

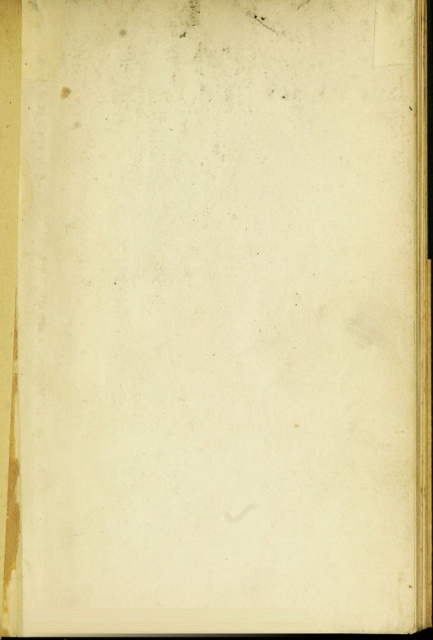
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# YARNS ON THE BEACH

A BUNDLE OF TALES.



24-62

BY

*Am*

*C*

G. A. HENTY,

Author of "By Sheer Pluck;" "Facing Death;" "True to the Old Flag;"  
"With Clive in India;" "Under Drake's Flag;" &c

WITH TWO FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS  
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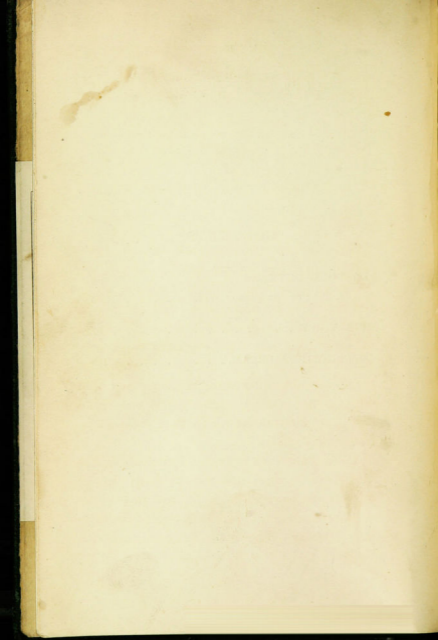
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## DO YOUR DUTY.

A TALE OF THE FRENCH WAR.

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**F**EARLY in the month of March, 1801, an old sailor was sitting on a bench gazing over the stretch of sea which lies between Hayling Island and the Isle of Wight. The prospect was a lively one, for in those days ships of war were constantly running in and out, and great convoys of merchantmen sailed under the protection of our cruisers; and the traffic between Spithead and Portsmouth resembled that of a much-frequented road.

Peter Langley had been a boatswain in the king's service, and had settled down in his old age on a pension, and lived in a small cottage near the western extremity of Hayling Island. Here he could see what was

going on at Spithead, and when he needed a talk with his old "chums" could get into his boat, which was lying hauled up on the sand, and with a good wind arrive in an hour at the Hard. He was sitting at present on a portion of a wreck thrown up by a very high tide on the sandy slope, when his meditations were disturbed by a light step behind him, and a lad in a sailor's dress, some fifteen years of age, with a bright honest face, came running down behind him.

"Hallo, dad!"

"Hallo, my boy! Bless me, who'd ha' thought o' seeing you!" and the old man clasped the boy in his arms in a way that showed the close relationship between the two. "I didn't expect you for another week."

"No! we've made a quick passage of it," the boy said; "fine wind all the way up, with a gale or two in the right quarter. We only arrived in the river on Monday, and as soon as we were fairly in dock I got leave to run down to see you."

"What were you in such a hurry for?" the

old sailor said. "It's the duty of every hand to stop by the ship till she's cleared out."

"I have always stayed before till the crew were paid off; but no sooner had we cast anchor than one of the owners came on board, and told the captain that another cargo was ready, that the ship was to be unloaded with all speed, and to take in cargo and sail again in a fortnight at the utmost, as a fleet was on the point of sailing for the West Indies under a strong convoy."

"A fortnight! That's sharp work," the old sailor said. "And the goods will have to be bundled out and in again with double speed. I know what it will be. You will be going out with the paint all wet, and those lubbers the stevedores will rub it off as fast as it's put on. Well, a few days at sea will shake all down into its place. But how did you get leave?"

"I am rather a favourite with the first officer," the lad said. "The men who desired to leave were to be discharged at once and a fresh gang taken on board, so I asked him directly the news came round if I might have

four days away. He agreed at once, and I came down by the night coach; and here I am for eight-and-forty hours."

"It's a short stay," the old sailor said, "after more than a year away, but we mustn't waste the time in regretting it. You've grown, Harry, and are getting on fast. In another couple of years you'll be fit to join a king's ship. I suppose you've got over your silly idea about sticking to the merchant service. It's all very well to learn your business there as a boy, and I grant that in some things a merchantman is a better school than a king's ship. They have fewer hands, and each man has to do more and to learn to think for himself. Still, after all, there's no place like a saucy frigate for excitement and happiness."

"I don't know, dad," the boy said. "I have been learning a little navigation. The first officer has been very kind to me, and I hope in the course of two or three years to pass and get a berth as a third mate. Still, I should like three or four years on board a man-of-war."

"I should think so," the old sailor said, "for a man ought to do his duty to his country."

"But there are plenty of men to do their duty to their country," the boy said.

"Not a bit of it," the sailor exclaimed. "There's a great difficulty in finding hands for the navy. Every one wants to throw their duty upon every one else. They all hanker after the higher wages and loafing life on board a merchantman, and hate to keep themselves smart and clean as they must do in a king's ship. If I had my way, every tar should serve at least five years of his life on board a man-of-war. It is above all things essential, Harry, that you should do your duty."

"I am ready to do my duty, dad," the boy said, "when the time comes. At present I do it to the best of my power, and I have in my pocket a letter from the first officer to you. He told you when you went down with me to see me off on my last voyage that he would keep an eye upon me, and he has done so."

"That's right," the old man said. "As you say, Harry, a man may do his duty anywhere; still, for all that, it is part of his duty, if he be a sailor, to help his majesty, for a time at least, against his enemies. Look at me. Why, I served man and boy for nigh fifty years, and was in action one way and another over a hundred times, and here I am now with a snug little pension, and as comfortable as his gracious majesty himself. What can you want more than that?"

"I don't know that I can want more," the boy said, "in its way, at least; but there are other ways in the merchant service. I might command a ship by the time I am thirty, and be my own master instead of being a mere part of a machine. I have heard the balls flying too," he said laughing.

"What! did you have a brush with Mounseer?" the old tar said, greatly interested.

"Yes; we had a bit of a fight with a large privateer off the coast of Spain. Fortunately the old barque carries a long eighteen, as well as her twelves, and when the Frenchman found that we could play at long bowls as



well as himself he soon drew off, but not before we had drilled a few holes in his sails and knocked away a bit of his bulwarks."

"Were you hit, Harry?"

"Yes, two or three shots hulled her, but they did little damage beyond knocking away a few of the fittings and frightening the lady passengers. We had a strong crew, and a good many were sorry that the skipper did not hide his teeth and let the Frenchman come close before he opened fire. We should like to have towed him up the river with our flag over the tricolour."

"There you see, Harry," the old sailor said, "you were just as ready to fight as if you had been on a man-of-war; and while in a sailing ship you only get a chance if one of these privateers happens to see you, in a king's ship you go looking about for an enemy, and when you see one the chances are he is bigger, instead of smaller, than yourself."

"Ah! well, dad, we shall never quite agree on it, I expect," the boy said; "but for all that, I do mean to serve for a few years in a

man-of-war. I expect that we may have a chance of seeing some fighting in the West Indies. There are, they say, several French cruisers in that direction, and although we shall have a considerable convoy, the Frenchmen generally have the legs of our ships. I believe that some of the vessels of the convoy are taking out troops, and that we are going to have a slap at some of the French islands. Has there been any news here since I went?"

"Nothing beyond a few rows with the smugglers. The revenue officers have a busy time here. There's no such place for smuggling on the coast as between Portsmouth and Chichester. These creeks are just the places for smugglers, and there's so much traffic in the Channel that a solitary lugger does not attract the attention of the coast-guard as it does where the sea's more empty. However, I don't trouble myself one way or the other about it. I may know a good deal of the smuggling, or I may not, but it's no business of mine. If it were my duty to lend a hand to the coast-guard, I should do it; but

as it isn't, I have no ill-will to the smugglers, and am content enough to get my spirits cheap."

"But, dad, surely it's your duty to prevent the king being cheated?" Harry said with a smile.

"If the king himself were going to touch the money," the old sailor said sturdily, "I would lend a hand to see that he got it, but there's no saying where this money would have gone. Besides, if the spirits hadn't been run, they would not have been brought over here at all, so after all the revenue is none the worse for the smuggling."

The boy laughed. "You can cheat yourself, dad, when you like, but you know as well as I do that smuggling's dishonest, and that those who smuggle cheat the revenue."

"Ah! well," the sailor said, "it may be so, but I don't clearly see that it's my duty to give information in the matter. If I did feel as it were going to be my duty, I should let all my neighbours know it, and take mighty good care that they didn't say anything within earshot of me, that I might feel called on

to repeat. And now, let's go up to the cottage and see the old woman."

"I looked in there for a moment," Harry said, "as I passed. Mother looks as hale and hearty as she did when I left, and so do you, dad."

"Yes, we have nothing to complain of," the old man said. "I have been so thoroughly seasoned with salt water that it would take a long time for me to decay."

When they got up to the cottage they found that Jane Langley had got breakfast prepared. Rashers of bacon were smoking on the table, and a large tankard of beer stood by, for in those days the use of tea had not become general in this country.

"Have you heard, mother," Peter Langley said, "that the boy is to leave us again in forty-eight hours?"

"No, indeed," the old woman said; "but this is hard news. I had hoped that you would be with us for a bit, my boy, for we're getting on fast in life, and may not be here when you return."

"Oh, mother! we will not think of such a

thing as that," Harry said. "Father was just saying that he's so seasoned that even time cannot make much of such a tough morsel; and you seem as hearty as he is."

"Ay, boy," Peter said, "that be true, but when old oak does come down, he generally falls sudden. However, we won't make our first meal sad by talking of what might be."

Gaily during the meal they chatted over the incidents of Harry's voyage to India and back. It was his second trip. The lad had had a much better education than most boys in his rank of life at that time, the boatswain having placed him at the age of ten in charge of a schoolmaster at Portsmouth. When Harry had reached that age Peter had retired from the service, and had settled down at Hayling, but for two years longer he had kept Harry at school. Then he had apprenticed him to a firm of ship-owners in London, and one of the officers under whom Peter had served had spoken to the heads of the firm, so that the boy was put in a ship commanded by a kind and considerate officer, and to whose charge he was specially recom-

mended. Thus he had not forgotten what he had learned at school, as is too often the case with lads in his position. His skipper had seen that he not only kept up what he knew, but that he studied for an hour or so each day such subjects as would be useful to him in his career.

After breakfast the pair again went out on to the sand-hills, Peter, as usual, carrying a huge telescope with him, with which he was in the habit of surveying every ship as she rounded the west of the island, and came running in through the channel to Portsmouth. Most of the men-of-war he knew in an instant, and the others he could make a shrewd guess at. Generally when alone with Harry he was full of talk of the sea, of good advice as to the lad's future bearing, and of suggestions and hints as to the best course to be adopted in various emergencies. But to-day he appeared unusually thoughtful, and smoked his pipe, and looked out in silence over the sea, scarcely even lifting his telescope to his eye.

"I've been thinking, Harry," he said at

last, "that as you are going away again, and, as the old woman says, you may not find us both here when you come back, it is right that I should tell you a little more about yourself. I once told you, years ago, that you were not my son, and that I would give you more particulars some day."

The lad looked anxiously up at the old sailor. It was a matter which he had often thought over in his mind, for although he loved the honest tar and his good wife as much as he could have done his natural parents, still, since he had known that he was their adopted son only, he had naturally wondered much as to who his parents were, and what was their condition in life.

"I thought it as well," the old sailor began, "not to tell you this here yarn until you were getting on. Boys' heads get upset with a little breeze, especially if they have no ballast, and though it isn't likely now that you will ever get any clue as to your birth, and it will make no difference whether it was a duke or a ship's caulker who was your father, still it's right that you should know

the facts, as no one can say when they start on a voyage in life what craft they may fall aboard before they've done. It may be, Harry, that as you intends to stick to the merchant service—saving, of course, that little time you mean to serve on board a king's ship,—you may rise to be a skipper, and perhaps an owner. It may be, boy, that as a skipper you may fall in love with some taut craft sailing in your convoy. I've seen such things before now, and then the fact that you might be, for aught you know, the son of a marquis instead of being that of a boatswain, might score in your favour. Women have curious notions, and though, for my part, I can't see that it makes much difference where the keel of a craft was laid as long as it's sound and well-built, there are those who thinks different.

“ Well, to tell you the yarn. It were nigh fourteen years ago that I was boatswain aboard the *Alert* frigate, as taut a craft as ever sailed. We had a smart captain, and as good a crew as you'd want to see. We were cruising in the West Indies, and had



for months been, off and on, in chase of a craft that had done much damage there. She carried a black flag, and her skipper was said to be the biggest villain that ever even commanded a pirate. Scarce a week passed but some ship was missing. It mattered little to him whether she sailed under the English, the French, or the Spanish flag; all was fish to him. Many and many a vessel sailed laden that never reached Europe. Sometimes a few charred timbers would be thrown up on the shore of the islands, showing that the ship to which they belonged had been taken and burned before she had gone many days on her way. Often and often had the pirate been chased. She was barque-rigged, which was in itself a very unusual thing with pirates—indeed, I never knew of one before. But she had been, I believe, a merchantman captured by the pirate, and was such a beauty that he hoisted his flag on her, and handed his own schooner over to his mate. Somehow or other he had altered her ballast, and maybe lengthened her a bit, for those pirates have a rendezvous in some

of the islands, where they are so strong that they can, if need be, build a ship of their own. Anyhow, she was the fastest ship of her class that ever was seen on those seas, and though our cruisers had over and over again chased her, she laughed at them, and would for a whole day keep just out of reach of their bow-chasers with half her sails set, while the cruisers were staggering under every rag they could put on their masts. Then when she was tired of that game she would hoist her full canvas and leave the king's vessel behind as if she was standing still. Once or twice she nearly got caught by cruisers coming up in different directions, but each time she managed to slip away without ever having a rope or stay started by a shot. We in the *Alert* had been on her footsteps a dozen times, but had had no more luck than the rest of them, and the mere name of the *Seamew* was sufficient to put any one of us into a passion. There wasn't one of the ship's company, from the captain down to the powder-monkey, who wouldn't have cheerfully given a year's pay

to get alongside the *Seamew*. The *Alert* carried thirty-two guns, and our crew was stronger than usual in a vessel of that size, for there was a good deal of boat service, and it was considered that at any moment 'Yellow Jack' might lay a good many hands up—or down, as the case may be. Well, one night we were at anchor in Porto Rico, and the first lieutenant had strolled up with two of the middies to the top of a hill just before the sun went down. He had taken a glass with him. Just as the night was falling, a middy on our quarter-deck, who was looking at the shore with a glass, said to the second lieutenant, who was on watch:

“‘Look, sir; here comes Mr. Jones with Keen and Hobart down that hill as if he were running a race. He isn't likely to be racing the middies. What can he be after?’”

“‘No,’ the second lieutenant said, with a smile; ‘Mr. Jones is hardly likely to be racing the middies;’ which, indeed, was true enough, for the first lieutenant was as stiff as a ramrod—a good officer, but as strict a martinet as ever I sailed under.

“The second lieutenant took the glasses, and saw that whatever the reason might be, it was as the midshipman had said. The news that Mr. Jones was coming down the hill, running as if Old Nick was after him, soon spread, and there was quite an excitement on the quarter-deck as to what could be the matter.

“Ten minutes afterwards the gig was seen coming off to the ship, and it was evident, by the way the spray was flying and the oars bending, that the men were pulling as if for life or death. By this time the news had spread through the ship, and the captain himself was on the quarter-deck.

“‘Give me the speaking-trumpet,’ he said, and as the boat came within call he shouted, ‘What’s the matter, Mr. Jones? Is anything wrong?’

“‘I’ve sighted,’ the lieutenant said, standing up and making a trumpet with his two hands, ‘two craft together round the point of the island some fifteen miles at sea. They’re low down on the sea-line, but by their look I think that one is the *Seamew*,

and the other a merchantman she has captured.'

"Not a moment was lost. The captain gave the orders sharp and quick. The men, who were all standing about, were in a minute clustering on the yards, and never was canvas got on a ship faster than it was on the *Alert* that evening. Before the boat was fairly run up to the davits the anchor was at the cat-head, and the *Alert's* bows were pointing seawards. Five minutes afterwards, with every stitch of canvas set, we were running out of the harbour. The first lieutenant had taken the bearings pretty accurately, and as there was a brisk evening breeze blowing we spun along at a famous rate. By this time it was dark, and we had every hope that we might come upon the pirate before she had finished transferring the cargo of her prize under her own hatches. Not a light was shown, and as the moon was not up we hoped to get within gunshot before being seen, as the pirate, seeing no craft within sight before the sun went down, would not suspect that the *Alert* could be on his

traces. We had to sail close to the wind till we were round the point of the island, and then to run nearly before it towards the spot where the vessels had been seen. In two hours from the time of starting we reckoned that we must be getting close to them if they still remained hove-to.

“All of a sudden, some two miles ahead, a point or two off the starboard bow, a great flame shot up. Every moment it grew and grew until we could see a large ship in flames, while another lay about a quarter of a mile distant. Three or four boats were pulling from the ship in flames towards the other, and as this was a barque we had no doubt that we had caught the *Seamew* at her villainous work. The pirate was lying between us and the burning merchantman, so that while her spars stood out clear and distinct against the glare of light we must have been invisible to her. The word was passed quickly forward for the men to go to quarters. Every gun was double-shotted and run out, and then, all being ready for the fight, the men stripped to their waists, cutlasses and

boarding-pikes ready to hand, we waited with breathless anxiety. We were already within range of our bow-chasers, and as yet there was no sign that the pirate was conscious of our presence. The boats were now near him, and no doubt those on board were looking rather in their direction than to windward. On the *Alert* tore through the water, the sail trimmers were all ready to take in her light canvas at a moment's notice. The officers clustered on the quarter-deck, and the men stood by their guns with every eye strained at the pirate. Nearer and nearer we came, and our hopes rose higher and higher. We were within a mile now, when suddenly a great movement was seen on board the pirate. The breeze was steady, and the sea quiet, and loud words of command could be heard shouted as a swarm of men ran up the rattlins. It was clear we were seen. There was no further need of concealment, and the captain gave word for the bow-chasers to open. Quickly as the pirate got her canvas spread—and I do think that sharp as we had been on board the *Alert*,

the *Seamew* was even quicker in getting under canvas—we were scarce a quarter of a mile from her when she got fairly under way. Up to this moment not a gun had spoken save the two bow-chasers, as the captain would not yaw her until the last moment. Then round she came and poured a broadside into the *Seamew*. Orders had been given to fire high, and every man was on his mettle. The maintopmast of the *Seamew* fell, snapped at the cap; the peak halyards of the mizen were shot away, and a number of holes were drilled through her sails. A loud cheer broke from our men. Fast as the *Seamew* was she was sufficiently crippled now to prevent her getting away, and at last she was to show whether she could fight as well as run, and I must say for her she did.

“She carried but twenty guns against our thirty-two, but they were of far heavier metal, and after ten minutes the *Alert* was as much bruised and battered as if she had been fighting a Frenchman of equal size for an hour. However, we had not been idle, and as our shot had been principally directed



against the enemy's rigging, as our great object was to cripple her and so prevent her from getting away, she was by this time a mere wreck above, although her sides were scarcely touched; whereas two of our ports had been knocked into one, and some thirty of our men had been struck down either by shot or by splinters. Pouring a last broadside into her, the captain ordered the *Alert* to be brought alongside the *Seamew*. There was no need to call upon the boarders to be ready. Every man was prepared, and as the vessels came alongside our men rushed to the assault. But the crew of the *Seamew* were as eager to board us as we were them, and upon the very bulwarks a desperate combat ensued. Strong as we were the *Seamew* carried fully as many hands, and as they were fighting with halters round their necks it's little wonder that they fought so well.

“I've been in a good many fights, but never did I see one like that. Each man hacked, and hewed, and wielded his boarding-pike as if the whole fight depended upon his single exertions. Gradually the men whose

places were at the guns on the starboard side left their places and joined in the fight, while those on the port side continued to pour a fire of grape into the enemy. It was near half an hour before we got a fair footing on the pirate's deck, and then steadily and gradually we fought our way forward. But it was another half hour after the pirate captain and all his officers had been killed, and fully half the crew cut down, that the rest surrendered.

“On board the *Alert* we had fully one-third of our complement killed or wounded. Mr. Jones had been shot through the head; the second and third lieutenants were both badly wounded, and the captain himself had had his jaw broken by a pistol fired in his face. I got this scar on my cheek, which spoilt my beauty for the rest of my life, but as I had been over thirty years married to the old woman that made but little difference. Never were a crew more glorious than we were that night. Even the wounded felt that the victory had been cheaply purchased. We had captured the scourge of these seas,

which had for ten years laughed at all the fastest cruisers of our navy, and we felt as proud as if we had captured a French first-rate.

“All hands were at work next day in repairing damages. I was up aloft seeing to the fitting of fresh gear to the topgallant-mast when I saw something floating at sea which took my attention. It seemed to me like a box, and an empty one, for it floated high on the water. Its lid seemed to be open, and I thought once or twice that I saw something inside. I slid down to the quarter-deck and reported what I had seen. The third lieutenant, who was doing duty with his arm in a sling, was not disposed to take the men off their work to lower a boat; but as I pointed out that the box might have belonged to the merchantman which had been burned overnight, and that it might afford some clue as to the name of the ship, he consented, and with four hands I was soon rowing towards the box.

“I don't know what I had expected to see, but I was never more surprised than when,

getting there, I found that it was a trunk, and that in it, sitting up, was a child about eighteen months old. That was you, Harry. In the bottom of the trunk were a locket with a woman's likeness in it, a curious Indian bangle, and a few other articles of jewellery. How you got there we never knew, but the supposition was that when the pirate was overhauling the merchantman, and her true nature was ascertained, some mother, knowing the fate that awaited all on board, had put you in an open trunk, had thrown in what ornaments she had about her, and had dropped the trunk overboard, in hopes that it might drift away and be picked up by some passing ship. It was a wild venture, with a thousand to one against its success, but the Lord had watched over it, and there you were as snug and comfortable as if you had been laying in your own cot, though, by the way, you were squalling as loud as a litter of kittens, and I expect had missed your breakfast considerably. You were sitting up, and it was lucky that you were backward of your age, for, although by

your size we guessed you to be eighteen months, you were still unable to walk. If you had been as active as some chaps of that age you would have scrambled on to your feet, and no doubt capsized your boat.

“Well, we brought you on board, and there was a great talk as to what was to be done with you; but as I was your discoverer I claimed you as a lawful prize, and I thought you would amuse the old woman while I was at sea, and perhaps be a comfort to me when I got laid up in ordinary, as indeed you have been. So that’s all I know, Harry. Every inquiry was made, but we never heard of any ship which exactly answered to the description. You see, beyond the fact that she was a square-rigged ship we could say but little about her. The ornaments found in the box seemed to show that she had come from the East Indies, but of course that could not be, for what would she be doing there? But at anyrate the person who put you into the trunk, and who was no doubt your mother, had been to the East Indies, or at least had been given those ornaments by

someone who had, for there was no doubt where they were turned out.

“Well, on board the *Alert* every one got promoted. There was enough valuable property found on board the *Seamew* to give us a handsome sum all round, and it was my share of the prize-money that enabled me to buy this little cottage, and went no small way towards paying for your schooling and board. As no one else claimed you, and your friends could not be heard of, no one disputed my right to your guardianship; and so, my boy, here you have been cruising about the world as Harry Langley ever since.”

The old sailor was silent, and Harry was some time before he spoke.

“Well, dad, you may not have been my real father, but no one could have been a better father to me than you have, and as it isn't likely now that I shall ever hit upon a clue which could lead me to discover who I am, I shall continue to regard you as my real father. Still, as you say, it may perhaps in life be some advantage to me to be able to claim that I am the son of a mar-

quis;" and he laughed merrily. They talked the matter over for some time, and then Harry changed the subject.

"Are all our friends well?" Harry asked.

"All except poor Tom Hardy. He slipped his cable six months since, and his wife, poor old soul, is gone to some friends near Winchester."

"Who's living in the cottage?"

"Black Jack has taken it."

"What! has he moved from his old place, then?"

"No, it is said that he's taken it for a Frenchy, who comes down off and on. They say he's in the smuggling business with Black Jack, and that he disposes of the silks and wines that are brought over in the *Lucy*, and that Jack trades over in France with his friends. The lieutenant at the coast-guard station has his eye upon him, and I believe that some day they will catch Black Jack as he runs his cargo, but he's a slippery customer. It would be a good day for Hayling if they could do so, for he and his crew do a lot of harm to the place. They look more

like men who have belonged to the *Seamew* I was talking to you about than honest English fishermen."

"It was a curious thing, dad, that the Frenchman should be coming backwards and forwards here, and I wonder that the revenue people don't inquire into it."

"I don't suppose that they know very much about it, Harry. He comes off and on, generally arriving at night, and leaving a few hours afterwards. I hear about these things because everyone knows that old Peter Langley is not the chap to put his nose into other people's business. I don't like these goings on, I must say, and consider they will end badly. However, it is no business of ours, lad. We get our brandy cheap in Hayling—nowhere cheaper, I should say—and that, after all, is the matter that concerns us most. The wind's rising fast; I think we're in for a gale."

It was as Peter said. The clouds were rising fast behind the island, the waves were breaking with a short, sharp sound upon the beach, white heads were beginning to show



themselves out at sea, the fishing craft were running in towards Portsmouth under reefed sails, the men-of-war at Spithead could be seen sending down their top-masts, and everything betokened that it would be a nasty night.

“What time must you leave, Harry?”

“I shall go off at three to-morrow morning; shall cross the ferry, and catch the coach as it goes along at eight. I promised that I would be back on the following morning, and I would not fail in keeping my appointment, for, as the capatin has been so good I should be sorry that he should think that I had broken my word.”

In the course of the day Harry went over to the village and saw many of his boy friends. Bill Simpkins, however, his great chum, happened to be away, but his parents said that he would be back at nine in the evening. He had gone over to Winchester to see a brother who was in a regiment quartered there. Accordingly, soon after nine o'clock Harry said to his father that he would just walk over to have a chat

with his friend, and be back in an hour or so.

“Thou had best stop at home and go to bed at once,” Jane Langley said; “if thou hast to start at three o’clock, it were time thou wert in bed now.”

“I am accustomed to short nights,” Harry said, laughing, “and I shall be able to sleep long to-morrow.”

Putting on his hat, he nodded to the old couple, and went off at a run into the darkness.

The road was a wide one, and but little frequented, and the grass grew thick over a considerable portion of the sides, therefore as he ran along with a light, springy tread, the sound of his footsteps was deadened. As he came along by the cottage of which he had been speaking to Peter Langley he heard the sound of voices within. Being curious to see what this mysterious Frenchman was like, Harry paused, lightly lifted the latch of the gate, and entered the little garden. He had intended to peep in at the window, and, having satisfied his curiosity, to

be off; but just as he reached the door the latter opened suddenly, and Harry had only time to draw back behind the little porch before two men came out. In one Harry recognized by his voice the smuggler Black Jack; the other was by his halting English evidently the foreigner. They stopped for a moment, looking out into the night.

"I tell you," the smuggler said, "it's going to be a storm, and no mistake. The *Lucy* is a tight craft, and has weathered gales when many a bigger ship has gone down. Still, I don't like running out into it without necessity."

"Necezity," said the Frenchman. "I sould have sought zat ze earning of £500 was as urgent a necezity as was wanted."

"Ay, the money will be handy enough," the smuggler said, "though one does put one's head into the noose to earn it. However, the sum is bigger than usual, and, as you say, the affair is important."

"Bah!" the Frenchman said, "what does it matter about ze nooze? It hasn't got over your zick neck or my zin one, and till it

does we needn't trouble about it. I tell you zis is ze most important despatch we have ever sent, and if it gets safe to hand zey cannot grudge us double pay. I have ridden from London wizout stopping, and have killed a horse worth fifty of your guineas. However, zat matters not. Zis letter should fetch us zê money to pay for a dozen horses and a dozen of your *Lucys*."

"All right!" the smuggler said; "in an hour we will be off. Letters like that in your pocket are best not kept long on hand. You are sure that the *Chasse Marée* will put out to meet us in such weather as we are likely to have?"

"She will put out if a hurricane's blowing," the Frenchman said. "They know ze importance of ze news, which is expected, and which I am bringing zem. Mon Dieu! what sums have been paid to get ze news zat's in zis little despatch."

"Do you know what it is?" the smuggler said.

"Not for certain," the Frenchman replied, "but I believe it is ze orders zat are to be

sent to ze British fleet, and zat zay are about to strike a great blow zomewhere."

"Well," the smuggler said, "I will go round and tell the boys. I warned them to be in readiness, and I will send them straight down to the beach. In a quarter of an hour I will return for you."

While this conversation had been going on Harry had been standing against the porch, the sides of which were filled with lattice-work over which a creeper grew. He had been frightened at the importance of the secret that he was hearing, and had been rapidly meditating in his mind how this all-important information which was about to be conveyed to the enemy could be stopped. He had made up his mind that the instant the smuggler moved out he would make his way down to the village, tell the tale to half-a-dozen men, and have the Frenchman seized. He saw at once that it would be difficult, for the smuggler and his gang were not men to be attacked with impunity, and the fishers of the village would hesitate in taking part in such a struggle merely on the

information of a boy. However, Harry saw that it was the only chance.

In his anxiety to stand close to the lattice and so hide himself from the view of the two men who were standing on the little garden-path in front, he pressed too hard against it. The woodwork was rotten with age, and suddenly with a crash it gave way.

With an oath the smuggler turned round, and he and the Frenchman dashed to the spot, and in an instant had collared the lad. In a moment he was dragged into the room.

"We must cut his throat, Mounseer," the smuggler said, with a terrible imprecation. "The scoundrel has heard what we've said, and our lives won't be worth a minute's purchase if he were to be let free. Stand by and I'll knock out his brains;" and he seized a heavy poker from the side of the hearth.

"No, no," the Frenchman said, "don't let us have blood. Zere might be inquiries, and zese sings will sometimes be found. Better take him to sea wis you in ze *Lucy*, and hand him over to ze *Chasse Marée*. Zay

will take care zat he does not come back again."

"I will take care myself," the smuggler said. "I'm not going to risk my neck on the chance of his blabbing. It's better, as you say, to have no blood, but as soon as the *Lucy's* at sea, overboard he goes."

"We can talk of it," the Frenchman said. "I'm wis you zat he must be silenced, but it may be better—my plan zan yours. Zis boy belongs, I suppose, to ze village?"

"Yes," the smuggler said, "I know him by sight. He's the son of an old man-of-war's man who lives half a mile away."

"Well, you see, some of your men might some day, if they quarrelled wis you, or in zeir drink, drop some words which might lead to inquiries. Better put him on board ze *Chasse Marée*. I will see ze matter is settled."

Harry had spoken no word from the time he was grasped. He felt in an instant that his life was forfeited, and was surprised that he had not been instantly killed. He had not raised his voice to hallo, for he knew that no cottagers were near, and was sure that an

attempt to give the alarm would ensure his instant death. To struggle would have been useless. He was unarmed, and although a stout lad, was but a child in the grasp of a powerful man like the smuggler. He saw, too, that on the instant the Frenchman had drawn a dagger from his breast, and though more quiet than the smuggler he felt by the tone of his voice that he was as determined as his colleague that his silence should be secured by death.

In another minute he was bound and thrown into a corner. The Frenchman then took his seat near him, assuring him in a low tone that he would at his first movement plant his dagger in his heart. The smuggler strolled off to summon his crew, and for a quarter of an hour silence reigned in the cottage.

“You are one fool,” the Frenchman said at last, as if he had been thinking the matter over—“one meddlesome fool. Why you want to listen at people’s doors and learn zeir secrets? I don’t want to kill you, but what are we to do? You make us kill you. You push your own head into ze trap. Zat



is ze way wis boys. Zey are for ever meddling in affairs zat concern zem not, and zen we have ze trouble to kill zem. I would give a hundred pounds if zis had not happened; but what can I do? It is my life against yours, and alzough I am sorry to have to do it—parbleu, my life is of much more value zan zat of a fishing-boy. Bah! you are one meddlesome fool.”

So exasperated was the Frenchman at the trouble which the prying of this lad had brought upon him that he got up and angrily gave him a kick. A few minutes later the smuggler returned.

“The men have all gone down to the boat,” he said briefly. “Come along, Mounseer. Bring that tin case with you, and those pistols.”

“Zere is no fear zat I forget ze tin case,” the Frenchman said. “As to ze pistols—zey are not of much use. However, I will take zem;” and hethrust them into the pockets of his coat.

The smuggler stooped, picked up Harry, threw him on to a sail which he laid on the

ground, wrapped this round him, and then cast him over his shoulder.

"I'm not likely to meet any one on my way to the boat," he said, "but should I do so I'm taking the main-sail of the *Lucy* down to her."

In another minute Harry heard the door slam, and then he felt himself being carried steadily along, his weight being as nothing to the smuggler. Not a word was spoken between the two men on their way down to the shore. Presently Harry felt by the deadened sound of the footsteps, and by the more uneven motion, that he was being carried over the sandy slopes down to the edge of the sea, and through the canvas he could hear the loud roar of the waves, which were now breaking violently.

Presently he was flung roughly down on the sands. A minute later he was lifted by the head and feet, and swung into a boat. Not a word was spoken as it was shoved off through the breakers, and after ten minutes' hard rowing he felt a shock, and knew that they were alongside of the *Lucy*. He was

hauled up on deck. He heard a few words of command, and then felt the vessel was on her way. A minute or two later the covering was unloosed. His cords were cut, and the smuggler said to him, "You can't get away now, and may as well make yourself handy for the present. Give a haul on that rope."

The *Lucy* was, in fact, short-handed, two of the six men who composed her crew having been absent. She was a lugger of some twenty-five tons burden, built something like an ordinary fishing-boat, but longer and lower, and was, in fact, used for fishing when her crew were not engaged upon other adventures. She was a remarkably fast craft, and had more than once showed her heels with success when chased by the revenue cutters. She owed her immunity from capture, however, chiefly to her appearance, as from her size and build she generally passed unsuspected as an innocent fisherman.

The storm increased in violence, and the little lugger, although a good sea-boat, had difficulty in making her way almost in the

teeth of the gale. She was bound, Harry gained from a word or two dropped by the captain, for the mouth of the Loire, off which she was to be met by the *Chasse Marée*. Long before morning the coast of England was out of sight, and the lugger was struggling down Channel bravely holding her way in the sou'-westerly gale.

“Will she be zere true to her time?” the Frenchman asked the smuggler.

“Ay, she will do it,” Black Jack said, “if the wind holds as at present. Two o'clock in the morning is the time named, and if your people are as punctual as I shall be, the £500 will be gained. There's one thing—in such a gale as is blowing to-day none of our cruisers who may be off the coast are likely to trouble themselves about a boat like ours. They may wonder what we are doing at sea, but are scarcely likely to chase us.”

Once or twice in the course of the day large vessels were seen in the distance, which Harry knew, by the cut of their sails, to be English cruisers. All were, however, lying-to under the smallest canvas, and Harry

knew that any assistance from them was out of the question. Towards evening the gale moderated, but the sea was still very high. During the day Harry had turned over in his mind every possible plan by which he might destroy the tin case which contained, as he knew, such important documents. From what he had gathered he learned that the success of some great undertaking upon which the British fleet were about to embark would be marred if these papers were to find their way into the hands of the French authorities. His own life he regarded as absolutely forfeited, for he was sure that no sooner was he fairly on board the French *Chasse Marée* than he would, at the orders of the French spy, be thrown overboard, and that his life had been so preserved, not from any feeling of mercy, but in order that his death might be accomplished with less risk to those whose safety demanded it.

He was determined, if opportunity presented it, to seize the little case and to leap overboard with it. The French spy never for one moment put it down. It was a small

tin case, with a handle at the top, and some eight inches long by three inches wide, and the same deep. Sometimes the Frenchman put it in his pocket, beyond which it projected, but even then he took the precaution always to keep his hand upon it. During the day Harry was constantly employed in work on board the lugger, hauling at ropes and acting as if he were one of the regular crew. He had shared in the meals with the men, but beyond a curse now and then not a word had been addressed to him by any on board. The night came on; the wind was still going down, but the sea was very heavy. From the occasional rifts in the clouds the stars could be seen shining brightly, and once or twice the moon broke through and spread a light over the angry sea. As time went on the smuggler became anxious, and kept a keen look-out ahead.

"It is past two," he exclaimed presently to the Frenchman, "and we are nearly off the mouth of the river. When the moon shone out just now I thought I caught sight of a vessel coming out, and I believe to

windward an English cruiser is lying. However, I will get ready the lanterns."

The next time the moon came out a vessel was clearly seen. The smuggler raised the lantern above the bulwarks, held it there for half a minute, and then lowered it. This he repeated three times. A moment later a similar signal was made on the bows of the vessel.

"That's her," the smuggler exclaimed exultingly, "and the £500 is as good as in my pocket."

As he spoke a bright flash was seen to windward.

"Confound it!" the smuggler said, "that cruiser has caught sight of the Frenchman. However, we shall be on board in plenty of time, and whether she gets safe to shore or not matters not much to me. I shall have done my part of the work, and you, mounseer, will give me the order for payment on London."

"It's done, my friend," the Frenchman said, "you've done your work well. Here's the order."

By this time the French craft was within a distance of a quarter of a mile, running down at a great pace under her reefed sails.

"It'll be no easy matter to get on board," the smuggler said, "for the sea is running tremendously. They will have to throw a rope, and you will have to catch it, mounseer, and jump overboard. I suppose your despatch-box is watertight?"

"And the boy?" the Frenchman asked.

"Let them throw another rope," the smuggler said, "and you can haul him on board too. It won't make much matter whether I slip the noose round his body or his neck. The last will be the easiest plan perhaps, for then, if he happens not to be alive when you pull him out, it would be an accident; and even if any one chooses to peach, they can't swear that it was purposely done."

Harry was standing near, and heard the words. He was close to the helm at the time, and watched with intense anxiety as the *Chasse Marée* ran rapidly down to them. It was clear that what had to be done must be done quickly, for another flash came up



from the cruiser; and although in the din of the wind and the toss of the waves it could not be seen where her shot had fallen, the brightness of the flash showed that she had come up since the last shot was discharged. The *Chasse Marée* ran down, and as she came its captain stood upon the bulwarks and shouted at the top of his voice, "Keep her steady, and as I run past I will throw a rope."

"Throw two," Black Jack shouted. "There are two to come on board."

The course taken by the *Chasse Marée* would bring her along at a distance of some ten yards from the side of the lugger. At the moment a squall came, and the lugger's head turned a little towards the approaching craft. When she was just upon them Harry saw that his one chance of escape had come. With a sudden rush he knocked the man at the helm from his footing, and put the tiller up hard. The lugger paid off instantly. Black Jack, with an oath, turned round and sprang at Harry. The lad leapt beneath his uplifted hand, sprang at the Frenchman, who

was standing with his back to him, and snatching the tin box from his hand leapt overboard.

Momentary as had been his hold upon the tiller it had been sufficient. The vessel had paid off from the wind, and before the helmsman could regain his feet, or Black Jack could seize the tiller, she lay across the course of the *Chasse Marée*; and in another moment the French craft plunged down upon her, and with a crash the *Lucy* sank under her bows, and went down with all on board.

As Harry sank beneath the waves he heard a shout of dismay from those on board the *Lucy*. When he came up a minute later he saw the *Chasse Marée* ploughing her way from him, but no sign of the *Lucy* was to be seen. Harry was a good swimmer, and fortunately the despatch-box which he grasped was water-tight, and buttoning it within his jacket he felt that it kept his head easily above the water. He swam as well as he could away from the spot where the *Lucy* had disappeared, for he knew that if Black Jack or the Frenchman had escaped being

run down and should see him, his death was certain—not indeed that his chances were in any case good, but with the natural hopefulness of boyhood he clung to life, and resolved to make a fight for it as long as possible. Had it not been for the despatch-box he must have speedily succumbed, for in so heavy a sea it was difficult in the extreme to swim. However, after a short time he turned his back to the wind, and suffered himself quietly to drift.

Hour passed after hour, and at last, to his intense delight, morning began to break. He saw on his right the low shores of the French coast, and looking round beheld seaward the British cruiser which had fired at the *Chasse Marée*. She was running quietly along the coast, and was evidently on guard at the mouth of the river. The sea had now gone down much, and the sun rose bright in an almost cloudless sky.

Invigorated by the sight of the vessel Harry at once swam towards her. She was farther out by a mile than the spot where he was swimming, and was some two miles astern

of him. She was sailing but slowly, and he hoped that by the time she came along he would be able to get within a distance whence he might be seen. His fear was that she might run back before she reached the spot where she would be nearer to him.

With all his strength he swam steadily out, keeping his eye fixed steadily on the ship. Still she came onward, and was within half a mile when she was abreast of him. Then raising himself as high as he could from the water he shouted at the top of his voice. Again and again he splashed with his hands to make as much spray and commotion as possible in order to attract attention. His heart almost stood still with joy as he heard an answering hail, and a moment later he saw the vessel come round into the wind, and lay there with her sails back. Then a boat was lowered, and five minutes later he was hauled in, his senses almost leaving him now that the time for exertion had passed. It was not until he had been lifted on to the deck of the *Viper*, and brandy had been poured down his throat, that he was able to speak.

As soon as he was sufficiently recovered he was sent for to the captain's cabin.

"And who are you, boy, and whence do you come?" the captain asked. "Do you belong to the *Chasse Marée*, which we chased in the night?"

The officer spoke in French, supposing that Harry had fallen overboard from that craft.

"I am English, sir," Harry said, "and escaped from a lugger which was run down by the French craft just as you were firing at her."

"I thought," exclaimed the captain, "that my eyes had not been wrong. I was sure that I saw a small fishing-boat close to the *Chasse Marée*. We lost sight of her when a cloud came over the moon, and thought we must have been mistaken. How came you there in an English fishing-boat?"

Harry modestly told the story, and produced the despatch-box.

"This is important news indeed," the officer said, "and your conduct has been in every way most gallant. What is your name, lad?"

“Harry Langley,” he replied. “I am an apprentice on board the Indiaman *Dundas Castle*, and was to have sailed this week in the convoy for the West Indies.”

“You will not be able to do that now,” the captain said. “This is most important. However, the steward will take charge of you, and I will talk to you again presently.”

The steward was called, and was told to put Harry into a cot slung for him, and to give him a bowl of warm soup; and in a few minutes the lad was asleep.

The *Viper* shortly afterwards hauled her wind, and ran down to a consort who was keeping watch with her over the mouth of the Loire. The captain repaired on board the other ship, whose commander was his senior officer, and a consultation was held between them, after which the *Viper* was again got under sail and shaped her course for Portsmouth.

The wind was fair, and the next morning the *Viper* passed through the Needles, and soon afterwards anchored at Spithead. Here a large number of men-of-war and frigates

were at anchor, and above two of the largest floated the flags of admirals. The *Viper* had made her signal as she came in sight of the fleet, and a reply was instantly run up from the masthead of the admiral's ship, directing the captain to come on board immediately the anchor was dropped. The moment this was done the captain's gig was lowered, and calling to Harry to follow him, the captain took his seat in the stern-sheets, and rowed for the admiral's ship. Directing the lad to remain on deck, the captain at once entered the admiral's cabin, and a few minutes later the admiral's orderly summoned Harry to enter.

Admiral Sir Hyde Parker had evidently had a breakfast party, for a number of naval officers, including Admiral Nelson and most of the captains of the men-of-war, were seated round the table. The admiral turned to Harry.

"So you are the lad who has brought this box of despatches?"

"Yes, sir," Harry said modestly.

"Tell us your story over again," the admiral said. "It's a strange one."

Harry again repeated the account of his adventures from the time of leaving his father's cottage. When he had done Admiral Nelson exclaimed:

"Very well, my lad. You could not have acted with more presence of mind had you been a captain of the fleet. You showed great bravery and did your duty nobly."

"There wasn't much bravery, sir," Harry said modestly, "for I knew that they were going to kill me anyhow, so that it made no difference. But I was determined, if possible, that the despatches should be destroyed."

The admiral smiled. He was not accustomed to hear his dicta even so slightly questioned by a lad.

"You are an apprentice in the merchant service, Captain Skinner tells me," Sir Hyde Parker said, "and have been two years at sea."

"Yes, sir," Harry said.

"Would you like to be on the quarter-deck of one of his majesty's vessels, instead of that of a merchantman?"

Harry's eyes glistened at the question.

"I should indeed, sir," he said.



"Then you shall be, my boy," the admiral answered. "Have any of you gentlemen a vacancy in the midshipmen's berth? If not, I'll have him ranked as a supernumerary on board my ship."

"I am short of a midshipman, Sir Hyde," one of the captains said. "Poor little De Lisle fell overboard the night before last as we came round from Plymouth. He was about the size of this lad, and I'll arrange for him to have his togs. I like his look, and I should be glad to have him with me. I am sure he will be a credit to the service."

"That's settled, then," the admiral said. "You are now, sir," he said, turning to Harry again, "an officer in his majesty's service, and, as Captain Ball remarks, I am sure you will do credit to the service. A lad who does his duty when death is staring him in the face, and without a hope that the act of devotion will ever be known or recognized, is sure to make a brave and worthy officer."

Harry's new captain wrote a few words on a piece of paper, and said to the admiral's

servant, "Will you tell the midshipman of my gig to come here?"

A minute afterwards the midshipman entered. The captain gave him the slip of paper and said, "Take this young gentleman on board the ship with you at once, and present him to Mr. Francis, and with him give this note. He will be your shipmate in future. See that he's made comfortable."

The midshipman then beckoned to Harry to follow him, gazing askance, and with no slight astonishment in his face, at the appearance of his new messmate. Harry's attire, indeed, was not in accordance with the received ideas of that of a midshipman freshly joining a ship. His clothes were all so much shrunk that his ankles showed below his trousers, and his wrists below his coat sleeves. Without a word the midshipman took his place in the stern-sheets, and beckoned Harry to sit beside him.

"Where have you sprung from?" he said shortly.

"I hail last from the admiral's cabin," Harry said with a laugh. "Before that from

his majesty's ship *Viper*, and before that from the sea."

"You look like the sea," said the midshipman. "But what have you been doing? Have you served before?"

"Not in a king's ship," Harry said; "I have only just been appointed."

The midshipman was too surprised at Harry's appearance to question him further. He felt that there was some mystery in the affair, and that it would be better for him to wait until he saw the footing upon which Harry was placed. He had little doubt from the fact of his appointment being made under such circumstances that there must be something at once singular and noteworthy about it.

Upon reaching the ship Harry's new messmate at once led him up to the first lieutenant, and presented the captain's note. The lieutenant opened it and glanced at the contents. They were brief:

"Harry Langley has been appointed midshipman on board the *Cæsar*, and has been promoted by Sir Hyde Parker himself. He

has performed a most gallant action, and one of the greatest importance. Make him at home at once, and let him have poor De Lisle's kit. I will arrange about it."

The senior midshipman was at once sent for by Mr. Francis, and Harry handed over to him. The first lieutenant intimated to him briefly the contents of the captain's letter, telling the midshipman to make him as comfortable as possible.

Harry was led below to the cockpit, where his arrival was greeted with a storm of questions, as his appearance on the quarter-deck had naturally excited a great deal of observation. The midshipman who had come with him could, of course, furnish no information, and beyond the brief fact mentioned by the captain and repeated by the first lieutenant, his new conductor could say no more.

"Just wait," the midshipman said, "till he's got into his new clothes and looks presentable. He's in my charge, and I am to make him comfortable. As he has been put on the quarter-deck by Sir Hyde himself you may be sure he has done something out of the way."

In a few minutes Harry was rigged out in full midshipman's dress, and being a very good-looking and gentlemanly lad, his appearance favourably impressed his new mess-mates, who had at first been disposed to resent the intrusion among themselves of a youngster whose appearance was at least the reverse of reputable.

"Now," said one of the passed mates, "this meeting will resolve itself into a committee. Let every one who can sit down; and let those who can't, stand quiet. I am the president of the court. Now, prisoner at the bar," he said, "what's your name?"

"Harry Langley."

"And how came you here?"

"I was brought in the captain's gig."

"No equivocation, prisoner. I mean what brought you on to the quarter-deck?"

"I had the good luck," Harry said, "to prevent a very important despatch falling into the hands of the French."

"The deuce you had!" the president said; "and how was that? That is to say," he said, "if there's no secret about it?"

"None at all," Harry said, "the matter was very simple;" and for the second time that morning he told the story.

When he had done there was a general exclamation of approval among those present, and the midshipmen crowded round him, shaking his hand, patting him on the back, and declaring that he was a trump.

"The prisoner is acquitted," the president said, "and is received as a worthy member of this noble body. Boy!"

"Yes, sir."

"Go to the purser and ask him to send in two bottles of rum for this honourable mess to drink the health of a new comrade."

Presently the boy returned.

"The purser says, sir, who is going to pay for the rum?"

There was a roar of laughter among the middies, for the master's mate, who had acted as president, was notoriously in the purser's books to the full amount of his credit. However, a midshipman who happened that morning to have received a remittance, undertook to stand the liquor to

the mess, and Harry's health was drunk with all honours.

"I suppose," one of the midshipmen said, "that the contents of the despatch were with reference to the point to which we are all bound. I wonder where it can be?"

Here an animated discussion arose as to the various points against which the attack of the fleet, now rapidly assembling at Spithead, might be directed. So far no whisper of its probable course had been made public, and it was believed indeed that even the captains of the fleet were ignorant of its object.

Upon the following day Harry at once obtained leave to go on shore for twenty-four hours. Immediately he reached the Head he chartered a wherry, and was on the point of sailing when he heard a well-known voice among a group of sailors standing near him.

"I can't make head or tail of it," Peter Langley said. "My boy left me merely to go down to the village, and was to have returned the first thing in the morning to join his ship in London. Well, he never came

back no more. What he did with himself, unless he sailed in a smuggling lugger which put out an hour or two afterwards, I can't make out. The boy would never have shipped in that craft willingly, and I can see no reason why he should have gone otherwise. He didn't cross the ferry, and I can't help suspecting there was some foul play. When Black Jack returns I will have it out of him if I kill him for it. He has a strong party there, and I want half a dozen good tight hands to come with me to Hayling. He will probably be back in a couple of days, and if we tackle him directly he lands we may find out something about him. Who will go with me?"

Half a dozen voices exclaimed that they were willing to assist their old mate, when suddenly Harry stepped in among them, saying, "There's no occasion for that. I can tell them all about him."

Peter Langley stepped backwards in his astonishment, and stared open-mouthed at Harry.

"Dash my buttons!" he exclaimed, "why,



if it isn't Harry himself, and in a midshipman's rig. What means this, my boy?"

"It means, father, that I am a midshipman on board his majesty's ship *Cæsar*."

Peter stood for a moment as one stupefied with astonishment, and then threw his tarpaulin high in the air with a shout of delight. It fell into the water, and the tide carried it away; Peter gave it no further thought, but seizing Harry's hand, wrung it with enthusiastic delight.

"This is news indeed, my boy," he said. "To think of seeing you on the quarter-deck, and that so soon!"

It was some minutes before Harry could shake himself free from his friends, all of whom were old chums of the boatswain, and had known him in his childhood. Drawing Peter aside at last he took him to a quiet hotel, and there, to the intense astonishment of the veteran, he related to him the circumstances which had led to his elevation. The old sailor was alternately filled with wrath and admiration, and it was only the consideration that beyond doubt Black Jack

and the Frenchman had both perished in the *Lucy* that restrained him from instantly rushing off to take vengeance upon them.

An hour later the pair took a wherry and sailed to Hayling, where the joy of Peter was rivalled by that of Harry's foster-mother. That evening Peter went out, and so copiously ordered grog for all the seafaring population in honour of the event that the village was a scene of rejoicing and festivity such as was unknown in its quiet annals.

The next day Harry rejoined his ship, and commenced his regular duties as a midshipman on board.

A week later the whole of the ships destined to take part in it had arrived. The "Blue Peter" was hoisted at the ship's head, and on a gun firing from the admiral's ship, the anchors were weighed, and the fleet soon left Spithead behind them. It consisted of eighteen sail of the line, with a number of frigates and gun-boats. The expedition was commanded by Sir Hyde Parker, with Admiral Nelson second in command. Contrary to the general expectation they sailed east-

ward instead of passing through the Solent, and, coasting along the south of England, passed through the Straits of Dover and stood out into the North Sea.

Harry had had an interview with his captain four days after he had joined. The latter told him that the despatch-box which he had taken had been sent up to London, and that its contents proved to be of the highest importance, and that the Lords of the Admiralty had themselves written to the admiral expressing their extreme satisfaction at the capture, saying that the whole of their plans would have been disconcerted had the papers fallen into the hands of the enemy. They were pleased to express their strong approval of the conduct of Harry Langley, and gave their assurance that when the time came his claim for promotion should not be ignored.

“So, my lad,” the captain said, “you may be sure that when you have passed your cadetship you will get your epaulette without loss of time, and if you are steady and well conducted you may look out for a brilliant

position. It is not many lads who enter the navy under such favourable conditions. I should advise you to study hard in order to fit yourself for command when the time should come. From what you tell me your education has not been neglected, and I have no doubt you know as much as the majority of my midshipmen as to books. But books are not all. An officer in his majesty's service should be a gentleman. That you are that in manner, I am happy to see. But it is desirable also that an officer should be able in all society to hold his own in point of general knowledge with other gentlemen. Midshipmen, as a class, are too much given to shirking their studies, and to think that if an officer can handle and fight a ship it is all that is required. It may be all that is absolutely necessary, but you will find that the men who have most made their mark are all something more than rough sailors. I need say nothing to you as to the necessity of at all times and all hazards doing your duty. That is a lesson that you have clearly already learned."

As the fleet still kept east, expectation rose higher and higher as to the objects of the expedition. Some supposed that a dash was to be made on Holland. Others conceived that the object of the expedition must be one of the North German or Russian forts, and the latter were confirmed in their ideas when one fine morning the fleet were found to be entering the Sound. Instead of passing through, however, the fleet anchored here out of gunshot of the forts of Copenhagen, and great was the astonishment of the officers and men alike of the fleet when it became known that an ultimatum had been sent on shore, and that the Danes (who had been regarded as a neutral power) were called upon at once to surrender their fleet to the English.

Upon the face of facts known to the world at large this was indeed a most monstrous breach of justice and right. The Danes had taken no part in the great struggle which had been going on, and their sympathies were generally supposed to be with the English rather than the French. Thus, for a

fleet to appear before the capital of Denmark, and to summon its king to surrender his fleet, appeared a high-handed act of brute force.

In fact, however, the English government had learned that negotiations had been proceeding between the Danish government and the French; and that a great scheme had been agreed upon, by which the Danes should join the French at a given moment, and the united fleets being augmented by ships of other powers, a sudden attack would be made upon England. Had this secret confederation not been interfered with, the position of England would have been seriously threatened. The fleet which the allies would have been able to put on to the scene would have greatly exceeded that which England could have mustered to defend her coast, and although peace nominally prevailed between England and Denmark the English ministry considered itself justified—and posterity has agreed in the verdict—in taking time by the forelock, and striking a blow before their seeming ally had time to throw

off the mask and to join in the projected attack upon them.

It was the news of this secret resolve on the part of the cabinet that, having in some way been obtained by a heavy bribe from a subordinate in the admiralty, was being carried over in cypher to France in the *Lucy*, and had it reached its destination the Danes would have been warned in time, and the enterprise undertaken by Parker and Nelson would have been impossible, for the forts of Copenhagen, aided by the fleet in the harbour, were too strong to have been attacked had they been thoroughly prepared for the strife. As all these matters were unknown to the officers of the fleet, great was the astonishment when the captains of the ships assembled in the admiral's cabin, and each received orders as to the position which his vessel was to take up, and the part it was to bear in the contest. This being settled, the captains returned to their respective ships.

Several days were spent in negotiations, but as the Danes finally refused compliance with the English demands the long-looked-

for signal was hoisted and the fleet stood in through the Sound. It was a fine sight as the leading squadron, consisting of twelve line-of-battle ships and a number of frigates under Admiral Nelson, steered on through the Sound, followed at a short distance by Sir Hyde Parker with the rest of the fleet. The Danish forts on the Sound cannonaded them, but their fire was very ineffectual, and the fleet without replying steered on until they had attained the position intended for them. The Danes were prepared for action. Their fleet of thirteen men-of-war and a number of frigates, supported by floating batteries mounting seventy heavy guns, was moored in a line four miles long in front of the town, and was further supported by the forts on shore.

This great force was to be engaged by the squadron of Admiral Nelson alone, as that of Sir Hyde Parker remained outside menacing the formidable Crown Batteries and preventing these from adding their fire to that of the fleet and other shore batteries upon Nelson's squadron.



The *Cæsar*, the leading ship of the fleet, had been directed to sail right past the line of ships and to operate against a detached fort standing on a spit of land on the right flank of the Danish position. This fort mounted many guns much superior to those of the *Cæsar* in weight, but the crew were in high spirits at the prospect of a fight, little as they understood the cause for which they were engaged. Stripping to the waist they clustered round the guns, each officer at his post, Harry, with two other midshipmen, being upon the quarter-deck near the captain to carry orders from him as might be required to different parts of the ship. As the *Cæsar* passed along the line of ships to take up her position she was saluted by a storm of fire from the Danish vessels, to which she made no reply. She suffered, however, but little injury, although shot and shell whistled between the masts and struck the water on all sides of her, several striking the hull with a dull, crashing sound, while her sails were pierced with holes. Harry felt that he was rather pale, and was disgusted with himself

at the feeling of discomfort which he experienced. But there is nothing that tries the nerves more than standing the fire of an enemy before it is time to set to work to reply. As soon as orders were given for the *Cæsar's* fire to be opened, directly the guns could be brought to bear, and the roar of her cannon answered those of the fort, the feeling of uneasiness on Harry's part disappeared, and was succeeded by that of the excitement of battle. The din was prodigious. Along the whole line the British fleet was engaged, and the boom of the heavy guns of the ships, forts, and batteries, and the rattle of musketry from the tops of the ships, kept up a deep roar like that of incessant thunder.

"The water is very shallow, sir," the first lieutenant reported to the captain. "There are but two fathoms under her foot. The wind, too, is dropping so much that we have scarcely steerage-way, and the current is sweeping us along fast."

"Prepare to anchor, Mr. Francis," the captain said.

He had scarcely spoken, however, when

there was a slight shivering sensation in the ship, and it was known by all on board that she was aground, and that on a falling tide. While the starboard guns were kept at work the men were called off from those of the port side, boats were lowered and hawsers were got out, and every effort was made to tow the ship off the shoal. The sailors pulled hard in spite of the storm of shot and shell which fell round them from the fort and the nearest Danish ships. But the *Cæsar* was fast. Calling the men on board again, the captain requested the first lieutenant to go aloft and see what was going on in other parts of the line. He returned with the news that four or five other ships were plainly aground and that things appeared to be going badly. In the meantime the *Cæsar* was suffering heavily. The fire of the fort was well directed, and the gunners, working their pieces under comparative shelter, were able to pour their fire steadily into the *Cæsar*, while a floating battery and two frigates also kept up an incessant fire.

The number of killed and wounded was

already large, but as only the guns of the starboard side could be worked the fire was kept up with unabated zeal, and the fort bore many signs of the accuracy of the fire. The parapet was in many places shot away and several of the guns put out of action. But the *Cæsar* was clearly overmatched, and the captain hastily wrote a note to the admiral, stating that the ship was aground and was altogether overmatched, and begging that another vessel might be despatched to his aid, if one could be spared, in order to partially relieve her of the enemy's fire.

"Here, Mr. Langley, take the gig and row off to the flagship instantly."

Harry obeyed orders. Through the storm of shot and shell which were flying, striking up the water in all directions, he made his way to the admiral's ship, which was lying nearly a mile away.

Admiral Nelson opened the note and read it through.

"Tell Captain Ball," he said, "that I haven't a ship to spare. Several are aground, and all hard pressed. He must do the best he can.

Ah! you are the lad whom I saw in Sir Hyde Parker's cabin, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

The admiral nodded in token of approval, and Harry prepared to leave. Suddenly a thought struck him, and running into the captain's cabin he asked the steward for a small table-cloth.

"What on earth d'you want it for?" he exclaimed.

"Never mind. Give it me at once."

Seizing the table-cloth he ran down into the boat. As they returned towards the *Cæsar* they could see how hardly matters were going with her. One of her masts was down. Her sides were battered and torn, and several of her port-holes were knocked into one. Still her fire continued unabated, but it was clear that she could not much longer resist.

"Do you think she must haul down her flag?" Harry said to the coxswain of the boat.

"Ay, ay, sir," the coxswain said. "Wood and iron can't stand such a pounding as that

much longer. Most captains would have hauled down the flag long before this, and even our skipper can't stand out much longer. There won't be a man alive to fight her."

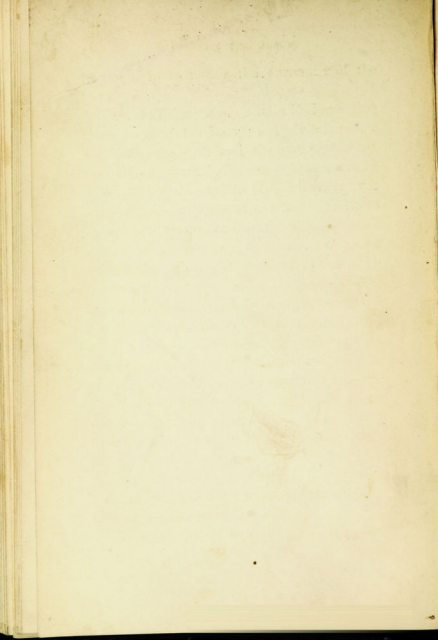
"Will you do as I order?" Harry said.

"Ay, sir," the coxswain said in surprise, "I will do what you like;" for the story of the conduct by which Harry had gained his midshipman's promotion had been repeated through the ship, and the men were all proud of the lad who had behaved so pluckily.

"At least," Harry said, "it may do good, and it can't do harm. Where's the boat-hook? Fasten this table-cloth to it and pull for the fort."

The coxswain gave an exclamation of surprise, but did as Harry told him, and with the white flag flying the boat pulled straight towards the fort. As he was seen to do so the fire of the latter, which had been directed towards the boat, ceased, although the duel between the battery and the *Cæsar* continued with unabated vigour. Harry steered direct to the steps on the sea face and mounted to the interior of the fort, where, on saying that







he brought a message from the captain, he was at once conducted to the commandant.

"I am come, sir," Harry said, "from the captain to beg of you to surrender at once. Your guns have been nobly fought, but two more ships are coming down to engage with you, and the captain would fain save further effusion of life. You have done all that brave men could do, but the fight everywhere goes against you, and further resistance is vain. In a quarter of an hour a fire will be centred upon your guns that will mean annihilation, and the captain therefore begs you to spare the brave men under your orders from further sacrifice."

Taken by surprise by this sudden demand, which was fortunately at the moment backed up by two ships of the squadron which had hitherto taken no part in the action being seen sailing in, the governor, after a hasty consultation with his officers, resolved to surrender, and two minutes afterwards the Danish flag was hauled down in the fort and the white flag run up. One of the Danish officers was directed to return with Harry

to the ship to notify the surrender of the fort.

The astonishment of Captain Ball at seeing the course of his boat suddenly altered, a white flag hoisted, and the gig proceeding direct to the fort, had been extreme, and he could only suppose that Harry had received some orders direct from the admiral and that a general cessation of hostilities was ordered. His surprise became astonishment when he saw the Danish flag disappear and the white flag hoisted in its place; and a shout of relief and exultation echoed from stem to stern of the *Cæsar*, for all had felt that the conflict was hopeless and that in a few minutes the *Cæsar* must strike her flag. All sorts of conjectures were rife as to the sudden and unexpected surrender of the fort, and expectation was at its highest when the gig was seen rowing out again with a Danish officer by the side of the midshipman.

On reaching the ship's side Harry ascended the ladder with the Danish officer, and advancing to Captain Ball said:

“This officer, sir, has, in compliance with

the summons which I took to the commander of the fort in your name, come off to surrender."

The Danish officer advanced and handed his sword to the captain, saying:

"In the name of the commander of the fort I surrender."

The captain handed him back his sword, and ordering Harry to follow him at once entered his cabin. His astonishment was unbounded when the latter informed him what he had done, with many apologies for having taken the matter into his own hands.

"I saw," he said, "that the *Cæsar* was being knocked to pieces, and the coxswain told me that it was impossible she could much longer resist. I therefore thought that I could do no harm by calling upon the governor to surrender, and that it was possible that I might succeed, as you see that I have."

"You certainly have saved the *Cæsar*," Captain Ball said warmly, "and we are all indeed indebted to you. It was a piece of astounding impudence indeed for a midship-

man to convey a message with which his captain had not charged him; but success in the present case a thousand times condones the offence. You have indeed done well, young sir, and I and the ship's company are vastly indebted to you. I will report the matter to the admiral."

A hundred men speedily took their places in the boats. Lieutenant Francis was sent ashore to take possession, and a few minutes later the British flag was flying upon the fort.

Ordering Harry to accompany him Captain Ball at once took his place in his gig and rowed to the flagship. The battle was still raging, and to the practised eye there was no doubt that the English fleet were suffering very severely. Captain Ball mounted the quarter-deck, and saluting the admiral reported that the fort with which he was engaged had struck, but that the *Cæsar* being ashore was unable to render any assistance to the general attack.

"A good many of us are ashore, Ball," Admiral Nelson said, "but I congratulate you

on having caused the fort to haul down its colours. Several of the Danish men-of-war have struck, but we cannot take possession, and fresh boat-loads of men came off from shore, and their fire has reopened. Our position is an unpleasant one. Sir Hyde Parker has signalled to me to draw off, but so far I have paid no attention. I fear that we shall have to haul off and leave some four or five ships to the enemy."

"The fact is," Captain Ball said, "it wasn't I who made the fort haul down its flag, but this midshipman of mine."

"Ha!" said the admiral, glancing at Harry, who, at Captain Ball's order, had left the boat and was standing a short distance off. "How on earth did he do that?"

"When you told him, sir, that you could give us no aid he took upon himself, instead of returning to the ship, to row straight to the fort with one of your table-cloths fastened to the boat-hook, and summoned the commander in my name to surrender at once so as to save all further effusion of life, seeing that more ships were bearing down and that

he had done all that a brave man could, and should now think of the lives of his troops."

"An impudent little rascal!" the admiral exclaimed. "Midshipmen were impudent enough in my days, but this boy beats everything. However, his idea was an excellent one, and, by Jupiter! I will adopt it myself. A man should never be above learning, and we are in such a sore strait that one catches at a straw."

So saying, the admiral, calling to his own captain, entered his cabin, and at once indited a letter to the King of Denmark begging him to surrender in order to save the blood of his subjects, expressing admiration at the way in which they had fought, and saying that they had done all that was possible to save honour, and might now surrender with a full consciousness of having done their duty. This missive was at once despatched to shore, and the admiral awaited with anxiety its result.

A half hour elapsed, the firing continuing with unabated fury.

"By Jove, Ball," the admiral suddenly exclaimed, "there's the white flag!" and a

tremendous cheer broke along the whole of the British ships as the flag of truce waved over the principal fort of Copenhagen. Instantly the fire on both sides ceased. Boats passed between the shore and the flag-ship with the proposals for surrender and conditions. Nelson insisted that the Danish fleet should be surrendered, in so firm and decisive a tone as to convince the king that he had it in his power completely to destroy the town, and had only so far desisted from motives of humanity. At length, to the intense relief of the admiral and his principal officers, who knew how sore the strait was, and to the delight of the sailors, the negotiations were completed, and the victory of Copenhagen won.

“Where’s that boy?” the admiral asked.

“That boy” was unfortunately no longer on the quarter-deck. One of the last shots fired from the Danish fleet had struck him above the knee, carrying away his leg. He had at once been carried down to the cockpit, and was attended to by the surgeons of the flag-ship. In the excitement of an action

men take but little heed of what is happening around them, and the fall of the young midshipman was unnoticed by his captain. Now, however, that the battle was over, Captain Ball looked round for his midshipman, and was filled with sorrow upon hearing what had happened. He hurried below to the wounded boy, whose leg had already been amputated, above the point at which the ball had severed it, by the surgeon.

"The white flag has been hoisted, my lad," he said, "and Copenhagen has been captured, and to you more than to any one is this great victory due. I am sorry, indeed, that you should have been shot."

Harry smiled faintly.

"It is the fortune of war, sir. My career in the navy has not been a long one. It is but a fortnight since I got my commission, and now I am leaving it altogether."

"Leaving the navy, perhaps," the captain said cheerfully, "but not leaving life, I hope. I trust there's a long one before you; but Admiral Nelson will, I am sure, be as grieved as I am that the career of a young officer,



who promised to rise to the highest honours of his profession and be a credit and glory to his country, has been cut short."

A short time later the admiral himself came down and shook hands with the boy, and thanked him for his services, and cheered him up by telling him that he would take care that his presence of mind and courage should be known.

For some days Harry lay between death and life, but by the time that the ship sailed into Portsmouth harbour the doctors had considerable hope that he would pull round. He was carried at once to the Naval Hospital, and a few hours later Peter Langley was by his bedside. His captain frequently came to see him, and upon one occasion came while his foster-father was sitting by his bedside.

"Ah, Peter, is it you?" he said. "Your son told me that you had served his majesty; but I didn't recognize the name as that of my old boatswain on board the *Cleopatra*."

"I am glad to see your honour," Peter said; "but I wish it had been on any other occasion. However, I think that the lad will not slip

his wind this time; but he's fretting that his career on blue water is at an end."

"It is sad that it should be so," Captain Ball said; "but there are many men who may live to a good age and will have done less for their country than this lad in the short time he was at sea. First, he prevented the despatch, which would have warned the enemy what was coming, from reaching them; and, in the second place, his sharpness and readiness saved no small portion of Admiral Nelson's fleet, and converted what threatened to be a defeat into a victory. You must be proud of your son, old salt."

"Has not the boy told you, sir, that he's not my son?" the boatswain said.

"No, indeed," Captain Ball exclaimed surprised; "on the contrary, he spoke of you as his father."

In a few words Peter Langley related the circumstances of the finding of Harry when a baby. Captain Ball was silent for a while, and then said, "Do you know, Peter, that I have been greatly struck by the resemblance of that lad to an old friend and school-fellow

of mine, a Mr. Harper? They are as like as two peas, that is, he is exactly what my friend was at his age. My friend never was married; but I remember hearing a good many years ago—I should say some fifteen years ago, which would be about in accordance with this lad's age—that he had lost a sister at sea. The ship she was in was supposed to have foundered, and was never heard of again. She was the wife of the captain, and was taking her first voyage with him. Of course it may be a mere coincidence; still the likeness is so strong that it would be worth making some inquiries. Have you anything by which the child can be identified?"

"There are some trinkets, sir, of Indian workmanship for the most part, and a locket. I will bring them over to your honour to-morrow if you will let me."

"Do so," Captain Ball said; "I am going up to London to-morrow, and shall see my friend. Don't speak to the boy about it, for it's a thousand to one against its being more than a coincidence. Still I hope sincerely for his sake that it may be so."

The next evening Captain Ball went up by coach to London, and the following day called upon his friend, who was a rich retired East Indian director. He told the story as Peter had told it to him.

"The dates answer," he said; "and, curiously, although the ship was lost in the West Indies, it's likely enough that the ornaments of my poor sister would have been Indian, as I was in the habit of often sending her home things from Calcutta."

"I have them with me," Captain Ball said, and produced the little packet which Peter had given him.

The old gentleman glanced at the ornaments, and then taking the locket, pressed the spring. He gave a cry as he saw the portrait within it, and exclaimed, "Yes, that's the likeness of my sister as she was when I last saw her. What an extraordinary discovery! Where is the lad of whom you have been speaking? for surely he is my nephew, the son of my sister Mary and Jack Peters."

Captain Ball then related the story of

Harry's doings from the time he had known him, and the old gentleman was greatly moved at the tale of bravery. The very next day he went down to Portsmouth with Captain Ball, and Harry, to his astonishment, found himself claimed as nephew by the friend of his captain.

When Harry was well enough to be moved he went up to London with his uncle, and a fortnight later received an official letter directing him to attend at the Board of Admiralty.

Donning his midshipman uniform he proceeded thither in his uncle's carriage, and walked with crutches—for his wound was not as yet sufficiently healed to allow him to wear an artificial leg—to the board-room. Here were assembled the first lord and his colleagues. Admiral Nelson was also present, and at once greeted him kindly.

A seat was placed for him, and the first lord then addressed him. "Mr. Peters, Admiral Nelson has brought to our notice the clever stratagem by which, on your own initiation and without instruction, you

obtained the surrender of the Danish fort, and saved the *Cæsar* at a time when she was aground and altogether overmatched. Admiral Nelson has also been good enough to say that it was the success which attended your action which suggested to him the course that he took which brought the battle to a happy termination. Thus we cannot but feel that the victory which has been won is in no small degree due to you. Moreover, we are mindful that it was your bravery and quickness which prevented the news of the intended sailing of the fleet from reaching the Continent, in which case the attack could not have been carried out. Under such extraordinary and exceptional circumstances we feel that an extraordinary and exceptional acknowledgment is due to you. We all feel very deep regret that the loss of your leg will render you unfit for active service at sea, and has deprived his majesty of the loss of so meritorious and most promising a young officer. We are about, therefore, to take a course altogether without precedent. You will be continued on the full-pay list all your

life, you will at once be promoted to the rank of lieutenant, three years hence to that of commander, and again in another three years to the rank of post captain. The board is glad to hear from Captain Ball that you are in good hands, and wish you every good fortune in life."

Harry was so overcome with pleasure that he could only stammer a word or two of thanks, and the first lord, his colleagues, and Admiral Nelson having warmly shaken hands with him he was taken back to the carriage, still in a state of bewilderment at the honour which had been bestowed upon him.

There is little more to tell. Having no other relations his uncle adopted him as his heir, and the only further connection that Harry had with the sea was that when he was twenty-one he possessed the fastest and best equipped yacht which sailed out of an English port. Later on he sat in Parliament, married, and to the end of his life declared that, after all, the luckiest point in his career was the cutting off of his leg by the last shot fired by the Danish batteries, for that, had

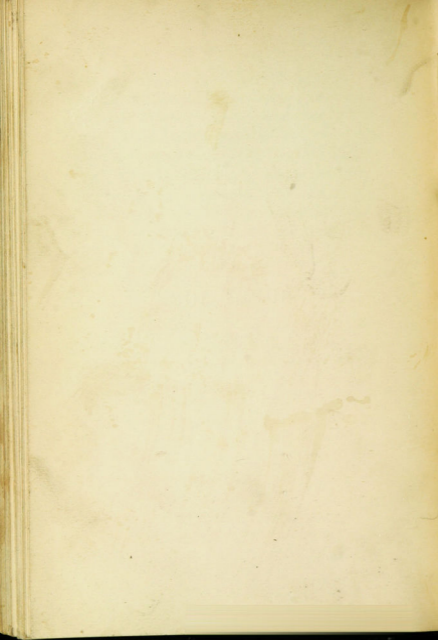
this not happened, he should never have known who he was, would never have met the wife whom he dearly loved, and would have passed his life as a miserable bachelor. Peter Langley, when not at sea with Harry in his yacht, lived in a snug cottage at South-sea, and had never reason to the end of his life to regret the time when he sighted the floating box from the tops of the *Alert*.





SURLY JOE.







## SURLY JOE.

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“**Y**OU wonder why I am called Surly Joe, sir? No, as you say, I hope I don't deserve the title now; but I did once, and a name like that sticks to a man for life. Well, sir, the fish are not biting at present, and I don't mind if I tell you how I got it.”

The speaker was a boatman, a man of some fifty years old, broad and weather-beaten; he had but one arm. I had been spending a month's well-earned holiday at Scarborough, and had been making the most of it, sailing or fishing every day. Upon my first arrival I had gone out with the one-armed boatman, and as he was a cheery companion, and his boat, the *Grateful Mary*, was the best and fastest on the strand, I had stuck to him

throughout. The boatmen at our watering-places soon learn when a visitor fixes upon a particular boat, and cease to importune him with offers of a sail; consequently it became an understood thing after a day or two that I was private property; and as soon as I was seen making my way across the wet sippy sand, which is the one drawback to the pleasure of Scarborough, a shout would at once be raised for Surly Joe. The name seemed a singularly inappropriate one; but it was not until the very day before I was returning to town that I made any remark on the subject. By this time we had become great allies; for what with a bathe in the morning early, a sail before lunch, and a fishing expedition afterwards, I had almost lived on board the *Grateful Mary*. The day had been too clear and bright for fishing; the curly-headed, bare-footed boy who assisted Joe had grown tired of watching us catch nothing, and had fallen asleep in the bow of the boat; and the motion, as the boat rose and fell gently on the swell, was so eminently provocative of sleep that I had nodded once

or twice as I sat with my eyes fixed on my line. Then the happy idea had occurred to me to remark that I wondered why my companion was called by a nickname which seemed so singularly inappropriate. Joe's offer to tell me how he obtained it woke me at once. I refilled my pipe, an invariable custom, I observe, with smokers when they are sitting down to listen to a story, passed my pouch to Joe, who followed my example; and when we had "lighted up" Joe began:

"Well, sir, it's about twelve years ago. I was a strong active chap then—not that I ain't strong now, for I can shove a boat over the sand-bar with any man on the shore—but I ain't as active as I were. I warn't called Surly Joe then, and I had my two arms like other men. My nickname then was Curly; 'cause, you see, my hair won't lay straight on my head, not when it gets as wet as seaweed. I owned my own boat, and the boys that worked with me warn't strangers, like Dick there, but they were my own flesh and blood. I was mighty proud of they two boys: fine straight tough-built lads was they,

and as good-plucked uns as any on the shore. I had lost their mother ten years, maybe, before that, and I never thought of giving them another. One of 'em was about twelve, just the size of Dick there; the other was a year older. Full of tricks and mischief they was, but good boys, sir, and could handle the boat nigh as well as I could. There was one thing they couldn't do, sir; they couldn't swim. I used to tell 'em they ought to learn; but there, you see, I can't swim myself, and out of all the men and boys on this shore I don't suppose one in twenty on 'em can swim. Rum, ain't it, sir? All their lives in the water or on the water, seeing all these visitors as comes here either swimming or learning to swim, and yet they won't try. They talks about instinks; I don't believe in instink, else everybody who's got to pass his life on the water would learn to swim, instead of being just the boys as never does learn. That year, sir, I was doing well. There was a gentleman and his wife and darter used to use my boat regular; morning and afternoon they'd go out for a sail whenever it warn't too

rough for the boat to put out. I don't think the old gentleman and lady cared so much for it; but they was just wrapped up in the girl, who was a pale, quiet sort o' girl, who had come down to the sea for her health. She was wonderful fond of the sea, and a deal o' good it did her; she warn't like the same creature after she had been here two months.

“It was a roughish sort of afternoon, with squalls from the east, but not too rough to go out: they was to go out at four o'clock, and they came down punctual; but the gentleman says, when he gets down:

“‘We have just got a telegram, Joe, to say as a friend is coming down by the five-o'clock train, and we must be at the station to meet her, she being an invalid; but I don't want Mary to lose her sail, so will trust her with you.’

“‘You'll take great care of her, Joe, and bring her back safe,’ the mother says, half laughing like; but I could see she were a little anxious about letten her go alone, which had never happened before.

“‘I’ll take care of her, ma’am,’ I says; ‘you may take your oath I’ll bring her back if I comes back myself.’

“‘Good-bye, mamma,’ the girl says as she steps on the plank; ‘don’t you fidget: you know you can trust Joe; and I’ll be back at half-past six to dinner.’

“Well, sir, as we pushed off I felt somehow responsible like, and although I’d told the boys before that one reef would be enough, I made ’em put in another before I hoisted the sail. There warn’t many boats out, for there was more sea on than most visitors care to face; but once fairly outside we went along through it splendid. When we got within a mile of Filey, and I asks her if we should turn, or go on for a bit farther,

“‘We shall go back as quick as we’ve come, sha’n’t we, Joe?’

“‘Just about the same, miss; the wind’s straight on the shore.’

“‘We haven’t been out twenty minutes,’ she says, looking at her watch; ‘I’d rather go a bit farther.’

“Well, sir, we ran till we were off the



brig. The wind was freshening, and the gusts coming down strong; it was backing round rather to the north too, and the sea was getting up.

“‘I a’most think, miss, we’d better run into Filey,’ I says; ‘and you could go across by the coach.’

“‘But there’s no danger, is there, Joe?’

“‘No, miss, there ain’t no danger; but we shall get a ducking before we get back; there’s rain in that squall to windward.’

“‘O, I don’t care a bit for rain, Joe; and the coach won’t get in till half-past seven, and mamma would be in a dreadful fright. O, I’d so much rather go on.’

“I did not say no more, but I put her about, and in another few minutes the squall was down upon us. The rain came against us as if it wanted to knock holes in the boat, and the wind just howled again. A sharper squall I don’t know as ever I was out in. It was so black you couldn’t have seen two boats’ length. I eased off the sheet, and put the helm up; but something went wrong, and—I don’t know rightly how it was, sir.

I've thought it over hundreds and hundreds of times, and I can't reason it out in any sort of form. But the 'sponsibility of that young gal weighed on me, I expect, and I must somehow ha' lost my head—I don't know, I can't account for it; but there it was, and in less time than it takes me to tell you we were all in the water. Whatever I'd ha' been before, I was cool enough now. I threw one arm round the gal, as I felt her going, and with the other I caught hold of the side of the boat. We was under water for a moment, and then I made shift to get hold of the rudder as she floated bottom upwards. The boys had stuck to her too, but they couldn't get hold of the keel; for you know how deep them boats are forward, drawing nigh a foot of water there more than they does astern. However, after a bit, they managed to get down to'rds the stern, and got a hand on the keel about half-way along. They couldn't come no nigher, because, as you know, the keel of them boats only runs half-way along. 'Hould on, lads!' I shouted; 'hould on for your lives! They'll

have seen us from the cliff, and 'll have a lugger out here for us in no time.'

"I said so to cheer them up; but I knew in my heart that a lugger, to get out with that wind on, would have to run right into t'other side o' the bay before she could get room enough to weather the brig. The girl hadn't spoken a word since the squall struck us, except that she gave a little short cry as the boat went over; and when we came up she got her hands on the rudder, and held on there as well as she could with my help. The squall did not last five minutes; and when it cleared off I could look round and judge of our chances. They weren't good. There was a party of people on the cliff, and another on the brig, who were making their way out as far as they could on the brig, for it were about half-tide. They must have seen us go over as we went into the squall, for as we lifted I could see over the brig, and there was a man galloping on horseback along the sands to'rds Filey as hard as he could go. We were, maybe, a quarter of a mile off the brig, and I saw that we should drift down on

it before a boat could beat out of the bay and get round to us. The sea was breaking on it, as it always does break if there's ever so little wind from the east, and the spray was flying up fifty feet in places where the waves hit the face of the rock. There ain't a worse place on all the coast than this, running as it do nigh a mile out from the head, and bare at low water. The waves broke over the boat heavy, and I had as much as I could do to hold on by one hand to the rudder, which swung backwards and forwards with every wave. As to the boys, I knew they couldn't hold on if they couldn't get on to the bottom of the boat; so I shouted to 'em to try to climb up. But they couldn't do it, sir; they'd tried already, over and over again. It would ha' been easy enough in calm water; but with the boat rolling and such waves going over her, and knocking them back again when they'd half got up, it was too much for 'em. If I'd ha' been free I could have got 'em up by working round to the side opposite 'em, and given them a hand to haul them up; but as it was, with only

one hand free, it took me all my time to hold on where I was. The girl saw it too, for she turned her face round to me, and spoke for the first time.

“‘Let me go, please,’ says she, ‘and help your boys.’

“‘I can’t do it,’ said I. ‘I’ve got to hold you till we’re both drowned together.’

“I spoke short and hard, sir; for if you’ll believe me, I was actually beginning to hate that gal. There was my own two boys a-struggling for their lives, and I couldn’t lend a hand to help ’em, because I was hampered by that white-faced thing. She saw it in my face, for she gave a sort of little cry, and said:

“‘O do—do let me go!’

“I didn’t answer a word, but held on all the harder. Presently Bill—he was my youngest boy—sang out:

“‘Father, can’t you get round and lend us a hand to get up? I can’t hold on much longer.’

“‘I can’t help you, Bill,’ says I. ‘I’ve given my promise to take this young woman

back, and I must keep my word. Her life's more precious to her father than yours is to me, no doubt, and she's got to be saved.'

"It was cruel of me, sir, and altogether unjust, and I knew it was when I said it, but I couldn't help it. I felt as if I had a devil in me. I was just mad with sorrow and hopelessness, and yet each word seemed to come as cold and hard from me as if it was frozen. For a moment she didn't move, and then, all of a sudden like, she gave a twist out of my arms and went straight down. I grabbed at her, and just got hold of her cloak and pulled her up again. She never moved after that, but just lay quiet on my arm as if she was dead. Her head was back, half in, half out of the water; and it was only by the tears that run down sometimes through her eyelids, and by a little sob in her breast, that I knew that she was sensible.

"Presently Bill says, 'Good-bye, father. God bless you!' and then he let go his hold and went down. Five minutes afterwards, maybe, though it seemed a week to me, Jack did the same.

“There we was—the girl and I—alone.

“I think now, sir, looking back upon it, as I was mad then. I felt somehow as that the gal had drowned my two boys; and the devil kept whispering to me to beat her white face in, and then to go with her to the bottom. I should ha' done it too, but my promise kept me back. I had sworn she should get safe to shore if I could, and it seemed to me that included the promise that I would do my best for us both to get there. I was getting weak now, and sometimes I seemed to wander, and my thoughts got mixed up, and I talked to the boys as if they could hear me. Once or twice my hold had slipped, and I had hard work enough to get hold again. I was sensible enough to know as it couldn't last much longer, and talking as in my sleep, I had told the boys I would be with 'em in a minute or two, when a sound of shouting quite close roused me up sudden.

“Then I saw we had drifted close to the brig. Some men had climbed along, taking hold hand-in-hand when they passed across

places where the sea was already breaking over, and bringing with them the rope which, as I afterwards heard, the man on horseback had brought back from Filey. It was a brave deed on their part, sir, for the tide was rising fast. When they saw I lifted my head and could hear them they shouted that they would throw me the rope, and that I must leave go of the boat, which would have smashed us to pieces, as I knew, if she had struck the rocks with us. Where they were standing the rock was full six feet above the sea; but a little farther it shelved down, and each wave ran three feet deep across the brig. They asked me could I swim; and when I shook my head, for I was too far gone to speak now, one of 'em jumped in with the end of the rope. He twisted it round the two of us, and shouted to his friends to pull. It was time, for we weren't much above a boat's length from the brig. Three of the chaps as had the rope run down to the low part of the rock and pulled together, while another two kept hold of the end of the rope and kept on the rock, so as to prevent us all



being washed across the brig together. I don't remember much more about it. I let go the boat, sank down at once, as if the girl and I had been lead, felt a tug of the rope, and then, just as the water seemed choking me, a great smash, and I remember nothing else. When I came to my right senses again I was in a bed at Filey. I had had a bad knock on the head, and my right arm, which had been round the girl, was just splintered. They took it off that night. The first thing as they told me when I came round was that the gal was safe. I don't know whether I was glad or sorry to hear it. I was glad, because I had kept my promise and brought her back alive. I was sorry, because I hated her like pison. Why should she have been saved when my two boys was drowned? She was well plucked was that gal, for she had never quite lost her senses; and the moment she had got warm in bed with hot blankets and suchlike, she wanted to get dry clothes and to go straight on to Scarborough in a carriage. However, the doctor would not hear of it, and she wrote a

little letter saying as she was all right; and a man galloped off with it on horseback, and got there just as they had got a carriage to the door to drive over to Filey to ask if there was any news there about the boat. They came over and slept there, and she went back with them next day. I heard all this afterwards, for I was off my head, what with the blow I had got and one thing and another, before I had been there an hour. And I raved and cussed at the girl, they tell me, so that they wouldn't let her father in to see me.

“It was nigh a fortnight before I came to myself, to find my arm gone, and then I was another month before I was out of bed. They came over to Filey when I was sensible, and I hear they had got the best doctor over from Scarborough to see me, and paid everything for me till I was well, but I wouldn't see them when they came. I was quite as bitter against her as I had been when I was in the sea drowning; and I was so fierce when they talked of coming in that the doctor told them it would make me bad again if they

came. So they went up to London, and when I could get about they sent me a letter, the gal herself and her father and mother, thanking me, I suppose; but I don't know, for I just tore 'em into pieces without reading them. Then a lawyer of the town here came to me and said he'd 'struction to buy me a new boat, and to buy a 'nuity for me. I told him his 'nuity couldn't bring my boys back again, and that I warn't going to take blood-money; and as to the boat, I'll knock a hole in her and sink her if she came. A year after that lawyer came to me again, and said he'd more 'structions; and I told him though I'd only one arm left I was man enough still to knock his head off his shoulders, and that I'd do it if he came to me with his 'structions or anything else.

“By this time I'd settled down to work on the shore, and had got the name of Surly Joe. Rightly enough, too. I had one of them planks with wheels that people use to get in and out of the boats; and as the boatmen on the shore was all good to me, being sorry for my loss, and so telling my story to

people as went out with them, I got enough to live on comfortable, only there was nothing comfortable about me. I wouldn't speak a word, good or bad, to a soul for days together, unless it was to swear at any one as tried to talk to me. I hated every one, and myself was nor all. I was always cussing the rock that didn't kill me, and wondering how many years I'd got to go on at this work before my turn came. Fortunately I'd never cared for drink; but sometimes I'd find my thoughts too hard for me, and I'd go and drink glass after glass till I tumbled under the table.

"At first my old mates tried to get me round, and made offers to me to take a share in their boats, or to make one in a fishing voyage; but I would not hear them, and in time they dropped off one by one, and left me to myself, and for six years there wasn't a surlier, wus-conditioned, lonelier chap not in all England than I was. Well, sir, one day, it was just at the beginning of the season, but was too rough a day for sailing. I was a-sitting down on the steps of a machine doing nothing, just wondering and

wondering why things was as they was, when two little gals cum up. One was, maybe, five, and the other a year younger. I didn't notice as they'd just cum away from the side of a lady and gentleman. I never did notice nothing that didn't just concern me; but I did see that they had a nurse not far off. The biggest girl had great big eyes, dark and soft, and she looked up into my face, and held out a broken wooden spade and a bit of string, and says she, 'Sailor-man, please mend our spade.' I was struck all of a heap like; for though I had been mighty fond of little children in the old days, and was still always careful of lifting them into boats, my name and my black looks had been enough, and none of them had spoken to me for years. I felt quite strange like when that child spoke out to me, a'most like what I've read *Robinson Crusoe*, he as was wrecked on the island, felt when he saw the mark of a foot.

"I goes to hold out my hand, and then I draws it back, and says, gruff, 'Don't you see I ain't got but one hand? Go to your nurse.'

“I expected to see her run right off; but she didn't, but stood as quiet as may be, with her eyes looking up into my face.

“‘Nurse can't mend spade; break again when Nina digs. Nina will hold spade together, sailor-man tie it up strong.’

“I didn't answer at once; but I saw her lip quiver, and it was plain she had been crying just before; so I put my hand into my pocket and brings out a bit of string, for the stuff she'd got in her hand was of no account; and I says, in a strange sort of voice, as I hardly knew as my own, ‘All right, missy, I'll tie it.’

“So she held the broken pieces together, and I ties 'em up with the aid of my hand and my teeth, and makes a strong shipshape job of it. I did it sitting on the bottom step, with a child standing on each side watching me. When I had done it the eldest took it, and felt it.

“‘That is nice and strong,’ she said; ‘thank you. Annie, say thank you.’

“‘Tank you,’ she said; and, with a little pat on my arm as a good-bye, the little ones

trotted away to a nurse sitting some little distance off.

“It may seem a little thing to you, sir, just a half minute’s talk to a child; but it warn’t a little thing to me. It seemed regularly to upset me like; and I sat there thinking it over and wondering what was come over me, till an hour afterwards they went past me with their nurse; and the little things ran up to me and said, ‘The spade’s quite good now—good-bye, sailor-man!’ and went on again. So I shook it off and went to my work; for as the tide rose the wind dropped, and a few boats went out; and, thinking what a fool I was, was gruffer and surlier than ever.

“Next morning I was lending a mate a hand painting a boat, when I saw they two children coming along the sand again, and I wondered to myself whether they would know me again, or think any more of me, and though I wanted them to do so I turned my back to the way they was coming, and went on with my painting. Somehow I felt wonderful glad when I heard their little feet

come pattering along the sand, and they sang out:

“‘Good-morning, sailor-man!’

“‘Good-morning!’ says I, short like, as if I didn’t want no talk; and I goes on with my work without turning round.

“Just then one of the men at the boats hails me.

“‘Joe, there’s a party coming down.’

“‘I’m busy,’ shouts I back; ‘shove the plank out yourself.’

“The children stopped quiet by me for a minute or two watching me at work, and then the eldest says:

“‘May we get inside the boat, Joe? we’ve never been inside a boat, and we do want to so much.’

“‘My hand is all covered with paint,’ says I, making a fight with myself against giving in.

“Then the little one said:

“‘Oo stoop down, Joe; sissy and me take hold round oor neck; then oo stand up and we det in.’

“Well, sir, the touch of their little arms



and those soft little faces against my cheeks as they got in fairly knocked me over, and it was some time before I could see what I was doing.

“Once in, they never stopped talking. They asked about everything, and I had to answer them; and as I got accustomed to it the words came freer till I was talking away with them as if I had known 'em all my life. Once I asked them didn't their papa and mamma ever take 'em out for a sail, and they shook their heads and said mammy hated the sea, and said it was a cruel sea; by which I judged as she must have lost some one dear to her by it.

“Well, sir, I must cut a long story short. Those children used to come every day down to talk with me, and I got to look for it regular; and if it was a wet day and they couldn't come I'd be regular put out by it; and I got to getting apples and cakes in my pockets for them. After a fortnight I took to carrying them across the wet sands and putting them on the stand as I wheeled it out and back with people to the boats. I

didn't do it till they'd asked their mother, and brought back the message that she knew she could trust them with me.

“All this time it never once struck me as strange that their nurse should sit with a baby-brother of theirs at a distance, and let them play with me by the hour together, without calling them away, for I wondered so much at myself, and to find myself telling stories to 'em just as I'd do with children who came out sailing with me in the old time, and in knowing as I was so wrapped up in 'em that I couldn't wonder at anything else. Natural like I changed a good deal in other respects, and I got to give a good-morning to mates as I had scarce spoken with for years; and the moment the children turned down on to the sands ther'd be sure to be a shout of 'There's your little ladies, Joe.'

“I don't know why my mates should ha' been pleased to see me coming round, for I had made myself onpleasant enough on the shore; but they'd made 'lowances for me, and they met me as kindly as if I'd cum back from a vyage. They did it just quiet like,

and would just say, natural, 'Lend us a hand here, Joe, boy,' or, 'Give us a shoulder over the bank, Joe,' and ask me what I thought o' the weather. It was a hard day for me when, after staying nigh two months, the little ladies came to say good-bye. It warn't as bad as might have been, though, for they were going to stay with some friends near York, and were to come back again in a fortnight before they went back to London. But they kissed me, and cried, and gave me a pipe and a lot o' 'bacca, and I was to think of them whenever I smoked it, and they would be sure to think of me, for they loved me very much.

"That very afternoon, sir, as I was standing by my stage, Jim Saunders—he'd been mate with me before I owned a boat of my own—says out loud:

"'Lor, here's my party a-coming down, and I've jammed my hand so as I can't hoist a sail. Who'll come out and lend me a hand?'

"Well, every one says they were busy, and couldn't come; but I believe now as the whole thing was a got-up plant to get me afloat

again; and then Jim turns to me as if a sudden idea had struck him.

“‘Come, Joe, lend us a hand for the sake o’ old times; come along, old chap.’

“I was taken aback like, and could only say something about my stage; but half a dozen chaps volunteers to look after my stage, and afore I scarce knew what I was after I was bundled aboard the boat; and as the party got in, I’m blest if I don’t think as every chap on the shore runs in to help shove her off, and a score of hands was held out just to give me a shake as we started.

“I don’t think I was much good on that vyage, for I went and sat up in the bow, with my back to the others, and my eyes fixed far ahead.

“I needn’t tell you, sir, when I’d once broken the ice I went regular to the sea again, and handed my stage over to a poor fellow who had lost his craft and a leg the winter before.

“One day when I came in from a sail I saw two little figures upon the sands, and it needed no word from any one to tell me my

little ladies had come back. They jumped and clapped their hands when they saw me, and would have run across the water to meet me hadn't I shouted to them to wait just a minute till I should be with them.'

"'We've been waiting a long time, Joe. Where have you been?'

"'I've been out sailing, missy.'

"'Joe, don't you know it's wicked to tell stories? You told us you should never go on sea any more.'

"'No more I didn't think I should, missy; and I don't suppose I ever should if I hadn't met you, though you won't understand that. However, I've give up the stage, and have taken to the sea again.'

"'I'm glad of that, Joe,' the eldest said, 'and mamma will be glad too.'

"'Why should mamma be glad, little one?' I asked.

"'Mamma will be glad,' she said positively. 'I know she will be glad when I tells her.'

"We'd sat down by this time, and I began to talk to them about their mamma. Mamma

very good, very kind, very pretty, they both agreed; and then they went on telling me about their home in London, and their carriage and amusements. Presently they stopped, and I could see the eldest wanted to say something particular, for she puckered up her forehead as she always did when she was very serious; and then she said, with her hands folded before her, almost as if she was saying a lesson:

“Mamma very happy woman. She’s got two little girls and baby-brother, and papa love her so much; but there’s one thing keeps her from being quite happy.’

“‘Is there, missy?’ I asked. ‘She ought to be happy with all these things. What is it?’

“‘Mamma once had some one do a great thing for her. If it hadn’t been for him Nina and sissy and little baby-brother could never have been born, and papa would never have had dear mamma to love; but it cost the man who did it a great deal—all he cared for; and now he won’t let mamma and papa and us love him, and help him; and it

makes mamma unhappy when she thinks of it.'

"Here she had evidently finished what she had heard her mamma say, for her forehead got smooth again, and she began to fill my pockets with sand.'

"'It don't sound likely, missy, that doesn't,' I says. 'It don't stand to reason nohow. You can't have understood what mamma said.'

"'Mamma said it over and over again, lots of time,' Nina said. 'Nina quite sure she said right.'

"We didn't say no more about it then, though after the children had gone I wondered to myself how a chap could go on so foolish as that. Well, sir, three days after come round from Whitby this very boat, the *Grateful Mary*. She was sent care of Joe Denton; and as that was me, I had her hauled up on the beach till I should hear who's she was. Several visitors that had been out with me had said, promiscuous like, that they should like to have a boat of their own, and I supposed they had bought her at

Whitby and sent her down, though why they should have sent her to my care I couldn't quite see.'

"Two days afterwards them children come down, and says:

"'We want you to go through the town to the other cliff with us, Joe.'

"'I can't,' says I. 'I'm all right talking to you here, missies; but I shouldn't be a credit to you in the town, and your pa wouldn't be best pleased if he was to see you walking about in the streets with a boatman.'

"'Papa said we might ask you, Joe.'

"I shook my head, and the little ladies ran off to their nurse, who come back with them and says:

"'Master told me to say he should be pertickler glad if you would go with the young ladies.'

"'Oh, very well,' I says; 'if their pa don't object, and they wishes it, I'd go with 'em anywheres. You wait here a quarter of an hour, while I goes and cleans myself, and I'll go with you.'

"When I comes back the youngest takes



my hand, and the oldest holds by my jacket, and we goes up into High-street, and across to the other cliff. We goes along till we comes to a pretty little cottage looking over the sea. There was a garden in front, new planted with flowers.'

"'Are you sure you are going right?' says I, when they turned in.

"They nodded, and ran up to the door and turned the handle.'

"'Come in, Joe,' they said; and they dragged me into a parlour, where a lady and gentleman was sitting.'

"The gentleman got up.

"'My little girls have spoken so much to me about you, Joe, that I feel that we know each other already.'

"'Yes, sir, surely,' says I.

"'Well, Joe, do you know that I owe you a great deal as to these little girls?'

"'Bless you, sir, it's I as owes a great deal to the little missies; they have made a changed man of me, they have; you ask any one on the shore.'

"'I hope they have, Joe; for had they not

got round your heart, and led you to your better self, I could never have done what I have done, for you would have rendered it useless.'

"I didn't say nothing, sir, for I could make neither head nor tail of what he was saying, and, I dessay, looked as surprised as might be. Then he takes a step forward, and he puts a hand on my shoulder, and says he

"'Joe, have you never guessed who these little girls were?'

"I looked first at the children, and then at him, and then at the lady, who had a veil down, but was wiping her eyes underneath it. I was downright flummuxed.

"'I see you haven't,' the gentleman went on. 'Well, Joe, it is time you should know now. I owe to you all that is dear to me in this world, and our one unhappiness has been that you would not hear us, that you had lost everything and would not let us do anything to lighten your blow.'

"Still, sir, I couldn't make out what he meant, and began to think that I was mad, or that he was. Then the lady stood up and

threw back her veil, and come up in front of me with the tears a-running down her face; and I fell back a step, and sits down suddenly in a chair, for, sure enough, it was that gal. Different to what I had seen her last, healthy-looking and well—older, in course; a woman now, and the mother of my little ladies.

“She stood before me, sir, with her hands out before her, pleading like.

“ ‘ Don’t hate me any more, Joe. Let my children stand between us. I know what you have suffered, and, in all my happiness, the thought of your loneliness has been a trouble, as my husband will tell you. I so often thought of you—a broken lonely man. I have talked to the children of you till they loved the man that saved their mother’s life. I cannot give you what you have lost, Joe—no one can do that; but you may make us happy in making you comfortable. At least, if you cannot help hating me, let the love I know you bear my children weigh with you.’

“As she spoke the children were hanging on me; and when she stopped, the little one said:

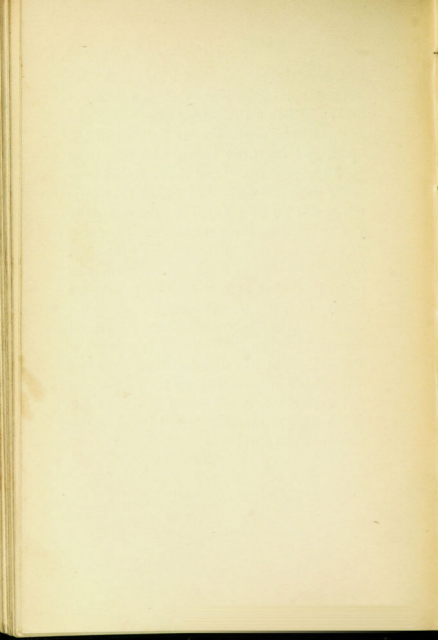
“‘Oh Joe, oo must be dood; oo mustn’t hate mamma, and make her cry’

“Well, sir, I don’t know as I need tell you more about it. You can imagine how I quite broke down, like a great baby, and called myself every kind of name, saying only that I thought, and I a’most think so now, that I had been somehow mad from the moment the squall struck the *Kate* till the time I first met they little girls.

“When I thought o’ that, and how I’d cut that poor gal to her drowning heart with my words, I could ha’ knelt to her if she’d ha’ let me. At last, when I was quiet, she explained that this cottage and its furniture and the *Grateful Mary* was all for me; and we’d a great fight over it, and I only gave in when at last she says that if I didn’t do as she wanted she’d never come down to Scarborough with the little ladies no more; but that if I ’greed they’d come down regular every year, and that the little girls should go out sailing with me regular in the *Grateful Mary*.

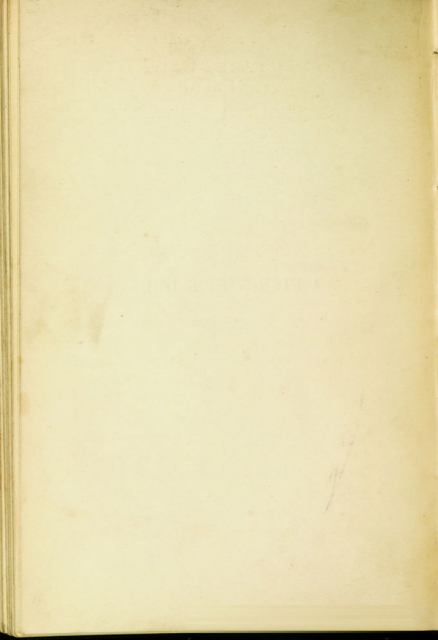
“Well, sir, there was no arguing against

that, was there? So here I am; and next week I expect Miss Mary that was, with her husband, who's a Parliament man, as she was engaged to be married to at the time of the upset, and my little ladies, who is getting quite big girls too. And if you hadn't been going away I'd ha' sailed round the castle tower, and I'd ha' pointed out the cottage to you. Yes, sir, I see what you are going to ask. I found it lonely there; and I found the widow of a old mate of mine who seemed to think as how she could make me comfortable; and comfortable I am, sir—no words could say how comfortable I am; and do you know, sir, I'm blest if there ain't a Joe up there at this identical time, only he's a very little one, and has got both arms. So you see, sir, I have got about as little right as has any chap in this mortal world to the name of Surly Joe."



A FISH-WIFE'S DREAM.









## A FISH-WIFE'S DREAM.

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**F**ALMOUTH is not a fashionable watering-place. Capitalists and speculative builders have somehow left it alone, and, except for its great hotel, standing in a position, as far as I know, unrivalled, there have been comparatively few additions to it in the last quarter of a century. Were I a yachtsman, I should make Falmouth my headquarters: blow high, blow low, there are shelter and plenty of sailing room, while in fine weather there is a glorious coast along which to cruise—something very different from the flat shores from Southampton to Brighton. It is some six years since that I was lying in the harbour, having sailed round in a friend's yacht from Cowes. Upon the day after we had come in my friend went

into Truro, and I landed, strolled up, and sat down on a bench high on the seaward face of the hill that shelters the inner harbour.

An old coastguardsman came along. I offered him tobacco, and in five minutes we were in full talk.

"I suppose those are the pilchard-boats far out there?"

"Ay, that's the pilchard fleet."

"Do they do well generally?"

"Sometimes they do, sometimes they don't; it's an uncertain fish the pilchard, and it's a rough life is fishing on this coast. There ain't a good harbour not this side of the Lizard; and if they're caught in a gale from the south-east it goes hard with them. With a south-wester they can run back here."

"Were you ever a fisherman yourself?"

"Ay, I began life at it; I went a-fishing as a boy well-nigh fifty year back, but I got a sickener of it, and tramped to Plymouth and shipped in a frigate there, and served all my time in Queen's ships."

"Did you get sick of fishing because of the

hardships of the life, or from any particular circumstance?"

"I got wrecked on the Scillys. There was fifty boats lost that night, and scarce a hand was saved. I shouldn't have been saved myself if it had not been for a dream of mother's."

"That's curious," I said. "Would you mind telling me about it?"

The old sailor did not speak for a minute or two; and then, after a sharp puff at his pipe he told me the following story, of which I have but slightly altered the wording:

I lived with mother at Tregannock. It's a bit of a village now, as it was then. My father had been washed overboard and drowned two years before. I was his only son. The boat I sailed in was mother's, and four men and myself worked her in shares. I was twenty-one, or maybe twenty-two, years old then. It was one day early in October. We had had a bad season, and times were hard. We'd agreed to start at eight o'clock in the morning. I was up at five, and went down to the boats to see as

everything was ready. When I got back mother had made breakfast; and when we sat down I saw that the old woman had been crying, and looked altogether queer like.

"My boy," says she, "I want you not to go out this trip."

"Not go out!" said I; "not go out, mother! Why? What's happened? Your share and mine didn't come to three pounds last month, and it would be a talk if I didn't go out in the *Jane*. Why, what is it?"

"My boy," says she, "I've had a dream as how you was drowned."

"Drowned!" said I; "I'm not going to be drowned, mother."

But what she said made me feel creepy like, for us Cornishmen goes a good deal on dreams and tokens; and sure enough mother had dreamed father was going to be drowned before he started on that last trip of his.

"That's not all, Will," she said. "I dreamed of you in bed, and a chap was leaning over you cutting your throat."

I didn't care much for going on with my

breakfast after that; but in a minute or two I plucks up and says:

“Well, mother, you’re wrong, anyhow; for if I be drowned no one has no call to cut my throat.”

“I didn’t see you downright drowned in my dream,” she said. “You was in the sea—a terribly rough sea—at night, and the waves were breaking down on you.”

“I can’t help going, mother,” I says, after a bit. “It’s a fine day, and it’s our boat. All the lads and girls in the village would laugh at me if I stayed at home.”

“That’s just what your father said; and he went to his death.”

And my mother, as she says this, puts her apron over her head and began to cry again. I’d more than half a mind to give way; but you know what young chaps are. The thought of what the girls of the place would say about my being afraid to go was too much for me.

At last, when mother saw I was bent on going, she got up and said:

“Well, Will, if my prayers can’t keep you

back, will you do something else I ask you?"

"I will, mother," said I—"anything but stay back."

She went off without a word into her bedroom, and she came back with something in her arms.

"Look here, Will, I made this for your father, and he wouldn't have it; now I ask you to take it, and put it on if a storm comes on. You see, you can put it on under your dreadnaught coat, and no one will be any the wiser."

The thing she brought in was two flat Dutch spirit-bottles, sewn between two pieces of canvas. It had got strings sewed on for tying round the body, and put on as she did to show me how, one bottle each side of the chest, it lay pretty flat.

"Now, Will, these bottles will keep you up for hours. A gentleman who was staying in the village before you was born was talking about wrecks, and he said that a couple of empty bottles, well corked, would keep up a fair swimmer for hours. So I made it; but

no words could get your father to try it, though he was willing enough to say that it would probably keep him afloat. You'll try it, won't you, Will?"

I didn't much like taking it, but I thought there wasn't much chance of a storm, and that if I put it under my coat and hid it away down in the fore-castle no one would see it; and so to please her I said I'd take it, and that if a bad storm came on I would slip it on.

"I will put a wineglass of brandy into one of the bottles," mother said. "It may be useful to you; who can say?"

I got the life-preserver, as you call it nowadays, on board without its being seen, and stowed it away in my locker. I felt glad now I'd got it, for mother's dream had made me feel uneasy; and on my way down, old Dick Tremaine said to me:

"I don't like the look of the sky, lad."

"No!" says I; "why, it looks fine enough."

"Too fine, lad. I tell ye, boy, I don't like the look of it. I think we're going to have a bad blow."

I told the others what he had said; but they didn't heed much. Two boats had come in that morning with a fine catch, and after the bad time we'd been having it would have taken a lot to keep them in after that.

We thought no more about it after we had once started. The wind was light and puffy; but we had great luck, and were too busy to watch the weather. What wind there was, was northerly; but towards sunset it dropped suddenly, and as the sails flapped we looked round at the sky.

"I fear old Dick was right, lads," Jabez Harper, who was skipper, said, "and I wish we had taken more heed to his words. That's about as wild a sunset as may be; and look how that drift is nearing our boat."

Even I, who was the youngest of them, was old enough to read the signs of a storm—the heavy bank of dark clouds, the pale-yellow broken light, the horse-tails high up in the sky, and the small broken irregular masses of cloud that hurried across them. Instinctively we looked round towards the coast. It was fully fifteen miles away, and we were



to the east of it. The great change in the appearance of the sky had taken place in the last half hour; previous to that time there had been nothing which would have struck any but a man grown old upon the coast like Dick Tremaine.

"Reef the mainsail," Jabez said, "and the foresail too; take in the mizen. Like enough it will come with a squall, and we'd best be as snug as may be. What do you say? shall we throw over some of the fish?"

It was a hard thing to agree to; but every minute the sky was changing. The scud was flying thicker and faster overhead, and the land was lost in a black cloud that seemed to touch the water.

"We needn't throw 'em all out," Jabez said; "if we get rid of half she'll be about in her best trim; and she's as good a sea-boat as there is on the coast. Come, lads, don't look at it."

It was, as he said, no use looking at it, and in five minutes half our catch of the day was overboard. The *Jane* was a half-decked boat, yawl-rigged; she wasn't built in our parts,

but had been brought round from somewhere east by a gentleman as a fishing-craft. He had used her for two years, and had got tired of the sport, and my father had bought her of him. She wasn't the sort of boat generally used about here, but we all liked her, and swore by her.

"It will be a tremendous blow for the first few minutes, I reckon," Jabez said after a while. "Lower down her sails altogether; get her head to it with a sweep. I'll take the helm; Harry, you stand ready to hoist the foresail a few feet; and, Will, you and John stand by the hoists of the mainsail. We must show enough to keep her laying-to as long as we can. You'd best get your coats out and put 'em on, and batten down the hatch."

I let the others go down first, and when they came up I went in, tied the life-belt round me, and put on my oilskin. I fetched out a bottle of hollands from my locker, and then came out and fastened the hatch.

"Here comes the first puff," Jabez said.

I stowed away the bottle among some ropes

for our future use, and took hold of the throat halyard.

"Here it comes," Jabez said, as a white line appeared under the cloud of mist and darkness ahead, and then with a roar it was upon us.

I have been at sea, man and boy, for forty years, and I never remember in these latitudes such a squall as that. For a few minutes I could scarcely see or breathe. The spray flew in sheets over us, and the wind roared so that you wouldn't have heard a sixty-eight pounder ten yards off. At first I thought we were going down bodily. It was lucky we had taken every stitch of canvas off her, for, as she spun round, the force of the wind against the masts and rigging all but capsized her. In five minutes the first burst was over, and we were running before it under our close-reefed foresail only. There was no occasion for us to stand by the halyards now, and we all gathered in the stern and crouched down in the well. Although the sun had only gone down half an hour it was pitch dark, except that the white foam round us

gave a sort of dim light that made the sky look all the blacker. The sea got up in less time than it takes in telling, and we were soon obliged to hoist the foresail a bit higher to prevent the waves from coming in over the stern. For three hours we tore on before the gale, and then it lulled almost as suddenly as it had come on. There had scarcely been a word spoken between us during this time. I was half asleep in spite of the showers of spray. Jim Hackers, who was always smoking, puffed away steadily; Jabez was steering still, and the others were quite quiet. With the sudden lull we were all on our feet.

“Is it all over, Jabez?” I asked.

“It’s only begun,” he said. “I scarce remember such a gale as this since I was a boy. Pass that bottle of yours round, Will; we shall be busy again directly. One of you take the helm; I’m stiff with the wet. We shall have it round from the south in a few minutes.”

There was scarce a breath of wind now, and she rolled so I thought she would have turned turtle.

“Get out a sweep,” Jabez said, “and bring her head round.”

We had scarcely done so ere the first squall from behind struck us, and in five minutes we were running back as fast as we had come. The wind was at first south, but settled round to south-east. We got up a little more sail now, and made a shift to keep her to the west, for with this wind we should have been ashore long before morning if we had run straight before it. The sea had been heavy—it was tremendous now; and, light and seaworthy as the *Jane* was, we had to keep baling as the sea broke into her. Over and over again I thought that it was all over with us as the great waves towered above our stern, but they slipped under us as we went driving on at twelve or fourteen knots an hour. I stood up by the side of Jabez, and asked him what he thought of it.

“I can't keep her off the wind,” he said; “we must run, and by midnight we shall be among the Scillys. Then it's a toss-up.”

Jabez's calculations could not have been far out, for it was just midnight, as far

as I could tell, when we saw a flash right ahead.

“That’s a ship on one of the Scillys,” Jabez said. “I wish I knew which it was.”

He tried to bring her a little more up into the wind, but she nearly lay over on to her beam-ends, and Jabez let her go ahead again. We saw one more flash, and then a broad faint light. The ship was burning a blue light. She was not a mile ahead now, and we could see she was a large vessel. I had often been to the Scillys before, and knew them as well as I did our coast, but I could not see the land. It was as Jabez had said—a toss-up. If we just missed one of them we might manage to bring up under its lee; but if we ran dead into one or other of them the *Jane* would break up like an eggshell.

We were rapidly running down upon the wreck when the glare of a fire on shore shone up. It was a great blaze, and we could faintly see the land and a white cottage some hundred yards from the shore.

“I know it,” Jabez shouted; “we are close

to the end of the island; we may miss it yet. Hoist the mainsail a bit."

I leapt up with another to seize the hal-yards, when a great wave struck us; she gave a roll, and the next moment I was in the water.

After the first wild efforts I felt calm like. I knew the shore was but half a mile ahead, and that the wind would set me dead upon it. I loosened my tarpaulin coat and shook it off, and I found that with mother's belt I could keep easily enough afloat, though I was half drowned with the waves as they swept in from behind me. My mother's dream cheered me up, for, according to that, it did not seem as I was to be drowned, whatever was to come afterwards. I drifted past the wreck within a hundred yards or so. They were still burning blue lights; but the sea made a clean sweep over her, and I saw that in a very few minutes she would go to pieces. Many times as the seas broke over me I quite gave up hope of reaching shore; but I was a fair swimmer, and the bottles buoyed me up, and I struggled on.

I could see the fire on shore, but the surf that broke against the rocks showed a certain death if I made for it, and I tried hard to work to the left, where I could see no breaking surf. It seemed to me that the fire was built close to the end of the island. As I came close I found that this was so. I drifted past the point of land not fifty feet off, where the waves were sending their spray a hundred feet up; then I made a great struggle, and got in under the lee of the point. There was a little bay with a shelving shore, and here I made a shift to land. Five minutes to rest, and then I made my way towards the fire. There was no one there, and I went to the edge of the rocks. Here four or five men with ropes were standing, trying to secure some of the casks, chests, and wreckage from the ship. The surf was full of floating objects, but nothing could stand the shock of a crash against those rocks. The water was deep alongside, and the waves, as they struck, flew up in spray, which made standing almost impossible.

The men came round me when they saw



me. There was no hearing one speak in the noise of the storm; so I made signs I had landed behind the point, and that if they came with their ropes to the point they might get something as it floated past. They went off, and I sat down by the fire, wrung my clothes as well as I could—I thought nothing of the wet, for one is wet through half our time in a fishing-boat—took off mother's belt, and found one of the bottles had broke as I got ashore; but luckily it was the one which was quite empty. I got the cork out of the other, and had a drink of brandy, and then felt pretty right again. I had good hopes the boat was all right, for she would get round the point easy, and Jabez would bring her up under the lee of the island. I thought I would go and see if I could help the others, and perhaps save some one drifting from the wreck; but I did not think there was very much chance, for she lay some little distance to the right, and I hardly thought a swimmer could keep off the shore.

Just as I was going to move I saw two of them coming back. They had a body be-

tween them, and they put it down a little distance from the fire. I was on the other side, and they had forgotten all about me. They stooped over the figure, and I could not see what they were doing. I got up and went over, and they gave a start when they saw me. "Is he alive?" says I. "Dunno," one of 'em growled; and I could see pretty well that if I had not been there it would have gone hard with the chap. He was a foreign Jewish-looking fellow, and had around him one of the ship's life-buoys. There were lots of rings on his fingers, and he had a belt round his waist that looked pretty well stuffed out. I put my hand to his heart, and found he still breathed; and then I poured a few drops of brandy which remained in my bottle down his throat.

While I was doing this the two men had talked to each other aside. "He's alive, all right," says I. "That's a good job," one of 'em said; but I knew he didn't think so. "We'll carry him up to our cottage. You'll be all the better for a sleep; it must be past two o'clock by this time."

They took the chap up, and carried him to the cottage, and put him on a bed. He was moaning a little, and between us we undressed him and got him into bed. "I doubt he'll come round," I said.

"I don't believe he will. Will you have a drink of whisky?"

I was mighty glad to do so, and then, throwing off my wet clothes, I got into the other bed, for there were two in the room.

The men said they were going down again to see what they could get. They left the whisky-bottle on the table, and as soon as I was alone I jumped out and poured a little into the other chap's teeth, so as to give him as good a chance as I could; but I didn't much think he'd get round, and then I got into bed and shut my eyes. I was just going off, when, with a sudden jump, I sat straight up. Mother's dream came right across me. I was out of bed in a moment, and looked at the door. There was no bolt, so I put a couple of chairs against it. Then I took my clasp-knife out of my pocket and opened it. I gave the other chap a shake, but there was

no sense in him, and I got into bed again. I thought to myself they would never risk a fight when they saw me armed and ready. But I soon found that I couldn't keep awake; so I got up and dressed in my wet clothes, and went to the door. I found it was fastened on the outside. I soon opened the window and got out, but before I did that I rolled up some clothes and put 'em in the bed, and made a sort of likeness of a man there. The poor fellow in bed was lying very still now, and I felt pretty sure that he would not live till morning. The candle was a fresh one when they had first lighted it, and I left it burning.

When I had got out I shut the window, and went away fifty yards or so, where I could hear them come back. Presently I heard some footsteps coming from the opposite direction. Then I heard a voice I knew say, "There is the fire; we shall soon know whether the poor lad has got ashore."

"Here am I, Jabez," I said. "Hush!" as he and the other were going to break into a shout of welcome, "hush! Some wreckers

are coming up directly to cut my throat and that of another chap in that cottage."

In a word or two I told them all about it; and they agreed to wait with me and see the end of it. Jabez had brought the *Jane* up under the lee of the island, and, leaving two of the men on board, had come on shore in the cobbles with the other to look for me, but with very faint hopes of finding me.

"You had best get hold of something to fight with, if you mean to take these fellows, Jabez."

"A good lump of rock is as good a weapon as another," Jabez said.

Our plan was soon arranged, and half an hour later we heard footsteps coming up from the shore again. Two men passed us, went into the cottage, and shut the door. Jabez and I made round to the window, where we could see in, and John Redpath stood at the door. He was to open it and rush in when he heard us shout. We stood a little back, but we could see well into the room. Presently we saw the door open very quietly, little by little. A hand came through and

moved the chairs, and then it opened wide. Then the two men entered. One, a big fellow, had a knife in his hand, and drew towards the bed, where, as it seemed, I was sleeping, with my head covered up by the clothes. The other had no knife in his hand, and came towards the other bed.

“Get ready, lad,” Jabez said to me.

The big fellow raised his knife and plunged it down into the figure, throwing his weight on to it at the same moment, while the smaller man snatched the pillow from under the other's head and clapped it over his face, and threw his weight on it. As they did so we pushed the casement open and leapt in. I seized the smaller man, who was suffocating the other chap, and before he could draw his knife I had him on the ground and my knee on his chest. The big fellow had leapt up. He gave a howl of rage as Jabez rushed at him, and stood at bay with his knife. Jabez stopped, however, and threw his lump of rock, as big as a baby's head, right into his stomach. It just tumbled him over like a cannon-shot. John burst in through the door,

and we had 'em both tied tightly before five minutes was over. Then we lit a big fire in the kitchen, and with warm clothes and some hot whisky and water we got the foreign chap pretty well round.

In the morning I went off and found a village on the other side of the island. I woke them up and told my story, and to do 'em justice, though there were some who would have shielded the fellows we had caught, the best part were on our side. Some of 'em told me there had been suspicion upon these men, and that they bore a bad name. There was no magistrate in the island, and no one objected when I said we would take them across to Penzance and give them in charge there.

So we did; and they were tried and got transportation for life for attempting to murder the foreign chap, who, it turned out, was a Brazilian Jew, with diamonds. He offered us all sorts of presents, but we would have none; but that's neither here nor there.

So you see, master, mother's dream saved me from drowning and from having my throat

cut. I gave up fishing after that and went into the queen's service. Mother sold the boat, and went to live with a sister of hers at Truro. The Scilly Islands have changed since those times, and you'll meet as much kindness there if you're wrecked as you will anywhere else; but they were a rough lot in those days, and I had a pretty close shave of it, hadn't I?

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THE END.





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