestle for a few minutes. No man came to the commander's help. Caldwell's intention to get Boldock under and so strangle him with stamp of foot or pressure of knee, was clear. He was by far the stronger of the two, fighting if not for his life at least for his liberty, and they swayed and rolled and gnashed their teeth and sweated, the commander silent, Caldwell muttering low curses as he swung and twisted; till all at once his grasp relaxed, a look of horror lighted up his face with the rounding of his eyes. 'Oh Christ! Look at her!' he yelled.

Crash! down he went with those words in his evil mouth, and that look of horror on his hanging face. The commander was on top of him, and now Trivett rushed to his side with a rope to bind the prisoner. Miss Mansel stood a little way in the cuddy, quite visible through the door, watching the fight.

'Back, Margaret, back!' panted the commander, but in an audible voice, to the girl, who shrieked, 'He is Caldwell! He

is the man whose name was on the handkerchief!' and, thus speaking, she fled to the after end of the cuddy.

'So we've got Miss Mansel's would-be murderer here, have we?' gasped the commander, who, with Trivett, was now kneeling upon the writhing, struggling form. 'Frap him handsomely, Trivett. It'll be round the neck when we get him ashore, I expect. Taut as you please. The bloody scoundrel!'

They bound his arms behind him, they bound his legs with the swift, but likewise with the sure, hand of seamanship, and then, as though he had been a newly slaughtered pig, they dragged him to the little steerage hatch under the break of the poop and dropped him through it, quivering, cursing, howling, but helpless as a man hanging at a yard-arm.

The struggle, however, was not yet over. The five had fought like furies, they snapped their revolvers to right and left, and hurled them, as Caldwell had, at the heads of the seamen when the chambers were empty. Three sailors lay wounded from the discharge of those firearms, while the gentlemen themselves remained unhurt. The giant Davenire had wrenched a handspike from the hand of a man, and, thus armed, he rushed upon Mr. Matthews. The worthy mate had a heart of oak, but he was new to this sort of business, and could not but spring back from the onslaught of that great figure, terrible with the heavy capstan bar he swung. In another moment the poor fellow would never have needed to sign articles any more for a living; he was saved by Davenire's foot, in his white, blind heat, striking the revolver that Caldwell had hurled at the commander: it tripped him and he was flung: he fell headlong with all his own and the weight of the massive beam he grasped. Then the mate, yelling for help, leapt upon him. Three seamen tumbled upon the prostrate giant; yet it took the united strength of those four men to secure the herculean Mr. Mark Davenire. At every wrestling heave and furious motion of his muscular mass of body he slung one or another, making them leap as a man springs from the side of a boat. But numbers must prevail. Matthews gripped him with both hands by the throat, and was strangling him, whilst the seamen were making a helpless bale of the huge robber by turn upon turn of rope round his arms and body and legs.

There was no more noise of firearms after Davenire was

secured. Trollope, Weston, Shannon, and Hankey, with their backs against the bulwarks in the gangway, were making a magnificent stand when the commander, having dropped Mr. Caldwell into the steerage, looked round the hatchway at the quarter-deck scene of struggle. Davenire was even then being bound, and the mate knelt upon him with his hands upon his throat. You might have heard the groans of the wounded men above the cries and curses of the seamen as they hacked and hewed at the four gentlemen against the bulwarks, not wishing to shoot them, and not able to subdue them. All four men had managed to wrench cutlasses out of the grasp of their opponents, and they made a lightning in the air with these weapons as they struck in return, louncing and parrying, or letting drive the slinging blows of the boarder. Trollope was scarcely recognisable for a wound in his head. Some hand had early laid his cheek open, and his linen coat was drenched with blood, and his left arm was crimson as he raised it. It was a wicked, miserable scene, lifted to no height of heroism—though the devil knows it lacked not that quality—because of the character of the villains. Boldock, gazing a moment, never could have imagined anything to surpass that picture of savage resistance.

‘Surrender!’ he roared, rushing towards the six or seven men who were swinging handspikes and cutlasses at the four; ‘we don’t want your lives, but you’re our prisoners; you must be our prisoners. Surrender, you scoundrels!’

As he thundered out these words a pistol, was fired behind him, and, with a groan, the unhappy Trollope let fall his cutlass; his blood-soaked arm sank slowly, a piteous expression swam into his eyes as he turned them upon the commander, death whitened him, and made very ghastly by contrast of hue the wound that bled in his head, and he fell, sinking on to his knees, next stretching his length.

When Weston saw this he flung his cutlass high in the air and folded his arms. He was immediately collared by a couple of seamen, and Mr. Hankey was at the same instant knocked down.

‘If it must be, it must be!’ Shannon panted, dropping his weapon, and striking his hands into his pockets and looking at the body of Trollope. He, too, was promptly seized, and the three men were walked off to the hatch and dropped below.

'Get the irons, Trivett!' shouted the commander, 'I suppose there *are* irons aboard this ship. Who killed that man?' and he pointed to the body of Trollope.

'It was the Dane, sir,' answered one of the seamen of the *Queen*. This poor fellow could scarcely speak, nearly the whole of his front teeth having been knocked out.

'The accursed little foreigner!' exclaimed the commander, almost losing his roared looks in the sudden paling heat of his wrath; 'I will have him indicted for murder. He shall hang for it. What's become of the little dog?' he cried, looking round him. Then his sight going to the three wounded seamen near the hatchway, he called to Mr. Matthews and told him to order some men to lift them and carry them carefully forward to their beds, and to accompany them that he might report their condition. The first man they handled was a poor fellow wounded to death. They raised him: he was Tom, the sailor that had jumped overboard. He was a favourite in the fore-castle, despite his queer views and love of argument and taint of harmless madness. 'Poor Tom!' said the men, as they lifted him. He gave a single struggle, and cried, with a dying roll of his eyes, 'Mates, God's put the sun out.'

The other two were quickly taken forward.

The commander stood beside the body of Trollope, gazing down at the dead face. He lay sideways. The wound was hidden, and Boldock saw a handsome gentleman lying in death. He lay a very fine figure of a man, and Boldock thought that he at some time in his life had met him. 'I may recall you some of these days,' mused the commander, with the velocity of thought, standing for a minute beside the body. 'That you were a gentleman is certain, no doubt an officer in the army. A base end, an ignoble end! What did you do with those qualities with which you might have made a respectable, even a shining figure upon this brief stage? God forgive us all! Why did the Dane kill this man?'

He lifted his wide straw hat to wipe the sweat from his streaming face, then turned from the body, calling to a couple of hands to carry it to a foremost cuddy cabin. Trivett came up to him.

'A sharp business,' said the commander, 'and far bloodier than I wanted.'

'It couldn't be helped, sir.'

'No. They fought like true children of Satan.'

'Like Englishmen, sir,' said Trivett.

'Get buckets and swabs for these decks,' the commander shouted. 'Been hurt, Trivett?'

'Bit of a thump over the back of the head, sir: nothing to talk of.'

'We have three men wounded,' said the commander; 'one man's badly hurt in the mouth. The mate of this barque will report other injuries. I believe we have come off pretty lightly. The rogues were handsomely armed, but shot wildly, or their first discharge should have dropped more than three of us. Is Miss Mansel on deck?'

'She's right aft near the wheel, sir.'

'The fellows are in irons?'

'They are, sir.'

'Well, get the decks washed down, Trivett, and—stay.' He rushed to the side and looked over. 'Just so!' he shouted; 'Trivett, we must get that longboat aboard. Keep all shaking aloft till the boat has been fetched and stowed.'

He then went on to the poop. The little combat had been fierce and long—long, at least, for numbers so unequal. The sun was high, the wind small, the sea floated before the faint northerly wind in a breast of shivering satin down to where the dim, pearly square of the brig's canvas took the eye. The barque had been held to the wind during the struggle, and the longboat lay about a quarter of a mile distant on her quarter. Miss Mansel stood beside the wheel watching her. When Boldock approached she turned, and, seeing him, ran to meet him.

'Are you hurt?' she cried.

'Not to the extent of a hair of my head, my dear,' answered.

'How the wretches fired! It was a perfect storm of shooting. I listened in the cuddy, shivering. If one ball had hit you . . .'

'It is pleasant to be thought of in this way. It is a novel sensation to me. There's been nobody to think of me, fair or foul, since my mother died.'

'That's altered,' said Miss Mansel.

She was about to ask after the prisoners: some men came along to enter the quarter-boat, which lay floating in the water alongside, and interrupted her. One was Harry the Dane. He looked with a scared though brilliant gaze at the commander, and tumbled quickly into the mizzen chains

before the rest. Boldock did not address him. He called to one of the others.

‘Any of you men injured?’

‘None of us here, sir. There’s a man dead in the fo’c’sle.’

‘Ha!’ groaned Boldock.

The seamen dropped over the side.

‘It was that scoundrel Dane who killed your friend Trollope, Margaret.’

‘Is Trollope dead?’ she exclaimed.

‘Killed by a dirty little mutinous foreigner in absolute disobedience to my orders. I will see how he is to be punished for it. I doubt if there is any law that, under the circumstances, will enable me to get at the scoundrel.’

‘Captain Trollope dead!’ murmured the girl. ‘Are others of them killed?’

‘All unhurt in irons in the steerage.’

They stood watching the men bringing the longboat to the ship, and they talked of the fight, and Miss Mansel asked the commander if he had observed the look on Caldwell’s face when he saw her?

‘It was not a favourable moment for observation,’ said the commander. ‘I tripped him on a sudden rather easily, I thought, and fell with him and on him. He carries the aspect of a wicked character. The handkerchief convicts him as one of them. I should like to know who was the other.’

‘It is like a dream,’ said the girl; ‘yet I could swear that the other was Mr. Davenire.’

Mr. Matthews rose upon the ladder and came in his slow walk along the poop. He looked pale and hollow, as though just out of a hospital.

‘Sorry to say there’s a hand dead in the fo’c’sle, and the others seem in a bad way. I’ve done what I could for them.’

‘The villains should have surrendered and saved this loss of life,’ cried the commander, stamping his foot.

‘As I came along,’ continued Mr. Matthews, ‘your bo’sun told me that one of the prisoners had gone mad. I put my head over the hatch to listen, and heard the voice of Mr. Caldwell shouting. It mainly concerned you, Miss Mansel. You and the man Masters. D’ye remember him? The worm-eaten, rather good-looking chap that was believed to have lost his heart to you.’

‘I’d rather not hear such things,’ said the commander, stiffly, whilst Miss Mansel’s cheeks began to glow.

‘What is that dreadful Caldwell saying?’ said the girl.

‘Oh, he was shouting and shouting, and all I could collect was—but he swears so—“I never would have shot you, you wretched idiot, if I’d known she was alive. Why in the name of brimstone did you challenge me for a dead woman as you thought her? There’s Davenire here will tell you we did it in the interests of the gang, for your sake, you——” Here he began to shout and rave again, but it was all to the same effect. He’s gone mad, and is talking to the ghost of Mr. Masters, and I never heard the others speak a word.’

‘Caldwell’s assistant, then, was the giant!’ said the commander.

‘I have all along said it,’ exclaimed Miss Mansel, and she appeared to watch the proceedings of the two boats.

‘What’s our programme now, sir?’ said Mr. Matthews, with a slow gaze of fatigue and horror at the distant brig.

‘Up helm for that craft there as soon as ever you like,’ answered the commander, ‘and a straight course for the island, where, I hope, we shall find the gold. Refresh yourself first, pray, and, Mr. Matthews, let the hands have a bumper all round. Get that boat stowed as smartly as the men are able to do it, and, Margaret, come below, my dear, and help me to find the materials for a glass of grog.’

POSTSCRIPT.

THE story of the issue of this daring and long memorable enterprise may be entrusted to Miss Mansel, who sent a copious account of the whole of the transactions on board the ships *Queen* and *Wellesley* to her aunt, Miss Julia Horne, Richmond, Surrey. Dating from Sydney, N.S.W., after six sheets of close writing she proceeds thus:—

When this dreadful fight was ended, Robert, who was kindly permitted by Mr. Matthews to remain in command of the barque until the island was reached, ordered the vessel to be steered for the brig, which was still in sight, like a little piece of paper at the end of the sea. Sail was made (I cannot help expressing myself in the language of nautical men), and we very soon overtook her. We then sailed in company through the night.

Robert did not at all like the idea of leaving the *Queen*

(meaning *me*) for the brig, but he had ultimately to shift his quarters, for duty is duty at sea, and I would not consent to live in a stuffy little cabin when I had got a beautiful airy bedroom and a large drawing and dining room and a noble esplanade, as it might be, all to myself. He is an honest dear fellow, but when I get to know him more intimately I shall entreat him never to talk to me in the language of love. You cannot believe what a *ragoût* his face makes of sentiment. Indeed, he is no beauty, but he is a gentleman and a man of courage and piety and a sailor, and I would not exchange him for the handsomest man in the army. Besides, I cannot forget that I am a beggarly governess, without any prospects here or at home, and I do think myself wonderfully lucky and greatly obliged to the villains who would have drowned me.

Though Mr. Caldwell ceased to make a noise, there could be no doubt he had gone out of his mind. Robert went down into the steerage, which in our ship was a little compartment under the cuddy deck, where there happened to be no wool: you gained it by a manhole, and a short up-and-down ladder; he descended into this steerage where the prisoners lay helpless in irons. They had been regaled, however, with beef and beer. Indeed, the rascals wanted refreshments. They had spent the night in an open boat, and they had been fighting like demons, as Robert would say—*why* do demons fight? He tried to coax some intelligence about the gold out of them, and they in return sought to bribe him.

‘Give us that longboat and our liberty,’ said the giant Davenire. ‘Give us meat and drink for a fortnight, give us a chance, in short, to escape the horrors to which I suppose you mean to carry us, and I swear by my heart’s blood to tell you where the gold is, and you shall be deceived, so help me God, in nothing.’

Such a proposal of course could not be listened to. Robert, looking at him in his stern way—and he can look very terrifying, I assure you, when vexed by his men, or when things go wrong—said:

‘You are one of the two persons who tried to murder Miss Mansel. There sits the other man,’ said he, pointing to Caldwell, who was squatting in a dark corner, scarcely visible, sometimes mumbling, and sometimes chuckling, but clearly giving no heed to what was passing. ‘God has visited him, and his punishment is hard enough. That young lady whom

you gagged and threw overboard has consented to be my wife, and I shall not lose sight of you when we get ashore, Mr. Davenire !'

The huge man made no reply, Robert said. The rest kept silence, and Robert came away.

We were off the island early next morning. When I awoke and came on deck, I beheld a beautiful scene of bright green land, most sweet and refreshing to the sight after long days of blue water ; it lay out upon what is called the port beam. Soon afterwards both vessels anchored. Robert, from the poop of the *Queen*, incessantly viewed the land through a glass, but told me he could see no sign of the men.

'Depend upon it,' said he, 'they are in hiding. The boat left the island yesterday on a piratical cruise, that is, with the idea, since they had lost the barque, of falling in with a small vessel suitable to their purpose, seizing her, and sending her people adrift. Look how well they were armed.'

I suggested that if the three men were not on the island, they might have been killed in quarrels.

'We shall soon find that out,' he exclaimed.

Before he went ashore he entered the steerage to exhort the prisoners to tell him where the gold was hidden. He said that a confession would be of great use to them, whilst their silence could simply signify nothing but the inconvenience of detention, for he was determined not to leave the island without the nuggets.

Davenire asked if the island was in sight, and being answered, asked if the commander had been ashore. This was all he said. He grinned fiercely at the others, Robert told me, who were as dumb as dogs. Quite as likely as not that wretch of a giant was hoping and thinking that the nuggets would not be found, that something would befall to free him, so that he could return to the island in due course properly equipped, and possess himself of the whole of the gold. Surely he or the others would have confessed the hiding-place but for some such wild dream.

Caldwell had been taken out of the steerage and put into the cabin into which Trollope's body was conveyed. I think I told you that the remains of that miserable man were buried in the evening. Caldwell was now gloomily and dangerously mad, and needed a sentinel with a truncheon. He was safe enough, however, with irons on his feet and handcuffs on his hands, and in this dreadful, degrading condition, Robert

told me, he lay in a bunk, cursing his watchman, blabbing secrets of horror and blood, and grimacing with the face of Satan at the upper deck.

Well, very soon after the ships were anchored the long-boat—that historic longboat!—was lowered into the water, and eight men and Robert entered her. I confess I cried when Robert went. I knew there were but three men—if three—if any! Yet, supposing three, they had the means of killing, without pausing to reload their weapons, eighteen people. There were but nine, and my heart sank and my tears flowed when I thought that Robert might be shot.

The south side of the island had been exactly described by the Dane. A curve of land formed a small harbour. I noticed a fine stretch of white sand, which ludicrously enough painted a vision of Ramsgate, and I dare say the humours of that town were not unrepresented in that island if Mr. Burn was one of the gentlemen who were ashore, for besides being continuously under the influence of bottled beer, he was a person of a vulgar but very sprightly wit.

The boat went ashore at eleven o'clock in the morning. It was very fine weather. Indeed, we were most fortunate in this respect throughout. The ships lay with their topsails beating in pulses of light and shade as they lightly rolled upon the smooth undulations. Many birds glanced like showers of broken glass over the island, and some drew near on arched wings with coarse shrieks. They were evidently not used to be disturbed by visitors. William was in the longboat. Robert had refused the services of Harry, pronouncing him a contemptible little murderer, unfit to oppose men in a fair fight.

I watched the boat through an opera-glass as she grounded upon the beach, and two men were left in charge of her. This reduced the strength of the commander's little company, but of course it was necessary that the boat should be watched. Likewise, there was the chance of her being seized by the three men rushing down upon her. But that was a risk not to be seriously apprehended. What use could they make of her? The brig's boat would fetch Robert and his party, who would immediately give chase to the robbers. I should add that the boat was without mast or sail, for these things the commander did not require to go ashore with.

Well, I watched Robert and his six men march along the white sand. Robert trudged with a cutlass in his grasp.

The others were armed with the like weapons, as well as muskets and pistols, and they entered a little valley, or, as I might say, a sort of hollow in the wood that was very thick upon this part of the island, and disappeared.

Then for two hours we could get no news either by eye or ear. Impatience became a torment. I longed, and yet dreaded, to hear the crackling of firearms, that I might know matters had been brought to a head. At about one o'clock, feeling a little faint, I went into the cuddy to get some wine and cake. When I got back to the poop I saw a dark line on the beach, and when I looked through the glass I counted a procession of ten men. My heart beat so hard that I could scarcely see. However, I was not mistaken. I looked again. They were ten men, and I distinguished Robert, but not the rest, as they trudged to the boat.

Forgetting myself, I shrieked in my excitement to Mr. Matthews, who was busy with some shipboard work :

'They have got the men.'

'Then,' says he, 'they'll have got the gold,' striking his leg hard in a manner of marvelling.

I had not thought of *that*; but was it so? Had those three men shown Robert the place where the chests were concealed? The island was a dot of land to look at, but a great tomb for a few chests, and if those men chose to keep the secret of the gold, who was to say but that we might stop a whole year hunting and probing, and then sail away in the end without the nuggets?

When the boat drew close I saw Cavendish, Johnson, and Burn among the crowd which filled her. They jumped into the chains (as the platform on the ship's side is called), and climbed over the bulwarks, the seamen in the boat coming quickly after them.

I had observed that the three gentlemen stared hard at the barque whilst the boat approached, but I don't think they clearly knew who I was until they were on board, and then they stood as men petrified. They were white with astonishment. Never could ink convey their varying expressions of dismay and incredulity, but chiefly amazement profound and thrilling. Johnson spoke to the commander, and they both looked at me. Johnson then whispered to Cavendish. Burn stood a little apart.

Cavendish looked the wickedest man you could imagine, with his mean little eyes and sinister fawning expression,

and his chin unshorn, and his hair wild as the wind that had blown it. The other, Mr. Peter Johnson, I had always rather admired for his intelligent eyes; he was black-bearded and a little bald. Oh, aunt! such respectable men, you would have thought, to figure in so audacious—I may say murderous—a business! I heard Robert say, ‘I shall not put you in irons; but, gentlemen, this is your road, and down there you will find a few of your old friends,’ and in a moment, in obedience to a gesture, some seamen laid hold of Mr. Cavendish and Mr. Johnson and walked them out of my sight to the hatch under the break of the poop.

Mr. Burn was left standing just where he had sprung from the rail and where the sight of me had nailed him. Robert said, ‘Step this way,’ and Burn followed the commander into the cuddy. I guessed by this treatment that he had turned informer, and was heartily glad and relieved to believe it. I looked through the skylight, and saw them talking together at the cabin table, and presently the commander pulled out a pocket-book, on a blank page of which Burn made a sketch. I heard the unfortunate man ask Robert for a glass of beer, and the commander fetched a bottle and a glass from the pantry; and after Burn had drunk he began to cry, and then he spoke of Mr. Masters. He said that he had loved Masters and abhorred Caldwell for his murder (as he called it). Neither he nor Masters had the least suspicion that Caldwell and Davenire, with the knowledge of the others, had brutally gagged and thrown me into the sea. He and his friend, I overheard him say, were never in close sympathy with the gang. Masters died in the desire to avenge my murder, and had he shot Caldwell he would have stood up a minute later to the giant Davenire.

I had never suspected any particular partiality for me in Mr. Masters. He had been a very handsome man. He had the handsomest profile of any that ever I saw in human face. Any woman would have been proud to have reclaimed such a person. I was much affected, and stepped away from the skylight that Robert should not know I was listening; for, judging by his looks, I thought he did not relish this passage of Mr. Burn’s discourse.

Presently I heard his voice distinct and loud under the skylight.

‘I trust you have not deceived me?’

‘I swear by heaven I have not,’ answered Burn, in his bubbling voice, full of tears and beer.

‘You will enter that cabin and stay there. You are, of course, my prisoner; but your behaviour has been very different from that of the rest, and when I have got the gold back into this ship you shall not be deceived in my promise of good usage.’

The commander came out of the cuddy and, looking up, spied me. He kissed his hand, and exclaimed in his deep intoning voice (which habit I shall hope one day to correct), ‘I am now off for the chests, Margaret; I have full particulars, and you may look for me in an hour or two.’

He then called for a boat’s crew and went ashore. Sure enough, about half an hour after his company of men had landed, I saw them coming out of the wood on to the beach, loaded with the chests. They brought some chests to the boat and went back for more, and when all the chests were together—a goodly heap—they loaded the boat and pulled to the ship.

I can’t tell whether the sailors realised the value of this recovered treasure, or whether it was that the realisation of its value awed them, but I recollect that those chests were swung on board in silence. No cheers, no demonstration of delight. But why should I have expected this? The sailors were not interested. They were not going to benefit, probably, by the value of a pennyweight of the precious stuff. In truth I believe every British sailor to be a buccaneer at heart, and suspect that the men regretted, on the whole, that the robbers of the *Queen* had not been successful.

For my part, though I had been thinking a great deal about the gold, I found my mind dwelling more upon Mr. Masters than upon the chests as they came over the ship’s side. The commander stood in the waist attending the shipment. I never shall forget whilst life lasts his face of delight. Deep were his smiles as the chests were handed up. It was, indeed, a wonderful recovery, and all brought about by their trying to drown *me*!

Within three hours of the time when Mr. Burn gave the commander the information about the gold, the chests were safe in their former locker amongst the wool, nailed up securely under the eye of the commander, and the hatches battened down. When the order to make sail was given, Mr. Matthews, the mate of the *Queen*, came up to the commander,

and was so affected, poor man, that he could scarcely speak. He extended his hand, and Robert silently pressed it.

'We owe this magnificent result first to you, Miss Mansel,' said he, 'and very much to you next, sir.'

'It is a truly glorious haul for us all,' said the commander, 'and it shall make us both richer if not better men, sir.'

He then left us to hail the brig: the little vessel was quite close at the time. The commander roared out, 'I suppose you know, Hardy, that we have recovered the chests?'

Mr. Hardy made a sailor's motion of congratulatory joy with his hand as he stood upon the brig's taffrail, the queerest figure of a mariner you can picture, his flowing trousers for ever shivering in the breeze, as though his legs were under some ceaseless uncontrollable influence of hornpipe.

'I will dine on board this ship,' shouted Robert, 'and be with you before sundown.' And he turned his great, red, dear old face round the sea to find out how the weather promised.

He told Mr. Matthews and me the story of his going ashore and getting the men and the nuggets. He found the wood very thick, and walked with great anxiety, fearing that they might be shot at by the men in concealment. The grass was tall and their tread soundless. There was no dry bush or brushwood to crackle. After they had gone a few hundred yards in a green twilight of wood they arrived suddenly at an open space of sunshine and grass, in the midst of which was a tent. It was a little tent shaped like a house, and contrived out of spars and spare sails. At the entrance stood Mr. Burn, who yelled when he saw the commander and his men, then let his arms fall and stood like one thunder-struck and deprived of speech by a stroke. The others were inside asleep. Robert noticed plenty of bottles and some glasses and the remains of a meal. All three were secured, two of them scarcely awake when they were seized. The commander asked them to tell him where the gold was. Cavendish grinned hideously; the three fellows kept obstinately silent. They began to look at one another, however, when Robert told them that the longboat was captured and Trollope dead, and the balance of the gang in irons aboard the *Queen*, which, with the *Wellesley*, lay out of sight upon the sea beyond the trees. Still they would not speak; but as they marched down to the beach Burn, who walked behind his two associates, signed to the commander and softly

addressed him, and Robert gathered that he would be willing to make a clear breast of it when he was alone.

They found the chests in the place where Mr. Burn had told them to look. They were in a cleft or fissure, at the foot of a hill facing east, so bountifully and luxuriously concealed by the wild growths of that spot of land that it was wonderful they should have lighted upon it. Robert told me he might have explored the island in vain for months. The eighteen cases were there intact. Burn assured the commander they had not been opened since the day when they were removed from the ship's hold. They had proposed, indeed, to open one that contained dust with the idea of buying a small vessel, but fell out over this, as, indeed, they quarrelled about nearly everything, and the longboat sailed away, as Robert had cleverly concluded, on a piratical mission, to seize.

Well, before I close this letter, which I am sure you would not wish shorter, I must give you a few interesting items of news which the commander picked up from the traitor Burn, who talked very freely, being evidently hopeful that Robert would intercede for him. He said that it was well known that a great purchase or cargo of gold was to be consigned from the diggings by the ship *Queen*. Trollope met him one day in Sydney, and asked him if he was willing to join a gang who meant to sail as passengers in the ship and seize her at sea. He went with Trollope to the house of one Moses Jacobs, who, it seems, found the capital for this enterprise, and there met Davenire, Caldwell, and others. They wanted a company of ten. Some believed they could not do with less, and so he introduced Masters. The brigantine that was to rendezvous at the island was commanded by Jacobs's brother-in-law. This man was brought in here, dead of paralysis, a fortnight ago. He lived till the vessel entered Sydney harbour, so he had his wish, and was buried by the side of his child.

On our arrival we heard that Jacobs, for whom, as you may suppose, inquiries were immediately made, had vanished shortly after the brigantine anchored. He has not yet been found. He is the worst of the culprits, but his loss is heavy. Robert calculated that he could not have put less than two thousand five hundred pounds into this venture! This, without any other security than the arrival of the brigantine at the island! This on the chance of the men rising and

successfully seizing the ship and navigating her to the island! This on the chance of Saunders remaining loyal! I do not think that the people of the nation to which Mr. Jacobs belongs are commonly great lovers of such loose, insecure speculations as this. And yet you do hear of money-lenders advancing large sums on note of hand at crushing rates of interest, and then uselessly suing the person to whom the balance was advanced.

Robert and I have been made much of here. Robert is the hero of the hour. Hundreds go down to the waterside to look at the *Queen*, which, by the way, Mr. Matthews will command on her voyage home. I cannot yet tell what the award will be, but as the value of the treasure is very great, it is generally thought that twenty thousand pounds will be divided in sums proportioned to rating and so forth among the people who were engaged in the work. How much do *I* deserve? But for me the gang would have got off clear with the gold, letting Jacobs in, and themselves dispersing in various countries.

It is not yet known how Davenire and his crew will be dealt with. It is believed that all of them, excepting Burn and another, will be sent to Norfolk Island. That other is Mr. Dike Caldwell, who is out of his mind, and promises to be incurably insane. The rest are sure to get a life sentence. Indeed, as Robert says, it may end in the gallows; for though all the boats of the *Queen* have been accounted for, a lady, Mrs. Peacock, died in one of them, and it is to be seen whether they cannot hang the men for causing her death.

My head aches now, and I have no time to write more by this mail.

THE END

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