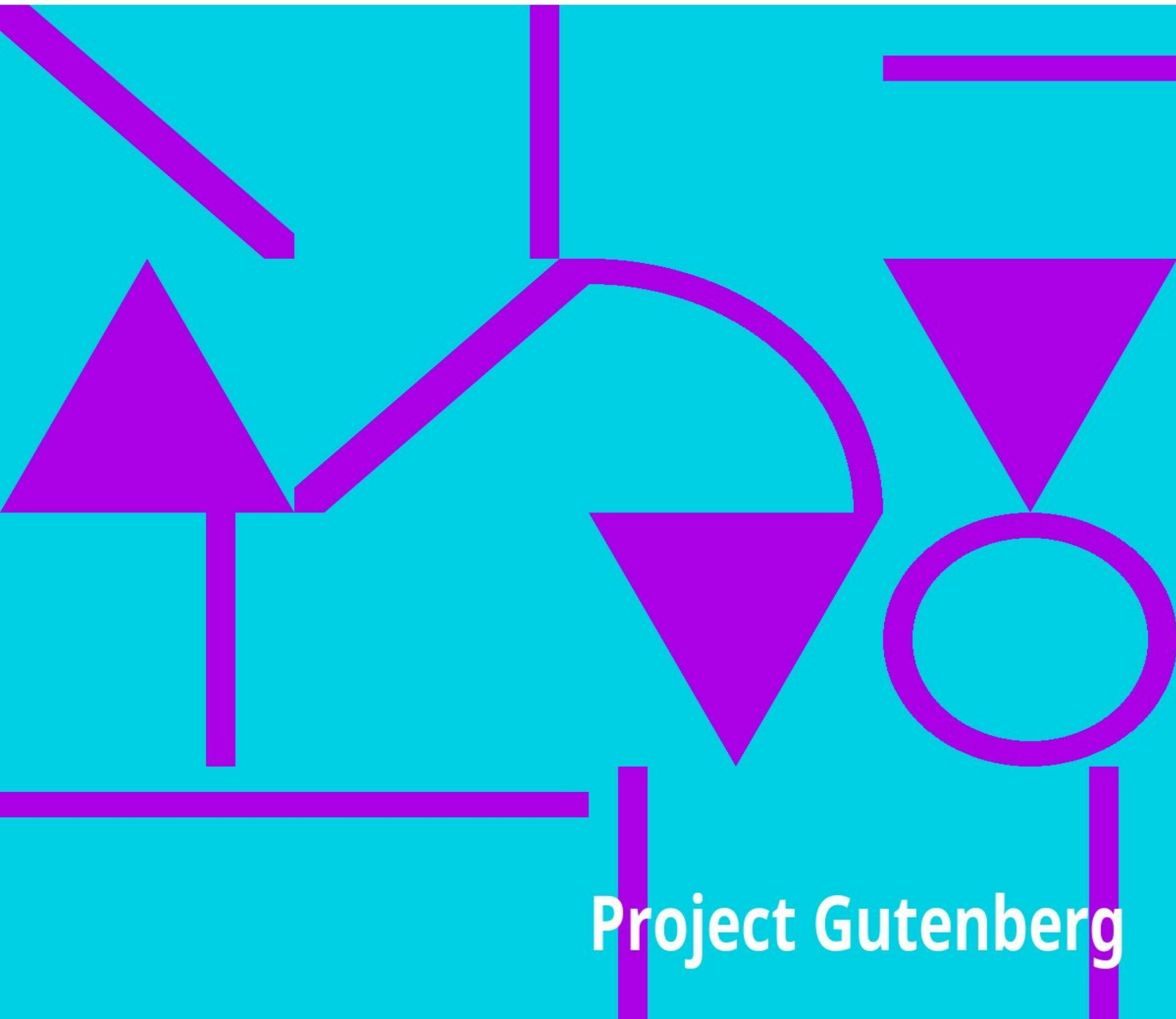


My Danish Sweetheart

A Novel. Volume 3 of 3

William Clark Russell



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MY DANISH SWEETHEART

A Novel

BY W. CLARK RUSSELL

**AUTHOR OF 'THE WRECK OF THE GROSVENOR,' 'THE
LIFE OF ADMIRAL LORD COLLINGWOOD,' 'A MARRIAGE
AT SEA,' ETC., ETC.**

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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MY DANISH SWEETHEART.



CHAPTER I.

WE SPEAK A SHIP.

On the afternoon of this same day of Tuesday, October 31, Helga having gone to her cabin, I stepped on deck to smoke a pipe—for my pipe was in my pocket when I ran to the lifeboat, and Captain Bunting had given me a square of tobacco to cut up.

We had dined at one. During the course of the meal Helga and I had said but very little, willing that the Captain should have the labour of talking. Nor did he spare us. His tongue, as sailors say, seemed to have been slung in the middle, and it wagged at both ends. His chatter was an infinite variety of nothing; but he spoke with singular enjoyment of the sound of his own voice, with ceaseless reference, besides, in his manner, to Helga, whom he continued silently and self-complacently to regard in a way that rendered her constantly uneasy, and kept her downward-looking and silent.

But nothing more at that table was said about our leaving his ship. Indeed, both Helga and I had agreed to drop the subject until an opportunity for our transference should arrive. We might, at all events, be very certain that he would not set us ashore in the Canary Islands; nor did I consider it politic to press him to land us there, for, waiving all consideration of other reasons which might induce him to detain us, it would have been unreasonable to entreat him to go out of his course to oblige us, who were without the means to repay him for his trouble and for loss of time.

He withdrew to his cabin after dinner. Helga and I sat over his draughtboard for half an hour; she then went below, and I, as I have already said, on deck, to smoke a pipe.

The wind had freshened since noon, and was now blowing a brisk and sparkling breeze out of something to the northward of east; sail had been heaped upon the barque, and when I gained the deck I found her swarming through it under overhanging wings of studdingsail, a broad wake of frost-like foam stretching behind, and many flying fish sparking out of the blue curl from the vessel's cutwater ere the polished round of brine flashed into foam abreast of the fore-

rigging. Mr. Jones stumped the deck, having relieved Abraham at noon. The fierce-faced, lemon-coloured creature with withered brow and fiery glances grasped the wheel. As I crouched under the lee of the companion-hatch to light my pipe, I curiously and intently inspected him; strangely enough, finding no hindrance of embarrassment from his staring at me too; which, I take it, was owing to his exceeding ugliness, so that I looked at him as at something out of nature, whose sensibilities were not of a human sort to grieve me with a fancy of vexing them.

'Well, Mr. Jones,' said I, crossing the deck and accosting the shabby figure of the mate as he slouched from one end to another in shambling slippers and in a cap with a broken peak, under which his thimble-shaped nose glowed in the middle of his pale face like—to match the poor creature with an elegant simile—the heart of a daisy, 'this is a very good wind for you, but bad for me, seeing how the ship heads. I want to get home, Mr. Jones. I have now been absent for nearly eleven days, though my start was but for an hour or two's cruise.'

'There's no man at sea,' said he, 'but wants to get home, unless he's got no home to go to. That's my case.'

'Where do you hail from?'

'Whitechapel,' he answered, 'when I'm ashore. I live in a big house; they call it the Sailors' Home. There are no wives to be found there, so that the good of it is to make a man glad to ship.'

'The sea is a hard life,' said I, 'and a very great deal harder than it need be—so Nakier and his men think, I warrant you. There's too much pork goes to the making of the Captain's religious ideas.'

'The pork in this ship,' said he, 'is better than the beef; and what is good enough for English sailors is good enough for Malays.'

'Ay! but the poor fellows' religion is opposed to pork.'

'Don't you let them make you believe it, sir,' he exclaimed. 'Religion! You should hear them swear in English! They want a grievance. That's the nature of everything afore the mast, no matter what be the colour of the hide it's wrapped up in.'

'What sort of sailors are they?'

'Oh, they tumble about; they're monkeys aloft; they're willing enough; I'm bound to say that.'

I could instinctively guess that whatever opinions I might offer on the Captain's treatment of his crew would find no echo in him. Poverty must make such a man the creature of any shipmaster he sailed with.

'Have you received orders from Captain Bunting,' I asked, 'to signal and bring-to any homeward ship that may come along?'

'No, sir.'

'We wish to be transhipped, you know, Mr. Jones. We should be sorry to lose the opportunity of a homeward-bounder through the Captain omitting to give you orders, and through his being below and asleep, perhaps, at the time.'

'I can do nothing without his instructions, sir,' he exclaimed, with a singular look that rose to the significance of a half-smile.

'All right!' I said, perceiving that his little blue eyes had witnessed more than I should have deemed them capable of observing in the slender opportunities he had had for employing them.

The wind blew the fire out of my pipe, and to save the tobacco I went down to the quarter-deck for the shelter of the bulwarks there. While I puffed I spied Jacob low down in the lee fore-rigging repairing or replacing some chafing-gear upon the swifter-shroud. I had not exchanged a word with this honest boatman since the previous day, and strolled forward to under the lee of the galley to greet him. I asked him if he was comfortable in his new berth. He answered 'Yes;' he was very well satisfied; the Captain had given orders that he was to have a glass of grog every day at noon; the provisions were also very good, and there was no stint.

"Soides," he called down to me, with his fat, ruddy face framed in the squares of the ratlines, 'three pound a month's good money. There'll be something to take up when I gets home, something that'll ligheten the loss o' my eight pound o' goods and clothes, and make the foundering of the *Airly Marn* easier to think of.'

'You and Abraham, then, have regularly entered yourselves for the round voyage?'

'Ay; the Capt'n put us on the articles this afternoon. He called us to his cabin and

talked like a gemman to us. Tain't often as one meets the likes of him at sea. No language—a koind smoile—a thank'ee for whatever a man does, if so be as it's rightly done—a feeling consarn for your morals and your comforts: tell'ee, Mr. Tregarthen, the loikes of Capt'n Buntin' ain't agoin' to be fallen in with every day—leastways, in vessels arter this here pattern, where mostly a man's a dog in the cap'n's opinion, and where the mate's got no other argument than the fust iron belaying-pin he can out with.'

'I am very glad to learn that you are so well satisfied,' said I. 'A pity poor Thomas isn't with you.'

'Pore Tommy! There's nothen in my toime as has made me feel so ordinary as Thomas's drown'd. But as to him making hisself happy here——'

'I beg your pardon, sah,' said a voice close beside me.

I turned, losing the remainder of Jacob's observations, and perceived the face of Nakier in the galley door, that was within an arm's length of me from where I leaned. His posture was one of hiding, as though to conceal himself from sight of the poop. As I looked, a copper-coloured face, with black, angry eyes flashing under a low forehead as wrinkled as the rind of an old apple, with the temper that worked in the creature, showed behind Nakier's head, and vanished in a breath. I now recollected that when I had first taken up my station under the lee of the galley I had caught the hiss of a swift fiery whispering within the little structure, but it had instantly ceased on my calling to Jacob, and the matter went out of my head as I listened to the boatman in the rigging.

'I beg your pardon, sah! May I speak a word wit you?'

'What is it, Nakier?' I exclaimed, finding a sort of pleasure in the mere contemplation of his handsome face and noble liquid Eastern eyes, dark and luminous like the gleam you will sometimes observe in a midnight sea.

'Are you a sailor, sah?'

'I am not,' I responded.

'Can you tellee me de law of ships?'

Here the copper-coloured face came out again, and now hung steadily with its frown over Nakier's shoulder; but both fellows kept all but their heads hidden.

'I know what you mean,' I answered. 'I fear I cannot counsel you.'

'Our Captain would have us starve,' said he; 'he give us meat we must not eat, and on dose days we have only bread and water. Dat is not right?'

'No, indeed,' said I; 'and how little we think it right you may know by what the lady said to-day.'

'Ah! she is good; she is good!' he exclaimed, always speaking very softly, and clasping his long thin fingers with filbert-shaped nails while he upturned his wonderful eyes. 'We are not of de Captain's religion—he sabbe dat when we ship. Is dere law among Englishman to ponish he for trying to make us eat what is forbidden?'

'I wish I knew—I wish I could advise you,' said I, somewhat secretly relieved by hearing this man talk of law; for when I had watched him that morning on the poop I could have sworn that his and his mates' whole theory of justice lay in the blades which rested upon sheaths strapped to their hips. 'One thing you may be sure of, Nakier: Captain Bunting has no right to force food upon you that is forbidden to you by your religion. There must be lawyers in Cape Town who will tell you how to deal with this matter if it is to be dealt with. Meanwhile, try to think of your Captain in this business as——' I significantly tapped my forehead. 'That will help you to patience, and the passage to the Cape is not a long one.'

The copper-coloured face behind Nakier violently wagged, the frown deepened, and the little dangerous eyes grew, if possible, more menacing in their expression.

'He is a cruel man,' said Nakier, with a sigh as plaintive as one could imagine in any love-sick Eastern maid: 'but we will be patient; and, sah, I tank you for listening.'

The copper-coloured face disappeared.

'You are no sailor, sah!' continued Nakier, smiling and showing as pearl-white a set of teeth as were ever disclosed by the fairest woman's parted lips; 'and yet you have been shipwreck?'

I briefly related my lifeboat adventure, and in a few words completed the narrative of the raft and of our deliverance by the lugger. Indeed, it pleased me to talk with him: his accent, his looks, were a sort of realization, in their way, of

early boyish dreams of travel; they carried me in fancy to the provinces of the sun; I tasted the ripe aromatic odours of tropic vegetation, there seemed a scent as of the hubble-bubble in the blue and sparkling breeze gushing fair over the rail. He begot in me a score of old yearning imaginations—of the elephant richly castellated, of the gloom of palatial structures dedicated to idols, their domes starry with encrustation of gems and the precious ores.

The brief spell was broken by Jacob's gruff, 'longshore voice:

'It don't look, Mr. Tregarthen, as if you and the lady was to git home as fast as ye want to.'

'No,' I replied. 'Do you see anything in sight up there, Jacob?'

He spat, and looked leisurely ahead.

'Nothen, sir.'

'I beg pardon, sah!' broke in Nakier's voice. 'Do you sabbe navigation?'

'I do not,' I answered, struck with a question that recalled Punmeamootty's inquiries that morning.

'But Mr. Vise,' he continued, 'he sabbe navigation?'

I shook my head with a slight smile.

'He has some trifling knowledge,' said I. 'Fortunately, there is no occasion to trust to his skill.'

'De sweet young lady sabbe navigation, sah?'

'I will not answer for it!' I exclaimed, looking at him. A sudden fancy in me may have been disclosed by my eyes. His gaze fell, and he drew in his head. Just then I caught sight of Helga at the break of the poop to leeward, looking along the decks. She saw me, and beckoned. As I knocked the ashes out of my pipe, Jacob cried out:

'Blowed if I don't believe that's a steamer's smoke ahead.'

'Ha!' thought I, 'Helga has seen it;' and I at once made for the poop-ladder.

It was as I supposed. She had seen the smoke when she came on deck, and instantly looked about for me. It was the merest film, the faintest streak, dim as a

filament of spider's web; but it was directly ahead, and it was easy to guess that unless the steamer was heading east or west she must be coming our way, for assuredly, though the *Light of the World* was sweeping through it at some six or seven knots, we were not going to overhaul a steamer at that pace.

A telescope lay in brackets inside the companionway; I fetched and levelled it, but there was nothing more to be seen than the soaring of the thin blue vein of smoke from behind the edge of the sea, where the dark, rich central blue of it went lightening out into a tint of opal. It did not take long, however, to discover, by the hanging of the smoke in the same place, that the steamer was heading directly for us. I put down the glass, and said to Mr. Jones:

'Will you be so good as to call the Captain and tell him that there is a steamer in sight, coming this way?'

'I have no orders to call the Captain merely to report a ship in sight, sir,' he answered.

'That may be,' said I; 'but here is a chance for us to leave this vessel, and the Captain might not thank you to keep him ignorant of the opportunity.'

'I can't help it, sir. My duty here is to obey orders and to do what's expected of me, and no more;' and so saying, he marched shambling aft; yet I will not say that his manner of leaving me was abrupt or offensive.

'There is no time to be lost, Helga,' said I. 'If that steamer is doing ten and we are doing six the joint speed is sixteen knots, and she will be abreast of us and away again quickly. I will report to the Captain myself,' with which I went on to the quarter-deck and passed into the cabin and knocked on the door of Captain Bunting's berth.

He immediately cried:

'Who's there?'

'Mr. Tregarthen,' I answered.

'Are you alone?' he called.

I told him I was.

'Then pray walk in,' said he.

I opened the door and found him lying in his bunk in his shirt-sleeves. Full as I was of the business of the steamer heaving into view, I could yet manage to notice, now that he was under no particular obligation to smile, that his habitual grin when his face was off duty, so to speak, was of the kind that is called sardonic. It was the set of his mouth with the thick curve of its upper lip that made the smile; but his eyes bore not the least part in this expression of mirth. It was a mere stroke of nature in him, however, and, though the congenital grin did not increase his beauty, it left untouched in his countenance the old character of blandness, self-complacency and an air of kindness too.

'What can I do for you, Mr. Tregarthen?' said he, promptly sitting up in his bunk, with a glance around for his coat.

'I must ask your pardon for intruding upon you,' said I; 'there is a steamer's smoke in sight over the bows. Mr. Jones declined to report to you. I venture to do so, and I have also to ask you, Captain Bunting, to signal her to stop that she may receive Miss Nielsen and me.'

'I shall be very willing to transfer you, Mr. Tregarthen,' said he, without more or less significance in his manner than was usual in it; 'but you must not, you really must not, ask me to part in this sort of hurry with your sweet engaging companion.'

'I certainly shall not leave you without her,' said I, breathing quickly.

'Just so,' he exclaimed, 'nor is it my wish that you should. I want you to convert your experience of shipwreck into a little holiday cruise. I hope you are comfortable with me?'

'Perfectly comfortable; but all the same, Miss Nielsen and I desire to return to England, and I must entreat—indeed, Captain Bunting, I must *insist* upon your signalling the steamer that is rapidly approaching us.'

He opened his eyes at the word *insist*, which I deplored having made use of the moment it had escaped me; but he continued very bland, and his smile, being now vitalized, as when he was at the table or on deck with us, had lost what I had found sardonic in it.

'A captain's powers, Mr. Tregarthen, are considerable,' he exclaimed. 'He is first on board his own ship; his will is the law that governs the vessel; no man aboard but he can *insist* for an instant. But my desire is for cordial feelings between us.'

Let us be friends and talk as friends. Pray bear with me. You are in possession of my hopes. Do not add fears to them by your behaviour.'

He dropped his head on one side, and surveyed me with an eye that seemed almost wistful. I believed that he meant to keep me talking till the steamer had passed.

'Captain Bunting,' said I, 'I am as fully disposed as you are to be friendly; but I must tell you that, if you decline to transfer us—if, in other words, you force us to proceed on this voyage—you will be acting at your peril. I shall exact reparation, and whatever the law can do for me shall be done. Practically you will be abducting Miss Nielsen, and *that*, you must know, is a highly punishable offence.'

He motioned with both his hands.

'It is no abduction,' said he. 'When you rescue a young lady with your lifeboat from a foundering craft you do not abduct her. I can understand your impatience, and forgive your irritability. Yet I had thought to have some claim upon you for a more generous, for a handsomer interpretation of my wishes. What is the reason of this extreme hurry in you to return home?'

'You surely do not require me to repeat my answer to that question!' I exclaimed, curbing my temper with an effort.

'To be sure. You are concerned for your poor dear mother. Come, Mr. Tregarthen, suppose we send news of your safety by this steamer you have reported!' His face beamed. 'Let me see—your home is—your home is——' he scratched his head. I viewed him without speaking. 'Ah, I have it—Tintrenale!' He spelt it twice or thrice. 'Hugh Tregarthen, Tintrenale. Come, the steamer shall report your safety, and then your mind will be at ease.'

'I am to understand that you refuse to transfer us?'

'Nay, never interpret the mind of another harshly. You know my wishes: every hour renders them dearer and dearer to me.'

Under all this blandness I could now perceive a spirit of resolution that was clearly no more to be influenced by me than his ship's side was to be kicked out by a blow of my foot. I turned to leave the cabin.

'If you are going on deck, will you have the kindness to send Mr. Jones to me?'

said he.

I pulled the door to, and regained the poop.

'The Captain wants you,' I called to Mr. Jones, who immediately left the deck.

Helga came to me.

'He refuses to tranship us,' said I.

'He dare not!' she cried, turning pale.

'The man, all smiles and blandness, says no, with as steady a thrust of his meaning as though it were a boarding-pike. We have to determine either to jump overboard or to remain with him.'

She clasped her hands. Her courage seemed to fail her; her eyes shone brilliant with the alarm that filled her.

'Can nothing be done? Is it possible that we are so entirely in his power? Could we not call upon the crew to help us?' A sob arrested her broken exclamations.

I stood looking at the approaching steamer, wrestling with my mind for some idea to make known our situation to her as she passed, but to no purpose. Why, though she should thrash through it within earshot of us, what meaning could I hope to convey in the brief cry I might have time to deliver? I cannot express the rage, the bitterness, the mortification, the sense, too, of the startling absurdity of our position, which fumed in my brain as I stood silently gazing at the steamer, with Helga at my side, white, straining her eyes at me, swiftly breathing.

In the short time during which I had been below, the approaching vessel had shaped herself upon the sea, and was growing large with a rapidity that expressed her an ocean mail-boat. Already with the naked sight I could catch the glint of the sun upon the gilt device at her stemhead, and sharp flashes of the reflection of light in some many-windowed deck structure broke from her, end-on as she was, to her slow stately swaying, as though she were firing guns.

The Captain remained below. A few minutes after Mr. Jones had gone to him, he—that is, the mate—came on to the poop bearing a great black board, which he rested upon the deck.

'Captain Bunting's compliments, Mr. Tregarthen,' said he, 'and he'll be glad to know if this message is satisfactory to you?'

Upon the board were written, in chalk, in very visible, decipherable characters, like the letters of print, the following words:

HUGH TREGARTHEN, OF TINTRENALE,
BLOWN OUT OF BAY NIGHT OCTOBER 21ST,
IS SAFE
ON BOARD THIS SHIP, 'LIGHT OF THE WORLD,'
BUNTING, MASTER, TO CAPE TOWN.
PLEASE REPORT.

'That will do,' said I coldly, and resumed my place at the rail.

Helga said, in a low voice:

'What is the object of that board?'

'They will read the writing aboard the steamer,' I answered, 'make a note of it, report it, and my mother will get to hear of it and know that I am alive.'

'But how will she get to hear of it?'

'Oh, the message is certain to find its way into the shipping papers, and there will be twenty people at Tintrenale to hear of it and repeat it to her.'

'It is a good idea, Hugh,' said she. 'It is a message to rest her heart. It may reach her, too, as quickly as you yourself could if we went on board that steamer. It was clever of you to think of it.'

'It was the Captain's suggestion!' I exclaimed.

'It is a good idea!' she repeated, with something of life coming into her blanched, dismayed face; 'you will feel a little happier. I shall feel happier too. I have grieved to think your mother may suppose you drowned. Now, in a few days she will know that you are well.'

'Yes, it is a good idea,' said I, with my eyes gloomily fastened upon the steamer; 'but is it not monstrous that we should be imprisoned in this fashion? That fellow below has no right to detain us. If it should cost me five years of my income, I'll punish him. It is his admiration for you that makes him reckless—but what does the rascal hope? He talked of his willingness to transfer me, providing *you* remained.'

'Oh, but you would not leave me with him, Hugh!' she cried, grasping my arm.

'Leave you, Helga! No, indeed. But I made one great blunder in my chat with him this morning. He asked me if there was anything between us—meaning were we sweethearts—and I said no. I should have answered yes; I should have told him we were betrothed; then perhaps he would have been willing to let us leave him.'

She returned no answer. I looked at her, and saw an expression in her face that told me I had said too much. The corners of her little mouth twitched, she slightly glanced at me, and tried to smile on observing that I was regarding her, then made a step from my side as though to get a better view of the steamer.

'She's a fine big ship,' exclaimed Mr. Jones, who had quietly drawn close to me; 'a Cape boat. In six days' time she'll be snug in dock. When I was first going to sea I laughed at steam. Now I should be glad if there was nothing else afloat.'

My impulse was to draw away, but my temper had somewhat cooled, and was now allowing me to exercise my common-sense again. If I was to be kept aboard this ship, it could serve no sort of end to make an enemy of Mr. Jones.

'Yes,' said I, 'she is coming along in fine style—a mail-steamer apparently. Why will not the Captain signal her? Surely she would receive us!'

'Not a doubt of it,' he answered, almost maliciously; 'but the Captain knows his own business, sir.'

'Where's your flag-locker?' cried I. 'Show it me, and I'll accept the responsibility of hoisting the ensign half-mast high!'

'Not without the Captain's orders, Mr. Tregarthen,' said he.

'The Captain!' I exclaimed. 'He has nothing to do with me. He's your master, not mine!'

'He's master of this ship, sir; and the master of a ship is the master of everything aboard of her!'

Helga softly called to me. I went to her.

'Do not reason with him!' she whispered. 'Let the people in that steamer read the message, and we can afford to be patient—for a little,' she added.

'For a little!' I rejoined. 'But how long will that little make? Is it to stretch from here to Table Bay?'

But by this time the steamer was on the lee bow, and when abreast would be within a few cables' length of us. I thought to myself, 'Shall I spring upon the rail and hail her in God's name, wave my hands to her to stop, and take my chance of her people hearing the few words I should have time to bawl?' Then, with the velocity of thought, I reflected that the mate would be certain to hinder any such attempt on my part, to the length, I dare say, of laying hands upon me and pulling me off the rail, so that I might subject myself to what would prove but little short of an outrage, while I should likewise forfeit the opportunity of getting the message delivered; for there was no man on the poop to hold up the board but the mate, and if the mate was busy with me the board must remain hidden.

All this I thought, and while I thought the steamer was sweeping past us at a speed of some twelve or thirteen knots, with Mr. Jones standing something forward of the mizzen-rigging, holding up the board at arm's-length.

The picture of that rushing metal fabric was full of glittering beauty. Her tall promenade deck, draped with white awnings, out of which the black column of her funnel forked leaning, was crowded with passengers, male and female. Dresses of white, pink, green—the ladies of South Africa, I believe, go very radiantly clad—fluttered and rippled to the sweep of the strong breeze raised by the steamer's progress. Those who walked came to a stand to survey us, and a dozen binocular glasses were pointed. High above, on the white canvas bridge, the mate in charge of the ship was reading the handwriting on the black board through a telescope that flashed like silver in his hands. Beside him, twinkling in buttons and lace, stood the commander of the steamer, as I might suppose. The sun was in the south-west sky; his reddening brilliance beat full upon the ship that was thundering by faster than a hurricane could have blown the *Light of the World* along; and the glass in her line of portholes seemed to stream in fire as though the tall black iron sides were veritably belted with flame. There were stars of gold in her bright-yellow masts and a writhing of glowing light all about the giltwork with which her quarters were glorified. She rolled softly, and every inclination was like the twist of a kaleidoscope for tints. How mean did the little barque look at that instant! how squalid her poor old stumpy decks with their embellishment of rude scuttle-butt, of grimy caboose, of squab long-boat, not to mention the choice humanities of her forecastle, the copper-coloured scarecrows who had dropped the various jobs they were upon to stare with their sloe-like eyes at the passing show!

She had not swept past abreast by more than her own length when the twinkling

commander on the bridge flourished his arm.

'And about time, too!' cried Mr. Jones, lowering the board and leaning it against the rail. 'They must be poor hands at spelling aboard that ship to keep me holding up that board as if I were a topsail-yard proper to set a whole sail upon!'

'Have they read the message, do you think, Mr. Jones?' cried Helga.

'Oh, yes, yes, miss,' he answered.

He ran in an awkward sprawl to the skylight, where the telescope lay, pointed it, and exclaimed, 'See for yourself, miss!'

She levelled the glass with the ease and precision of an old sailor.

'Yes,' she called to me, while she held the telescope to her eye; 'the man in the jacket and buttons is writing in what looks to be a pocket-book; the other bends over him as though to see that the words are correct. I am satisfied!' and, putting the glass down, she returned to me.

The steamer was now astern of us, showing but little more than the breadth of her, rapidly growing toy-like as she swept onwards, with an oil-smooth wake spreading fan-shaped from her counter, and the white foam curving with the dazzle of sifted snow from either side the iron tooth of her shearing stem. My heart ached with the yearning for home as I followed her. At that moment eight bells was struck forward, and almost immediately Abraham came aft to relieve Mr. Jones, who, after saying a word or two to the boatman, picked up the board and went below.

'There's a hopportunity lost, Mr. Tregarthen,' exclaimed Abraham, looking at the receding steamer; 'not that me and Jacob ain't satisfied, but there's ne'er a doubt that wessel 'ud ha' taken you and the lady, if so be as Capt'n Bunting had asted her.'

'We are kept here against our will,' said I. 'What the man means to do I don't know, but what he *can* do I now see. Unless I can get those black fellows to back the topsail and put us aboard the next ship when she comes along, here we must stop until it is the Captain's pleasure to release us.'

'But what does he want along of ye?' inquired Abraham, in a low, hoarse voice, with a glance at the open skylight.

I looked at Helga, and then said bluntly—for I had some dim hope of this boatman and his mate being able to help us, and the plain truth must therefore be given to them: 'The long and short of it is, Abraham, the Captain greatly admires Miss Nielsen—he has fallen in love with her, in short—and so you have it.'

Helga looked and listened without any air of embarrassment, as though the reference were of general instead of individual interest.

'But he hain't fallen in love with *you*, sir? Why do he want to keep ye both, then? Couldn't he have sent *you* aboard?'

'You astonish me!' I cried. 'Do you suppose I would leave this lady alone in the vessel?'

'Why, p'raps not,' he answered; 'but, still, 'tain't as if *you* was a lady, one of her own sex, as was hacting companion to her. Oi don't mean to say that one man's as good as another; but I don't see no call for *you* to keep all on in this here wessel.'

'What am I to understand you to mean?' cried I. 'That Miss Nielsen is to be left without a protector in the company of a fellow like Captain Bunting?'

'But if he's willing to be her protector, sir, ain't it all right?' he inquired.

'Has not your head been turned?' said Helga warmly, with a flushed face.

He looked stupidly from one to the other of us with a slow gaze and a mind labouring to master the difficulty he could not understand.

'Sorry if I've said anything to offend ye, miss,' said he; 'this here Capt'n's an honourable man, Oi allow, and he's evidently on the look-out for a wife. All I says is, what's the good of his keeping Mr. Tregarthen away from his home when he's willing to take his place?'

'But he must not take his place!' exclaimed Helga, with glowing eyes, in which I looked to see a tear presently. 'I would drown myself if I were to be left here alone!'

A slow smile animated the leathern countenance of Abraham.

'Then, mum, asking your pardon, all Oi can say is, Mr. Tregarthen should ha' put it differently. When there's wan there's no call for tew, and there being wan already, then, of course, it's the Capt'n's duty to send ye both home as soon as he

can.'

'If Captain Bunting persists,' said I, not choosing to follow the line of Abraham's reasoning, 'what is my remedy? You Deal boatmen have the reputation of knowing the law pretty well. First, has he the right to carry us with him against our wishes?'

'There's never much question of right along with sea captains,' he answered. 'My 'sperience is that what the master of a wessel chooses to do he *will* do, and the rights of it somehow seems to come out of his doing of it.'

'But have we no remedy?' said I.

'Ask yourself the question!' he answered. 'Where's the remedy to be found?' and here he sent his eyes roaming over the sea and up aloft and along the decks.

'Of all Job's comforters!' I exclaimed.

'If I was you,' he continued, apparently not understanding my remark, and sending another cautious look at the open skylight, with a further subduing of his voice, 'what Oi'd do is this: Oi'd just enjoy myself at this 'ere gemman's expense, eat his wittles and drink his rum—and I'm bound to say this, that a better drop o' rum than he keeps in that there locker of his isn't to be met with afloat or ashore—I say Oi'd drink and eat at his expense, and keep my spirits as joyful as sarcumstances might permit, but taking care to let him know every day, oy, and p'raps twice a day—say at breakfast and at supper—that the lady and me wants to get home; and this Oi'd dew till we got to port, and then Oi'd bring an action agin him and sail home on the damages, with a few pound to the good.'

He had barely ceased, when he turned sharply round and marched aft, and as he did so the Captain mounted the poop ladder, exclaiming:

'What very enjoyable weather, to be sure! Mr. Jones informs me that the message was duly noted. Now, Miss Nielsen, we may take it that our friend Mr. Tregarthen's mind is perfectly at ease.'



CHAPTER II.

I MAKE FREE.

It was four o'clock when the steamer passed, and, half an hour later, she was out of sight, so rapid was the combined pace of the vessels. Her name was large upon her stern had we chosen to read it, but the mate was too busy with his board and I with my temper to note the letters, and Helga did not think of doing so, and thus it was that the steamer passed away and none of us knew more about her than that she was a Cape Union mail-liner bound to England with now a message, meant for my mother, on board.

The Captain hung about us, and was all blandness, courtesy, and admiration when he addressed Helga or directed his eyes at her. On his first joining us she said quickly, pointing to the steamer that was still in sight:

'Why have you suffered us to lose that opportunity?'

'Mr. Tregarthen's and your company,' he answered, 'makes me so happy that I cannot bear to part with you yet!'

Her little nostrils enlarged, her blue eyes glittered, her breast quickly rose and fell.

'You called yourself a Samaritan yesterday!' she exclaimed, with all the scorn her tender soul was capable of, and her pensive, pretty face could express. 'Is this the way in which Samaritans usually behave?'

He viewed her as though she were a picture that cannot be held in a new position without disclosing a fresh grace.

'You are too good and kind to be cruel,' said he, regarding her with deepening admiration, as it seemed to me. 'The Samaritan played his part fairly well yesterday, I believe?' He blandly bowed to her with a countenance of exquisite self-complacency. 'He is still on board, my dear young lady, with a character in essentials unchanged, merely enlarged.' Here he spread his fingers upon his breast, and expanded his waistcoat, looking at her in a very knowing sort of way, with his head on one side. 'Now that we have sent our message home, there is no

hurry. Our little cruise,' he exclaimed, pointing over the bow, 'is almost entirely tropical, and there is no reason at all why we should not find it delightful!'

I caught Helga's eye, and exhorted her by a glance to keep silent. She fixed her gaze upon the deck, with a lip lightly curled by disgust, and I stepped aft under a pretence to look at the compass, with so much more contempt and anger than I could hold between my teeth that I dared not speak.

The breeze slackened as the sun sank, and at supper, as the Captain persisted in calling the last meal, the ocean fell calm and the old broad-bowed barque rolled sleepily, but with much creaking of her rheumatic bones, upon a long-drawn polished swell flowing out of the north-east. Her canvas beat the masts and fetched reports out of the tall spars that penetrated the little cuddy like discharges of musketry.

For a long while the Captain gave Helga and me no opportunity for a quiet talk. At table he was more effusive than he had been, distressingly importunate in his attentions to the girl, to whom he would address himself in tones of loverlike coaxing if she happened to say No to his entreaties to her to drink a little wine, to try a slice of ham, and the like. He begged us to make ourselves thoroughly at home; his coloured cook, he said, was not a first-rate hand, but if Miss Helga ever had a fancy, she need but name it, and it would go very hard with the cook if he failed to humour her.

'We are not a yacht,' said he, pulling a whisker and looking around, 'but, most fortunately, gaudy mirrors and handsome carpets and the ginger-bread ornamentations of the pleasure craft need never form any portion of human happiness at sea. The sun looks as brightly down upon the *Light of the World* as upon the most stately ship afloat, the ocean breeze will taste as sweetly over my bulwark-rails as on the bridge of the gallantest man-of-war that flies the crimson cross;' and thus he went on vapouring as usual in fathoms of commonplace, yet with a bland underlying insistence always upon our being his guests, upon our remaining with him and being happy, as though, indeed, we had cheerfully consented to stop, and were looking forward with great enjoyment to the voyage.

I was as cold and distant as I could well be, answered him in monosyllables, ate as if with aversion, and as though I constrained myself to devour merely to keep body and soul together. But he did not seem to heed my manner in the least; I could swear, indeed, that he did not observe it. He was wholly engrossed in contemplation of Helga, and in the enjoyment of enlarging his waistcoat, and

delivering, more or less through his nose, with a fixed smile and somewhat leering eye, the dull, trivial, insipid contents of his mind.

He asked the girl to play draughts with him when Punmeamootty had cleared the table. On her declining, he fetched from his cabin the volume of Jeremy Taylor—it was that divine's 'Holy Living and Dying,' I think—and asked permission to read a few pages aloud. She could not refuse, and I see that extraordinary shipmaster now, standing under the lamp, holding the portly volume up with both hands, smiling upon the page, pausing at intervals to look over the top of the book at the girl with a nod to serve as a point of admiration, and reading nasally without the faintest inflection, so that at a little distance his delivery must have sounded like a continuous groan. He then begged her to read to him.

'What greater treat could we have,' said he, looking at me, 'than to hear the rich, noble, impressive words of this great Bishop pronounced by the charming lips of Miss Helga Nielsen?'

But she curtly refused; and, after hovering about her for another half-hour, during which I could notice a growing air in him that was a distinct intimation, in its way, of his entire satisfaction with the progress he was making, he withdrew to his cabin.

Helga looked at me with weariness and dismay, and moistened her lips.

'This is worse than the raft,' said I.

'It is so bad,' she exclaimed, 'that I feel persuaded it cannot last.'

'Let us go on deck. If we linger here he may rejoin us. How tragical it all is one may know by the humour of it.'

We went softly to the companion-steps, and I recollect that I looked over my shoulder to see if he was following us—than which I can recall no better proof of my perfect recognition of our helplessness.

The new moon had followed the sun, and the planet would not be showing by night for two or three days; but in the south, and over our mastheads, the sky was richly spangled with stars, which burnt in one or two dyes of glory, and very sharply, whence, from recollection of a like sight at home, I supposed that hard weather was at hand. There was some little lightning, of a delicate shade of violet, in the north-east, which, indeed, would have been no noticeable thing down in this part of the world but for the mountainous heaping of cloud it

revealed, a black sullen mass stretching along the sea-line in that quarter, and putting a hue as of ink into the dusk which swept in glittering obscurity to the shadow of it. There was a great deal of greenish fire in the sea, and it broadened and shrank in wide spaces in the lift of the noiseless running swell as though the rays of a tinted lantern were cast upon the water. The dew was plentiful, and lay along the rails and upon the skylight, crisp as frost in the starshine.

It was Abraham's watch, and I spied his figure flitting cumbrously in the neighbourhood of the wheel, at which stood the shape of some coloured man, motionless as though carved in ebony, faintly touched by the sheen of the binnacle lamp. I was in no humour to converse with the boatman. His stupid talk that afternoon in response to my questions had vexed me, and I was still angry with the fool, as I chose to think him, spite of the claims he had upon my kindness and gratitude.

I put Helga's hand under my arm, and we quietly patrolled the deck to leeward. Our conversation wholly concerned our position—it would only tease you to repeat it. There was nothing to suggest, no plan to propose; for think, advise, scheme as we might, it could only come to this: that if the Captain declined to part with us, then, unless the men took our side and insisted on putting us aboard a passing ship, we must stop. But if the crew took our side, it would be mutiny with them; and bewilderingly disagreeable as our situation was, preposterously and ridiculously wretched as it was, yet assuredly it was not to be mended by a revolt among those dusky skins forward.

Yet the fancy of stirring up the Malays to befriend us was in my mind as I walked with the girl.

'God forbid,' said I, 'that I should have a hand in it; yet, for all that, I believe it is to be done. I had a short talk with Nakier to-day, and there was that in his questions and his manner which persuades me that the train is ready, and nothing wanting but the spark.'

'A mutiny is a terrible thing at sea,' said she; 'and what would men like the crew of this ship stop at?'

'Ay, nothing more terrible, Helga. But are we to be carried to the Cape?'

'The Captain has no intention of putting into Santa Cruz,' said she.

'*That* we may be sure of. But does the fellow intend that you shall pass week

after week with no other apparel than what you stand up in?'

I was interrupted by Abraham sending a hurricane shout into the blackness forward for some hands to clew up the fore and main royals, and for others to lay aft and haul down the gaff-topsail.

'It's agoing to blow to-night, Mr. Tregarthen,' he called across to me.

'Yes; and you may see where it is coming from, too,' I replied, not knowing till then that he had observed us.

In a few moments the silence that had hung upon the vessel, with nothing to disturb it but an occasional sob of water and the beating of canvas hollowing into the mast to the roll of the fabric, was broken by the strange howling noises raised by the coloured seamen as they hauled upon the gear.

'Get them sails furled, my lads!' bawled Abraham; 'and the rest of ye lay aft and take this 'ere mizzen off her.'

'It is wonderful that the fellows should understand the man,' said I.

'There's the Captain!' exclaimed Helga, instantly halting, and then recoiling in a way that dragged me a pace back with her.

He rose through the companion-hatch, his outline vaguely visible in the dim radiance sifting through the cabin skylight. Abraham addressed him.

'Quite right, Wise, very wise of you, Wise!' he exclaimed. 'There is a marked fall in the barometer, and I perceive lightning in the north-east, with a deal of rugged cloud down there.' His shadowy form stepped to the binnacle, into which he peered a moment. 'I think, Wise,' said he—and, to use a Paddyism, I could see the man's fixed and singular smile in the oiliness of his accents—'that you cannot do better than go forward and rouse up all hands. I can rely best upon my crew when the weather is quiet.'

Abraham trudged forward, and a minute later I heard him thumping heavily on the fore hatch, topping the blows with a boatswain's hoarse roar of 'All hands shorten sail!'

'The Captain's politeness,' I said, 'will end in making that Deal boatman sit at his feet.'

'He is afraid of his crew, perhaps,' answered Helga, 'and is behaving so as to

make sure that the two men will stand by him should difficulties come.'

'It was a bad blow that sunk the fellows' lugger. We might have sighted that steamer of to-day and be now homeward bound at the rate of fourteen knots an hour.'

'And it is all my fault!' she cried, in tones impassioned by regret and temper. 'But for me, Hugh——'

I silenced her by taking her hand as it lay in my arm and pressing it. She drew closer to me, with a movement caressing but wistful too, though finely and tenderly simple.

I did not doubt that the Captain perceived us; nevertheless, he hung near the wheel, never coming farther forward than the companion-hatch, while we kept at the other end of the little poop, where the shadow of the port-wing of mainsail lay heavy.

Shortly after Abraham had summoned the men, the decks were alive with sliding and gliding shapes, and the stillness of the ocean night was clamorous with parrot-like cries. The lightning had ceased, but the darkness was fast deepening, and overhead the stars were beginning to languish in the projected dimness of the growing mass of cloud that, now that there was no play of violet fire upon it, was indistinguishable in its own dumb, brooding obscurity.

'Whatever is to come will happen on a sudden,' said I.

We neither of us cared to keep the deck now that the Captain had arrived, and descending the ladder, we entered the cabin. Under other conditions I should have been willing, and indeed anxious, to assist the crew, but now I was resolved not to touch a rope, to maintain and present as sullen a front as I could contrive, to hold apart with Helga, to mark my resentment by my behavior, and so, perhaps—but God knows I had no hope of it—to intimidate the fellow into releasing us by obliging him to understand that he had already gone a very great deal too far. There was much noise on deck; Mr. Jones was bawling from the fore-castle, and Abraham from the waist, and the songs of the Malays might easily have passed for the cries of people writhing in pain. Apparently the Captain was alarmed by the indications of the glass and the look of the weather in the north-east, and was denuding his little ship as speedily as might be. His own voice began to sound now, and, though it was perfectly distinguishable, there was nothing nasal, bland, or greasy about it. On the contrary, his roars

seemed to proceed from a pair of honest sealungs, as though what was nautical in him had been worked up by the appearance of the weather, and was proving too strong for the soapy exterior of his habitual manner.

'He can be natural when he forgets himself,' said I.

'It is quite possible that he swears at times,' said Helga.

'One touch of nature in the fellow would make me feel almost comfortable,' I exclaimed.

'He is not a true sailor: he never could be natural for any length of time,' said Helga.

The pattering of the naked feet of the crew was like the noise of a shower of rain. Helga seemed to be able to follow what was being done, as though she were on deck directing the crew.

They have furled this sail—they are reefing that sail—now they are hauling down such and such a jib—now they are stowing the mainsail, she would say, giving the canvas its proper names, and looking at me with a little smile in her liquid blue eyes, as though the interest in the sailors' work made her forget our troubles.

'Be as nautical as you like with me,' said I. 'I love to hear you pronounce the strange, uncouth language of the sea; but guard your lips before the Captain. The more sailorly you are, the more he will admire you.'

'What would make him hate me?' she exclaimed, with the light of the smile going out of her eyes, and her white brow contracting. 'How is he to be sickened?'

'Oh, what can you do? What can a pretty girl do that will not heighten the passion of a man who has fallen in love with her?'

'Call me pretty if you will,' said she, with a maidenly droop of her eyelids; 'but do not speak of me as a girl with whom anybody has fallen in love.'

'By George!' said I, starting and heaving a long sigh, with a look at the clock, the hands of which were now at nine, 'the road to Kolding gets longer and longer. But we shall measure it—we shall measure it yet, Helga!' I quickly added, heartily grieved by the sorrow that entered her face.

'What a strange dream has all this time been!' she half murmured, pressing her eyes. 'My father stood by my side last night; I felt his kiss—oh, Hugh! it was colder than the salt water outside.' She uttered an exclamation in Danish, with a little passionate shake of the head.

'I hope you are quite comfortable below,' exclaimed a much too familiar voice, and, looking up, I spied the long whiskers and smiling countenance of Captain Bunting framed in the open casement of the skylight.

Helga rallied as if to a shock, and stiffened into marble, motionless, and with a hardening of her countenance that I should have thought impossible to the gentle, ingenuous prettiness of her face.

'I fear,' he continued, talking through the skylight, 'that we are in for some nasty weather; but my barque is stripped and nearly ready for the affray. I am grieved not to be able to join you, Miss Nielsen. It is necessary that I should remain on deck. You are partaking of no refreshment. I will send Punmeamootty to you. Pray give him your orders.'

His whiskers floated out into the obscurity like two puffs of smoke, and he called, but in genteel accents, for Helga was now listening, and he knew it, to Abraham to send Punmeamootty 'to wait upon his guests in the cabin.' A moment after his whiskers reappeared.

'I have to beg, Miss Nielsen, that you will consider yourself mistress here. And before you withdraw to rest—and, whatever may happen, pray slumber securely, for *I* shall be watching the ship—may I entreat you to occupy Mr. Jones's berth, which you will find so very much more airy and comfortable than the dark, confined steerage?'

'I am quite satisfied with my accommodation, thank you,' she answered, without looking up.

He youthfully wagged his head in reproach of what his manner seemed to consider no more than an enchanting girlish capriciousness, and adding, 'Well, I entreat you both to make yourselves thoroughly at home,' he disappeared.

Punmeamootty arrived. He entered soundlessly as a spirit, and with the gliding movements that one could imagine of a phantom. I said to Helga:

'Abraham's philosophy shall be mine. My temper shall not prevent me from using our friend's larder. You asked just now what will sicken him. Let us eat and

drink him up! Punmeamootty, when is the gale going to burst?'

'It will not be long, sah,' he answered, showing his teeth.

'Put the best supper you can upon the table. Have you nothing better than rum to drink?'

'Dere is wine, sah.'

'Yes, and very poor wine too. Have you no brandy?'

'Yes, sah, de Capt'n hab some choice brandy for sickness.'

'Put a bottle of it on the table, Punmeamootty, and be quick, like a good fellow as you are, to serve the food before this sweet little ship begins to kick up her heels.'

He showed his teeth again, with a glance at the skylight, following it on with a short-lived look of deep interest at Helga, then slipped away.

With wonderful nimbleness he had spread the cloth and put ham, salt beef, biscuit, and such things upon the table.

'Now draw that cork!' said I.

The pop of it brought the whiskers to the open skylight as if by magic.

'Quite right, quite right!' exclaimed the Captain. 'I hope, Miss Helga, this repast is of *your* ordering? What have you there, Punmeamootty?' he suddenly cried with excitement. 'That is brandy, I believe?'

'I ordered it!' I called out in a sullen voice.

'You will handle it tenderly, if you please,' said he, with a trifle of asperity in his speech. 'It is a fine cordial brandy, and I have but three bottles of it.'

I returned no answer, and he vanished.

'Upon my word, I believe Abraham is right, after all!' said I, with a laugh. 'Now, Helga, to punish him, if the road to his sensibility lie through ham and beef!'

She feigned to eat merely to please me, as I could see. Though I was not very hungry, I made a great business of sharpening my knife, and fell to the beef and ham with every appearance of avidity, not doubting that we should be furtively

surveyed from time to time by the Captain, who could peep at us unseen without trouble as he passed the skylight, and who could very well overhear the clatter of dishes, the sharpening of my knife, and my calls to the steward, so silent did the night continue, as though there rested some great hush of expectancy upon the ocean.

I filled a bumper of brandy-and-water, and exclaimed in a loud voice:

'Here's to our speedy release, Helga! But if that is not to happen, then here's to the safest and swiftest passage this crazy old bucket is capable of making. And here's to proceedings hereafter to be taken!'

The coloured steward stood looking on with a grin of wonder.

'Capital brandy, this, Punmeamootty!' I sang out in accents that might have been heard upon the forecastle. 'Another drop, if you please! Thank you! I will help myself.'

A mere drop it was, for I had had enough; but I took care by my posture to persuade an eye surveying me from above that I was not sparing the bottle.

'You may clear away, Punmeamootty; and if you can find a cigar I shall feel obliged by your bringing it to me.'

'Well, and how are we getting on?' exclaimed the Captain, bending his head into the skylight.

'We have supped, thank you,' I answered haughtily and coldly. 'Punmeamootty, a cigar, if you please!'

The Captain's head vanished.

'Me no sabbee where the Capt'n him keep his cigar,' said Punmeamootty.

'Ransack his cabin!' said I loudly.

The fellow shook his head, but there was enjoyment in his grin, with an expression of elation in his eyes that borrowed a quality of fierceness from the singularly keen gleam which irradiated their dusky depths. I was about to speak, when Helga raised her hand.

'Hark!' she cried.

I bent my ear, and caught a sound resembling the low moan of surf heard at a

distance.

'More than a capful of wind goes to the making of that noise,' said I.

A bright flash of lightning dazzled upon the skylight and eclipsed the cabin-lamp with its blinding bluish glare. A small shock of thunder followed. I heard the Captain cry out an order; the next minute the skylight was hastily closed and a tarpaulin thrown over it.

'Bring me my oilskins, Punmeamootty!' shouted the Captain down the companionway. The man ran on deck with the things.

'Can that be rain?' cried Helga.

Rain it was indeed! a very avalanche of wet, charged with immense hailstones. The roar of the smoking discharge upon the planks was absolutely deafening. It lasted about a couple of minutes, then ceased with startling suddenness, and you heard nothing but the surf-like moaning that had now gathered a deeper and a more thrilling note, mingled with the wild sobbing in the scuppers, and a melancholy hissing of wet as the water on the quarter-deck splashed from side to side to the light rolling of the barque. Yet fully another five minutes passed in quiet, while the growling of the thunder of the still distant storm-swept sea waxed fiercer and fiercer. It was as though one stood at the mouth of a tunnel and listened to the growing rattling and rumbling of a long train of goods waggons approaching in tow of a panting locomotive.

Then in a breath the wind smote the barque, and down she leaned to it. So amazingly violent was the angle, I do most truthfully believe that for the space of some twenty or thirty seconds the barque lay completely on her beam ends, as much so as if she were bilged high and dry upon a shoal, and there was a dreadful noise of water pouring in upon her deck from over the submerged lee main-deck rail.

Helga was to windward, and the table supported her, but the chair upon which I was seated broke away with me, and I fell sprawling upon my back amid a whole raffle of the contents of the table, which Punmeamootty had not yet removed. The full mess of it came headlong about me with a mighty smash; the beef, the ham, the bottle of brandy, now shivered into a thousand pieces, the jam pots, the biscuits, the knives and forks—all these things I lay in the midst of, and such was the heel of the deck that I could not stir a limb. Helga shrieked.

I cried out:

'I am not hurt; I'll rise when I can.' Someone was hoarsely bawling from the poop; but whatever the meaning of the yell might have been, it was immediately followed by a loud report resembling the blast of a twenty-four-pounder gun. 'There goes a sail!' I shouted. The vessel found life on being relieved of the canvas, whatever it was; there was a gradual recovery of her hull, and presently she was on a level keel, driving smoothly as a sleigh over a level plain of snow, but with such an infernal bellowing and hooting and ear-piercing whistling of wind accompanying her that there is nothing I can imagine to liken it to.

I waited awhile, and then, bidding Helga stay where she was, went on to the quarter-deck; but all betwixt the rails was of a pitch darkness, with a sort of hoariness in the blackness on either hand outside, rising from the foam, of which the ocean was now one vast field. I mounted the poop-ladder, but was blinded in a moment by the violence of the wind, that was full of wet, and was glad to regain the cabin; for I could be of no use, and there was no question to be asked nor answer to be caught at such a time.



CHAPTER III.

JOPPA IS IN EARNEST.

It was about half-past nine when this gale took us, but such was the force and weight of it, so flattening and shearing was its scythe-like horizontal sweep, that no sea worth speaking of had risen till ten o'clock, and then, indeed, it was beginning to run high. All this while there had been no sound of human voices, but at this hour a command was delivered above our heads, and going on to the quarter-deck, I dimly discerned the figures of men hauling upon the forebraces; but they pulled dumbly; no song broke from them; they were silent as though in terror. A little later on I knew by the motions of the barque that she had been brought to the wind and lay hove-to.

That few vessels would better know how to plunge and roll than this old *Light of the World* I might have guessed from her behaviour in quiet weather, when there was nothing but a slight swell to lift her. But I never could have conjectured how truly prodigious was her skill in the art of tumbling. She soared and sank as an empty cask might. She took every hollow with a shock that threatened to rend her bones into fragments, as though she had been hurled through the air from a mighty height; and when she swung up an acclivity, the sensation was that of being violently lifted, as by a balloon or by the grip of an eagle. Groans and cries rose from her interior as though she had a thousand miserable, perishing slaves—men, women, and children—locked up in her hold.

'This,' said I to Helga, 'is worse than the *Anine*.'

'Yet it was blowing harder on that Saturday night than it is now,' she answered, watching the mad oscillations of the cabin lamp with serene eyes and a mouth steadfast in expression. 'I have a greater dread of Captain Bunting's smile,' she continued, 'than of any hurricane that can blow across the ocean.' She looked at the clock. 'He is certain to arrive shortly. He is sure to find some excuse to torture me with his politeness. He will tease me to exchange my cabin. I think I will go to bed, Hugh.'

There was little temptation to remain up. I put my hand under her arm to steady the pair of us, and we passed on to the quarter-deck, where I found the hatch that

led to our sleeping quarters shut. We lifted it, and looked into a blackness profounder than that of a coal-mine. On this I roared for Punmeamootty. I shouted four or five times at the top of my lungs, and then some voice bawled from over the rail of the deck above, 'What's wrong down there?' Who it was I could not tell; it was impossible to distinguish voices amid the hellish clamour of the wind roaring in the rigging with the sound of a tempest-swept forest. I took no notice, and bawled again for Punmeamootty, and, after a little, the poor coloured wretch came out of the darkness into the sheen of the cabin-light that feebly touched the quarter-deck, crawling on his hands and knees. He was soaked through, and when he stood up could scarcely keep his feet. Indeed, forward, the seas were sweeping the decks in sheets, and each time the vessel lifted her bows the water came roaring in a fury of foam to the cuddy front.

We were forced to put the hatch on again to keep the sea out of the ship till Punmeamootty came staggering out of the cuddy with a lantern. Helga then dropped below with amazing dexterity, and I handed the light down to her, requesting that she would hang it up and leave it burning, as I was in no mood to 'turn in' just then, wishing to see more of the weather before resting, and to smoke a pipe. I put the hatch on and re-entered the cuddy, followed by Punmeamootty.

'You seem half drowned!' said I.

'A sea knock me down, sah. Is dere danger, sah?'

'I hope not,' I answered. 'Do you feel equal to picking up that mess?' and I pointed to the broken china and bit of beef, and so on.

He turned a terrified eye upon them, staggering and swaying wildly, and then, as though he had not heard my question, he exclaimed, 'We all say dis storm come tro' Capt'n being wicked man! Tankee de Lor'! we hab no eat pork! Tankee de Lor'! we hab no eat pork!'

He bared his gleaming teeth, as though in the anguish of cold, and shook his small clenched fist at the skylight. I sat down and lighted a pipe, and, having been somewhat chilled by waiting out in the wet of the quarter-deck for Punmeamootty to bring the lantern, I slid and clawed my way round to Captain Bunting's locker for a bottle of rum that lay within. As I did this, the companion door opened, and down came the skipper. The wind and the wet had twisted his whiskers into lines like lengths of rope. I could have burst into a laugh at the sight of his singular face, framed in the streaming thatch and flannel

ear-protectors of his sou'-wester. The water poured from his oilskins as he came to a stand at the end of the table, grabbing it, and looking about him.

'What's all that?' cried he, pointing with a fat forefinger to the mess on deck.

This was addressed to Punmeamootty, but I answered, flinging the surliest note I could manage into my voice, which I had to raise into a shout, 'An accident. This is a beast of a ship, sir! No barge could make worse weather of a breeze of wind.'

I let fall the lid of the locker, and sat upon it, poisoning the bottle of rum, and blowing a great cloud with my pipe.

'Where is Miss Nielsen?' he exclaimed.

'Gone to bed,' I answered. 'Punmeamootty, reach me a glass out of that rack.'

The man, in taking the tumbler, reeled to a violent heel of the deck, and let it fall.

'D—n it!' roared the Captain, 'you clumsy son of a bitch! What more damage is to be done?' His sudden passion made his fixed smile extraordinarily grotesque. 'Get a basket and pick up that stuff, and bear a hand!' he thundered. 'Has Miss Helga a light?'

'Yes,' I answered. 'I have seen to that.'

'But she may fall—she may let the lantern drop!'

'She is a better sailor than you,' I called out; 'she knows how to keep her feet. Punmeamootty! a tumbler, if you please, before you begin picking up that stuff.'

'I must see that Miss Nielsen's lantern is safe,' said the Captain; and he was coming forward as though to pass through the cuddy door. I sprang to my feet and confronted him on widely stretched legs.

'No man,' said I, 'enters Miss Nielsen's sleeping quarters while she and I remain in this ship.'

He stared at me, with twenty emotions working in his face. His countenance then changed. I perceived him glance at the bottle of rum that I held by the neck, and that I was just in the temper to let him have fair between his eyes had he attempted to shove past me. I believe he thought I had been drinking.

'I can assure you,' he exclaimed, with a violent reaching out of his mind, so to speak, in the direction of his regular and familiar blandness, 'that Miss Nielsen's

privacy is as sacred to me as to you. Will you go below and see that her light is all right? It is a matter that as much concerns your safety as ours.'

Without answering him, I opened the locker, replaced the bottle, and continuing to puff out great clouds of smoke through the excitement under which I laboured—for I had been prepared for a hand-to-hand struggle with him, and my heart beat fast to the resolution of my temper—I quitted the cuddy, with a loud call to Punmeamootty to follow me and replace the hatch.

Whether the coloured steward put the hatch on, whether, indeed, he followed me as I bade him, I cannot tell. I found the lantern burning bravely and swinging fiercely under the beam, and extinguished it, and lay down completely clothed, with the exception of my boots, shrewdly guessing there would be little sleep for me that night.

That it blew at any time as hard as it had when we were aboard the *Anine*, I cannot say; enough that the dreadful maddened motions of the old vessel made a truly hideous gale of wind of the weather. Again and again she would tumble off the head of a sea and fall headlong into the yawn of water at the base, heeling over as she fell, till you would have believed the line of her masts parallel with the horizon, and strike herself such a mighty blow when she got to the bottom, that you listened, with a thumping heart, for a crackling and a rending noise of timbers to tell you that she was going to pieces like a child's house of cards. It was impossible to sleep; twice I was flung from my bunk, and came very near to breaking a limb. I called to Helga, and found her awake. I asked her how she did; but, silver-clear and keen as her voice was, I could not catch her answer.

It is likely that towards the small hours of the morning I now and again snatched a few minutes of sleep. From one of these brief spells of slumber I was aroused by the blow of a sea that thrilled like an electric shock through every plank and fastening of the vessel, and to my great joy I observed, as I thought, the faint gray of dawn colouring the dim and weeping glass of the scuttle. I immediately pulled on my boots and made for the hatch, but the cover was on and the darkness was as deep as ever it had been at midnight. I considered for a minute how I should make myself heard, and groping my way back to my berth, I took a loose plank, or bunk-board as it is called, from out of the sea-bedstead, and with it succeeded in raising such a thunder in the hollow cover that in a few minutes it was lifted. The homely, flat, ruddy-cheeked face of Jacob, his head clothed in a somewhat tattered yellow sou'-wester, which he had probably borrowed from one of his coloured mates forward, looked down upon me through the

glimmering square of the aperture.

'Why, blowed, Mr. Tregarthen,' cried he, 'if Oi didn't think the barque was ashore! But ye'd have had to hammer much louder and much longer before escaping from that rat-trap, if it hadn't been for me a-sheltering of moyself under this 'ere break.'

It was a wild scene indeed to arrive on deck and suddenly view. Furious as was the behaviour of the barque, I could have got no notion of the weight of the surge from her capers. A huge swelling, livid, frothing surface—every billow looking to rear to the height of the maintop, where it was shattered and blown into a snowstorm—a heaven of whirling soot: this, in brief, was the picture. The vessel, however, was undamaged aloft. She was lying hove-to under a band of close-reefed topsail, which glanced like a sheet of foam against the stooping dismal dusk of the sky. None of the dark-skinned crew were visible. Jacob roared in my ear that they had been half wild with fear during the night.

'There's some sort of superstition a-working in them,' he shouted; 'they've been a-praying and a-praying horrible, arter their fashion. Lucky for the ship that she was snugged afore the storm busted. Them poor covies ain't agoing to save their lives when the call comes for them to live or perish.'

'Who has the watch?' said I.

'The mate,' he answered.

I looked at my watch, and was astonished to find that it was after eight. I had believed the hour to be daybreak, but, indeed, it was surprising that any light at all should have had power to sift through that storm-laden sky. Helga at this moment showed in the hatch. I took her hand. She looked pale, but her mouth was firm as she swept the boiling, swollen scene with her gaze, holding the deck with feet that seemed to float above the planks.

'What a night it has been!' she cried. 'This is a bad ship for bad weather. Hour after hour I have been thinking that she was going to pieces!'

I told Jacob to replace the hatch-cover, and the girl and I entered the cuddy, as it was impossible to converse in the open; while, spite of the parallel on which we reeled, the weight of the wind carried an edge as of a Channel January blast in it. In the comparative shelter of the interior we were able to talk, and I told her how I had behaved to the Captain on the previous night.

'Nothing that we can do,' said she, 'can signify while this weather lasts!'

'No, indeed!' I exclaimed. 'We must now pray for the ship to live. Our leaving her is made a twopenny consideration of by this gale.'

She rose to look at the tell-tale compass, and returned to my side with a look of concern and a sad shake of the head.

'This must end our dream of Santa Cruz,' said she.

'It was an idle dream at the best,' I answered.

'Unless it should result in disabling the barque!' she continued. She added, with a little passion, as she looked through the cuddy window on to the quarter-deck: 'I wish all three masts would go overboard!'

'Leaving the hull sound,' said I.

'Yes, yes, leaving the hull sound. I would be content to roll about in this hateful vessel for a whole fortnight, if I could be sure of being taken off at the end. Anything, *anything* to terminate this cruel, this ridiculous captivity!'

As these words left her lips, the Captain came down the companion-steps. He paused on seeing us, as though he had supposed the cuddy empty, and was ashamed to be seen in that figure. The dried white salt lay like flour in his eyes, his whiskers were mere rags of wet hair; a large globule of salt water hung at the end of his nose, like a gem worn after the Eastern fashion. He struggled along to where we sat, and extended his hand to Helga. In his most unctuous manner, that contrasted ludicrously with his streaming oilskins, he expressed the hope that she had slept well, lamented the severity of the gale, for her sake, but assured her there was no danger, that the barque was making noble weather of it, and that he expected the wind to moderate before noon. He held her hand while he spoke, despite her visible efforts to withdraw it from his grasp. He then addressed me:

'I have to apologize,' he exclaimed, 'for a little exhibition of temper last night. I employed an expletive which I am happy to think has not escaped me for years. The provocation was great—the anxieties of the gale—the loss of a foretopmast-staysail—the ruined crockery on the deck—a bottle of my valuable cordial-brandy wasted—Punmeamootty's somewhat insolent stupidity: the most pious mind might be reasonably forgiven for venting itself in the language of the forecastle, under the irritation of so many trials! But I offer you my apologies, Mr. Tregarthen, and I hope, sir, that you slept well!'

I answered him coldly and with averted eyes, being now resolved to persevere in my assumption of contemptuous dislike, which I also desired he should believe was animated by a determination to punish him when I got ashore.

He went to his cabin to refresh himself, first taking care to inform us, with a large smile, that he had spent the whole of the night on deck in looking after the vessel, 'whose safety,' he exclaimed, with a significant leer at Helga, 'has been rendered extraordinarily precious to me since Monday last.'

I now told her—for I had forgotten the incident—how our oily friend had whipped out a small oath on the previous night.

'So, then, he has humanized himself to you?' said she, laughing.

'It is the only symptom of sincerity I have observed in him,' I exclaimed.

He reappeared presently, soaped, shining, and smiling, with dried whiskers floating smoke-like on either hand a purple satin cravat. But the breakfast was to be a poor one that morning. The cook, it seems, could not keep the galley fire alight, and we had to make the best meal we could off a tin of preserved meat and some biscuit and wine-and-water. The Captain was profusely apologetic to Helga, and unctuously ascribed the poverty of the meal to me, who, he said with an air of jocosity, was the cause of half a ham and an excellent piece of beef being rendered unfit for the table. I made no answer to this. Indeed, Helga and I sat like mutes at that table; but the Captain talked abundantly, almost wholly addressing himself to the girl. In truth, it was now easy to see that the unfortunate man was head over ears in love with her. His gaze was a prolonged stare of admiration, and he seemed to find nothing in her behaviour to chill or repel him. On the contrary, the more she kept her eyes downwards bent, the colder and harder grew her face, the more taciturn she was—again and again not vouchsafing even a monosyllabic answer to him—the more he warmed towards her, the more he encroached in his behaviour. If he had any sensibility, it was armour-clad by complacency. I never could have believed that vanity had such power as I here found to sheath so impenetrably the human understanding. 'Well,' thought I to myself, 'all this means a voyage for Helga, if not for me. Assuredly he'll not part with her this side of the Cape, and the fool's hope,' I thought, as I let my eyes rest on the grinning mask of his countenance, 'is that he will have won her long before he reaches the parallel of thirty-four degrees south, though he has to make the most of every calm and of every gale of wind to achieve his end.'

I will not attempt to follow the hours of that day. They were little more than a repetition of our experiences in the *Anine*. The Captain came and went, but for the most part Helga and I remained in the cabin. The gale somewhat moderated at noon, as the skipper had predicted; but it still blew too hard to make sail on the ship, and she lay hove-to in the trough, sickening me to the inmost recesses of my soul with her extravagant somersaults and prodigious falls and upheavals. Somewhere about half-past four that afternoon, on looking through the cuddy-window, I saw Jacob smoking a pipe in the shelter of the projection of the Captain's and mate's cabins. I thought I would keep him company, and, having cut up a pipe of tobacco for myself, I quitted Helga, who showed a disposition to doze, and joined the boatman.

The wind made a great howling aloft, and the thunderous wash of the breaking waters against the vessel's side put a wild note of storm into the shrieking and hissing and hooting of the rigging. But it was fairly calm in the recess, and we conversed very easily. I asked Jacob, while I pointed over the lee-rail at the huge, dark-green, froth-laced backs of the seas rushing from the ship in headlong race, what would be his thoughts of this weather if he were aboard the *Early Morn*.

'Why, the lugger 'ud be doing as well as this here bucket, any way,' said he.

'Captain Bunting,' said I, 'will think that you are not half grateful enough for your deliverance.'

'He is a proper gentleman!' he exclaimed. 'Abraham swears there ain't the likes of him afloat for politeness; but his crew ben't of Abey's mind, I'm afraid. Looks to me as if there's going to be trouble.'

'Anything fresh happened?' I asked.

'It's all along of this matter of sarving out pork to them chaps as won't eat it, Mr. Tregarthen. The mate gave 'em pork again to-day. There ain't no galley fire alight, so it's all the same to them coloured chaps whether it be pork or beef. But it's the principle of it what's a-sticking in their gizzards. Nakier says to me, "It would be allee de same if de water boil," says he, "for it is eider pork or no meat," by which he sinnified that if so be as it was fine weather and the galley fire goin', the men's dinner to-day 'ud be pork or nothen. Now, Mr. Tregarthen, Oi allow that they don't mean to keep all on enduring of this here treatment.'

'What have you noticed to make you suppose this?' said I, with a glance along the deserted decks, dark with sobbing wet, and often shrouded forwards by vast

showers of flying spray.

'Well,' he answered, 'all the darkies has been a-sitting below saving the chap at the wheel, there being nothen for them to do on deck. I was in the fok'sle when Nakier comes down and tells the men that it was to be pork again. I couldn't understand him, for he spoke his own language, but guessed what was up when I heerd the hullabaloo his words raised. They all began to sing out together in a sort of screeching voice like the row made by a crowd of women a-quarrelling and a-pulling the hair out of each other's heads up a halley. Some skipped about in their rage as though there was a fiddle going. One chap, him with a face like a decayed lemon, he outs with his knife and falls a-stabbing of the atmosphere; and Oi tell ye, Mr. Tregarthen, when I saw *that* I just drewed my legs up into my bunk and tried to make myself as little as possible, with the hope of escaping his hobservation, for damme! thought I, if that there article's agoing to run amuck, as I've heerd tell the likes of him is in the habit of doing, strike me dark, thinks Oi, if I ben't the fust man he'll fall foul on!'

'What was said?' I asked.

'Why, ask yourself the question, sir! What do monkeys say when they start a-yelling. Who's to know *what* they said?'

'How do you know, then, that it was the serving out of pork again that excited them?' said I.

'Whoy, that there Nakier told me so arterwards.'

'Ha!' I exclaimed; 'and for how long did they go on shrieking, as you say, and brandishing their knives?'

'It was over wonderful soon,' he answered. 'Nakier looked on whilst they was all a-shouting together, then said something, and it was like blowing the head off a pint o' ale—nothen remained but flatness. They just stood and listened whilst Nakier spouted, and ye should ha' seen 'em a-nodding and a-grimacing, and brandishing their arms and slapping their legs; but they never said nothen; they just took and listened. Tell 'ee, Mr. Tregarthen, the suddenness of it, and the looks of 'em, was something to bring the puseration out of the pores of a Polar bear.'

'What does Abraham think?' said I.

'Whoy, I dunno how it is, he don't seem to obsarve—appears to find nothen to

take to heart. He's growed a bit consequential, being now what the skipper would call a orficer, and though he sleeps forrard his feelings is aft. 'Tis mere growling, he thinks, with the fellows. But there's more 'n that,' said he, striking a match and catching the flame of it in his clasped hand, and lighting his pipe as easily as if there were not a breath of air stirring.

'The lunatic of a Captain has eyes in his head,' said I, thinking aloud rather than conversing. 'If *he* can't see the mischief his mad notion of conversion is breeding, it is not for me to point it out. In fact, I heartily wish the Malays would seize the barque and sail her to Madeira or the Canaries. Is it not abominable that Miss Nielsen and I should be carried away to the Cape of Good Hope against our will by that long-whiskered rogue?' signifying the Captain by a backward motion of my head at the cabin.

'Abraham was a-telling me about this here traverse. The skipper's gone and fallen in love with the young lady, ain't he?' said Jacob, with a grin overspreading his flat face.

'Yes,' said I, 'and hopes by keeping her aboard to win her heart. The dolt!'

'Dunno about *dolt*, sir!' exclaimed Jacob. 'She's a nice-looking young gal, is Miss Nielsen, and, I allow, just the sort of wife as a shipmaster would live heasy vith.'

'You argue as vilely as Abraham,' said I, looking at him angrily. 'Will you pretend that this Captain is not acting outrageously in detaining the young lady on board his ship—imprisoning her, in short—for that is what it comes to?'

A little look of intelligence gave a new expression to the flat-faced fellow's smile as he respectfully surveyed me.

'Well, sir—I don't blame you, I can't blame you,' he exclaimed. 'I've kep' company myself. I was for five year along with as nice a gal as was ever seen in Deal, a-courting and a-courting, and always too pore to git spliced. I know what the passion of jealousy is. She took up with a corporal of Marines, and, I tell ye, I *suffered*. It came roight, then it went wrong again, and it ended in her marrying a measly little slice of a chap, named Billy Tusser, who'd saved a bit out o' sprattin' and hovellin'. I *can't* blame 'ee, sir.'

It was not a matter to pursue with this worthy man, whose small intelligence lay too deep to be worth boring for; so I dropped the subject, and talked afresh of the coloured crew, and continued lingering till I could not have told how long our

chat lasted. Though the gale was much less hard than it had blown down from noon, it was still a very violent wind, and the sea as wild as ever it had been, with the shadow of the evening now to add a darker tinge of gloom to the whirl of stooping, sooty heaven, under which every head of surge broke like a flash of ghastly light. The vessel was a strangely desolate picture—not a living creature to be seen forward, the decks half drowned, water sluicing white off the forecastle rim, or blowing up into the wind from off that raised deck in bursts of crystalline smoke, like corkscrew leapings of fine snow to the hurl of a blast roaring across a wintry moor. The black gear curved black with wet: again and again the vessel would pitch into the head sea till the spreading froth made by the massive plunge of her round bows rose to her forecastle rail. I had had enough of the cold and the wet; the cheerless picture of the barque and the ocean, too, was unspeakably depressing, and, with a glance round at the near horizon of broken creaming waters on which nothing showed, I bestowed a nod of farewell on Jacob, and re-entered the cuddy.

Captain Bunting was sitting close to Helga. The light was so weak in this interior that I had to peer a little to make sure that it was the Captain, for the dim figure might well have been the mate's. Helga was at the extreme end of the locker, as though she had uneasily worked her way from his side while they sat; but he had followed, and was now close, and her next and only step to get rid of him must be to rise. He was addressing her very earnestly when I entered; his whiskers floated from his cheeks as he bent towards her. Though the cuddy was charged with the complaining sounds of the labouring fabric, speech was very easy within it, nor was it necessary to raise the voice. Indeed, the interior had the effect of a hush upon my ears, coming as I did fresh from the shriek and thunder of the weather out on deck.

On seeing me the Captain instantly broke off, sat up, and called out:

'Well, and how are things looking on deck?'

Helga rose and went to the little window against the door.

'The weather could not be worse,' I answered, with the air and tone of sullenness I had resolved on. 'Your ship is too old and squab for such a conflict.'

'She is old, but she is a stout ship,' he answered. 'She will be afloat when scores of what you might consider beauties have vanished.'

'I think not,' said I, looking towards Helga, and wondering what the man had

been saying to her.

'Let us hope,' he exclaimed, lifting a great pilot coat from the locker and struggling into it, 'that the necessity for your remaining here will not last very much longer. I should have expected handsomer treatment at your hands, Mr. Tregarthen.'

'I do not know what you can find to base such an expectation on,' I cried. 'Your detention of us is cruel, and, as I hope and believe, punishable. But there is no good in discussing *that* matter with you here and now. I have merely to beg that we may be as strangers while we are so unfortunate as to be together in the same ship.'

He drew his sou'-wester down upon his head, surveying me meanwhile; but I witnessed no malevolence in his regard; indeed, I may say, no trace of temper. His enduring smile lay broad with such expansion, indeed, as gave an air of elation to his face.

'No,' said he, wagging his head, while he slipped the elastic band of his sou'-wester behind his whisker; 'we will not live together as strangers, as you desire. Brotherly love is still practicable, and nothing that you can say or do, my young friend, shall dissuade me from cultivating it. That we shall be long together I do not believe,' he added, with a significance that astonished me and sent my eyes askant at Helga, whose back was still upon us. 'Meanwhile, endeavour to be contented. To have content is to have all, and to have all is to be richer than the richest.'

He inclined his sou'-westered head in an odd benedictory, grotesque nod, or bow, and, with a half-pause in his manner as though he would call some speech to Helga, turned on his heel and went on deck.

'What has he been saying, Helga?'

She looked round, and, finding the Captain gone, came to my side and locked her fingers upon my arm. She had drawn to me with a pale face, but the blood flushed her throat and cheeks as she let fall her eyes from mine. I had never before thought her so sweet as she showed at that moment. She was without a hat, and her short fair hair glimmered on her head in the gathering gloom of the evening with a sheen like the glancing of bright amber. My memory gave me a thought full of beauty—a wild caprice of sentiment at such a time:

'The freshness of new hay is on thy hair,
And the withdrawing innocence of home
Within thine eye.'

'What has he been saying to you, Helga?'

'That he loves me,' she answered, now fixing her artless, tender gaze upon me, though her blush lingered.

'A fine time to tell you such a thing! Does that sort of sea-captain wait for a gale of wind to propose to a girl?' I exclaimed, with a sudden irritation of jealousy tingling through me, and I looked at her closely and suspiciously.

'I wanted to be angry, but could not,' said she. 'I hate the man, yet I could not be angry with him. He spoke of his daughter—he did not talk through his nose—he did not cant at all. Is "cant" the right word? I felt sorry; I had not the heart to answer him in rudeness, and to have risen and left him whilst he was speaking would have been rudeness.'

I made a slight effort to disengage my arm from her clasp.

'He told me—no doubt you heard him,' said I—'he told me he believed there would be no necessity to keep me long. He is a clever man—a shrewd man. Well, after this I shall believe in all the proverbs about women.'

'What do you mean?' she exclaimed in a startled voice, letting fall her hands and staring at me.

'What do *you* mean?'

'Why, that I am sorry for the man, and hate him.'

'Oh! if you keep sorry long you will soon cease to hate him.'

'No, no!' she cried with a little passion, making as if to clasp my arm afresh, and then shrinking. 'I could not help his coming here and speaking to me.'

'That is true.'

'Why are you angry?'

Her gaze pleaded, her lips twitched, even as she looked at me her blue eyes filled. Her grieved, pretty face, her wistful, tender, tearful face, must have

transformed my temper into impassioned pity, into self-reproach, into keen self-resentment, even had there been solid ground for vexation. I took her hand and lifted it to my lips.

'Forgive me; we have been much together. Our association and your father's dying words make me think of you as mine until—until—the long and short of it is, Helga, I am jealous!'

An expression of delight entered and vanished from her face. She stood thoughtfully looking down on the deck. Just then Punmeamootty entered to prepare the table for supper, and Helga again went to the cabin window and stood looking out, lightly, with unconscious ease and grace, swaying to the stormy heave of the deck, with her hands clasped behind her in a posture of meditation.



CHAPTER IV.

A NIGHT OF HORROR.

The gale broke on the morning of Thursday, November 2. The compacted heaven of cloud scattered in swelling cream-coloured masses; the sun shone out of the wide lakes of moist blue, and the sea turned from the cold and sickly gray of the stormy hours into a rich sapphire, with a high swell and a plentiful chasing of foaming billows. By four o'clock in the afternoon the ocean had smoothed down into a tropical expanse of quietly rising and falling waters, with the hot sun sliding westwards and the barque stemming the sea afresh under all cloths which could be piled upon her, the wind a small breeze, about west, and the sea-line a flawless girdle.

The evening that followed was one of quiet beauty. There was a young moon overhead, with power enough to drop a little trickling of silver into the dark sea under her; the clouds had vanished, and the stars shone brightly with a very abundant showering of meteoric lights above the trucks of the silent swaying masts.

As we paced the deck the Captain joined us. Short of going to our respective cabins, there was no means of getting rid of him; so we continued to patrol the planks, with him at Helga's side, talking, talking—oh, Heaven! how he talked! His manner was distressingly caressing. Helga kept hold of my arm, and meanwhile I, true to that posture I had maintained for the past three days, listened or sent my thoughts elsewhere, rarely speaking. In the course of his ceaseless chatter he struck upon the subject of his crew and their victuals, and told us he was sorry that we were not present when Nakier and two other coloured men came aft into the cuddy after he had taken sights and gone below.

'I am certain,' he exclaimed, smiting his leg, 'that I have made them reflective! I believe I could not mistake. Nakier in particular listened with attention, and looked at his mates with an expression as though conviction were being slowly borne in upon him.'

I pricked up my ears at this, for here was a matter that had been causing me some anxious thought, and I broke away from my sullen, resentful behaviour to

question him.

'What brought the men aft?'

'The same tiresome story,' he answered, speaking loudly, and seemingly forgetful of or indifferent to the pair of yellow ears which, I might warrant him, were thirstily listening at the helm. 'They ask for beef, for beef, for nothing but beef, and I say yes—beef one day, pork another; beef for your bodies and pork for your souls. I shall conquer them; and what a triumph it will be! Though I should make no further progress with them, yet I could never feel too grateful for a decisive victory over a gross imbecile superstition that, like a shutter, though it be one of many, helps to keep out the light.'

He then went on to tell us what he had said, how he had reasoned, and I shall not soon forget the unctuous, self-satisfied chuckle which broke from the folds of his throat as he paused before asking Helga what she thought of *that* as an example of pure logic. I listened, wondering that a man who could talk as he did could be crazy enough to attempt so perilous an experiment as the attempting to win his crew over to his own views of religion by as dangerous an insult as his fanatical mind could have lighted upon. It was the more incomprehensible to me in that the fellow had started upon his crude missionary scheme when there were but two whites in the ship to eleven believers in the Prophet.

I waited until his having to fetch breath enabled me to put in a word. I then briefly and quietly related what had passed in the forecastle as described to me by Jacob Minnikin.

'And what then, Mr. Tregarthen?' said he, and I seemed to catch a sneer threading, so to speak, his bland utterance: the moon gave but little light, as I have said, and I could not see his face. 'When a man starts on the work of converting, he must not be afraid.'

'Your men have knives—they are devils, so I have heard, when aroused—you may not be afraid, but you have no right to provoke peril for us,' I said.

'The coxswain of a lifeboat should have a stout heart,' he exclaimed. 'Miss Nielsen, do not be alarmed by your courageous friend's apprehension. My duty is exceedingly simple. I must do what is right. Right is divinely protected;' and I saw by the pose of his head that he cast his eyes up at the sky.

I nudged Helga as a hint not to speak, just breathlessly whispering, 'He is not to

be reasoned with.'

It was a little before ten o'clock that night when the girl retired to her cabin. The Captain, addressing her in a simpering, loverlike voice, had importuned her to change her cabin. She needed to grow fretful before her determined refusals silenced him. He entered his berth when she had gone, and I took my pipe to enjoy a quiet smoke on deck. After the uproar of the past three days, the serenity of the night was exquisitely soothing. The moon shone in a curl of silver; the canvas soared in pallid visible spaces starwards; there was a pleasant rippling sound of gently stirred waters alongside, and the soft westerly night-wind fanned the cheek with the warmth of an infant's breath. The decks ran darkling forwards; the shadow of the courses flung a dye that was deeper than the gloom of the hour betwixt the rails, and nothing stirred save the low-lying stars which slipped up and down past the forecastle rail under the crescent of the foresail as the barque curtseyed.

Nevertheless, though I could not see the men, I heard a delicate sound of voices proceeding from the block of darkness where the forecastle front lay. Mr. Jones had charge of the watch, and, on my stepping aft to the wheel, I found Jacob grasping the spokes, having relieved the helm at four bells—ten o'clock. He was not to be accosted while on that duty; and my dislike of the mate had not been lessened by the few words which had passed between us since the day when the Cape steamer had gone by, and by my observation of his fawning behaviour to the Captain. I briefly exclaimed that it was a fine night, received some careless, drowsy answer from him, and, with pipe betwixt my lips, lounged lonely on the lee side of the deck, often overhanging the rail, and viewing the sea-glow as it crept by, with my mind full of Helga, of my home, of our experiences so far, and of what might lie before us.

I was startled out of a fit of musing by the forecastle bell ringing five. The clear, keen chimes floated like an echo from the sea, and I caught a faint reverberation of them in the hollow canvas. It was half-past ten. I knocked the ashes out of my pipe, and, going on to the quarter-deck, dropped through the hatch.

The lantern swinging in the corridor betwixt the berths was burning. I lightly called to Helga to know if all was well with her, but she was silent, and, as I might suppose, asleep. I put out the light, as my custom now was, and, partially unclothing myself in the dark, got into my bunk and lay for a little watching the dance of a phantom star or two in the dim black round of the scuttle close against my head, sleepily wondering how long this sort of life was to continue, what

time was to pass, and how much was to happen before I should be restored to the comfort of my own snug bedroom at home; and thus musing, too drowsy perhaps for melancholy, I fell asleep.

I was awakened by someone beating heavily upon the bulkhead of the next-door cabin.

'Mr. Tregarthen! Mr. Tregarthen!' roared a voice; then thump! thump! went the blows of a massive fist or handspike. 'For Gor' a'mighty's sake wake up and turn out!—there's murder a-doing! Which is your cabin?'

I recognised the voice of Abraham, disguised as it was by horror and by the panting of his breath.

The exclamation, *There's murder a-doing!* collected my wits in a flash, and I was wide awake and conscious of the man's meaning ere he had fairly delivered himself of his cry.

'I am here—I will be with you!' I shouted, and, without pausing further to attire myself, dropped from my bunk and made with outstretched hands for the door, which I felt for and opened.

It was pitch dark in this passage betwixt the cabins, without even the dim gleam the porthole in the berth offered to the eye to rest on.

'Where are you, Abraham?' I cried.

'Here, sir!' he exclaimed, almost in my ear, and, lifting my hand, I touched him.

'The crew's up!' he cried. 'They've killed the mate, and by this time, I allow, the Capt'n's done for.'

'Where's Jacob?'

'Gor' He only knows, sir!'

'Are you armed? Do you grip anything?'

'Nothen, nothen. I run without stopping to arm myself. I'll tell ye about it—but it's awful to be a-talking in this here blackness with murder happening close by.'

He still panted as from heavy recent exertion, and his voice faltered as though he were sinking from a wound.

'What is it?' cried the clear voice of Helga from her berth.

'Open your door!' I said, knowing that it was her practice to shoot the bolt. 'All is darkness here. Let us in—dress yourself by feeling for your clothes—the Malays have risen upon the Captain and mate—it may be our turn next, and we must make a stand in your cabin. Hush!'

In the interval of her quitting her bunk to open the door, I strained my ears. Nothing was to be heard save near and distant noises rising out of the vessel as she heeled on the long westerly swell. But then we were deep down, with two decks for any noise made on the poop to penetrate.

'The door is open,' said Helga.

I had one hand on Abraham's arm, and, feeling with the other, I guided him into Helga's berth, the position of which, as he had never before been in this part of the vessel, he could not have guessed. I then closed the door and bolted it.

'Dress yourself quickly, Helga!' said I, talking to her in the mine-like blindness of this interior that was untouched by the star or two that danced in her cabin window as in mine.

'Tell me what has happened!' she exclaimed.

'Speak, Abraham!' said I.

'Lor!' but Oi don't seem able to talk without a light,' he answered. 'Ain't there no lantern here? If there's a lantern, I've got three or four loocifers in my pocket.'

'Hist!' I cried. 'I hear footsteps.'

We held our breath: all was still. Some sound had fallen upon my ear. It resembled the slapping of planks with naked feet to my fancy, that had been terrified by Abraham's sudden horrible report, before there was time for my muscles and nerves to harden into full waking strength.

'What d'y'e hear?' hoarsely whispered Abraham.

'It was imagination. Helga, can we light the lantern?'

She answered 'Yes'—she was ready.

'Strike a match, Abraham, that I may see where the lantern hangs!' said I.

He did so, holding the flame in his fist. I opened the door, whipped out, took down the lantern and darted in again, bolting the door anew with a thrill of fear following upon the haste I had made through imagination of one of those yellow-skins crouching outside with naked knife in hand. I swiftly lighted the lantern, and placed it in Helga's bunk. Abraham was of an ashen paleness, and I knew my own cheeks to be bloodless.

'Ought we to fear the crew?' cried Helga. 'We have not wronged them. They will not want *our* lives.'

'Dorn't trust 'em, dorn't trust 'em!' exclaimed Abraham. 'Ain't there nothen here to sarve as weapons?' he added, rolling his eyes around the cabin.

'What is the story? Tell it now, man, tell it!' I cried, in a voice vehement with nerves.

He answered, speaking low, very hastily and hoarsely: 'Oi'd gone below at eight bells. Oi found Nakier haranguing some of the men as was in the fok'sle; but he broke off when he see me. Oi smoked a pipe, and then tarned in and slep' for an hour or so; then awoke and spied five or six of the chaps a-whispering together up in a corner of the fok'sle. They often looked moy way, but there worn't loight enough to let 'em know that my eyes was open, and I lay secretly a-watching 'em, smelling mischief. Then a couple of 'em went on deck, and the rest lay down. Nothen happened for some time. Meanwhile Oi lay woide awake, listening and watching. 'Twas about seven bells, Oi reckon, when someone—Oi think it was Nakier—calls softly down through the hatch, and instantly all the fellows, who as I could ha' swore was sound asleep, dropped from their hammocks like one man, and the fok'sle was empty. I looked round to make sure that it were empty, then sneaks up and looks aft with my chin no higher than the coaming. I heered a loud shriek, and a cry of "O God! O God! Help! help!" and now, guessing what was happening, and believing that the tastin' of blood would drive them fellows mad, and that Oi should be the next if Jacob worn't already gone, him being at the wheel, as I might calculate by his not being forrard, Oi took and run, and here Oi am.'

He passed the back of his hand over his brow, following the action with a fling of his fingers from the wrist; and, indeed, it was now to be seen that his face streamed with sweat.

'Do you believe they have murdered the Captain?' cried Helga.

'I dorn't doubt it—I *can't* doubt it. There seemed two gangs of 'em. Oi run for my life, and yet I see two gangs,' answered Abraham.

'Horrible!' exclaimed the girl, looking at me with fixed eyes, yet she seemed more shocked than frightened.

'Did not I foresee this?' I exclaimed. 'Where were your senses, man—you who lived amongst them, ate and drank with them? It would be bad enough if they were white men; but how stands our case, do you think, in a ship seized by savages who have been made to hate us for our creed and for the colour of our skins?'

'Hark!' cried Helga.

We strained our hearing, but nothing was audible to me saving my heart, that beat loud in my ears.

'I thought I heard the sound of a splash,' she said.

'If they should ha' done for my mate, Jacob!' cried Abraham. 'As the Lord's good, 'twill be too hard. Fust wan, then another, and now nowt but me left of our little company as left Deal but a day or tew ago, as it seems when Oi looks back.'

'Are we to perish here like poisoned rats in a hole?' said I. 'If they clap the hatch-cover on, what's to become of us?'

'Who among them can navigate the ship?' asked Helga.

'Ne'er a one,' replied Abraham; '*that* I can tell 'ee from recollecting of the questions Nakier's asted me from toime to toime.'

'But if the body of them should come below,' cried I, 'and force that door—as easily done as blowing out that light there—are we to be butchered with empty hands, looking at them without a lift of our arms, unless it be to implore mercy? Here are two of us—Englishmen! Are we to be struck down as if we were women?'

'There are three of us!' said Helga.

'What are our weapons?' I exclaimed, wildly sweeping the little hole of a cabin with my eyes. 'They have their knives!'

'Give me the handling of 'em one arter the other,' said Abraham, fetching a deep

breath and then spitting on his hands, 'and I'll take the whole 'leven whilst ye both sit down and look on. But all of them at wanst—all dronk with rage and snapping round a man as if he was a sheep and they wolves!'—he breathed deeply again, slowly shaking his head.

'The planks in that bunk are loose,' said I, 'but what can we do with boards?'

'I will go on deck!' suddenly exclaimed Helga.

'You?' cried I. 'No, indeed! You will remain here. There must be two of us for them to deal with before the third can be come at!'

'I will go on deck!' she repeated. 'I have less cause to fear them than you. They know that I am acquainted with navigation—they have always looked at me with kindness in their faces. Let me go and talk to them!'

She made a step to the door—I gripped her arm, and brought her to my side and held her.

'What is to be done is for us two men to do!' said I. 'We must think, and we must wait.'

'Let me go!' she cried. 'They will listen to me, and I shall be able to make terms. Unless there be a navigator among them, what can they do with the ship in this great ocean?' She struggled, crying again: 'Let me go to them, Hugh!'

'Dorn't you do nothen of the sort, sir!' exclaimed Abraham. 'What'd happen? They'd tarn to and lock her up until they'd made an end of you and me, and then she'd be left alone aboard this wessel—alone, I mean, with eleven yaller savages. Gor' preserve us! If you let go of her, sir, *Oi* shall have to stop the road.'

There was something of deliberateness in his speech: his English spirit was coming back with the weakening of the horror that had filled him when he first came rushing below.

Someone knocked lightly on the door. At the same instant my eye was taken by the glance of lamp or candle flame in the opening in the bulkhead overlooking the narrow passage.

'Hush!' cried I.

The knock was repeated. It was a very soft tapping, as though made by a timid knuckle.

'Who is there?' I shouted, gathering myself together with a resolution to leap upon the first dark throat that showed; for I believed this soft knocking—this soundless approach—a Malay ruse, and my veins tingled with the madness that enters the blood of a man in the supreme moment whose expiry means life or death to him.

'It is me, master! Open, master! It is allee right!'

'That's Nakier!' exclaimed Abraham.

'Who is it?' I cried.

'Me, sah—Nakier. It is allee right, I say. Do not fear. Our work is done. We wish to speakee with you, and be friend.'

'How many of you are there outside?' I called.

'No man but Nakier,' he answered.

'How are we to know that?' bawled Abraham. 'The most of you have naked feet. A whole army of ye might sneak aft, and no one guess it.'

'I swear Nakier is alone. Lady, you shall trust Nakier. Our work is done; it is allee right, I say. See, you tink I am not alone: you are afraid of my knife; go a leetle way back—I trow my knife to you.'

We recoiled to the bulkhead, and Abraham roared 'Heave!' The knife fell upon the deck close to my feet. I pounced upon it as a cat upon a mouse, but dropped it with a cry. 'Oh, God, it is bloody!'

'Give it me!' exclaimed Abraham, in a hoarse shout; 'it'll be bloodier yet, now I've got it, if that there Nakier's a-playing false.'

Grasping it in his right hand, he slipped back the bolt, and opened the door. The sensations of a lifetime of wild experiences might have been concentrated in that one instant. I had heard and read so much about the treachery of the Malay that when Abraham flung open the little cabin door I was prepared for a rush of dusky shapes, and to find myself grappling—but not for life, since death I knew to be certain, armed as every creature of them was with the deadly blade of the sailor's sheath knife. Instead—in the corridor, immediately abreast of our cabin, holding a bull's-eye lamp in his hand, stood Nakier, who on seeing us put the light on the deck, and saluted us by bringing both hands to his brow. Abraham

put his head out.

'There ain't nobody here but Nakier!' he cried.

'What have you done?' I exclaimed, looking at the man, who in the combined light showed plainly, and whose handsome features had the modest look, the prepossessing air, I had found when my gaze first rested on him in this ship.

'The Captain is kill—Pallunappachelly, he kill him. The mate is kill—with this han'.' He held up his arm.

'Where's moy mate?' thundered Abraham.

'No man touch him. Jacob, he allee right. Two only.' He held up two fingers. 'The Captain and Misser Jones. They treat us like dog, and we bite like dog,' he added, showing his teeth, but with nothing whatever of fierceness or wildness in his grin.

'What do you want?' I repeated.

'We wantchee you come speak with us. We allee swear on de Koran not to hurt you, but to serve you, and you serve we.'

I stood staring, not knowing how to act.

'He is to be trusted,' said Helga.

'But the others?' I said.

'They can do nothing without us.'

'Without *one* of us. But the others!'

'We may trust them,' she repeated, with an accent of conviction.

Nakier's eyes, gleaming in the lantern-light, were bent upon us as we whispered. He perceived my irresolution, and, once again putting down the bull's-eye lamp on the deck, he clasped and extended his hands in a posture of impassioned entreaty.

'We allee swear we no hurt you!' he cried in a voice of soft entreaty that was absolutely sweet with the melody of its tones; 'dat beautiful young lady—oh! I would kill here,' he cried, gesticulating as though he would stab his heart, 'before dat good, kind, clever lady be harm. Oh, you may trust us! We hab done our

work. Mr. Wise, he be Capt'n; you be gentleman—passengaire; you live upstairs and be very much comfortable. De beautiful young lady, she conduct dis ship to Afric. Oh, no, no, no! you are allee safe. My men shall trow down dere knives upon de table when you come, and we swear on de Koran to be your friend, and you be friend to we.'

'Let's go along with him, Mr. Tregarthen,' said Abraham. 'Nakier, I shall stick to this here knife. Where's moy mate Jacob? If 'ere a man of ye's hurted him——'

'It is no time to threaten,' I whispered angrily, shoving past him. 'Come, Helga! Nakier, pick up that bull's-eye and lead the way, and, Abraham, follow with that lantern, will you?'

In silence we gained the hatch. It lay open. Nakier sprang through it, and, one after the other, we ascended. The wind had fallen scantier since I was on deck last, and though the loftier canvas was asleep, silent as carved marble, and spreading in spectral wanness under the bright stars, there was no weight in the wind to hold steady the heavy folds of the fore and main courses, which swung in and out with the dull sound of distant artillery as the barque leaned from side to side. The cuddy lamp was brightly burning, and the first glance I sent through the open door showed me the whole of the crew, as I for the instant supposed—though I afterwards found that one of them was at the wheel—standing at the table, ranged on either hand of it, all as motionless as a company of soldiers drawn up on parade. Every dark face was turned our way, and never was shipboard picture more startling and impressive than this one of stirless figures, dusky fiery eyes, knitted brows, most of the countenances hideous, but all various in their ugliness. Their caps and queer headgear lay in a heap upon the table. Nakier entered and paused, with a look to us to follow. Helga was fearlessly pressing forwards. I caught her by the hand and cried to Nakier:

'Those men are all armed.'

He rounded upon them, and uttered some swift feverish sentence in his native tongue. In a moment every man whipped out his knife from the sheath in which it lay buried at the hip, and placed it upon the table. Nakier again spoke, pronouncing the words with a passionate gesture, on which Punmeamootty gathered the knives into one of the caps and handed them to Nakier, who brought the cap to Helga and placed it at her feet. On his doing this, Abraham threw the blood-stained knife he held into the cap.

It was at that moment we were startled by a cry of 'Below there!'

'Whoy, it's Jacob!' roared Abraham, and stepping backwards and looking straight up, he shouted, 'Jacob, ahoy! Where are ye, mate?'

'Up in the maintop, pretty nigh dead,' came down the leather-lunged response from the silence up above.

'Thank God you're alive!' cried Abraham. 'It's all roight now—it's all roight now.'

'Who's agoing to make me believe it?' cried Jacob.

I stared up, and fancied I could just perceive the black knob of his head projected over the rim of the top.

'You can come down, Jacob,' I cried. 'All danger, I hope, is over.'

'Danger over?' he bawled. 'Whoy, they've killed the mate and chucked him overboard, and if I hadn't taken to my heels and jumped aloft they'd have killed me.'

'No, no—not true; not true, sah!' shrieked Nakier. 'Come down, Jacob! It is allee right!'

'Where's the Captain?' cried Jacob.

'Him overboard!' answered Nakier. 'It is allee right, I say!'

A shudder ran through me as I glanced at the cabin which the Captain had occupied. I cannot express how the horror of this sudden, shocking, bloody tragedy was heightened by Nakier's cool and easy acceptance of the deed, as though the two men whom he and his had slain were less to his sympathies than had they been a couple of fowls whose necks had been wrung.

'Pray come down, Jacob!' said Helga, sending her voice clear as a bell into the silent towering heights. 'You, as well as Abraham, are to be known as an Englishman.'

This little scornful stroke, which was extremely happy in that it was unintelligible to Nakier and the others, had the desired effect.

'Why, if it is all right, then I suppose it *be* all right,' I heard Jacob say, and a few moments after his figure, with 'longshore clumsiness, came slowly down the rigging.

As he sprang from the bulwark rail on to the deck, he whipped off his cap and

dashed it down on to the planks, and with the utmost agitation of voice and manner danced around his cap as he vociferated while he flourished his fist at Abraham:

'Now, what did Oi say? All along Oi've been a-telling ye that that there pork job was agoing to get our throats cut. Whoy didn't ye stop it? Whoy didn't ye tell the Capt'n what you seed and knowed? Froight! Whoy, I moight ha' died in that there top and rolled overboards, and what yarn was ye going to give my missis as to my hending, if so be as ever ye got ashore at Deal agin?'

He continued to shout after this fashion, meanwhile tumbling and reeling about his cap as though it were a mark for him upon the theatre of this deck on which to act his part. But though it appeared a very ecstasy of rage in him, the outbreak seemed wholly due to revulsion of feeling. Nakier stood motionlessly eyeing him; the others also remained at table, all preserving their sentinel postures. At last the fellow made an end, put his cap on, and was silent, breathing hard.

'Will you come in, sah? Will you enter, lady? Misser Wise, it is allee right. Come along, Jacob, my mate!'

Thus saying, Nakier re-entered the cuddy, and the four of us followed him. There was a dark stain on the bare plank close against the coaming or ledge of the door of the Captain's cabin. It was the short, wild, startled sideways spring which Abraham gave that caused me to look at it. The very soul within me seemed to shrink at the sight.

Nakier exclaimed, 'It is easy to scrape out,' motioning with his little delicately-shaped hand as though he scraped. He then addressed one of the fellows at the table, who nodded, sweeping the air with his arm as he did so.

It now occurred to me, with the marvellous swiftness of thought, that the cap containing the men's knives still lay upon the deck where Nakier had lodged it at Helga's feet, and the instant motion of my mind was to return to the quarter-deck, pick the cap up, and heave it over the rail. But I reflected that not only might an act of this sort enrage the crew by losing them their knives—it would also imply profound distrust on our part. I also considered that, if they designed to kill us, they would be able to manage that business very well without their knives—for there was the carpenter's tool-chest forward, which would supply them with plenty of deadly weapons, not to mention the cabin knives, which Punmeamootty had charge of, and of which several were at all times to be found in the galley. All this passed through my mind in the space that a man might

count five in, so amazing is the velocity of imagination; and my resolution was formed in this matter even while I continued to measure the few steps which separated the table from the cuddy door.

Nakier went to the head of the table, and, putting his hand upon the Captain's chair, exclaimed, bowing with inimitable grace to Helga as he spoke:

'Will de sweet mees sit here?'

She passed along the little file of five men and took the chair. I do not know whether she had seen that mark on the deck I have spoken of. She was of a deathlike whiteness, but her eyes shone spiritedly as she ran them over the coloured faces of the queer figures erect on either hand the table, and never at any time since the hour when the dawn showed me her pretty face aboard the *Anine*, appalled as she then was as a boy, had I observed more composure and resolution in her countenance.

I stood close beside her, and Abraham and his mate were on her right. Nakier went on gliding feet to the fore-end of the table and said something to the men. What language he expressed himself in I did not then, and still do not, know. The effect of his speech was to cause the whole of them to extend their arms towards us with the forefingers of both hands together. The posture, for the moment, was absolutely as though to Nakier's command they had simultaneously levelled firearms at us! Jacob fell back a step with a growl of alarm.

'What is all this, Nakier?' I called out.

'It is to say we are all your brodders, sah. It is my country sign of friendship.'

Their hands fell to their sides, but immediately afterwards Nakier spoke again to them, whereupon every man levelled his forefingers, as before, at Helga. Again Nakier spoke, and Punmeamootty left the cuddy.

'I wish he'd talk English,' exclaimed Abraham, wiping his forehead. 'Who's to know what's agoing to happen?'

'It is allee right, Misser Wise,' said Nakier, with a soft smile, half of reproach, half of encouragement. 'Punmeamootty hab gone to fetch de Koran for we to swear to be true and not harm you.'

CHAPTER V.

A CONFERENCE.

There was now a pause. How am I to convey the dramatic character of this interval of silence? The hush of the night worked like a spirit in the vessel, and the silence seemed to be deepened rather than disturbed by the dull, pinion-like beat of the mainsail swinging into the mast, by the occasional creak breaking forth from some slightly strained bulkhead, and by the half-muffled gurgling of some little lift of dark water laving the barque's side. I could witness no temper in the men. Wherever there lay a scowl, it was no more than a part of the creature's make. Their faces were by this time familiar to me, and I could not mistake. Custom had even diminished something of the fierceness, and I may say the hideousness, of the lemon-coloured man, whose corrugated brow and savage eyes had been among the earliest details of this ship to attract my attention on boarding her. Yet with the memory in me of what had just now been enacted—with thoughts in me of two corpses scarcely yet cold sinking, still sinking, at but a little distance from the vessel—these men opposed a horribly formidable array of countenances to the gaze. Their various dyes of complexion were deepened by the lantern light; the grotesque character of their attire seemed to intensify their tragic appearance. Their figures were as motionless as though they were acting a part as statues in a stage representation. At intervals one or another would look to right or left, but in the main their eyes were directed our way, and were chiefly fixed upon Helga.

Jacob stared as though in a dream; Abraham, with his under-jaw hanging loose, appeared to be fascinated by Nakier. I longed to plunge into this silence, so to speak, to expend in speech and questions the emotions which were keeping my heart fiercely beating; but I was held dumb by the notion that this stillness was a part of the solemnities which were to be employed for the protection of our lives.

Punmeamootty re-entered the cuddy holding a book. Nakier took it from him, and, coming round to us, said:

'Look, lady! look, sah! You see dis is de Koran'—I observed that he sometimes said *de* and sometimes *the*—'it is our religion. We swear upon it. Look, to make sure!'

I received the volume, and examined it. It was a manuscript, bound in leather, with a flap, and very elegantly ornamented on the sides and back with some sort of devices in gold and colour. The writing was in red, and every page was margined with a finely ruled red line. What tongue it was written in I could not, of course, tell. I have since supposed it was in Arabic; but for us it might as well have been the Talmud as the Koran. I returned the book to Nakier.

'It is allee right, you see, sah,' he exclaimed, showing his wonderfully white teeth in a smile of gentle, respectful congratulation that put a deeper glow into his eyes and gave a new beauty to his handsome features.

'It may be the Koran,' said I. 'I cannot tell. I will take your word.'

He turned to the men, and, with a passionate gesticulation, addressed them; on which they shouted out all as one man:

'Yaas! yaas! Al-Koran! Al-Koran!'—nodding and pointing and writhing and working with excess of Asiatic contortion.

'We are quite content,' said I.

Nakier withdrew to his end of the table, carrying the book with him. He stood erect, blending the grace of a reposing dancer with an air of reserved eagerness and enthusiasm.

'Lady and you, sah!' he exclaimed, while every dusky eye along the table was fixed intently upon him, 'you sabbee why we kill de Capt'n and Misser Jones? Them two bad men—them two wicked, shocking men. They would make we poor Mussulmans sin, and would send we to hell. And why? Dey not care at heart our soul for to save. We came here for work: we gib dem *dis* for dere money'—he elevated his clenched hands, and then gesticulated as though he pulled and hauled—'not dis, which is Allah's,' striking his breast vehemently; by which, I presume, he signified his spirit or conscience.

A rumbling murmur ran round the table. I should not have supposed the fellows understood the man; but acquiescence was strong in every tawny face, and a universal nod followed when he struck his bosom.

'We not all Malay,' he continued, 'but we are all men, lady. We hab feeling—we hab hunger; we drink and cry and laugh like you all who are white and do not believe in de Prophet. We have killed dose two shocking wicked men, and we are not sorry. No; it is justice!' he added, with a sudden piercing rise in his

melodious voice, and a flush of the eye that was emphasized somewhat alarmingly by an unconscious clutch of his hand at the empty sheath strapped to his hip. But his manner instantly softened, and his voice sweetened again, though his behaviour seemed, while it lasted, to exercise an almost electrical influence over his people. They fluttered and swayed to it like ears of wheat brushed by a wind, darting looks at one another and at us. But this ceased on Nakier resuming his former air.

'Dis ship,' said he, 'is boun' to Table Bay. Some of us belong to Cape Town. Allee want to get to Afric, and dem as not belong to Cape Town ship for dere own country. But dis ship must not steer for Cape Town. When we arrive, it is asked, "Where is de Capt'n? Where is Misser Jones?" and we must not tell,' said he, smiling.

'But where do you wish to go, then?' said I, almost oppressed by the sudden simultaneous turning of the men's dark fiery eyes upon me.

'Near to Cape Town,' said he.

'But what do you call near to Cape Town?' I asked.

'Oh, dere will be a river—we find him. We anchor and go ashore and walkee, walkee,' he exclaimed.

Helga gave a little start.

'What you and your mates wants is that we should put ye ashore somewhere?' said Abraham.

'Yaas, dat's so,' called the fellow named Pallunappachelly.

'No, no!' cried Nakier, 'not somewhere, Misser Vise. Near Cape Town, I say. Not too far for we to walkee.'

'But to set ye ashore, anyhow?' exclaimed Abraham.

The man nodded.

'I suppose you know, Nakier,' said I, with a sense of dismay pressing like a weight upon my spirits, 'that this young lady and I wish to return home? The Captain refused to part with us—he insisted on carrying us with him—we have a home to return to. Surely you do not intend that we should make the passage to the Cape in this barque?'

'Who will navigate de ship?' said Nakier.

'Why, Mr. Wise will,' I exclaimed, turning upon the boatman.

'Blowed, then, if I dew!' cried Abraham, recoiling. 'What! along with these—arter what's—'soides, I don't know nothen about longitude.'

'For mercy's sake, man, don't talk like that!' cried I. 'Miss Nielsen and I must be transhipped.'

'So must Oi!' said Abraham.

'And Oi!' hoarsely shouted Jacob.

'What ees it you say?' exclaimed Nakier, smiling.

'Why, that we all of us wish to get aboard another vessel,' said I, 'and leave this barque in your hands to do whatever you like with.'

There was a sharp muttering of 'No, no!' with some fierce shaking of heads on either side the table. Nakier made a commanding gesture and uttered a few words in his own tongue.

'We must not speakee any ship, lady, and you, sah, and you, Misser Vise, and Jacob, my mate. Cannot you tell why?'

'If you're going to keep us here for fear of our peaching,' cried Abraham, 'there's me for wan as is ready to take moy oath that I'll say nothen about what's happened, purwiding you safely set us aboard another wessel.'

Nakier strained his ear, with a puzzled face. The language of Deal was happily unintelligible to him, for which I was exceedingly grateful, since nothing could be more imperilling than such talk as this.

Helga, who all this while remained silent, seated in her chair, without lifting her eyes to my face or turning her head, said softly, in little more than a whisper, so that only I, who stood at her shoulder, could catch her accents:

'You can see by their faces that they are resolved. All this has been preconcerted. Their plans are formed, and they mean to have their way. We must seem to consent. Let us agree, that they may take the oath, otherwise our lives are not worth more than the Captain's or the mate's.'

Nakier's glowing eyes were upon her, but, though the movements of her lips

might have been visible, it would seem to them as though she whispered to herself. The conviction that she was absolutely right in her advice came to me with her words. I needed but to glance at the double line of determined faces to gather that argument, that even hesitation would merely result in speedily enraging the fellows; that they were not to be influenced by the most reasonable of our wishes; that our lives had been spared in order that we should convey them to a place of safety; and this, too, I saw with the help of the illumination supplied by Helga's few words—that, fully believing the girl qualified to navigate the vessel, they might, if we provoked them, destroy the three of us and retain her, counting upon their threats and her situation to achieve their ends.

I said in a hurried aside to the boatmen:

'Not a word now, from either of you! This must be left to *me*! If you interfere, your blood will be on your own heads!'

Then, addressing Nakier:

'Your demands are these: the barque is to be navigated to some part of the South African coast lying near to Table Bay?'

'Yaas, sah!' he answered, holding up one finger as though counting.

'The spot you wish to arrive at will have to be pointed out on the chart.'

Up went a second finger, followed by another 'Yaas, sah!'

'We are not to communicate with passing ships?'

'Right, sah!' he added, nodding and smiling, and raising a third finger.

'And then?' said I.

'Den,' said he, 'you swear to do dis and we swear by de Koran to be true, and to serve you, and be your friend.'

'And if we refuse?' said I.

'Do not say it!' he cried, sweeping his hands forward as though to repel the idea.

'There must be other conditions!' said I, talking with an air of resolution which, I fear, was but poorly simulated. 'First as to the accommodation?'

'I do not understand!' said Nakier.

'I mean, where are we to live?' I cried.

'Oh, here! oh, here!' he shouted, motioning round the cuddy; 'dis is your room. No man of us come here.'

'And here I stop, tew,' said Abraham. 'No more of your forecastle for me, mates!'

'Nor for me!' rumbled Jacob.

'Do not say so!' exclaimed Helga, turning hastily to address them. 'Be advised. Do not interfere. Let Mr. Tregarthen have his way.'

'And I suppose,' I continued, running my eyes over the rows of faces till they settled on Nakier, 'that we shall be waited upon as usual, and that we shall be as well cared for as when Captain Bunting was alive?'

'Yaas, sah! yaas, sah!' said Nakier demonstratively, and Punmeamootty shouted:

'Me wait allee same upon you and de sweet lady. Me sabbee what you like. Me get dem room ready,' pointing to the mate's and the Captain's cabins.

I shook my head with a shudder, then said softly to Helga, whose gaze was bent on the table:

'Can you suggest anything further for me to say to them?'

'Nothing. Get them to take their oath.'

'Nakier,' I exclaimed, 'we consent to your proposals. Among us we will navigate this ship for you. But first you and your mates will swear by that Koran in which you believe—I suppose it *is* the Koran——'

'Oh, yaas, yaas!' he cried, and there was a general chorus of 'yaases.'

'You must swear by that sacred book of yours not to harm us; to be our friends; to serve us and do our bidding as though we were the officers of this ship. Explain this to your men, and let them take the oath in their and your country's fashion, and we shall be satisfied.'

On this he addressed them. I hear now his melodious voice and witness his animated handsome face as he poured forth his rich unintelligible syllables. It was difficult to look at the fellow and not believe that he was some prince of his own nation. There was nothing in his scarecrow clothes to impair the dignity of his mien and the grace of his motions. I could conceive of him as a species of

man-serpent capable of fascinating and paralyzing with his marvellous eyes, holding his victim motionless till he should choose to strike. His influence over the others was manifestly supreme, and I had no doubt whatever that the tragedy which had been enacted was his, and wholly his, by the claim of creation and command. While he talked I would here and there mark a dingy face with a look of expostulation in it. The lamp swinging fairly over the table yielded light enough to reveal expressions. When he had ceased there was a little hubbub of voices, a running growl so to speak of discontent. One cried out to him, and then another, and then a third, but in notes of expostulation rather than temper.

Helga, without turning her head, said to me:

'I expect they wish us to swear too. Your bare assurance does not satisfy them.'

The guess seemed a shrewd one, and highly probable, but the men's talk was sheer Hebrew to the four of us. Nakier listened, darting looks from side to side, then suddenly lifted both his hands in the most dramatic posture of denunciation that could be imagined, and hissed some word to them, whereupon every man fell as silent as though he had been shot. He picked up the volume and extended it to the fellow next him.

'Takee, takee,' he cried, speaking that we might understand. 'Lady, and you, sah, Misser Vise and Jacob my mate, this is the Mussulman oath we men now take. I speak not well your language, but dis is my speech in English of what you shall hear.' Then, composing his countenance and turning up his eyes till nothing gleamed but the whites of them in his dark visage, he exclaimed in a profoundly devotional tone and in accents as melodious as singing:

'In de name of Allah de most merciful, and de good Lord of all things, if break dis oath do I, den, O Allah, may I go to hell!'

He paused, then turned to the man who held the volume, who forthwith held the book at arm's length above his head and pronounced in his native tongue what we might suppose the oath that Nakier had essayed to make English of. This done, the book was handed to the next man, and so it went round, all in dead silence, broken only by the strange, wildly solemn accents of the oath-taker, and I noticed that the glittering eyes of Nakier rested upon every man as he swore, as though he constrained him to take the vow by his gaze.

Abraham and his mate looked on with open mouths, breathing deeply. The book came to Nakier. He was about to lift it, paused, and spoke to the fierce-looking

fellow that was called Ong-Kew-Ho, who immediately glided out of the cabin—none of these men seemed to walk: the motion of their legs resembled that of skaters. I was wondering what was to happen next, when the fellow who had been stationed at the wheel arrived. Nakier addressed him. Immediately he extended his arms and levelled his forefingers at us as the others had; then elevated the book and recited the oath.

'All this looks very honest,' I whispered to Helga.

Then Nakier took the oath, handed the volume to a man, and said something. Instantly every man's arms were pointed at us, with the index fingers touching, and a minute later all the men, saving Nakier, had quitted the cabin.

'You see, lady, it is allee right,' said he, smiling.

'Yes, we are satisfied,' she exclaimed, rising from her chair; but her eye caught the stain on the deck; an expression of horror worked in her face like a spasm, and she brought her hand to her breast with a half-stifled exclamation.

'When day come,' said Nakier, addressing Helga, 'we look at de chart and find out de place for you to steer we to.'

His bearing was still full of Eastern grace and courtesy. No expression entered his face to deform its beauty; yet somehow I seemed sensible of a subtle spirit or quality of command in the fellow, as though he was now disguising his sense of power and possession with difficulty. It was clear that he looked to Helga mainly, if not wholly, for what was to be done for them.

'You shall point out the spot you have in your mind,' said she.

'You sabbee navigation, sweet lady?'

'Among us,' she answered, with a motion of her hand that comprehended the two boatmen and myself, 'we shall be able to do all you require.'

He made a sort of salaam to her, and said, looking at Abraham: 'Who keep de watch?'

'Whose watch on deck is it?' I asked.

'The starboard's—moine,' answered Abraham, with an uneasy shuffling of his feet.

'Allee right, Mr. Vise; allee right! It is verree fine night. I go now to sleep,' said Nakier; and he went in his sliding, spirit-like fashion to the cuddy-door, and vanished in the blackness on the quarter-deck.

The four of us stood grouped at the head of that little table, staring at one another. Now that the coloured crew were gone, a sense of the unreality of what had happened possessed me. It was like starting from a nightmare, with the reason in one slowly dominating the horror raised by the hideous phantasmagoria of sleep.

'We must not seem to be standing here as though we were planning and plotting,' exclaimed Helga. 'Dark figures out in that shadow there are watching us.'

'That's right enough, miss,' said Abraham; 'but what's to be done?'

'Here stands a man,' cried Jacob hotly, striking his breast, 'as dorn't mean for to be carried to the Cape in a bloomin' wessel full o' bloody savages; and that's speaking straight!'

'Hush!' cried I. 'Soften those leather lungs of yours, will you?'

'Ain't there no firearms knocking about?' said Abraham.

'I hope not,' said Helga; 'we shall be able to manage without firearms!'

'What is in your mind?'

'An idea not yet formed,' she answered. 'Give me time to think. I believe that not only are our lives to be saved, but the vessel too!'

'Ha!' cried Abraham, with a thirsty look. 'It needs a sailor's lass to get such a fancy as that into her head! I'm a Cockney if I don't seem to see a salvage job here!'

But Jacob was staring at us gloomily.

'What I says is this,' he exclaimed, addressing us with his fists clenched: 'Here be three Englishmen and a gal with the heart of two men in her'—'Softly,' I interposed—'with the heart of two men in her,' he continued, with a shake of his fist; 'and what's forward? He-leven wisps of coloured yarn! He-leven heffigies with backbones separately to be broke like this!' He crooked his knee, and made as if he were breaking a stick across it. 'Are we,' he cried, with the blood mounting to his face and an expression of wrath sparkling in his eyes, 'are we

fower—three men and a young lady—to quietly sit down and wait to be murdered? or are we to handle 'em as if they was a pack of apes, to be swept below and smothered under hatches as a breeze o' wind 'ud blow a coil of smoke along?'

'Lower your voice, man!' I whispered. 'What do you want?—to court the death that you bolted aloft to escape?'

'What's to prevent us,' he continued, muffling his tone, though the fierceness of his temper hissed in every breath he expelled—'what's to prevent us a-doing this? More than the watch are below; three or fower may be on deck. Ain't the scuttle forrards to be clapped down over the forecastle, where they lie safe as if they was at the bottom of a well a hundred foot deep? Ain't that to be done? And if the three or fower that's knocking about on deck aren't to be handled by us three men—good-noight!'

He rounded his back upon us in sheer contempt of passion.

'We may do better than that,' said Helga.

'You're for supposing that they ain't going to keep a bright look-out, mate,' said Abraham. 'See here! What good's to be done, these here hands you'll find equal to,' smiting first his left, then his right knuckles; 'but s'elp me Moses I'm not here to be killed. Them chaps are born knife-stickers. Touch one, and you're groaning at your length on deck, with a mortal wound in your witals. And if what we do ain't complete—if so be they're wan too many for us—and it's eleven to three, remember *that*, mate—what's to happen? Ask yourself the question! For the lady's sake, I'm for caution.'

'We must not remain debating here,' said I. 'They believe us sincere. There are eyes watching us, as Miss Nielsen says. This holding a council is not going to reassure them. If you object to keeping a look-out, Abraham, I'll take charge.'

'I will keep you company,' said Helga.

'No, no!' cried Abraham. 'It's moy watch, and Oi'll keep it.'

He went clumsily, and with a bewildered manner, to the companion-steps.

'I'll remain along wi' ye, Abey,' said Jacob. 'Arter what I saw, as I stood at the wheel—the poor chap's cry—the way they chucked him overboard——' He buried his eyes in his coat-sleeve. 'The cussed murderers!' he exclaimed, lifting

his face, and looking savagely around.

'Come!' cried Abraham, 'if ye *mean* to come! What's your temper agoing to do for us?'

'I'll relieve you at four o'clock,' said I, looking at the timepiece, the hands of which stood at a quarter before two.

The men went on deck, and turning down the lamp—for the revelation of the light served as a violent irritant to the nerves on top of the fancy of the secret, fiery-eyed observation of us without—I seated myself beside Helga on a locker to whisper and to think.

The girl and I had passed through some evil, dark, and dangerous hours since we first came together in that furious Saturday night's gale; but never was the worst of them all comparable to this middle-watch through which we sat, for hard upon two hours of it, in gloom, in the ocean silence that lay upon the barque, imagining the movement of dark shapes in the blackness that came like a wall to the cabin-door, and the gleam of swiftly receding eyes peering at us through the cabin skylight. Regularly through the stillness sounded the combined tread of Abraham and his mate, over our heads, with sometimes a halt that almost startled the ear, while we could clearly catch the grumbling growling of their conversation as they passed the skylight on their way to and fro.

Yet, strangely enough—I am speaking for myself—the horror of the double assassination did not lie upon my spirit with the deadening weight I should have imagined as the effect of so shocking, sudden, and bloody a tragedy. That which might have been acute horror was subdued into little more than a dull and sickening consternation by perception of our own peril. Yet I would look at those berths lying on either side the cuddy front, as though from either one or the other of them the figure of the Captain or his mate must stalk! The stain upon the cabin-deck lay black as ink against the Captain's door. To think that *that* was all of him his barque now contained!

We sat whispering about the unhappy creature and his wretched subordinate; then our talk went to other matters. I told Helga we need not question that the intention of the crew was to cast the vessel away upon some part of the South African coast, near enough to Cape Town to enable them to trudge the distance, but too remote from civilization for the movements of the barque to be witnessed. That was their resolution, I said: I would swear to it as though it had been revealed to me. That they would never suffer us three men to land alive we

might be as sure as that they had slaughtered Bunting and his mate.

'Their oath counts for nothing, you think?' said she.

I answered, 'Nothing: they would value their lives above their oath. Not likely they would suffer us to testify to their crime.' Under the serpent-fair exterior of Nakier lay as passionless a capacity of murder as ever formed the mechanical instinct of any deadly beast or reptile.

'His eye,' I said, 'will never be off us.' Even as we whispered, his gaze, or that of another subtle as himself, might be upon us. He was the one to fear; and this carried me into asking, 'What is to be done?'

Yet, before the hands of the clock were upon the hour of four, we knew what was to be done. It was wholly Helga's scheme. Her brain had planned it all; but it was not until she spoke and delivered her plot bit by bit that I understood the reason of her silence while I had been feverishly whispering my fears, talking of the Captain, of Nakier, of the treachery of the Malay and Cingalese miscreants, and asking, as one might think aloud, 'What is to be done?'

We went on deck at four; it was the darkest hour of the night, but very quiet. I bade Abraham and the other man go forward and turn in, as had heretofore been their custom.

'Not a word!' I cried, in swift response to the first of Jacob's remonstrance. 'I cannot speak here. There are thirsty ears at the wheel. We have planned that long before this time to-morrow the barque shall be our own, with nothing more for you to do than to calculate the value of the salvage. I'll find an early chance to explain—but not here! not *now*! Forward with you both; for our lives depend upon the fellows believing that we have confidence in them.'

This I spoke as rapidly as intelligibility would permit, and, with Helga, drew away from them, moving towards the wheel. They hung as though staring and deliberating a few moments, then, without a word, went forward.

I spoke pleasantly to the fellow at the helm—what man it was I could not see—said that the vessel's course was the right navigation for the South African coast, and so forth. He answered me throatily, with a note of satisfaction in his thick speech, and then Helga and I fell to quietly pacing the deck.

We took great care to speak low; so nimble and ghostly were the movements of this coloured crew, that it was impossible to tell where a man might be lying

listening and hidden. Twice I beheld the flitting of a shadow in the obscurity round about the mainmast, and all the while I walked I was again and again casting a look behind me.

It seemed an eternity ere the cold gray of the dawn hovered in the east. The first sight the bleak and desolate light revealed was a patch of dark crimson abreast of the companion, close against the rail, marking the spot where the unhappy mate had been stabbed. The barque stole glimmering out to the daylight, lifting her ashen canvas with a gloom about the deck where the forecastle ended, as though the blackness of the night had been something tangible, and the lingering shadows betwixt the rails fragments and tatters of it. I swept the sea-line. The ocean was a gray desert floating in thin lines of swell which made it resemble a vast carpet stirred by a draught of wind. But the small breeze of the previous evening was still with us, and the broad bows of the vessel broke the water into wrinkles fine-drawn as piano-wire, as she swam forwards, slowly rolling.

Three of the crew sat squatting like Lascars against the long-boat. I called, and they instantly sprang to their feet and came aft.

'Get scrapers,' said I, 'and work that stain out of the deck as fast as you can move your arms.'

They sprang forwards, returned with the necessary tools, and in a minute were on their knees scraping violently. With a dreadful feeling of sickness of heart I rejoined Helga at the other end of the deck.

The sun rose: the morning was to be a bright one; the heavens went, in a clear tropic blue, into the south and west, and in the north-east the clouds, like a scattering of frosted silver, hung high and motionless—mere pearly feathers or vapour, to be presently absorbed. Helga went below, to her cabin under the deck. When I asked her if she did not feel timid at the idea of penetrating those gloomy depths alone, she smiled, and, merely saying, 'You have called me brave, but you do not believe me so!' she left me.

It was shortly after seven o'clock that I spied Nakier standing in the galley-door, talking to someone within. I called to him: he immediately knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and slipping the inch of sooty clay into his breast, approached me. His salute was full of respect, and he surveyed me with eyes so gentle and so cordial, that one looked to see the engaging tenderness of his heart overflowing his face in smiles. So much for appearances! The most poisonous-fanged rogue of them all in that barque, full of coloured wretches made miscreants and

murderers of by Captain Joppa Bunting's theories of conversion, might have passed to every eye as one of the very few sweet-souled men in this great world of wrong-headed humanity!

'Send Abraham to me,' said I, in the civilest manner I could command. 'It is his watch below, but I desire his presence and help while I overhaul the Captain's cabin for charts, for instruments of navigation, and so forth.'

He sought to veil, by drooping his lids, the keen glance he shot at me.

'Yaas, I send Misser Vise to you, sah,' said he; 'but first I would like to speakee about dat place we sail to. We have agree, and we ask you,' he continued with a smile that put an expression of coaxing into his handsome face, 'to agree allee same with us to sail for Mossel Bay. It is a very good bay, and it have a nice little town.'

'Yes,' said I; 'and when we get there, what do you mean to do with the ship?'

'Oh, we allee go ashore,' he answered.

He then asked me if I knew where Mossel Bay was. I answered that I had never heard of the place, but that if it was down on the charts we should undoubtedly be able to carry the barque to it. I then again requested him to send Abraham aft, that he and I and the young lady might examine the contents of the Captain's cabin, ascertain the situation of the ship when observations were last taken, and confer as to the course to be steered. I thought he hesitated for an instant, but, with true Malay swiftness of resolution that scarcely gave me time to note the hang of the mind in him, he exclaimed: 'I will send Misser Vise, sah,' and went forward.

In a few minutes Abraham arrived. He was speedily followed by Jacob, who hung about in the waist, looking wistfully aft. He, however, was to be talked to afterwards, for the policy of the three of us was to keep as separate as possible, coming together only under such excuse as I had now invented. The men who formed the watch on deck were 'loafing about,' to use the expressive vulgarism, one lounging against the bulwark-rail with another talking to him; here a fellow squatting like a Hindoo blowing a cloud, there a couple patrolling ten feet of deck, their arms folded upon their breasts. There was no gesticulation, no excitement, nothing of the swift fierce whispered conversation significant with the flashing of the askant glance that had been noticeable down to the dusk of the previous evening. Nakier paced the weather-side of the forecastle. I never

once caught him looking our way, yet I could *feel* that the fellow had us in his eye as fully as though his stare was a level one.

'Abraham,' said I, 'I have sent for you under the pretence of helping me to overhaul the dead skipper's stock of nautical appliances. My real motive is to create an opportunity to acquaint you with the plot Miss Nielsen and I settled between us while we were in the cuddy. Don't look knowing, man! Put on as honest and stupid a Deal beach air as you can manufacture.'

I called to Nakier.

'The barque will want watching. Step aft and keep a look-out while we are below, will you?' and, followed by Abraham, I entered the cuddy.

CHAPTER VI.

HELGA'S PLOT.

Before summoning Helga, I resolved to take a peep at the berths, lest there should be some sight in one or the other of them too shocking for her to behold. I was made to think of this by the great bloodstain on the deck close against the cabin-door. Its true complexion showed in the daylight. Abraham again backed away on seeing it; but time was precious. This was an opportunity to make the most of, and pushing open the door, I peered in. It was as I might have conjectured. The Captain had been assassinated by twenty strokes of the fellows' knives as he lay in his bunk asleep. Not one, not half a dozen stabs could have made such a horror of the bedclothes and the square of carpet on the deck as we gazed at. It was not an interior fit for Helga to enter.

I looked into the mate's berth, and found it as the man had left it—the blanket lying as it had been tossed when he arose. There was nothing frightful here; but our business lay in the Captain's cabin, and, full of loathing, I re-entered the horrible room and shut the door.

'A piteous sight! a piteous sight, sir!' exclaimed Abraham, looking about him in a stupefied way, and biting upon his under-lip to moisten it.

'Now attend!' said I. 'Collect your wits, for our stratagem signifies life or death to us.'

It took me but a few minutes to communicate Helga's plan. He grasped the thing with sailorly promptitude, nodding eagerly, with the blood returning to his cheeks to my hurried whispering; and when I had made an end and drew back to mark his judgment in his face, he struck his thigh a mighty blow, but said in a voice cold with resolution, despite his countenance being all awork with agitation:

'It will do, sir. It can't fail. It is only the getting 'em together; but it's to be done with a little patience.'

'Now,' said I, 'let us see what is here. Will the poor fellow have had a revolver?'

But we searched in vain for such a weapon. With hasty, desperate hands, never knowing but that at the next moment Nakier might enter, or some probing yellow face stare in upon us through the little window that overlooked the quarter-deck, we ransacked the lockers, explored a large black sea-chest, examined the shelves—to no purpose.

'He was too good a Christian man,' said Abraham hoarsely, 'to own a pistol. Had he been a Nova Scotiaman there'd be veapons enough here to rig out a regiment of the line vith.'

'It cannot be helped,' said I, keenly disappointed nevertheless, for I had counted upon finding a revolver, scarcely doubting that a man in charge of such a ship's company as these coloured fellows formed would go to sea well armed.

With all haste possible we transferred to the mate's cabin a bag of charts, a couple of sextants, a chronometer, and other matters of a like sort, and then with sickened hearts closed the door upon that tragic interior of the Captain's berth. I looked through the contents of the bag, and found a large blue-backed chart of South Africa, with marginal illustrations of the principal ports, harbours and headlands.

'This will do,' said I, and rolling it up, I put it under my arm, and, accompanied by Abraham, stepped through the cuddy door.

My eye once more as I passed fell upon the dreadful stain ingrained in the plank of the deck, and observing Punmeamootty speaking with another man a little forward of the mainmast, I was about to call and order him to scrape out the odious shocking blotch. But at the same instant it crossed my mind to let it be: it was a detail to fit into our stratagem, and I whispered the fancy to Abraham as we quitted the cuddy. I believed that all this while Helga was below in her cabin, and I was leaning over the little hatch that led to our quarters to call to her, when she pronounced my name from the deck overhead, and on looking up I saw her standing at the brass rail with Nakier.

'Shall Oi go forward an' get my breakfast or keep along with you, Mr. Tregarthen?' said Abraham.

'Keep with me for a little time,' I answered, and he followed me on to the poop.

Nakier's fine eyes glowed, and his face was lighted up with an expression of admiration and pleasure. It was manifest at the first glance that Helga had not

spared her simple pretty arts in conversing with him.

Her first words to me were:

'Nakier has been talking to me about his native country. Oh, what a happy land of flowers and birds and a thousand other delights must it be!' She clasped her hands as though in rapture, and added: 'I shall hope some of these days to visit that shining country.'

'This is all very clever and happily devised, and well done,' thought I, stealing a peep at Nakier, who was steadfastly regarding with undissembled admiration the girl's sweet fresh face, that was faintly flushed by her enactment; 'but if we three men should be made away with——' I choked off the hurry of ugly fancies that swarmed on top of the thought of that dark princely-mannered villain falling in love with her, and exclaimed:

'Yes, the country of the Malays is a paradise, I believe! Here, Nakier, is a chart of South Africa.'

We went to the skylight to spread it.

'Now,' said I, 'where is this Mossel Bay that you were speaking about?'

I pored upon the chart in a posture of eager interest. He immediately pointed to the place with a forefinger as delicately shaped as a woman's.

'Ha!' said I. 'Yes; that is to the eastward of Agulhas. See,' I continued, pointing to one of those marginal illustrations I have referred to, 'here is a picture of the bay. It is a long walk to Cape Town!' I continued, looking round at Nakier.

'Oh no; plenty coach, plenty horse, plenty ox,' he responded, showing his teeth and speaking without the least hesitation—a quality of assurance that made me hopeful, for it was everything indeed that he should believe us credulous enough to suppose that Mossel Bay was the destination he had in his mind.

'Here is the picture, Helga!' said I. 'D'ye see it, Abraham? A fine open roadstead, not to be easily missed by you and Miss Nielsen. There are a couple of excellent sextants and a good chronometer below, and all necessary instruments for a safe navigation.'

'Oy, a first-class bay, and no mistake!' exclaimed Abraham.

Bending his squint upon the chart in a musing way, he scored along the line of

coast with his square-cut thumb, as though calculating courses and distances. Miserable as I felt, I could have burst into a laugh at the face he put on.

'Oi've long had a notion,' said he, still squinting at the chart, 'of wisiting these 'ere foreign parts. Oi've heered tell of Cape Town as a proper city, plenty o' grapes a-knocking about and sherry vines and the likes of them drinks to be had for the asting, everything A1 and up to the knocker. But see here, Nakier,' said he, in a wonderfully familiar and friendly, shipmate-like sort of way. 'Oi'm a pore man, and so is my mate Jacob. Tell ye what Oi'm a-thinking of: ain't there no chance of our taking up a few pound for this here run?'

His apparent earnestness must have deceived a subtler eye than ever Nakier could have brought to bear on him. I uttered a word or two, as though I would remonstrate.

'You and me, Misser Vise, will speak on dat by-um-bye. We allee want money, and we get it,' responded Nakier, nodding significantly.

I partly turned away, as though there was nothing in this conversation to interest me.

'Ye don't know what hovelling is, Nakier, Oi suppose,' said Abraham. 'This here wessel is what we should call a blooming good job down our way——'

I interrupted him, fearful lest he should overdo his part: 'You might go forward and get some breakfast now, Abraham. You can relieve me here when you have finished the meal. Is there anything more you wish to know that this chart can tell us about, Nakier?'

'No, sah. Now you sabbee where Mossel Bay is, it is allee right.'

Abraham was descending the poop ladder. Under pretence of giving him the chart to replace in the mate's berth, I whispered, 'Mind you tell Jacob everything,' and then walked aft with Helga, leaving Nakier to go forward.

Throughout that morning the weather continued wonderfully brilliant and quiet. The heavens were a sweep of blue from line to line, and the sun as hot as we might have thought to find it ten degrees farther south. But shortly after ten o'clock the weak wind, that had been barely giving the *Light of the World* steerage way, entirely failed; the atmosphere grew stagnant with the dry, parched hollowness that one sometimes notices before a storm, as though Nature sucked in her cheeks before expelling her breath through her feverish lips. I put my head

into the skylight to look at the barometer, not knowing but that there might be dirty weather at the heels of this passing spell of sultry silence; but the mercury stood high, and the lens-like sharpness of the line of the horizon along with the high fine-weather blue was as ample a confirmation of its promise as one could hope to find. By eleven o'clock the calm was broken by a delicate rippling of wind out of the north-east—the first fanning of the north-east trade-wind I took it to be. The yards were trimmed to the change by Abraham, who followed on with some orders about the foretopmast-studdingsail. I was on deck at the time, and hearing this, rose hastily and thrust past him, saying betwixt my teeth, so vexed was I by his want of foresight:

'Keep all fast with your studdingsail gear, you fool! Are we three Englishmen a line-of-battle ship's company? Think before you bawl out!'

He saw his blunder, and, after a leisurely well-acted view of the sea, as though the weather had raised a debate in his mind, he called out to the three or four fellows who were clambering aloft to rig the boom out on the foreyard:

'Never mind about that there stun'-sail! Ye can lay down, moy lads!' and he bawled to me (who had returned aft), by way, no doubt, of excusing himself to Nakier, who was on the forecastle, and who appeared to be keeping a keen look-out upon the ship on his own account, 'There's no use, Oi think, Mr. Tregarthen, aworriting about stun'-sails ontill this here breeze hardens. It'll only be keeping the men agoing for no good.'

'Unless we are speedy,' I whispered to Helga, as we stood within earshot of the helmsman, 'that man Abraham will ruin us. Think of the fellow piling canvas at such a time! What a curse is consequentiality when out of season! Here is a poor, miserable Deal boatman with the privilege of ordering a few black men about, and he doesn't know how to make enough of his rights.'

From time to time I would gaze mechanically round the sea in search of a ship, but with no notion of finding encouragement in the gleam of a sail or in the shadowing of a steamer's smoke. My hope lay in a very different direction. But custom is strangely strong on shipboard, and I continued to look, though I was without the wish to see.

Shortly before noon I fetched the two sextants, one of which I gave to Abraham and the other to Helga. The boatman seemed hardly to know what to do with the instrument; it was a new, very handsome sextant, sparkling with brass and details of telescope, coloured glass, and the like, and bore as little resemblance to the

aged, time-eaten quadrant that had gone down with the *Early Morn* as to the cross-staff of the ancient mariner. I marked him putting it to his eye, and then fumbling with it, and, noticing several fellows forward, Nakier among them, attentively watching us, I called to him softly:

'Keep it at your eye, man! Let them believe that you thoroughly understand it!'

'Roight ye are,' he answered, putting the instrument to his face; 'but who the blazes is agoing to bring the sun into the middle o' such a muddle o' hornamentation as this here?'

The attention of the men, however, was in reality fixed upon Helga. She stood at the rail within full view of them, and there was, indeed, novelty enough in the sight to account for their staring, apart from the hope they had of her as the one that was to navigate their ship to the coast on which, as I took it, they meant to wreck her. Her well-fitting dress of dark serge showed no signs of wear as yet. No posture that she might have artfully adopted could so happily express the charms of her figure as this, when she turned her face sunwards, with the shining sextant raised to her eye. The delicate pale gold of her short hair was the right sort of tint to fascinate the dusky gaze that was fastened upon her. In her conversations with me she had made little or nothing of her knowledge of navigation, but it was easy to see in an instant's glance that she was a practised hand in the art of coaxing the sun's limb to the sip of the sea-line.

I spied Nakier forward watching her with an air of breathless interest. He and the rest of them might have doubted her capacity, knowing of it only from such off-hand talk as Punmeamootty had been able to collect and repeat from the cabin table. But now she was justifying their expectations, and by this time the whole of the crew—ten of them, with Jacob in the waist and a Malay at the wheel—were staring as one man; the cook from the door of his galley, Nakier on the forecastle swinging off from a rope, the rest of them in groups here and there.

'It is eight bells,' cried Helga in her clear voice, accentuated, as it always was, with a faint harshness of Scandinavian articulation.

'Height bells!' roared Abraham, though it might have been midnight to him, so far as the indications of *his* sextant went.

'Eight bell!' piped the melodious voice of Nakier, like a belated echo of Helga's cry; and the chimes floated along the quiet decks.

I told Abraham to go below to the mate's cabin, and bring materials of ink, paper, log-book, and so forth, to enable Helga to work out the sights; also the chronometer and the Nautical Almanack. This was a part of our plot; otherwise, as you may suppose, the chronometer was not a thing to be carried here and there, least of all by such hands as Abraham's. The men were now passing in and out of the galley, conveying their dinner of smoking beef and ship's 'duff' into the forecastle. They talked eagerly, and with a gratulatory tone. That Helga had been able to find out what o'clock it was by the sextant, was the fullest warranty of her sufficiency as a navigator the poor wretches' ignorant souls could have demanded.

Nakier remained on the forecastle, watching us. I summoned him with the motion of my forefinger, and he came rapidly gliding to the poop.

'I wish you to remain here,' said I, 'while Miss Nielsen calculates the barque's position, that you may be able to tell the rest of the men they are in friendly hands, and that we look for the same friendly behaviour from you all.'

He answered with a motion of his hand, that was as expressive as a Frenchman's gesture.

'It would have been more convenient for the lady,' I continued, 'to have made her calculations in the Captain's cabin, but——' I looked him full in the face. He did not seem to understand. 'That berth is not fit for her to enter.'

'Ha!' he exclaimed, 'dat shall be put right. I have forgot.'

'By-and-bye. No hurry now. Tell Punmeamootty to bring us our dinner here. Miss Nielsen does not care to use the cuddy. She is a young lady—impressionable—you understand me, Nakier? When all is made straight the feeling will pass with her. But for the present——'

I broke off as Abraham arrived, bringing with him the articles I had despatched him to procure.

'Whose trick at the wheel is it?' I asked the boatman carelessly. 'It is noon, and that man yonder has been at the helm since ten.'

'It'll be Jacob's, sir. Oi allow he's waiting to finish his dinner.'

'No, no,' said I, 'that's not true ship's discipline. Fair must be fair aboard us,' and with some demonstration of warmth in my manner, I went to the poop rail and

bawled for Jacob to come aft. The man promptly made his appearance, and the moment he had gripped the spokes of the wheel the ginger-coloured fellow who had been steering fled along the decks for his dinner, fleet as a hare with hunger. Abraham, with pencil and paper in hand, leaned upon the companion-cover while he pretended to be lost in calculating. Nakier and I stood looking on at Helga, who was seated on one side the skylight, the lid of which, being closed and lying flat, provided her with a table on which stood the chronometer, the volumes, the charts, and the other appliances she needed. She knew exactly what to do, and worked out her problems with a busy face and the blue of her eyes sweetened into violet by the shadow of her lashes. Deeply worried, miserably anxious as I was, on the eve of a project the failure of which was bound to signify an inhuman butchery of the three of us by the dark-skinned creatures we designed to betray, I could still find heart for admiration of the wonderful heroism of this girl. She was actively to share in our enterprise, and if failure followed, her doom might be even more fearful than ours; yet had her face been of marble carved into an incomparable counterfeit of a girl's countenance intent on a bit of arithmetic and nothing more, its passionlessness, its marvellous freedom from all expression of agitation, could not have been completer.

When she had completed her reckoning, she opened the chart which bore Captain Bunting's 'prickings,' as it is termed, and with rules and pencil continued the line to the situation of the ship at noon.

'That is where we are at this moment,' she exclaimed, pointing to the chart.

Nakier, with looks of astonishment and delight, peered.

'What d'ye make it, miss?' called Abraham.

She gave him the latitude—what it was has wholly escaped me.

'Roight,' he shouted, tearing up his bit of paper.

'Take these things below, Abraham,' said I, 'and then get your dinner. When you have done, come aft and take charge of the barque for half an hour. Miss Nielsen wishes to go to her cabin, and I am no sailor to be left alone with this craft.'

'Send Punmeamootty here with something for us to eat, if you please, Nakier.'

He made a soft salaaming bow, and quitted us with shining eyes and a highly pleased face. Presently the steward approached us with some cold salt beef, biscuit, and a bottle of wine. He spread a cloth upon the skylight, and then

brought a couple of chairs from the cabin. While he was doing this I slipped into the mate's berth and took a tract-chart of the world from the bag and returned with it. I opened and pretended to examine it with anxious attention, speaking in an aside to Helga in a grumbling, doubting voice, and with a shake of my head, while Punmeamootty stood by waiting to learn if we had further orders. I told him we should require nothing more, and then, rolling up the chart, feigned to attack the repast before us. But as to *eating*!—not for ten times the value of this *Light of the World* and her cargo could I have swallowed a morsel. Helga munched a biscuit and drank a little wine, eyeing me collectedly, with often a smile when my glance went to her.

'What a heart beats in you!' I cried gently, for it was impossible to know but that some wriggling, nimble-heeled coloured skin had slipped into the cabin, and was hanging motionless close under us, with his ear at the skylight. 'But it is not too late even yet to reconsider. I can do without you.'

'Not so well as with me.'

'But if we fail——'

'We shan't fail.'

'If we fail,' I continued, 'they may spare you as not apparently in the plot, and they will spare you the more readily, and use you well too, since they must be helpless without you to navigate them.'

'Hush!' she whispered. 'The stratagem will be the surer for my presence. And what is the danger? There can be none if we manage as we have arranged.'

'When d'ye reckon on starting on this here job, Mr. Tregarthen?' called Jacob from the wheel.

I shook my fist as a hint to him to hold his tongue. I waited a few minutes, during which I pretended to be busy with my knife and fork. The yellow-faced cook stood in the galley door smoking; there were two fellows beyond him conversing close against the fore-castle hatch. The rest of the seamen were below at their dinner. I now opened the chart; Helga came round to my side, and the pair of us fell to pointing and motioning with our hands over the chart as though we were warmly discussing a difficulty. I raised my voice and shook my head, exclaiming: 'No, no! Any sailor will tell you that the prevailing gales off Agulhas are from the east'ard;' and continued in this fashion, delivering

meaningless sentences, always very noisily, and with a great deal of gesticulation, while Helga acted a like part. The three fellows forward watched us steadfastly.

Just then Abraham rose out of the forecastle hatch and approached the poop in a strolling, rolling gait, carelessly filling his pipe as he came, and sending the true 'longshore leisurely look at the sea from side to side. A couple of fellows followed him out of the hatch, entered the galley for a light, as I supposed, and emerged smoking. Helga and I still feigned to be wrangling. Then Abraham joined us, and after listening a minute or two, raised his voice with a wrangling note in it also.

'Come, Helga,' I whispered; 'this fooling has lasted long enough. Now for it, and may God shield us! Abraham, stand by, my lad! Keep your eye forward!'

I had courted a few occasions of peril in my time, and knew what it was to have death close alongside of me for hour after hour; but then my blood was up, there was human life to be saved, and, outside that consideration, there was small opportunity for thought. It was otherwise now, and I own that my heart felt cold as stone as I advanced to the forecastle with Helga. I prayed that my cheeks would not betray my inward perturbation. I did not greatly fear for the girl. Though we should fail, I believed her life would be saved, horrible as the conditions of preservation *might* prove to her. It was otherwise with me. Let but a suspicion of my intention enter the minds of the men, and I knew that in the space of a pulse or two I must be a corpse pierced by every knife in that vessel's forecastle.

As I approached the hatch that led to the quarters of the crew, Nakier came out of it. I suppose that the fellows who had been watching us called down to him, and that he came up to gather what the discussion on the poop might be about. He looked astonished by our presence in that forepart of the ship, and there was a mingling of puzzlement and of cunning in his eyes as he ran them over us.

'I cannot satisfy myself that Mossel Bay is a safe and easy destination for this vessel.'

'It was settle, sah,' he exclaimed quickly.

'There are more accessible ports on the South African coast. What are the views of your crew?'

'Dey are all of my 'pinion, sah.'

'The matter has not been discussed in their presence. Why do you wish to carry us round Agulhas? Besides, do not you know that there are ships of war at Simon's Bay, and that there is every chance of our falling in with one of her Majesty's cruisers off that line of coast you wish us to sail round?'

By this time the few men on deck gathered about us, and were listening eagerly with their necks stretched and their eyes, like blots of ink upon ovals of yellow satin, but fire-touched, steadfast upon me.

'I do not agree with Mr. Tregarthen, Nakier,' said Helga. 'I believe there is nothing to fear from our sailing round the Cape. He speaks of the heavy seas of the Southern Ocean, and of strong easterly winds. It is not so.'

'No, no,' he cried, with a passionate motion of the head; 'no easter wind dis time ob year. All fine-wedder sailing; beautiful smooth sea, allee same as now.'

'Now, see here,' said I, with a note of imperativeness in my speech. 'I have a right to express an opinion on this matter, and my contention is, that it is ridiculous to sail round to Mossel Bay, when you may get ashore for your walk to Cape Town on this side of the stormy headland of Agulhas.'

The fellow's eyes sparkled with irritation and mischief as he looked at me.

'Abraham and his mate are both of my way of thinking,' I went on. 'The lady, on the other hand, has no objection to Mossel Bay. Here we are, then, undecided as yet. Do you follow me?' He nodded his head sideways, as much as to say, 'Go on!' 'The four of us, however, will agree to this. The chart gives you a view of South Africa. Let all hands assemble, saving those two men aft there, who are willing to abide by your decision. Let me show them this chart and explain my ideas to them. If after I have been heard, you and your men still insist upon our carrying this vessel to Mossel Bay, it shall be done.'

'Where can we lay the chart?' said Helga.

'Is there a table in your forecastle?' I asked, sending a look at the little hatch which yawned close by.

'Yaas, sah,' answered Nakier, glancing from Helga to the cuddy, as if he could not understand us.

I met his eyes with a shake of my head, as though I could read his thoughts, and, approaching him by a stride, whispered: 'Not in the cuddy. You know why. I must have her by my side if we are to fairly argue this difficulty.'

'I can easily descend,' said Helga, stepping to the fore-castle hatch to look down. 'I want to see the men's quarters, Nakier. I am as much a sailor as any of you, and have slept in a hammock.'

The man's gaze glowed with the admiration I had noticed in it when she worked out the navigation problems. Had he been the subtlest-witted of his race, what could he have witnessed in this desire of the girl and me to enter the fore-castle to excite his suspicion? The other poor dusky fools, standing by with tawny, orange, or primrose faces, wrinkled their repellent masks with sailor-like grins of expectation; for whatever be the colour of Jack's skin at sea, the least excitement, the least divergement from the miserable monotony of his life, is a delight to him.

'Shall I go first?' said I.

Helga uttered a clear laugh. 'I should be ashamed,' she answered, 'not to be able to enter a ship's fore-castle without help;' and so saying, she put her little foot upon the first of the pieces of wood nailed against the bulkhead and serving as steps, and descended. I followed, bidding Nakier, as I entered the hatch, to order every mother's son of his crew to attend, since it was a question for all hands, and their decision was to be final.

It was a time of emotions and sensations, and memory recalls but little more. I remember that one after another, in response to Nakier's call, the men who were on deck dropped below, till the fore-castle was full of dusky, grotesquely attired shapes. The daylight streamed down through the oblong yawn of hatch. The flame of a slush-lamp charged the interior with an atmosphere of greasy smoke. Some bunks went on either hand, and a few hammocks dangled from the upper deck. There was a square table fixed to the stout after-bulkhead that divided this compartment from the hold. The men seemed to be without other wearing apparel than that they stood up in. I saw no sea-chests, no bags, merely here and there a shoe, a cap, a sou'-wester, an oilskin smock dangling at a nail. The murmur of the water, broken by the stealthily sliding stem, penetrated the stillness with a subdued sound of hissing like the swift respiration of the men, who gathered about Helga and me as we stood at the table with the chart open before us. Hard by the table was a stove, the chimney of which, in a zigzag,

pierced the deck, showing its head well out of the way, close against the hollow under the top-gallant forecastle, where the windlass was.

Pressing my forefinger upon the chart, the curling corners of which were held down by Nakier on the one hand and Helga on the other, I fell to explaining my views, as I chose to call them, meanwhile looking round to observe that all hands of the Malays and Cingalese were present—for the creatures had a trick of coming and going like shadows. I bade them all listen, looking into one face after another, and I can see them now, shouldering one another and eagerly bending forwards—a strange, gloomy huddle of discoloured countenances flashful with eyes, and of many expressions. Some of them barely understood English, apart from the plain sea-going terms, and these frowned down upon the chart, or at me, in their effort to understand my meaning. Upon every man's left hip was strapped the inevitable sheath-knife of the sailor, accessible in a twist of the wrist, and my breath for a little while grew laboured, while I cursed myself for not having acted upon the first motion of my mind after Nakier had laid the capful of naked blades at Helga's feet.

'See here, now!' I exclaimed, addressing the men generally: 'judge of the time and leagues we might be able to save by making for St. Helena Bay, or say Saldanha Bay, instead of Mossel Bay. Here is Simon's Town, and in this bight, as all of you know, lie several of her Majesty's ships. Figure a cruiser requiring us to bring to, and sending a boat aboard us. What then?'

The few of the fellows who understood me breathed hard and looked at Nakier. One of them, with a Dutch accent, exclaimed:

'Boss! how far it be from Saldanha Bay to Cape Town?'

Nakier said something almost fiercely to him in his native tongue. The man responded in a dialect that certainly, to my ear, did not resemble Nakier's—but this might have been owing to the swinish thickness of his utterance—and, having spoken, he thrust one of his mates aside to get nearer to the table, and, putting his grimy thumb on the part of the chart where Simon's Bay was marked, he stared at Nakier, nodding with a vehemence that seemed a sort of fury in him—immediately afterwards rounding upon the others, and gesticulating with his hand to his neck, clearly signifying a halter.

'No, no!' cried Nakier.

'How far?—how far, boss?' shouted the other, addressing me.

'I cannot tell,' said I, 'without a pair of compasses. I forgot to bring those measuring instruments with me. I will fetch them—I will be back among you in a few minutes.'

Helga, with a well-acted start and look of alarm, said: 'You must not leave me alone here! Let me fetch the box!'

'Very good,' said I.

She lightly gained the deck, but even while she was making for the hatch I was covering her retreat by noisily talking and demonstratively pointing, so that every man's attention was fixed upon me.

I held the corner of the chart, which Helga had pinned down with her fingers, while I spoke; the chart was stiff, and had not been often used, and when you let go it rolled itself up into a funnel. I perceived that my reference to the British ships of war at Simon's Bay had taken a hold upon the imagination of a few of the fellows, and while I seemed to wait for Helga I made the most of this by asking the men if they could tell me what vessels were on that station, if they knew how often and in what direction they cruised, and then I said:

'Suppose on our arrival at Mossel Bay we find an English frigate or corvette there? Men, have you thought of that? It is not because I am innocent of the blood of the Captain and the mate who were assassinated last night that I wish to be boarded by a lieutenant and a dozen English sailors from a man-of-war on our arrival, wherever it may be, or on the high seas. Can I be sure of proving my innocence if I am charged with having had a hand in this crime?' I cried, looking defiantly at Nakier, and raising my voice. 'Would you come forward and say that you and your men were guilty, and that I and the lady and the two Englishmen were innocent? You know you would not!' I thundered, heavily striking the chart a thump with my clenched fist. 'Why, then, do you want to sail past this Simon's Bay? Is not this side of the coast safer, freer from the risks of falling in with a ship of war, and nearer by many miles to Cape Town than Mossel Bay?'

'How much near?—how much near, boss?' cried the man who had already asked this question.

'Here!' said I. 'Hold down this corner of the chart, will you, while I call to Mr. Wise to bring me the box of instruments? Miss Nielsen cannot find the things. Wise put the box away, and knows where it is.'

I left the table and stood under the hatch a moment to address a word to Nakier in that wild mad spirit of defiance that will often in the timidest mock at peril in the most terrible instant of it.

'Make your men understand,' I cried, 'that if we fall in with a man-of-war, every soul of them stands to be hanged by the neck until he is dead!'

As I said these words I sprang, caught the coaming of the hatch, gained the deck with another bound, and the next instant the slide of the hatch was swept in a roar through its grooves by the powerful hands of the two Deal boatmen.



CHAPTER VII.

FIRE!

'Well, and if this here ain't been a right-down sort of proper cajolin' job tew! Strike me bald, Mr. Tregarthen, if the hexecution of this here trepanning ain't vurth a gold medal, let alone the planning of it!' shouted Jacob.

I rose from my knees with my hand upon my heart, breathing short. The reaction from the intense mental strain of the preceding twenty minutes ran a feeling of swooning through my brain, but the fresh air and sense of safety speedily rallied me. Helga stood at the wheel, steering the barque. I flourished my arm to her, and she kissed her hand to me. Close against the securely covered hatch stood the two boatmen, and at either man's feet lay a heavy belaying-pin, which, as I knew by what had been preconcerted, had been gripped by their powerful fists ready for the first black head that might have followed me as I emerged.

'Never should ha' believed you could have compassed it!' exclaimed Abraham. 'Never could ha' supposed that such artful chaps as them darkies was so easy to be took in! A hay wan piece of acting, Mr. Tregarthen! No theayter show that e'er I've heard of or sat at ever came up to it!'

All was silent below. I had thought, on the hatch being thrust to, that the imprisoned devils would have fallen to beating and bawling. Not a sound! Were they accepting their fate with the resignation of the Mussulman? The scantling of the hatch-cover that secured them was of unusual thickness. When opened, the foremost lid slid back on top of the other, and when closed, as it now was, it was held fast to the coaming by a strong iron-hinged bar fitting to a staple in which lay a padlock. The after-lid was kept down by an iron batten, so that, once secured, the hatch-cover was in all respects as impenetrable from above or below as the deck itself. Nor were we under any apprehension that the immured men could find other means of escaping. The bulkhead of the forecastle was a massive wall of wood. There was, indeed, a little hatch right forward, by which the forepeak might be entered, but this forepeak was also stoutly bulkheaded, with the cargo in the hold coming hard against the division; and though the men should contrive to break through into the hold, the secured after-hatches would still as effectually bar the deck to them as though every mother's son lay

helplessly manacled in the bottom of the ship.

'Now,' said I, 'the poor wretches must not suppose we mean to starve them. Murderers though they be, Heaven knows one can't but pity them, seeing what the wrong was that drove them into crime. Hush, that I may catch their answer!'

I stepped over to the forecandle chimney, which, as I have already told you, pierced the planks close against the opening under the top-gallant deck. It stood as high as a man; my mouth was on a level with the orifice, and the zigzag funnel provided as excellent a speaking-tube as though designed for that and no other purpose.

'Below, there!' I cried through it, and thrice did I utter this summons before I received a response.

'What you wantchee?' floated up a reply—thin, reed-like, unreal, a tone not to be distinguished.

'I am hailing to let you know that we shall keep you liberally supplied with food and fresh water,' I shouted. 'Plenty of fresh air will blow down to you through this chimney. Take notice: you are securely imprisoned. There is no possibility of your escaping. At the same time, if you make the least effort to release yourselves we will leave you to starve below and to perish miserably with thirst.'

'What do you mean to do with us?' was the faint cry that followed my speech.

'That is our business,' I roared back. 'Keep you quiet, and you shall be well used!'

I waited for the voice to speak again, but all remained hushed, and I came away very well satisfied to know that Nakier, at all events, would understand my language and translate it to the others.

This plot had been so carefully prepared that we knew exactly what to do. Our first business was to shift the barque's helm and trim sail for the Canaries—the land that lay nearest to us—where, at Santa Cruz, we might count upon getting all the help we required. We briefly arranged that Jacob should keep watch at the hatch. At the first sound of disturbance below he was to call us. There was small need for such sentinelling, yet our fears seemed to find it necessary, at the outset at all events, for they were eleven to three, and we could not forget *that*, securely imprisoned as we knew them to be.

I went aft with Abraham. My brave little Helga, on my approach, let go the

wheel, and extended her hands. My love for her, that had been held silent in my heart by the troubles, the worries, the anxieties, the perils which had been pressing heavily upon us for many days, now leapt in me, a full and abounding emotion, and, taking her in my arms, I held her to me, and kissed her once, and yet again. Abraham, grasping a spoke of the wheel, swung off from it, giving us, with 'longshore modesty, his back, as he gazed steadfastly over the stern. She struggled for a moment, and was then quiet, trying to hide her blushing face against my shoulder.

'It must have come to this,' I whispered, 'sooner or later; and what is soonest is always best, my love, in such matters. You are mine by right of the poor old *Anine*; you are mine, Helga, by right of your father's commands to me.'

I kissed her again, released her, and she went to the rail and overhung it for a few minutes, while I waited, watching her.

'Now, dear heart,' said I, 'let us get the ship round, and you shall tell us what course to steer for Santa Cruz.'

From this moment we were too busy for a long while to think of sentiment. The barque was under all plain sail, and we were but three men to get the yards braced round. The wind was a very light breeze, the sea smooth and delicately crisped, the sky a pure azure, unblurred anywhere by so much as a feather-tip of cloud. Helga, still wearing a rosy face, but with the very spirit of happiness and hope radiant in her eyes—and no better sign of how it was with her heart could I have asked of her—fetched the chart, and, having determined the course, took the wheel from Abraham, and the three of us went to work with the braces. We sprang about in red-hot haste, since none of us liked the notion of leaving the hatch unwatched for even a few minutes. But two pairs of hands only could not have dealt without tedious toil with those yards.

According to Captain Bunting's reckoning, we had been in the latitude of Madeira on Tuesday the 31st of October, but, spite of our having been hove to during the fierce weather of November the 1st and 2nd, we had driven heavily to the southward, so that now on this afternoon of Friday, November 3rd, we computed our distance from the Canaries to be some hundred miles: I can but speak as my memory serves me, but these figures I believe fairly represent the distance. The light wind softly humming in our rigging out of the north-east would not suffer the barque to lie her course for the islands by a point or two, but this was a matter of little moment. We might surely count from one hour to

another now on heaving some sort of sail into sight, and in expectation of this we took the English ensign out of the locker and bent it on to the peak halliards with the jack down ready for hoisting when the moment arrived. Not that we expected that any merchantman we might fall in with would greatly help us. It was hardly to be supposed that a shipmaster would consent to receive a mutinous, murderous crew of eleven coloured men into his vessel. The utmost we could hope from a ship homeward bound like ourselves was the loan of a couple of men to assist us in navigating the barque to Funchal.

Indeed, the sense of our necessity in this way grew very strong in me after we had come to a pause in our labour of bracing the yards up, and were standing near the forecastle hatch pale with heat and wet with perspiration, and panting heavily: I say I grew mighty sensible of the slenderness of our little crew of three men and a girl—who, to be sure, in her boy's clothes would have been the nimblest of us all aloft, but who could do no service in that way in her woman's dress—when I sent my gaze up at the quiet breasts of sail softly swelling one upon another, and rising spire-like, and thought of how it must be with us should heavy weather set in, such a gale as we might be able to show no more than a close-reefed topsail to, unless the whole fabric of masts and canvas was to go overboard.

I said to Abraham: 'Don't you think we could safely trust a couple of those poor devils below—Punmeamootty, for example, and that tawny fellow, Mow Lauree? We're terribly short-handed.'

'Ay,' he answered, 'short-handed we are, as you say, sir; but trust e'er a one of 'em, arter the trick they've been sarved! Lord love 'ee! the first thing them two men 'ud do whensoever our backs should be tarned for a moment 'ud be to lift that hatch there. And then stand by!'

"Soides," exclaimed Jacob, 'this ere's to be a salvage job, and, as poor old Tommy 'ud ha' said, we don't want to make no more shares than the divisions what's already represented.'

I was not to have been influenced by Jacob's talk about shares; but Abraham's remark was to the point; it convinced me, and I dropped the subject, making up my mind to this—that, if the wind should freshen, there was nothing for it but to shorten sail as best we could, and leave what we could not deal with to blow away.

When our work of trimming yards was ended, I told Jacob to boil a quantity of

salt beef for the fellows below, that they might have rations to last them several days. We found a breaker stowed away in the long-boat, and this we filled with fresh water from the scuttle-butt, ready to hand through the hatch. I was very earnest in this work. It was easily imagined that the interior in which the men lay imprisoned would be desperately hot, with no more air to get to them than such as sulkily sank out of the listless breeze through the zigzag chimney, and with the planks of the deck above their heads like the top of an oven with the day-long pouring of the sun. And, miscreants as they were, villains as I have no doubt they would have ultimately proved themselves to us, I could not endure to think of them as athirst, and also tormented with fears that we intended to leave them to perish of that most horrible form of suffering.

Yet it would not do to make separate parcels of the provisions we intended for them. We must open the hatch at our peril while we lowered the food; and this was to be done once, and once only.

It was past five by the time that all was ready. Twice had we heard a sound of knocking in the hatchway; but I guessed that it signified a demand for water, and dared take no notice of it until we were prepared. The three of us—Helga being at the wheel—armed ourselves with a heavy iron belaying-pin apiece, and, stationing the boatmen at the hatch, I put my face against the mouth of the funnel and hailed the men through it. I was instantly answered:

'Yaas, yaas, sah! In the name of Allah, water!'

It was such another thin, reed-like voice as had before sounded, yet not the same. This time it might have been Nakier who spoke.

'We are going to give you water and food now!' I shouted. 'We will open the hatch; but only one man must show himself to receive the things. If more than one of you shows himself we will close the hatch instantly, and you will get no water. Do you understand me?'

'Yaas, yaas,' responded the voice, sounding in my ear as though it were half a mile distant. 'We swear by Allah only one man he show hisself.'

'Let that man be Punmeamootty!' I bawled.

I then returned to the hatch. Jacob, putting the belaying-pin into his coat pocket, stood abaft ready to rush the lid of the hatch to at a cry from me, while Abraham, on the left, hung, with poised weapon, prepared for the first hint of a scramble up

from below. I remember the look in his face: it was as though he were already fighting for his life. I slipped the padlock, withdrew the bar, and pushed the cover back some three or four inches. The glare on the deck blinded me when I peered down: the interior seemed as black as midnight to my eyes.

'Are you there, Punmeamootty?' I cried.

I heard a faint 'Yaas,' pronounced in a subdued, terrified tone.

'Come up till your hands show,' cried I, for I feared that he might have his knife drawn and would stab me if I put my arms down.

His hands, with extended fingers, rose through the mere slice of opening like those of a drowning man above water, and then I could see the glimmer of his eyes as he looked up.

'Are the rest of you well away?'

'Allee standing back! Allee standing back!' he exclaimed piteously.

On this I pulled the hatch open a little wider, Abraham bending over it with the belaying-pin lifted; and, the interstice being now wide enough, I fell to work as quickly as possible to hand down the provisions. These consisted of three or four bags of ship's biscuit and a number of large pieces of boiled salt horse. But the water-cask, or breaker rather, gave me some trouble. What its capacity was I do not know. It was too heavy for me to deal with single-handed. I called Jacob, and together we slung it in a couple of bights of rope, and, rolling it over the coaming, lowered away. It effectually blocked the hatch while it hung in it, and Punmeamootty had to back away to receive it.

This done, I threw down a few pannikins, not knowing but that they might be without a drinking-vessel in the forecabin, then closed the hatch, catching a loud cry from below as I did so; but I dared not pause to ask what it was, and a moment later the cover was securely bolted, with Jacob sitting upon it, leisurely pulling out his pipe, and Abraham and I walking aft.

Some time later than this, bringing the hour to about six o'clock, Helga and I were eating some supper—I give the black tea, the biscuit, and beef of this meal the name they carry at sea—one or the other of us holding the wheel that Abraham might obtain some sleep in the cabin, when the man Jacob, who was trudging a little space of the deck forward, suddenly called to me. I left the wheel in Helga's hands, and made my way to the boatman.

'Oi fear them chaps is a-suffocating below,' said he; 'they're a-knocking desperate hard against the hatch, and their voices has been a-pouring through that there chimney as though their language wor smoke. Hark! and ye'll hear 'em.'

The sound of beating was distinct. I went to the mouth of the funnel, and heard a noise of wailing.

'What is it?' I cried. 'What is wrong with you below?'

'Oh, give us air, sah! give us air!' was the response. 'Some men die; no man he live long downee here.'

God knows to whom that weak, sick voice belonged. It struck a horror into me.

'We must give them air, Jacob,' I cried, 'or they're all dead men. What is to be done?'

'There's nowt for it but to open the hatch,' he answered.

'Yes,' cried I; 'we can lay bare a little space of the hatchway—enough to freely ventilate the fore-castle. But how to contrive that they shall not slip the cover far enough back to enable them to get out?'

He thought a moment, then, with the promptitude that is part of the education of the seafaring life, he cried, 'I have it!'

Next moment he was speeding aft. I saw him spring into the starboard quarter-boat with an energy that proved his heart an honest and humane one, and in a trice he was coming forward holding a couple of boat stretchers—that is to say, pieces of wood which are placed in the bottom of a boat for the oarsman to strain his legs against.

'These'll fit, I allow,' cried he, 'and save half an hour of sawing and cutting and planing.'

He placed them parallel upon the after-lid, and their foremost extremities suffered the lid which travelled to be opened to a width that gave plenty of scope for air, but through which it would have been impossible for the slenderest human figure to squeeze. Between us we bound these stretchers so that there was no possibility of their shifting, and then I tried the sliding cover, and found it as hard-set as though wholly closed and padlocked.

'How is it now with you?' I cried, through this interstice.

The reply came in the form of a near chorus of murmurs, which gave me to know that all the poor wretches had drawn together under the hatch to breathe. I desired to be satisfied that there was air enough for them, and called again, 'How is it with you now, men?'

This time I could distinctly recognise the melodious voice of Nakier: 'It is allee right now. Oh, how sweet is dis breeving! Why you wantchee keep us here?'

He was proceeding, but I cut him short; the liberation of the wretched creatures was not to be entertained for an instant, and it could merely grieve my heart to the quick, without staggering my resolution, to listen to the protests and appeals of them as they stood directly under the hatch in that small, black, oppressive hole of a forecastle.

After this all remained quiet among them. I was happy to believe that they were free from suffering; but, though I knew the hatch to be secure as though it was shut tight and the hinged bar bolted, yet it was impossible not to feel uneasy at the thought of its lying even a little way open. Of all the nights that Helga and I had as yet passed, this one of Friday, November the 3rd, was the fullest of anxiety, the most horribly trying. The wind held very light; the darkness was richly burthened with stars, there was much fire in the sea too, and the moon, that was drawing on to her half, rode in brilliance over the dark world of waters which mirrored her light in a wedge of rippling silver that seemed to sink a hundred miles deep. We dared not leave the hatch unwatched a minute, and our little company of four we divided into watches, thus: one man to sentinel the Malays, two resting, the fourth at the wheel. But there was to be no rest for me, nor could Helga sleep, and for the greater space of the night we kept the deck together.

Yet there were times when anxiety would yield to a quiet, pure emotion of happiness, when I had my little sweetheart's hand under my arm, and when by the clear light of the moon I gazed upon her face and thought of her as my own, as my first love, to be my wife presently, as I might hope—a gift of sweetness and of gentleness and of heroism, as it might well seem to me, from old Ocean himself. That she loved me fondly I did truly believe and, indeed, know. It might be that the memory of her father's words to me had directed, and now consecrated, her affection. She loved me, too, as one who had adventured his life to save hers, who had suffered grievously in that attempt—as one, moreover, whom bereavement, whom distress, privation, all that we had endured, in short, had rendered intimate to her heart as a friend, and, as it might be, now that her

father was gone and she was a girl destitute of means, her only friend. All had happened since October the 21st: it was now the 3rd of November. A little less than a fortnight had sufficed for the holding of this wild, adventurous, tragical, yet sweet passage of our lives. But how much may happen in fourteen days! Seeds sown in the spirit have time to shoot, to bud, and to blossom—ay, and often to wither—in a shorter compass of time. Was my dear mother living? Oh! I might hope that, seeing that, if ever Captain Bunting's message about me had been delivered, she would before this be knowing that I was safe, or alive, at least. What would she think of Helga? What of me, coming back with a sweetheart, and eager for marriage?—coming back with a young girl of whom I could tell her no more than this: that she was brave and good and gentle; an heroic daughter; all that was lovely and fair in girlhood meeting in her Danish and English blood.

The morning broke. All through the night there had been silence in the fore-castle; but daylight showed how the extreme vigilance of those long hours had worked in my face, as I might tell by no other mirror than Helga's eyes, whose gaze was full of concern as we viewed each other by the spreading light of the dawn. There was the dim gleam of a ship's canvas right abreast of us to starboard, and that was all to be seen the whole horizon round.

After we had got breakfast, the three of us went forward and received the empty breaker from the fellows below, contriving on our removing the stretchers so to pose ourselves as to be ready to beat down the first of them if a rush should be attempted, and instantly close the hatch. The breaker came empty to our hands. We filled and lowered it as on the previous evening, then left the hatch a little open as before; and now, so far as the provisioning of the fellows was concerned, our work for the day was ended, seeing that they had beef and biscuit enough to last them for several days. They made no complaint as to the heat or want of air; but after we had lowered the little cask, and were fixing the stretchers, several of them shouted out to know what we meant to do with them, and I heard Nakier vowing that if we released them they would be honest, that they had sworn by the Koran and would go to hell if they deceived us; but we went on securing the hatch with deaf ears, and then Jacob and I went aft, leaving Abraham to watch.

The sun was hanging about two hours and a half high over the western sea-line that afternoon, when the light air that had been little more than a crawling wind all day freshened into a pleasant breeze with weight enough slightly to incline the broad-beamed barque. This pleasant warm blowing was a refreshment to every sense: it poured cool upon our heated faces; it raised a brook-like murmur,

a sound as of some shallow fretting stream on either hand the vessel; and, above all, it soothed us with a sense and reality of motion, for to it the barque broke the smooth waters bravely, and the wake of her, polished and iridescent as oil, went away astern to the scope of two or three cables. A few wool-white clouds floated along the slowly darkening blue like puffs of steam from the funnel of a newly started locomotive; but they had not the look of the trade cloud, Helga said. She had taken sights at noon, had worked out the vessel's reckoning, and had made me see that it would not need very many hours of sailing to heave the high land of Teneriffe into sight over the bow, if only wind enough would hold to give the old bucket that floated under us headway.

I was holding the wheel at this hour I am speaking of, and Helga was abreast of me, leaning against the rail, sending her soft blue glances round the sea as she talked. Abraham, with a pipe in his mouth, his arms folded, and his head depressed, was slowly marching up and down beside the forecastle hatch. Jacob lay sound asleep upon a locker in the cuddy within easy reach of a shout down the companionway or through the skylight.

On a sudden my attention was taken from what Helga was saying, and I found myself staring at the mainmast, which was what is called at sea a 'bright' mast—that is to say, unpainted, so that the slowly crimsoning sun found a reflection in it, and the western splendour lay in a line of pinkish radiance upon the surface of the wood. This line, along with a portion of the spar, to the height, perhaps, of eighteen or twenty feet, seemed to be slowly revolving, as though, in fact, it were part of a gigantic corkscrew, quietly turned from the depth of the hold. At first I believed it might be the heat of the atmosphere. Helga observing that I stared, looked too, and instantly cried out:

'The vessel is on fire!'

'Why, yes!' I exclaimed; 'that bluish haze is smoke!'

I had scarcely pronounced these words when Abraham, with his face turned our way, came to a dead halt, peered, and then roared out:

'Mr. Tregarthen, there's smoke a-filtering up out of the main hatch!'

'Take this wheel!' said I to Helga; then, in a bound, I gained the skylight, into which I roared with all my lungs for Jacob to come on deck. As I ran forward I saw smoke thinly rising in bluish wreaths and eddies round about the sides of the main-hatch, and from under the mast-coat at the foot of the mainmast.

'They're a-shouting like demons in the fok'sle, sir,' cried Abraham, throwing his pipe overboard in his excitement.

'They have set fire to the ship!' I cried. 'Does smoke rise from the fok'sle?'

'Yes! ye may see it now!—ye may see it now!' he bawled.

In the moment or two's pause that followed I heard the half-muffled shouts of the dark-skinned crew, with one or two clearer voices, as though a couple of the fellows had got their mouths close against the narrow opening in the hatch. I rushed forward from abreast of the mainmast, where I had come to a stand.

'What is wrong?' I cried. 'Where is this smoke coming from?'

A voice answered—it was Nakier's—but his dark skin blended with the gloom out of which he spoke, and I could not see him.

'Some man hab taken de fok'sle lamp into de forepeak, and hab by haccident set fire to de cargo by putting de lamp troo a hole in de bulkhead. For your God's sake let we out or we burn!'

'Is this a trick?' cried I to Abraham.

'Test it, sir!—test it by opening the main hatch!' he shouted.

Jacob had by this time joined us. In a few moments we had removed the battens and torn off the tarpaulin, but at the first rise of the after-hatch cover that we laid our hands upon up belched a volume of smoke, with so much more following that each man of us started back to catch his breath. Now could be plainly heard a noise of shrieking forward.

'My God! men, what shall we do?' I cried, almost paralyzed by this sudden confrontment of the direst peril that can befall humanity at sea, but rendered in our case inexpressibly more horrible yet, to my mind, by the existence of the pent-up wretches whom I felt, even in that moment of stupefying consternation, we dared not liberate while we remained on board.

'What's to be done?' cried Jacob, whose wits seemed less abroad than Abraham's. 'Ask yourself the question. The wessel's on fire, and we must leave if we ain't to be burnt.'

'What! leave the Malays to perish?' I exclaimed.

'Let's smother this smoke down first, anyways,' cried Abraham; and he and his mate put the hatch on.

'Helga,' I shouted, 'drop the wheel! Come to us here! The ship is on fire!'

She came running along the poop.

'See this!' cried Abraham extending his arms, which trembled with the hurry and agitation of his mind; 'if them fellows forward are not to be burnt—and oh, my Gord! listen to them a-singing out!—we must provision a quarter-boat and get away, and, afore casting off, one of us must pull them stretchers off that the men may get out. Who's to be that last man? *I will!*'

'No, ye can't swim, Abey! That must be moy job,' shouted Jacob.

'I can lay hold of a buoy, an' jump overboard.'

'It'll be moy job, I tell ye!' passionately cried Jacob.

'Oh, hark to those poor creatures!' exclaimed Helga.

'Quick!' cried I. 'Abraham has told us what to do. There would be no need for this horrible haste but for those imprisoned men! Hear them! Hear them!'

It was a wild and dreadful chorus of lamentation, mingled with such wailings as might rise in the stillness following a scene of battle. The noise was scarcely human. It seemed to proceed from famished or wounded jackals and hyenas. But to liberate them—every man armed as he was with a sheath-knife deadly as a creese in those dingy fists—every man infuriate—it was not to be dreamt of!

As swiftly as we could ply our legs and arms, we victualled the starboard quarter-boat. Provisions were to our hands; we threw them in plentifully—remains of cooked meat, biscuit, cheese, and the like; we took from each boat the breaker that belonged to her, filled them both with water, and stowed them. The sail belonging to the boat lay snugged in a yellow waterproof cover along the mast; there were oars in her—all other furniture, indeed, that properly belonged to her—rowlocks, rudder, yoke; and the boatmen, old hands at such work as this, nimbly but carefully saw that the plug was in its place.

All the time that we worked there was rising out of the fore-castle hatch the dreadful noise of lamentation, of cries, of entreaties. It was a sound to goad us into red-hot haste, and we laboured as though we were eight instead of four.

'Now, Mr. Tregarthen,' cried Abraham, 'if we ain't to be pursued by them savages on our liberating of 'em, we must cut them there falls.' And he pointed to the tackles which suspended the other boat at the port davits.

'Do so!' said I.

He sprang on to the rail, and passed his knife through the ends of the falls. This effectually put an end to all chance of the fellows chasing us in *that* boat.

'There'll be plenty o' time for them to get the long-boat out,' shouted Abraham, running across the deck to us. 'They're seamen, and there's Nakier to tell 'em what to do.'

'Rot 'em for firing the ship!' cried Jacob. 'I don't believe she *is* on fire. They've made a smoke to scare us out of her!'

'Is everything ready?' I exclaimed.

'Hugh!' cried Helga, clasping her hands, 'I have forgotten my little parcel—the picture and the Bible!'

She was about to fetch them.

'I can be quicker than you,' I cried, and, rushing to the hatch, jumped down it, gained the cabin she had occupied in Captain Bunting's time, and snatched up the little parcel that lay in the bunk. There was no smoke down here. I sniffed shrewdly, but could catch not the least savour of burning. 'It is the fore part of the ship that is on fire,' I thought. As I ran to regain the hatch, it somehow entered my mind to recollect that while looking for a lead-pencil in the chief mate's berth, on the previous day, I had found a small bag of sovereigns and shillings, the unhappy man's savings—all, perhaps, that he possessed in the world—the noble fruits of Heaven knows how many years of hard suffering and bitter labour! I was without a halfpenny in my pocket, and entered the cabin to take this money, which I might hope to be able to repay to some next-of-kin of the poor fellow, should I ever get to hear of such a person, and which in any case would be more serviceable in my pocket than at the bottom of the sea, whither it was now tending. Having secured the money, which would be very useful to Helga and me, should we live to reach a port, I hastened on to the poop, heart-sickened by the dull noise of the ceaseless crying forward.

'Now,' said I, 'let us lower away, in the name of mercy, if only to free those wretches, half of whom may be already suffocated.'

Helga and I got into the boat, and Abraham and his mate smartly slackened away the tackles. In a few moments we were water-borne, with the blocks released—for there was little left for me to learn in those days of the handling and management of a boat—and myself standing in the bow, holding on by the end of the painter, which I had passed through a mizzen-channel plate. Abraham came down hand over hand by one of the tackles, and dropped into the boat, instantly falling to work to step the mast and clear away the sail.

'Below there!' roared Jacob; 'look out for these duds!' and down came first his boots, then his cap, then his coat, and then his waistcoat. 'I'll jump overboard from this 'ere quarter!' he bawled. 'Stand by to pick me up!'

The released helm had suffered the barque to come up into the wind, and she lay aback with a very slow leewardly trend. The breeze held the water briskly rippling, but the plain of the ocean was wonderfully smooth, with a faint, scarce noticeable swell lightly breathing in it.

'Mr. Tregarthen,' exclaimed Abraham, 'you'll pull a stouter oar than Miss Nielsen. Supposin' the lady stands by that there painter?'

'Right!' I exclaimed, and on the girl entering the bows Abraham and I seized an oar apiece in readiness for Jacob's leap.

We lay close alongside, so that nothing was visible save the length of the ship's black side and her overhanging yardarms, and the thick lines of her shrouds rising to the lower mastheads. It was a breathless time. I had no fear for Jacob; I guessed that the imprisoned wretches would be too dazed by the glaring sunshine and by the fresh air and by their deliverance from the stifling, smoke-thickened gloom of the forecastle to catch him even should they pursue him ere he jumped. Nevertheless, those moments of waiting, of expectation, of suspense, strung the nerves to the tension of fiddle-strings, and sensation was sharpened into anguish.

Not more than three minutes elapsed—yet it seemed an hour. Then in a hoarse roar right over our heads sounded a shout:

'Look out, now!'

'Let go!' shrieked Abraham.

Helga dropped the line that held the boat.

'Back astarn, now!'

The fellow poled the boat off, while I put my whole strength into the oar I gripped. I caught a glimpse of Jacob poising and stooping with his arms outstretched and his finger-ends together; his body whizzed through the air, his arms and head striking the water as clean as a knife; then uprose his purple face at a distance of three boat's lengths. A thrust of the oar brought us alongside of him, and, while I grabbed him by the neck to help him inboard, Abraham was hoisting the sail, with Helga at the yoke-lines, quietly waiting for the sheet to be hauled aft.

'Bravely done, Jacob!' cried I. 'There's a bottle of brandy in the stern-sheets. Take a pull at it! The sun will speedily dry you.'

'Where's the Malays?' exclaimed Abraham.

'Didn't stop to see,' answered Jacob. 'I chucked the stretchers off and sung down "Ye can come up," and then bolted.'

'There's Nakier!' cried Helga.

'And there's Punmeamootty!' I called.

I was astounded by observing the figures of these two fellows quietly gazing at us from the forecastle. Almost immediately after they had appeared others joined them, and before our boat had fairly got way upon her I counted the whole eleven of them. They stood in a body with Nakier in the thick of them surveying us as coolly as though their ship were at anchor, and all were well, and we were objects of curiosity merely.

'Why, what's the matter with 'em?' cried Abraham. 'Are they waiting for us to sing out to tell 'em what to do?'

He had scarcely spoken the words when a loud shout of laughter broke from the dingy little mob, accompanied by much ironical flourishing of hands, while Nakier, springing on to the rail, pulled his hat off and repeatedly bowed to us. We were too much astounded to do more than gape at them. A minute later Nakier sprang back again on to the forecastle and piped out some orders in his melodious voice, in which, assuredly, the most attentive ear could have detected nothing of the weakness that I had noticed in his cries to us through the half-closed hatch. Instantly the men distributed themselves, one of them running to the wheel; and while we continued to gaze, mute with amazement, the

foretopsail-yard was swung, the barque's head slowly fell off, the yards were then again braced up, and, behold! the little vessel, with her head at about south, was softly breaking the waters, with the after-yards swinging as they were squared by the braces to the north-east wind.

There was small need to go on staring and gaping for any length of time to discover that we were the victims of an out-and-away shrewder, cleverer, subtler stratagem than we had practised upon those dark-skins. I could not perceive any smoke rising from the forecabin. The fellows had been much too clever to accept the risk of suffocation as a condition of their escape. Abraham had assured me that the bulkhead which divided the forepeak from the main hold was as strong as any timber wall could well be; but there was either some damage, some rent, some imperfection in the bulkhead, which provided access to the hold, or the crew, jobbing with Asiatic patience at the plank with their sharp knives, had penetrated it, having had all last night and all this day to do the work in.

A very little thing will make a very great deal of smoke. The burning of a small blanket might suffice to fill the hold of a much bigger ship than that barque with a smell of fire strong enough and rolls of vapour dense enough to fill her crew with consternation and drive them to the boats. While the fellows kept the hatch of the forepeak closed the smoke could hardly filter through into the forecabin. I can but conjecture how they managed; but the triumphant evidence of their cleverness lay clear to our gaze in the spectacle of the barque slowly drawing away into the morning blue of the south and west.

When the two boatmen saw how it was, I thought they would have jumped overboard in their passion. Abraham, as usual, flung his cap into the bottom of the boat and roared at the receding figure of the ship as though she were hard by, and the men aboard attentively listening to him. Jacob, soaking wet, his black hair plastered upon his brow, and his face as purple now with temper as it had before been when he rose half strangled out of the water, chimed in, and together they shouted.

Then turning upon me, Abraham bawled out that he would follow them.

'This here's a fast boat,' he vociferated. 'Here be oars to help her canvas. Think them coloured scaramouches is agoing to rob me of my salvage? Is it to be *all* bad luck?—fust the *Airly Marn*, and now,' cried he, wildly pointing at the barque, 'a job that might ha' been worth three or four hundred pound a man? And

to be tricked by such creatures! to be made to feel sorry by their howling and wailing! to watch 'em a-sailing away with what's properly moine and Jacob's, and yourn! Whoy, there's money enough for a fust-class marriage and the loife of a gentleman afterwards, in a single share of the salwage that them beasts has robbed us of!'

And so he went on; and when he paused for breath Jacob fell a-shouting in a like strain.

Meanwhile Helga, at the helm with a composed face, was making the boat hug the wind, and the little fabric, bowed down by the spread of lug till the line of her gunwale was within a hand's-breadth of the water, was buzzing along at a speed that was fast dwindling the heap of square canvas astern into a toy-like space of white. At last Abraham and his mate fell silent; they seated themselves, looking with dogged faces over their folded arms at the diminishing barque.

For my part, long before the two honest fellows had made an end of their temper I had ceased to think of the Malays and the trick they had put upon us. Here we were now in a little open boat—three men and a girl—in the heart of a spacious field of sea, with nothing in sight, and no land nearer to us than the Great Canary, which lay many leagues distant, and for which the north-east wind would not suffer us to head on a direct course. Here was a situation heavy and significant enough to fill the mind, and leave no room for other thoughts. And yet I do not know that I was in the least degree apprehensive. The having the barque's fore-castle filled with a crew of fellows whose first business would have been to slaughter us three men on their breaking out had weighed intolerably upon my spirits. It was a dreadful danger, a horrible obligation now passed, and my heart felt comparatively light, forlorn and perilous as our situation still was. Then, again, I found a sort of support in the experiences I had passed through on the raft and in the lugger. The mind is always sensible of a shock on leaving the secure high deck of a ship, and looking abroad upon the vast, pitiless breast of old Ocean from the low elevation of a boat's side. I have heard of this sort of transition paralyzing the stoutest-hearted of a shipwrecked crew; for in no other situation does death seem to come nearer to one, floating close alongside, as it were, and chilling the hottest air of the tropics to the taste and quality of a frosty blast; and in no other situation does human helplessness find a like accentuation, so illimitable are the reaches of the materialized eternity upon which the tiny structure rests, the very stars by night looking wan and faintly glittering, as though the foundered gaze had rendered their familiar and noted distances measureless compared to their height from a ship's deck or from solid earth.

But, as I have it in my mind to say, our experiences on the raft and the open lugger were so recent that it was impossible to feel all this vastness and nearness of the deep and the unutterable solitude of our tiny speck of fabric in the midst of it, as though one came fresh from days of bulwarked heights and broad white decks to the situation. Helga surrendered the helm to Abraham, and the boat blew nimbly along over that summer stretch of sea; Abraham steering with a mortified face; Jacob leaning upon the weather gunwale with his chin upon his arms, sullenly gazing into vacancy; and Helga and I a little way forward, talking in a low voice over the past. What new adventure was this we had entered upon? Should we come off with our lives, after all? The tigress ocean had shown herself in many moods since I had found myself within reach of her claws. She was slumbering now. The dusky lid of night was closing upon the huge open trembling blue eye. Should we have escaped her before she roused in wrath?

The sun was now low upon the horizon, and the sky was a flashing scarlet to the zenith, and of a violet dimness eastward, where a streak or two of delicate cloud caught the western glory, and lay like some bits of chiselling in bronze in those tender depths.

'There ain't nothing in sight,' said Jacob, resuming his seat after a long look round; 'we shall have to go through the night.'

'Well, I've been out in worse weather than this,' exclaimed Abraham.

'Pity the breeze doesn't draw more north or south,' said I. 'The boat sails finely. A straight course for Teneriffe would soon be giving us a sight of the Peak.'

'Ye and the lady'll ha' seen enough, I allow, by this toime to make ye both want to get home,' said Abraham. 'Is there e'er a seafaring man who could tell of such a procession of smothering jobs all atreading on each other's heels? Fust, the loss of the *Hayneen*' [meaning the *Anine*], 'then the raft, then the foundering of the *Airly Marn*, then the feeding of Mussulmen with pork, then the skipper—as was a proper gentleman, tew—afalling in love, and afterwards being murdered; then that there fire, and now this here boat—and all for what? Not a blooming penny to come out of the whole boiling!' And his temper giving way, down went his cap again, and he jumped to his feet with a thirsty look astern; but fortunately by this time the barque was out of sight, otherwise there is no doubt we should have been regaled with another half-hour of 'longshore lamentation and invective.

The breeze held steady, and the boat swept through it as though she were in tow of a steamer. The sun sank, the western hectic perished, and over our heads was

spread the high night of hovering silver with much meteoric dust sailing amid the luminaries; and in the south-east stood the moon, in whose light the fabric of the boat and her canvas looked as though formed of ivory. We had brought a bull's-eye lamp with us, and this we lighted that we might tell how to steer by a small compass which Abraham had taken from the Captain's cabin. We made as fair a meal as our little stock of provisions would yield, sitting in the moonshine eating and talking, dwelling much upon the incidents of the day, especially on the subtlety of the Malays, with occasional speculation on what yet lay before us; and again and again one after another of us would rise to see if there was anything in sight in the pale hazy blending of the ocean-rim with the sky, which the moon as it soared flooded with her light.

To recount the passage of those hours would be merely to retrace our steps in this narrative. It was a tedious course of dozing, of watching, of whispering. At times I would start with the conviction that it was a ship's light my eyes had fastened upon out in the silvery obscure; but never did it prove more than a star or some phosphorescent sparkling in the eye itself, as often happens in a gaze that is much strained and long vigilant.

It was some time before five o'clock in the morning that I was startled from what was more a trance of weariness than of restful slumber, by a shout.

'Here's something coming at last!' cried the hoarse voice of Abraham.

The moon was gone, but the starlight made the dark very clear and fine, and no sooner had I directed my eyes astern than I spied a steamer's lights. The triangle of red, green, and white seemed directly in our wake, and so light was the breeze, and so still the surface of the ocean, that the pulsing of the engines, with the respiratory splashing of the water from the exhaust-pipe, penetrated the ear as distinctly as the tick of a watch held close.

'Flash the bull's-eye, Jacob,' shouted Abraham, 'or she'll be a-cutting of us down.'

The fellow sprang into the stern-sheets and flourished the light.

'Now sing out altogether, when I count three,' cried Abraham again. 'Ship ahoy! —to make one word of it. Now then!—wan, tew, *three*!' We united our voices in a hurricane yell of 'Ship ahoy!'

'Again!'

Once more we delivered the shout with such a note in it as could only come from

lungs made tempestuous by fear and desire of preservation. Six or seven times did we thus hail that approaching lump of shadow, defined by its triangle of sparks, and in the intervals of our cries Jacob vehemently flourished the bull's-eye lamp.

Suddenly the green light disappeared.

'Ha! She sees us!' exclaimed Abraham.

The sound of pulsing ceased, and then, with a swiftness due to the atmospheric illusion of the gloom, but that, nevertheless, seemed incredible in a vessel whose engines had stopped, the great mass of shadow came shaping and forming itself out within her own length of us into the aspect of a large brig-rigged steamer, dark as the tomb along the length of her hull, but with a stream of lamplight touching her bridge, from which came a clear strong hail:

'Boat ahoy! What is wrong with you?'

'We're adrift, and want ye to pick us up!' roared Abraham. 'Stand by to give us the end of a line!'

Within five minutes the boat, with sail down and mast unstepped, was alongside the motionless steamer, and ten minutes later she was veering astern and the four of us, with such few articles as we had to hand up, safe aboard, the engines champing, the bow-wave seething, and the commander of the vessel asking us for our story.



CHAPTER VIII.

HOME.

On the morning of Saturday, the 18th of November, the brig-rigged steamer *Mosquito*, from the west coast of Africa for London, stopped her engines and came to a stand off the port of Falmouth, to put Helga and me ashore at that town, by the aid of a little West-country smack which had been spoken and now lay alongside.

The English coast should have been abreast of us days earlier than this; but very shortly after the *Mosquito* had picked us up something went wrong in the engine-room; our passage to Madeira was so slow as to be little more than a dull and tedious crawling over the waters; and we were delayed for some considerable time at Funchal, while the chief engineer and his assistants got the engines into a condition to drive the great metal hull to her destination.

But now the two bold headlands of the fair coast of Falmouth—the tenderest, most gem-like bit of scenery, I do honestly believe, not that England only, but that this whole great world of rich and varied pictures has to show—lay plain in our eyes. Streaks of snow upon the heights shone like virgin silver in the crisp brilliant November sun of that wintry Channel morning, and betwixt the headlands the hills beyond showed in masses of a milk-white softness poised cloud-like in the keen blue distance, as though by watching you would see them soar.

I thanked the captain heartily for his kindness, and then, standing in the gangway with my sweetheart at my side, I asked for Abraham and Jacob, that we might bid them farewell. The worthy fellows, endeared to me by the association of peril bravely met and happily passed, promptly arrived. I pulled out the money that I had taken from Mr. Jones's berth, and said: 'Here are thirteen pounds and some shillings, Abraham, which belonged to that poor mate whom the Malays killed. Here is half the amount for you and Jacob; the other half will carry Miss Nielsen and me to Tintrenale. I will make inquiries if the poor creature had any relatives, and, if I can hear of them, the money will be repaid. And now you will, both of you, remember a promise I made to you aboard the *Early Morn*. Let me have your addresses at Deal!'—for they were proceeding to the Downs in the

steamer.

They told me where they lived. I then extended my hand.

'God bless you both!' I said. 'I shall never forget you!' And, indeed, more than that I could not have said at the moment, for my throat tightened when I looked into their honest faces and thought how Helga and I owed our lives to them.

It was a hearty farewell among the four of us; much hand-shaking and God-blessing of one and another; and when we had entered the smack and shoved off, the two poor fellows got upon the bulwark-rail and cheered us again and again with such contortions of form and violence of gesture that I feared to see them fall overboard. But the steamer was now in motion, and in a very little while the two figures were indistinguishable. I have never seen them since; yet, as I write these words and think of them, my heart is full; if they be living, I earnestly hope they are well and doing well; and if these lines meet their eyes they will know that the heartiest of hearty welcomes awaits them whenever they shall find themselves near my little Cornish home.

The 18th was a Saturday, and I made up my mind to stay throughout Sunday at Falmouth, that I might have time to receive a line from Mr. Trembath, to whom my first business must be to send news of my safe return, that he might deliver it with all caution to my mother; for it was not to be foreseen how a sudden shock of joy might serve her. So we were no sooner ashore than I wrote to Mr. Trembath, and then Helga and I quitted the hotel to make some purchases, taking care to reserve enough to pay our travelling expenses home.

Next morning we went to church, and kneeling side by side, we offered up the thanks of our deeply grateful hearts for our preservation from the many dark and deadly perils we had encountered, and for our restoration, sound in health and limb, to a land we had often talked of and had as often feared we should never again behold.

It was a quiet holiday with us afterwards: a brief passage of hours whose happiness was alloyed only by anxiety to get news of my mother. Our love for each other was true and deep—how true and deep I am better able to know now than I did then, before time had tested the metal of our hearts. I was proud of my Danish sweetheart, of her heroic nature, of her many endearing qualities of tenderness, goodness, simple piety, of her girlish gentleness of character, which, in the hour of trial and of danger, could harden into the courage of the lioness, without loss, as I knew, of the sweetness and the bloom of her maidenhood. I

felt, too, she was mine in a sense novel indeed in the experiences of love-making; I mean, by the right of having saved her life, of plucking her, as it were, out of the fury of the sea; for we were both very conscious that, but for my having been aboard the *Anine*, she must have perished, incapable of leaving her dying father even had she been able with her girl's hands alone to save herself, as between us we had saved ourselves.

But not to dwell upon this, nor to recount our walks on that quiet November Sabbath day, our exquisite and impassioned enjoyment of the scenes and sights and aromas of this favoured space of land after our many privations and after the sickening iteration of the ocean girdle, flawless for days and making our sight ache with gazing and with expectation: not to dwell upon this and much more that memory loves to recall, Monday morning's post brought me a letter from Mr. Trembath. My mother was well—he had told her I was at Falmouth—I was to come to her without delay. It was a long letter, full of congratulations, of astonishment, but—my mother was well! She knew I was at Falmouth! All the rest was idle words to my happiness, full of news as the letter was, too. Helga laughed and cried and kissed me, and an hour later we were in a railway carriage on our way to Tintrenale.

On our arrival we immediately proceeded to the house of Mr. Trembath. We were on foot, and on our way from the railway station, as we turned the corner of the hilly road that led to the town, the whole view of the spacious bay opened upon our eyes. We instantly stopped, and I grasped Helga's hand while we stood looking. It was a keen bright blue morning, the air of a frosty, of an almost prismatic brilliance of purity owing to the shining ranges of snow upon the slopes and downs of the headlands of the cliffs. The Twins and the Deadlow Rock showed their black fangs with a recurrent flash of light as the sun smote them while wet from the lift of the swell that was rolling into the bay.

'Yonder is where the *Anine* brought up. Do you remember?'

White gulls were hovering off the pier. To the right was the lifeboat house out of which we had launched on that dark and desperate night of October 21. The weather-cock crowning the tall spire of St. Saviour's was glowing like fire in the blue. Far off, at the foot of Hurricane Point, was the cloudy glimmer of boiling water, the seething of the Atlantic fold recoiling from the giant base. A smart little schooner lay half a mile out on a line with the pier, and, as she rolled, her copper glistened ruddily upon the dark-blue surface. Sounds of life arose from the town: the ringing of bells, the rattling of vehicles, the cries of the hawker.

'Come, my darling!' said I, and we proceeded.

I shall never forget the look of astonishment with which Mr. Trembath received us. We were shown into his study—his servant was a new hand and did not know me; she admitted us as a brace of parishioners, I dare say. 'Great Heaven! it is Hugh Tregarthen!' he cried, starting out of his chair as though a red-hot iron had been applied to him. He wrung both my hands, overwhelming me with exclamations. I could not speak. He gave me no opportunity to introduce Helga. Indeed, he did not seem sensible of her presence.

'Alive, after all! A resurrection, in good faith! What a night it was, d'ye remember? Ha! ha!' he cried, clinging to my hands and staring, with the wildest earnestness of expression, into my face, while his eyes danced with congratulation and gratification. 'We gave you up. You ought to be dead—not a doubt of it! No young fellow should return to life who has been mourned for as you were!' Thus he rattled on.

'But my mother—my mother, Mr. Trembath! How is my mother?'

'Well, well, *perfectly* well—looking out for you. Why are you not with her instead of with me? But to whom am I talking? To Hugh Tregarthen's ghost?'

Here his eyes went to Helga, and his face underwent a change.

'This young lady is a friend of yours?' and he gave her an odd sort of puzzling, inquisitive bow.

'If you will give me leave, Mr. Trembath. I have not yet had a chance. First let me introduce you to Miss Helga Nielsen, my betrothed—the young lady who before long will be Mrs. Hugh Tregarthen, so named by your friendly offices.'

He peered at me to see if I was joking, then stepped up to her, extended his hand, and courteously greeted her. Sweet the dear heart looked as she stood with her hand in his, smiling and blushing, her blue eyes filled with emotion, that darkened them to the very complexion of tears, and that made them the prettier for the contrast of their expression with her smile.

'My dear mother being well,' said I, 'the delay of a quarter of an hour can signify nothing. Let us seat ourselves that I may briefly tell you my story and explain how it happens that Helga and I are here instead of going straight to my home.'

He composed himself to listen, and I began. I gave him our adventures from the

hour of my boarding the *Anine*, and I observed that as I talked he incessantly glanced at Helga with looks of growing respect, satisfaction, and pleasure.

'Now,' said I, when I had brought my narrative down to the time of our being picked up by the *Mosquito*, never suffering his repeated exclamations of amazement, his frequent starts and questions, to throw me off the straight course of my recital, 'my wish is to see my mother alone, and when I have had about an hour with her I want you to bring Helga to our home.'

'I quite understand,' he exclaimed: 'a complication of surprises would certainly be undesirable. You will prepare the way. I shall know how to congratulate her. I shall be able to speak from my heart,' said he, smiling at Helga.

'One question, Mr. Trembath. What of my poor lifeboat's crew?'

'Three of them were drowned,' he answered; 'the rest came ashore alive in their belts. It was a very astonishing preservation. The gale shifted and blew in a hurricane off the land, as of course you remember; yet the drive of the seas stranded the survivors down upon the southern end of the esplanade. They were all washed in together—a most extraordinary occurrence, as though they had been secured by short lengths of line.'

'And *they* are all well?'

'All. Poor Bobby Tucker and Lance Hudson were almost spent, almost gone; but there was a Preventive man standing close by the spot to which the sea washed them: he rushed away for help; they were carried to their homes—and what a story they had to tell! The poor Danes who had jumped into the boat were drowned to a man.'

Helga clasped her hands, and whispered some exclamation to herself in Danish.

I sat for another five minutes, and then rose with a significant look at the clock, that Mr. Trembath might remember my sweetheart was not to be absent from me for more than an hour. I then kissed her and left the house, and made my way to my mother's home.

It was but a short step, yet it took me a long while to reach the door. I believe I was stopped at least ten times. Tintrenale is a little place; the ripple of a bit of news dropped into that small pool swiftly spreads to the narrow boundaries of it, and, though Mr. Trembath had only heard from me on the preceding day, the whole town knew that I was alive, that I was at Falmouth, that I was on my way

home. But for this I might have been stared at as a ghost, and have nimbly stepped past faces turned in dumb astonishment upon me. Now I had to shake hands; now I had to answer questions, breaking away with what grace I could.

When I reached my home there was no need to knock. My dear mother was at the window, and, to judge from the celerity with which the door flew open, she had stationed a servant in the hall ready to admit me at her first cry.

'Dear mother!'

'My darling child!'

She strained me to her heart in silence. My throat swelled, and she could not speak for weeping. But tears of rejoicing are soon dried, and in a few minutes I was on the sofa, at her side, our hands locked.

In the first hurry and joy of such a meeting as this much will be said that the memory cannot carry. There was a score of questions to answer and put, none of which had any reference whatever to my strange experiences. She was looking somewhat thin and worn, as though fretting had grown into a habit which she could not easily shake off. Her snow-white hair, her dear old face, her dim eyes, in which lay a heart-light of holy, reverent exultation, the trembling fingers with which she caressed my hair—the homely little parlour, too, with the dance of the fire-play in the shady corners of the room, its twenty details of pictures, sideboard—I know not what else—all my life familiar to me, upon which, indeed, the eyes of my boyhood first opened—I found it as hard to believe that I was in my old home again at last, that my mother's voice was sounding in my ear, that it was her beloved hand which toyed with my hair, as at times I had found it hard to believe that I was at sea, floating helplessly aboard a tiny raft under the stars.

'Mother, did you receive the message that was written upon a board, and read by the people of the Cape steamer homeward bound?'

'Yes, four days ago; but only four days ago, Hugh! I believed I should never see you again, my child!'

'Well, thank God! it is well with us both—ay, well with three of us,' said I: 'the third presently to be as precious in this little home, mother, as ever a one of us that has slept beneath its roof.'

'What is this you are saying?' she exclaimed.

'Be composed, and give me your ear and follow me in the adventures I am going to relate to you,' said I, pulling out my watch and looking at it.

My words would readily account for her perceiving something in my mind of a significance quite outside that of my adventures; but the instincts of the mother went further than that; I seemed to catch a look in her as though she half guessed at what I must later on tell her. It was an expression of mingled alarm and remonstrance, almost as anticipative as though she had spoken. God knows why it was she should thus suggest that she had lighted upon what was still a secret to her, seeing, as one might suppose, that the very last notion which would occur to her was that I had found a sweetheart out upon the ocean in these few weeks of my absence from home. But there is a subtle quality in the blood of those closely related which will interpret to the instincts as though the eye had the power of exploring the recesses of the heart.

I began my story. As briefly as I might, for there was no longer an hour before me, I related my adventures step by step. I had only to pronounce the girl's name to witness the little movement of jealousy and suspicion hardening in the compressed lips and graver attention of the dear old soul. I had much to say of Helga. In truth, my story was nearly all about Helga: her devotion to her father, her marvellous spirit in the direst extremity, her pious resignation to the stroke that had made her an orphan. I put before my mother a picture of the raft, the star-lit gloom of the night, the dying man with his wife's portrait in his hand. I told her of Helga's heroic struggle with her anguish of bereavement, her posture of prayer as I launched the corpse, her prayer again in the little forepeak of the lugger, where the dim lantern faintly disclosed the picture of her mother, before which the sweet heart knelt. My love for her, my pride in her, were in my face as I spoke; I felt the warm blood in my cheek, and emotion made my poor words eloquent.

Sometimes my mother would break out with an exclamation of wonder or of admiration, sometimes she would give a sigh of sympathy; tears stood in her eyes while I was telling her of the poor Danish captain's death and of Helga kneeling in prayer in the little forepeak. When I had made an end, she gazed earnestly at me for some moments in silence, and then said:

'Hugh, where is she?'

'At Mr. Trembath's.'

'She is in Tintrenale?'

'At Mr. Trembath's, mother.'

'Why did you not bring her here?'

'I wished to break the news.'

'But she is your friend, Hugh. She was a good daughter, and she is a good girl. I must love her for that.'

I kissed her. 'You will love her when you see her. You will love her more and more as you know her better and better. She is to be my wife. Oh, mother, you will welcome her—you will take her to your heart, so friendless as she is and so poor; so tender too, so gentle, so affectionate?'

She sat musing awhile, playing with her fingers. That colouring of suspicion, of a mother's jealousy, which I have spoken of, had yielded to my tale. She was thinking earnestly, and with an expression of kindness.

'You are young to marry, Hugh.'

'No, no, mother!'

'She is very young too. We are poor, dear; and she has nothing, you tell me.'

'She is one of those girls, mother, who, having nothing, yet have all.'

She smiled, and stroked my hand, and then turned her head as though in a reverie, and fixed her eyes for a little space upon my father's picture.

'We know nothing of her parents,' said she.

'She has her mother's portrait. It tells its own story. We know who and what her father was. But you shall question her, mother. I see her kneeling at your side telling you her little life-history.'

At this moment the house-door knocker was set clattering by a hand that I very well knew could belong to no other man than Mr. Trembath. I was too impatient to await the attendance of a servant, and, rushing to the door, brought Helga into the parlour. The clergyman followed, and as Helga stood in the doorway he peered over her shoulder at my mother. The dear girl was pale and nervous, yet sweet and fresh and fair beyond words did she look, and my heart leapt up in my breast to the instant thought that my mother could not see her without being won.

The pause was but for a moment; my mother rose and looked at the girl. It was a swift, penetrating gaze, that vanished in a fine warm cordial smile.

'Welcome to our little home, Helga!' said she, and, stepping up to her, she took her by the hands, kissed her on both cheeks, and drew her to the sofa.

'Well, good-bye for the present, Hugh,' exclaimed Mr. Trembath.

'I will accompany you,' said I.

'No,' cried my mother, 'stay here, Hugh! This is your proper place,' and she motioned for me to sit beside her.

Mr. Trembath, with a friendly nod, disappeared.



My story comes to an end as the worthy little clergyman closes the door upon the three of us. When I sat down to this work, I designed no more than the recital of the adventures of a month; and now I put down my pen very well satisfied that I leave you who have followed me in no doubt as to the issue of Helga's introduction to my mother, though it would go beyond my scheme to say more on that head. I found a sweetheart at sea, and made her my wife ashore, and a time came when my mother was as proud of her Danish daughter as I was of my Danish bride.

There had been much talk between Helga and me, when we were on the ocean, of our going to Kolding; but down to the present time we have not visited that place. Her friends there are few, and the journey a long one; yet we are constantly talking of making an excursion to Copenhagen: the mere fancy, perhaps, gives us as much pleasure as the trip itself would. Through the friendly offices of the Danish Vice-Consul at Falmouth, we were enabled to realize upon the few poor effects which Captain Nielsen had left behind him in his little house at Kolding, and we also obtained payment of the money for which he had insured his own venture in the freight that had foundered.

There were moments when I would think with regret of the *Light of the World*. No doubt, could we have brought her to England or to a port, our share of the salvage would have made a little dowry for Helga, for, though I had not seen the vessel's papers, I might reasonably suppose the value of the cargo, added to that

of the barque herself, amounted to several thousands of pounds, and as there were but four to share, Helga's and my division would not have failed to yield us a good round sum.

And what was the end of that ship? I have heard the story: it found its way into the newspapers, but in brief, insufficient paragraphs only. The whole narrative of her adventures after we had been tricked out of her by her coloured crew is one of the strangest romances of the sea that my experience has encountered, student as I am of maritime affairs. Some of these days I may hope to tell the story; but for the present you will consider that I have said enough.

THE END.

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