THE WHITE SQUALL

A STORY OF THE SARGASSO SEA

BY

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The White Squall

Chapter One

Mount Pleasant

“Jake!”

“Dat me, Mass’ Tom.”

“Have you heard the gun fire yet?”

“Golly, no, Mass’ Tom.”

“Then you must go up the hill at once and see whether the mail steamer has been signalled or not. She ought to have been in sight by now; for, she’s been expected since early this morning, and we’re all anxious about the news from England.”

“All right, Mass’ Tom, me go for see, suah.”

“Look alive then, Jake, and lose no more time in starting. Let me just see how quickly you can get up to the Battery and back again; and mind, Jake, if the packet should be in, you can saddle my pony when you return for me to ride into town.”

“Berry well, Mass’ Tom. I’se spec, railly for true, um go dere in brace of shakes, an’ back ’gain hyar ’fore dat lazy ole niggah Pomp fetch him cutlash out o’ stable an’ go in bush to cut him guinea-grass for de hosses. Golly, dat so, Mass’ Tom—see if um don’t for suah, yah, yah!”

Jake broke off into a huge guffaw, as he shouted out these hurried words in high glee, laughing with all that hearty abandon which was such a strong characteristic of his genuine African nature. Such was the intensity of his merriment, indeed, that he opened his wide red-lipped mouth almost from ear to ear, disclosing a brilliant set of shining teeth, whose ivory whiteness contrasted conspicuously with the jetty blackness of his sable skin. The willing fellow then went off on his mission at a slinging jog-trot, evidently determined to make his promise good of outstripping his more lethargic rival Pompey, whom he was absurdly jealous of and ever eager to surpass in every way he could.

I watched him on his onward way from the raised terrace, laid out as an ornamental garden, in front of our square, one-storied, shingle-roofed, verandah-encircled West Indian home—which lay nestled in a gorgeous wealth of tropical foliage and was perched half-way up the side of a mountain peak that protected it from hurricane blasts in the rear; and, I could see Jake spinning rapidly along the winding carriage drive, bordered with cocoa-nut trees and grou-grou palms in lieu of the oaks and elms of old England. In another second, ere the sound of his merry chuckle had ceased to re-echo in the distance, he had passed through the swing-gate that gave admittance to the grounds.

The lawn sloped downwards from the house, following the curve of the hill, and was studded with orange-trees, whose golden fruit peeped through their shining green leaves, shaddocks, and mangosteen, with many a stately palmiste rearing its tall feathery head above the others; while, in addition, the wild locust, or iron-wood tree, the mammee apple, the pomme-rose and the guava bush flourished between huge blocks of stone, with flat table surfaces and of probable volcanic origin, that seemed to have been thrown at random upon the surface of the grassy expanse, where they now rested, monoliths of the past.

As the gate swung back upon its hinges with a clang, Jake's woolly head, surmounted by the veriest wisp of a ragged red handkerchief, disappeared behind the thick and impenetrable hedge of thorny cactus and spike-guarded prickly-pear that inclosed the plantation, separating it from the main-road forming its boundary and leading, some four miles or so beyond, over mountain and gully to Saint George's, the capital town of Grenada, the most southern of the group of the Windward Islands—a spot where the earlier days of my rather adventurous life were passed and which is endeared to me by all the vivid associations of youth, the fond recollections of memory.

Our place was aptly named "Mount Pleasant," and well do I remember every salient feature of it—the forest of lofty silk-cotton trees, bordered on the left by a row of the curious bois immortel, with its blood-red branches that had blossomed into flowers; the mountain slope covered with green waving guinea-grass at the back; and in front the park-like lawn already described. To the right was a long range of negro huts and stabling; and, beyond these again the kitchen-garden or "provision ground," prolific of sweet-potatoes, yams, and tanias, with plantain and banana trees laden with pendent bunches of their sausage-shaped fruit and hedged round with pine-apples. Stretching away still

further in the distance was the cocoa plantation, a sea of verdure, interspersed with the darker green foliage of the nutmeg and wax-like clove-tree. Here reigned in all its majesty the bread-fruit tree, with broad serrated leaves, like a gigantic horse-chestnut, sheltering the more fragile trees that grow only beneath its shadow, and acting as the "mother of the cocoa"—el madre del cacao—as the Spaniards call it.

But, I wish to go back now to the memorable day when Jake set off so briskly on his errand to see if the English mail steamer had arrived, leaving me on the terrace in front of our house wondering, as he speeded on his way, whether the packet was in sight; and, if she had been signalled, trying to surmise what news she would bring.

I was really very anxious about the matter, and I will tell you the reason why.

My father was an officer of the royal navy, who found it a hard thing, with an increasing family, to make both ends meet in the mother country on his half-pay. At last, sick of waiting for active employment afloat during the long stagnation in the service occasioned by the interregnum of peace that lasted almost from Waterloo up to the time of the Crimean war, he determined, like Cincinnatus, to "beat his sword into a ploughshare." In other words, he abandoned the fickle element on which he had passed the early days of his manhood and emigrated to the West Indies, to see whether he might not improve his fortunes by investing what little capital he had in a coffee and cocoa plantation in the island where my scene opens. A couple of months or so before, he had taken a trip across the Atlantic to arrange some money matters with his London agent, and we were now expecting his return by every mail. Beyond this, my father had more than half-hinted that, as soon as he got back to Grenada, he would send me over to England in my turn to go to school, when, most likely, I would have to bid adieu to my West Indian home for good and all; for, my fervent desire was to follow in dad's footsteps and enter the navy as soon as I was able to pass the admiralty examination—a desire to which dad, in spite of the scurvy way in which he had been treated by an ungrateful country, did not say nay, his ambition being that I should succeed where he failed if possible, for he was a true sailor and hankered after the sea yet.

It was not surprising, therefore, that I was so eager to learn whether the packet had come in, albeit her arrival would naturally bring to an end the little brief authority which I had been so proud to assume during dad's absence as the protector of my mother and sisters, besides being regarded by all the negro

hands as “um lilly massa of um plantashun.” Really, I esteemed myself at that period to be a most important and highly dignified person, being only a boy of thirteen years old then, and small-grown for my age at that!

Jake had scarcely been out of sight five minutes when I began to look out for his return. My impatience, indeed, quite got the better of my reason, for I ought to have known well enough, if I had only considered, that he could not have yet half accomplished the journey to the signal station on Richmond Hill, much less thought even of coming back, the willing darkey being as unable as anyone else to annihilate distance or space!

It was a terribly hot day, being close on to the noontide hour, the thermometer under the shade of the verandah where I stood marking over a hundred degrees; while, goodness only knew what it was out in the open, where the sun’s blistering rays produced such intense heat that the paintwork of the green jalousie shutters outside the windows of the house fairly frizzled up in liquid blotches!

The air, too, was oppressively close and warm, just as when the door of an oven is opened in one’s face, not a breath of wind stirring to agitate the still atmosphere; but, neither did this fact, nor did the blazing power of the glowing orb of day, which looked like a globe of fire in the centre of the heavens, affect the wild luxuriance of nature at Mount Pleasant.

As I gazed around, everything appeared to be invigorated instead of prostrated by the high temperature.

This seems to be the natural order of things in the tropics, that is, in respect of everything and everyone accustomed to broiling weather, like hot-house flowers and coloured gentry of the kidney of Jake and his sable brethren, whose ancestors, having been born under the sweltering equator, handed down to their descendants constitutions of such a nature that they seem fairly to revel in the heat, and appear to be all the healthier and happier the hotter it is!

Ruby-throated humming-birds, with breasts of burnished gold, fluttered about the garden on the terrace in front of me in dainty flight, or else poised themselves in mid-air opposite the sweet-smelling blossoms of the frangipanni, their little wings moving so rapidly as to make them appear without motion; broad-backed butterflies, with black stripes across their yellow uniforms, floated lazily about, purposelessly, doing nothing, as if they could not make up their minds to anything; and the scent of heliotropes and of big cabbage roses,

that blossomed in profusion on trees larger than shrubs, almost intoxicated the senses. The eye, too, was charmed at the same time by the pinky prodigality of the “Queen of Flowers,” and the purple profusion of the convolvulus, their colours contrasting with the soft green foliage of the bay-tree; while great masses of scarlet geranium, and myriad hues of different varieties of the balsam and Bird of Paradise plant were harmonised by the snowy chastity of the Cape jessamine and a hundred other sorts of lilies, of almost every tint, which encircled a warm-toned hibiscus, that seemed to lord it over them, the king of the floral world.

I was watching a little procession of “umbrella ants,” as they are called, that were promenading across the marble flooring of the verandah, each of the tiny insects carrying above its head a tinier piece of the green leaf of some plant, apparently for the purpose of shielding itself from the sun, for they held up their shades just in the same way as a lady carries her parasol; when, all at once, I heard a heavy step outside, advancing along the terrace from the direction of the stables.

Without turning my head, or consulting watch or clock—or, even without looking up at the scorching sun overhead, had my eyes been sufficiently glare-proof to have stood the ordeal—I knew who the intruder was, and could have also told you that it was exactly mid-day.

Why?—you may ask perhaps.

You will learn in a moment.

The heavy footstep came a pace nearer, and then paused; when, looking round, I beheld an old negro, with a withered monkey-like face, clad in the ordinary conventional costume of an African labourer in the West Indies. His dress consisted of a loose pair of trousers and shirt of blue cotton check; and, on the top of his white woolly head was fixed on in some mysterious fashion a battered fragment of a straw hat, just of the sort that would be used by an English farmer as a scarecrow to frighten off the birds from his fields.

This was Pompey, Jake’s rival; and, as he politely doffed his ragged head-gear with one hand, in deference to my dignity as “the young massa,” he held out to me with his other paw a wine-glass whose foot, if ever it had one, had been broken-off at some remote period of time.

I knew what Pompey wanted as well as he did himself, but for my own amusement, and in order to hear him make his usual stereotyped announcement, I asked him a leading question.

“Well, what is it?” I said.

“U’m come, rum!” was his laconic rejoinder—nothing more, but the sentence was sufficiently expressive.

Every day of the week, with the exception of Sundays, it had been always Pompey’s privilege to have a quartern of rum served out to him, as if he were on board ship, at twelve o’clock, the ordinary grog-time; and, punctually at that hour every day, in the wet season or dry, he never failed to come up to the house for his allowance, bringing with him the footless wine-glass to receive the grateful liquor. His appearance, consequently, was an unfailing token that the sun had crossed the zenith and that it was time to “make it eight bells.”

Unlike the majority of his dark-complexioned brethren, who are generally loquacious in the extreme, Pompey was singularly reticent of speech, never varying this parrot-like formula of his when coming at twelve o’clock for his daily stimulant, without which he would never set about his afternoon work.

“U’m come, rum!” was all he would say ever since he had been taken over by my father with the other belongings of the plantation; and, as he was an old “hand,” the former proprietor related, and had always been similarly indulged with a quartern of rum at mid-day as far back as he could recollect, old Pompey—and precious old he must have been by this reckoning—had evidently grown into the habit, so that it was part of himself.

Entering the house through one of the low window-less windows which opened out on to the verandah, like the ports in the side of a ship—ventilation being everything in the tropics and closed doors and shut-up rooms unheard of, as everybody was free to walk in and out of the different apartments just as they pleased—I soon brought out a case-bottle from the sideboard where it stood handy for the purpose. Then, filling the old darkey’s footless wine-glass, which he held with a remarkably steady hand considering his age, he tossed off the contents without drawing breath, the fiery liquor disappearing down his throat with a sort of gurgling “gluck, gluck,” as if it had been decanted into the capacious orifice, Pompey not even winking once during the operation.

“Tank you, Mass’ Tom,” said he, when he had sucked in the last drop; when, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, he stalked off across the terrace again towards the stable to fetch his cutlass to cut the guinea-grass for the horses, according to his usual habit at this time of day. This Jake well knew, by the bye, when he said he thought he would be able to return from his mission before the old fellow should have started, Pompey being as regular as clockwork in his movements, carrying out his daily routine most systematically.

I did not expect to see him again until later on in the afternoon on his return from the mountain at the back of the house, laden with a bale of provender for the stable, which he had charge of; but, what was my surprise a few minutes afterwards, to see him hurrying up again to the house, without his customary companion the cutlass and in a state of great excitement most unaccountable in one generally so phlegmatic.

“Hullo, Pompey! what’s the matter now?” I called out as he began to ascend the steps leading up to the terrace, his boots coming down with a heavy stamp on the marble surface. He was a most peculiar old fellow; for, unlike again most of the negroes, who only wear any foot covering on Sundays, when they torture themselves horribly by squeezing their spreading toes into patent leather pumps if they can get them by hook or by crook, the old darkey invariably stalked about in a tall pair of Wellington boots that made him walk as gingerly as a cat with its paws in walnut shells.

“Hey, Mass’ Tom, look smart,” he sang out in response. “Um big ’guana down by de stable; come quick an’ bring ’tick an’ we kill him togedder!”

An iguana? This was something to make one excited; for, harmless though the reptile is, one does not come across one everyday. Besides, it is capital eating, tasting just like a chicken, and that of the tenderest: you could not tell the difference between the two when well cooked.

Catching up a thick stick, I was after Pompey in a minute, forgetting alike the heat of the sun’s rays in the open—although but a short period before I had been forced to retreat under the shade of the verandah—and my anxious watch for Jake with news of the mail steamer, about whose delay I had been so impatient.

I soon overtook the darkey, who never could make much headway in his boots. They were so big for him that I believe his feet used to have a quiet walk inside them on their own account!

“Where’s the ’guana?” I said.

“Just dere, Mass’ Tom,” he replied, pointing with one of his lean, bony, mottled fingers, the black colour of which seemed to have been worked off them by years of rough usage.

“Where?” I repeated, for I could not see the animal as yet anywhere.

“Dere, on manure heap—see?”

“Yes, I see now,” I replied, as, getting nearer to the stables, I noticed something on the top of a mound of straw rubbish. It was a creature like a gigantic lizard, some five or six feet long and as broad about the head as a decent-sized pig.

“Yah, yah, dere he is, dere he is!” shouted out Pompey. “Golly, Mass’ Tom, he am big ’guana, too! Give me de ’tick, and dis niggah will soon ’top um runnin’ ’way.”

The green-looking creature had been basking in the sun, enjoying itself all the more, probably, from the warmth of the manure heap on which it lay; but now, on our nearer approach, it raised its serpent-like head and, puffing out its creamy throat, grew in an instant to double its former size, while the beautiful iridescent colouring of its skin became more conspicuous.

Pompey raised the stick I had handed to him, and the iguana, as if likewise springing to arms to resist attack, elevated a sort of spiny fringe, resembling a mane, that reached from the crest of its head to the shoulders. At the same time, it slung round its tail, in crocodile fashion, as if to give a blow with it to its assailant.

The old darkey, however, was not frightened at the motion. Stepping up to the animal’s side, he gave it one smart stroke on the nose, whereupon the iguana was incontinently settled, turning over on its back a second afterwards. The brightness at once faded from its green and gold skin, while the rich cream-coloured throat changed to a dirty-white in the hues of death, in the same way that a dolphin alters its colour when taken from its native element.

“Guess um well kill’ now, nohow,” said Pompey grimly, taking up the animal by the tail; but it was such a big one that he couldn’t lift it, so he had to drag it along the ground towards the quarters of himself and the other negroes. Here it would, I knew, ere long be skinned and dressed in a very savoury way, known only to African cooks, when a portion of the banquet would be sent in anon to “the big house,” for the kindly acceptance of the white folks there—my mother, and sisters, and myself—elegantly dished up in plantain leaves with red peppers for dressing.

While I stood for a second watching old Pompey making off with his prey in high good-humour, looking in the distance, as he climbed the slope of the hill up to the huts, uncommonly like a lean monkey dragging away a centipede, the intense glare of the tropical noontide, of which I was for the moment oblivious, changed in an instant to a deep gloom resembling the blackness of night. It seemed as if some interposing body had suddenly been placed between the sun and the earth.

Then came a tremendous crash of thunder, like the sound of heaven’s dome breaking in, it was so fearfully loud and awesome; and the reverberating roar was accompanied by a vivid flash of forked lightning, whose zigzag stream struck a tall tamarind-tree standing in front of me, splintering the trunk from top to bottom with a scrunching noise like that made in rending timber!

I turned and ran back to the house for shelter as fast as I could, anticipating what was coming, such storms being of frequent occurrence in the tropics after exceptional heat and when there is no wind to agitate the pent-up air; but, ere I could ascend the half dozen steps leading up to the terrace, the rain-cloud overhead burst and a sheet of water came down as if poured over the side of some giant reservoir in the sky, wetting me to the skin by the time I had gained the shelter of the verandah.

My mother was just coming out of the drawing-room to see where I was, when Jake came up racing behind me, shouting out at the pitch of his voice, above the sound of the sluicing rain, “De packet am in, Mass’ Tom! De packet am in!”

Chapter Two

"More Haste, Worse Speed"

"Hurrah!" I shouted out.

I was so overjoyed at hearing Jake's announcement that the long-expected mail steamer had at last arrived that I was utterly oblivious of my soaking condition, although I had been so completely drenched in the brief space of time that had elapsed before I could get under shelter from the shower, that the water was now trickling down my dripping garments and running out of my boots. "Look alive, old fellow," I added to the willing darkey, who was in an equally moist state, his black skin glistening as if it had received a fresh coating of Japan varnish. "Saddle my pony at once, for I must go into town, as I told you!"

"But, Tom," interposed my mother at this juncture, "you cannot start in all this rain. See how wet you are already, dear, and it is still pouring down, worse than ever!"

"Oh, never mind that, mother, it will stop soon," I rejoined hastily, mortally afraid of her putting an embargo on my contemplated expedition to Saint George's. "I will go in and change my things, and long before I'm ready it'll be fine again, you'll see! Besides, you know, dad may have come by the steamer, and he'll be expecting me to meet him and want Dandy to ride home on. Jake can take him down along with me, so as to be on the safe side, eh?"

"Well, well, my dear, I suppose you must have your way," said my mother, whom this last argument of mine, in respect of my father's possible arrival, seemed to convince against her will, for she made no further demur to my setting out, in spite of the weather.

This very material point being satisfactorily arranged in my favour, as Jake could see with half an eye, he having waited to learn whether my orders were to be carried out or not, the darkey now hurried off to the stables to execute them with a cheerful grin on his ebony face, fearing the rain as little as he did the burning rays of the mid-day sun; while I scurried off to my room upstairs to shift my wringing clothes and put on another suit of white flannel, which is the ordinary wear of all sensible people in tropical countries—just as it is becoming the fashion over here in summer, especially for fellows who go in for cricket and other athletic games provocative of perspiration.

I had judged well of the climate and been a true weather prophet; for, albeit I was pretty sharp in dressing, long ere I could get below again the rain suddenly ceased falling, and, in another moment or so, the sun was shining down as potently as it had done before the thunder-storm, from an absolutely cloudless sky, whose burnished blue arc was only suggestive of heat and glare as usual.

When I stood under the verandah once more, awaiting Jake with the horses, I noticed that the marble pavement of the terrace in front had dried up already, while the earth of the flower-beds scarcely looked damp. As previously, lots of humming-birds, displaying their rainbow plumage to the best advantage, were flitting here and there between the shrubs, in pursuit of the myriads of flies and other insects that had come out for an airing after the shower, some of the tiny feathered mites poising themselves before some opening bud or blossom, or else peering into its interior, with their little wings moving at the rate of ten thousand bird-power per minute and creating a little halo of variegated light around them.

The industrious ants, too, had reformed their parasol procession, which the temporary deluge had seriously disorganised; and, but that several solemn-looking blackbirds, of a larger species than the yellow-billed variety familiar to us in England, were now hopping about on the lawn under the orange-trees, digging up worms, and that a stray drop or two of crystal glittered on the petals of the roses like diamonds, or reflected the sunshine from the trumpet bells of the lilies, while there was a greener tint on the vegetation around, one could hardly have imagined that it had rained at all!

Still, there was a perceptible coolness in the air now noticeable that was most refreshing after the suffocating heat, which I had found so oppressive an hour agone; and, this tempered tone of the atmosphere brought out more vividly the fragrant scent of the frangipanni and languid perfume of the jessamine, the whole atmosphere without being redolent of their mingled odours, harmoniously blended together in sweet unison, like a regular pot-pourri!

The showery avalanche, besides cooling and sweetening the air with the balmy breath of the flowers which its influence extracted, left also other evidence of its effect behind. This was especially apparent in the swelling torrent of muddy water, drained from the slopes of the mountain-side above the house and now impetuously rushing down an impromptu gully which the flood had scooped out for itself across the grounds, following the course of the carriage drive almost up to the entrance-gate, where the suddenly-created cataract, diverging

into a hollow to the left, made another exit for itself through the cactus hedge into the cocoa plantation beyond.

Jake was much longer in getting the horses saddled than I had expected; and I had to shout out for him more than once before he came up to the steps of the terrace with the especial animals he had charge of—"Prince," my pony, a skittish little bay from the Spanish main; and "Dandy," a sturdy dapple-grey Canadian roadster, that in appearance was quite the reverse of what his name would imply. The old horse, however, was as sound and steady as a veteran drum-major and thoroughly reliable; and my father prized him highly, always riding him from choice and not minding any chaff about his charger's looks.

On advancing to mount Prince, our darkey groom seemed put out about something, I noticed; but, before I could put any question to him or ask the reason of his being so tardy in bringing out the horses, he burst out full of his grievance.

"I tole um so, Mass' Tom, tole um so!" he exclaimed.

"Why, what is the matter?" I inquired, rather surprised.

"Golly, matter 'nuff for dis chile," grumbled Jake.

"You savvy I tell you, Mass' Tom, I'se come back from de hill 'fore Pomp get him cutlash to cut um guinea-grass, hey?"

"Yes, so you did, Jake," I said sympathisingly, remembering his boast when setting out.

"I'se right den, massa!"

"Indeed?" I responded.

"Iss, Mass' Tom. Belieb me, dat lazy ole niggah not cut guinea-grass, not do nuffin'!" said Jake indignantly, thinking and hoping that Pompey would receive a rating.

"Oh, he caught a 'guana before the rain came on, and that prevented him from going to cut the grass," I explained.

Jake looked astounded.

"Hey, Pomp catch him 'guana?" he asked.

“Yes,” said I. “He killed it in the stable-yard, and has gone to cook it.”

This immediately fired Jake’s jealousy. It was, to him, just like adding insult to injury on his rival’s park. It seemed like poaching on his special domain.

“What, Mass’ Tom, he catchee ’guana, for suah?”

“Yes, in the corner there,” I answered, pointing out the exact place with the twisted rattan, or “supple Jack,” which I used for a riding-whip and held loosely in my hand.

“Dat for true, right on de mush heap dar?” repeated Jake, apparently unable to realise the fact of the other’s success in the chase.

“He did,” I said briefly; and then, wishing to end the colloquy, I jumped on Prince’s back, whereupon my skittish pony, as I had trained him to do on my once mounting, immediately started off at a brisk canter down the carriage drive. So Jake had perforce to bestride Dandy and follow after me, without having the pleasure of calling Pompey to account for his misdeeds before we started—as he evidently expected and most decidedly wished to have done I’ve no doubt.

Jake was very angry.

This was not so much because the other darkey had omitted cutting the guinea-grass, which, of course, the horses would not now require until we returned from town, as from the circumstance of Pompey having had the chance of exhibiting his prowess in respect of the iguana. Jake was evidently much dissatisfied with the whole proceeding; and I could hear him muttering anathemas against his rival as he trotted behind me through the grounds, and out at the entrance-gate into the main-road beyond.

“Golly, dat most mystiferous, nohow!” I heard him ejaculate after a bit as he got nearer up to me. “I’se spec dat ’guana one big fool let Pomp grab him. Nebber mine! Me catchee big manacou byme-bye; an’ dat heap betterer dan nasty fat-face ’guana. Say, Mass’ Tom, um like manacou?”

“I can’t tell you, Jake,” I replied. “I have never yet tasted one.”

“Den you jest wait an’ see. Dey is splendiferous, Mass’ Tom, an’ beat cock-fightin’. Golly, I get you one, two, tree, five manacou to-morrer, dat ebber so

nicer dan dat poor trash ob 'guana dat hangman tief Pomp catchee, you jest wait an' see!"

"All right, Jake," I said kindly, to appease his jealous feelings; for, he was very fond of me and thought that his rival had eclipsed him in my estimation. "I will come with you to-morrow, if my father doesn't want me, and then we'll hunt for manacous up the mountain."

This promise delighted him, and very soon Jake regained his customary good-humour, satisfied with having prospectively outshone Pompey; for, he presently broke out with one of his happy African laughs, which told me as plainly as words the little unpleasantness of the past was now dismissed from his thoughts.

As we rode on, at first downwards and then up a steep hillside again, the path winding by the edge of a precipice most of the way, we came across further traces of the force of the recent storm. Large trees were at one place stretched across the road, their massive trunks having been rended by the lightning; while the sudden deluge of rain had channelled little streams through the red clay. These coursed along like so many independent rivulets, right under our horses' hoofs, rippling onward light-heartedly, until they came to one of the many broad ditches or gullies, that intersected our track at intervals, the contents of which they swelled to such an extent that we frequently had great difficulty in fording them, the water reaching quite up to Prince's girths, and the current being so strong as to almost sweep him off his legs.

The scenery on either hand was grand.

On the right, plantations of cocoa and nutmeg trees stretched up the slopes of hills, which all converged towards a central mountain peak that overtopped all the rest by many hundred feet. This was crowned by the extinct crater of a volcano, now filled with water and known as Le Grand Etang. On the left, were valleys and gorges of the richest green, with here and there a tall silk-cotton tree or graceful palm elevating itself above the other wood-nymphs, the smoke of charcoal burners dotting the landscape from amid the thickest part of the forest growth of green with curling wreaths of grey.

We soon reached a wide plateau just above Government House, where the best view in the whole island was to be obtained, above which towered the old battery on Richmond Hill, armed with obsolete and worm-eaten thirty-two pounders, once deemed sufficient protection for the Carenage or harbour

below, which it commanded. Fort George, another fortification equally powerless nowadays either for attack or defence, lay on the right; and looking beyond, over a series of terraces of villas and gardens, and negro provision grounds, the open sea could be seen stretching away to the Boccas of the Gulf of Paria and the Serpent Passage which divides the island of Trinidad from the main coast of British Guiana.

I could see, on arriving at this point, the English mail steamer coaling at the jetty below, with gangs of negroes and negresses busily engaged going to and fro along the wharf, carrying baskets of fuel on their heads; so, setting spurs to Master Prince, I made him race down the road as if a drove of wild bulls were after him, heedless of every obstacle in my path and only intent on reaching the quay.

"Top, Mass' Tom, 'top!" shouted out Jake behind me, putting Dandy into a heavy trot. "De road am berry slippy, an' you go one big fall soon!"

But, Jake's caution was all in vain, for the steamer was there, and the passengers had probably already landed with my father amongst them, so there was every reason for my hastening on quickly.

I did not waste time, I can assure you!

Cantering past groups of coloured people of every hue, from the palest copper tint up to the jettiest black, all returning to their huts in the hills after disposing of their market produce for the day and each giving me the customary patois greeting, "Bon j'u', massa, ken nou'?" as I raced by them; past cottage doors and overseers' houses I went on at full speed, until I came to a long street that sloped down with a gradient like that of one of those sharp-pointed, heavy-gabled roofs of Queen Anne's time.

Even this, however, did not arrest my headlong course.

I was much too anxious to get below to the harbour side before the coaling of the steamer should be completed and the vessel start off again on her intercolonial trip amongst the islands to deliver her mails from Europe; and so, deaf to all my darkey attendant's prayers and expostulations, I hit poor Prince over the head with my supple jack and galloped as if a drove of wild bulls was after me down the dangerous incline, which was paved with smooth slippery

fixed boulders to make it all the more treacherous to a horse's hoofs unless rough-shod.

"Golly, Mass' Tom, you break um neck for suah," I heard the terrified Jake call out far away in my rear; but I could not have stopped then even had I wished, Prince having too much "way" on him.

"Come on!" I cried. "Come on!"

These were the last words I remember uttering, for at that moment, the pony, with me clinging to his back with might and main, was tearing down the slope at a terrific pace; and then, just as we were passing the school-house at the corner of the market-place, some boys who were outside suddenly set up a loud yell at something or other.

This frightened Prince so that he shied.

The pony bounded up in the air first like a goat, lifting all his legs from the ground at once in true buck-jumper fashion, after which he came to a dead halt as if he had been shot; and then, placing his fore-feet straight out before him he sent me flying over his head right through the window of a little shop opposite with such force that I was picked up insensible.

Chapter Three

Convalescent

The first face I saw when I came to myself was that of my father. He was bending over me and looking very anxious. I think he had been crying.

“Better, Tom?” he said softly, as if afraid of making a noise and frightening me back into unconsciousness—everything seeming to be strangely still around me!

“Oh, I’m all right,” I answered joyfully, much pleased at seeing him. “Why, how did you come here?” and I tried to get up from the sofa on which I discovered that I Was lying. But it was only an attempt, for I fell back again in a heap, feeling pain all over me. It seemed just as if I had been broken into little pieces and somebody was now separating the bits!

“Bress de Lor’, him ’peak again!” I heard Jake ejaculate, and then I noticed his black face behind dad’s, while there was another gentleman there too. The latter now took hold of my hand and felt my pulse, I suppose, although he didn’t ask me to put out my tongue, as he generally did when he came up to Mount Pleasant specially to prescribe for me!

“Hallo, Doctor Martin!” I exclaimed, recognising him. “What’s the matter with me? I can’t rise, or move my legs, or do anything.”

“You confounded young rascal!” he rejoined in his hearty voice, “a nice mess you have got yourself into, alarming us all in this way. What do you mean by galloping down Constitution Hill as if you were after a pack of foxhounds? It’s a mercy you haven’t broken every bone in your body.”

“Poor Prince isn’t hurt, is he?” I asked abruptly, without answering him directly.

“No, Mass’ Tom,” eagerly cried out Jake, glad of saying something to me in order to show his sympathy; “he berry well, no scrape um knees or nuffin’, he—”

“There, that will do,” said Doctor Martin, interrupting the flow of the good-natured darkey’s eloquence, “you mustn’t agitate Master Tom now; he’s in a very critical state, and any excitement is bad for him. You’d better go and see after the horses.”

“Me no want agg-agg-tate um, Mass’ Doctor,” pitifully expostulated Jake, almost blubbering at the accusation of his possibly wanting to do me harm, “I’se only glad to hear him ’peak again, dat all;” and he went out of the room quite crest-fallen.

“Oh, doctor!” I cried, but then, all at once, a sort of sick sensation came over me. Dad and Doctor Martin seemed to be waltzing round me, with the furniture and everything else following suit, and I fainted away again, I fancy; although I could hear their whispering voices, as of people who were far away in the distance. Then, there was a blank.

When I next opened my eyes, strange to say, I was in my own little bed at home, with my mother sitting by my side.

I felt very weak, and one of my arms was tied up in bandages, while my other limbs didn’t seem to belong to me; but, at first, I had no recollection of what had happened.

I could not imagine what was the reason for my being laid up like that; and, seeing my mother there, I fancied for the moment that I had overslept myself, as was frequently the case, and that she had come to call me for breakfast.

“Why, mother,” I said, “I’m sorry I’m so late.”

“You’ve been ill, Tom,” she replied soothingly, without referring to my laziness as I expected; “I’m glad, though, you’re recovering at last.”

“Hi!” I exclaimed, much astonished.

“Yes, my dear, very ill,” she repeated.

“Dear me! and for how long?” I asked, in wonder still.

“Well, it is more than three weeks since you were brought here, dear; but take this now, Tom,” she added, before telling me anything further, putting her arm round me and lifting me up in a sitting position, so as to be better able to swallow something in a wine-glass which she held to my lips.

“Medicine, eh?” I said, making a wry face.

“Yes, dear, but it doesn’t taste badly,” she whispered coaxingly. “Besides, Tom, if you won’t take it the doctor says you are not to be allowed to speak, and of course I shall not be able to answer your questions.”

This settled the point; so I at once tossed off the draught she handed me, which, although slightly bitter, was not nearly as nasty as I thought it would have been, having a wholesome horror of doctor's mixtures. The draught, at all events, put fresh vigour into me. It certainly gave me strength to speak again as soon as I had gulped it down, for I was fidgeting to know what had occurred.

"Now, mother," I said, "tell me all about it. I can't be quiet till you do. Have I had the fever again, or what?"

I may mention in explanation of this question of mine that, the year before, I had been confined to bed with a sharp attack of a sort of tertian ague, which is the scourge of most tropical countries. This was the only illness I had ever suffered from in my young life; so, I thought now that my old enemy had paid me another visit.

"No, dear, you have not had the fever," she answered. "Do you forget all about going to town to meet your father, and how your pony threw you over his head at the foot of Constitution Hill?"

Thereupon the whole thing flashed back upon my mind in an instant.

"But how did I get here?" I inquired, puzzled at this part of the affair. "I remember now about my tumble, and seeing dad and Doctor Martin at some place in Saint George's, with old Jake crying behind them, but I don't recollect anything else."

"My boy," said my mother seriously, her lips trembling as she spoke, "you've had a very narrow escape from an awful death! Do you know that had you fallen on your head in the street when Prince pitched you over, nothing could have saved your life? As it was, you got your left arm broken and face cut, besides which you have been suffering from a slight concussion of the brain, Doctor Martin says. It is the latter which has made you insensible for so long a time. At one time, indeed, we all despaired of you!"

"Really!" I exclaimed, drawing a long breath of dismay at this catalogue of my injuries.

"Yes, really, Tom," said she; "it is a wonder to me that you are now lying here in your right senses again."

"But how did I get home, mother?" I asked, pressing my inquiries so as to learn every incident of the accident.

“Well, dear, being unconscious, and as moving you could not affect your head much, Doctor Martin thought you would recover sooner if removed to the fresh country air of Mount Pleasant than if you were allowed to remain in the stifling atmosphere of the town. So you were brought up here, borne on the very sofa on which you were placed when they picked you up after your fall, four negroes acting as your palanquin bearers.”

“Jake was one, I bet!” I here put in, interrupting her. “I am sure he wouldn’t have let anyone else carry me if he could help it.”

“Oh, yes, Jake assisted,” she said; “and I gave him a fine scolding, too, afterwards, for allowing you to ride down that hill at such a pace. It was a mercy you were not killed outright!”

“It wasn’t his fault, mother,” I interposed at this point. Really, I was not going to let poor Jake be blamed for my obstinacy! “I made Prince gallop into the town as hard as I could, in spite of all he could say, for I was anxious to get down to the wharf before the passengers had landed from the steamer. I wished to be the first to meet dad.”

“And you’ve found out now, Tom, the truth of the old proverb, ‘more haste, worse speed,’ eh, my dear?”

“Yes, mother,” I said with a laugh, “I never got there at all. But, dad came all right, for I saw him, you know. Where is he?”

“He’ll be here presently,” she replied; “he has been very anxious about you, and has sat up every night with you.”

“I’m very sorry,” I said; but then, feeling about my face and head with the solitary hand I was now only able to move, I noticed something strange. “Why, hullo, mother!” I cried out, “what is the matter with the top of my head—where is my hair gone? All seems so smooth!”

She couldn’t help laughing—I suppose it was at my comical look of mingled astonishment and perplexity.

“It had to be shaved off when you were delirious, Tom,” she said with a smile; “you feel funny without it, no doubt, but it will soon grow again, my boy.”

“Oh dear, oh dear!” I exclaimed lugubriously; “I suppose I will be bald and have to wear a wig, like old Mr Bunting! My arm, too, mother, hurts awfully! and I can’t move it at all.”

“Never mind, Tom, it might have been worse, you know,” she said in her quiet soothing way. “You ought to thank God for sparing your life, instead of grumbling at what your own recklessness has produced. However, my dear boy, you’ll soon pull round and be yourself again if you will only keep quiet and obey all the doctor’s directions.”

“But, mother, it’s a terrible task for me to keep quiet,” I cried in such a serious manner that I made her laugh again.

“No doubt it is,” she said, “but you must learn to do it if you wish to get well again; and, Tom, I can’t help reminding you that your being laid up now has greatly interfered with our plans. Your father wished to have sold the estate, and for us all to go home to England. Indeed, but for your accident we would have gone by the last packet.”

This was news with a vengeance! It almost made me jump out of bed, crippled as I was, and my mother had to put her hand on my shoulder to restrain me.

“What! sell Mount Pleasant?” I ejaculated.

“Yes,” she replied.

“And all of us go home together, instead of my being sent to England alone to school?” I continued.

“That was what your father thought of,” said my mother in answer to this question of mine; “but your illness has made him alter his mind somewhat, as you will learn when you are able to get up and move about. You must now, dear, remain quiet, and not excite yourself; otherwise, your recovery will be retarded and that will worry your father more.”

“All right, mother, I promise to be good,” I said resolutely, nestling down amongst the pillows which had been comfortably fixed around me, and trying to be as still as a mouse. “I will do all that you and the doctor tells me, if you’ll only make me well again.”

“That’s my brave boy,” she murmured softly, smoothing my poor hairless head with her gentle hand in such a caressing way that it made me feel drowsy, and

in another minute I had dropped off into a sound sleep. I did not wake again until some hours afterwards, when I was so refreshed and hungry that I was able to demolish a large basin of jelly-like chicken broth with some thin toast, which did me much good.

From that time I gradually got better; but my recovery was very slow, on account of the thorough shaking I had received from my fall, and it was quite another fortnight before I was able to be moved downstairs and allowed to sit in the verandah, where the fresh breezes from the sea and the scent of the flowers on the terrace completed my cure.

For some days even after this, however, I had to keep perfectly quiet, in accordance with the orders of Doctor Martin, who feared that I had sustained some injury to my spine in addition to my other contusions. This suspicion of his turned out, fortunately for me, to be groundless; but the rest he enjoined was very much out of keeping with my buoyant and excitable nature, which was fidgety in the extreme.

Still, this period of convalescence was by no means irksome to me on the whole, for I had plenty wherewith to occupy my attention and my sisters for companions, little Totty, the youngest, never being so happy as when with me.

In order the better to amuse me, and make me remain in a recumbent position, dad rigged up an Indian grass hammock for me beneath the shade of one of the large silk-cotton trees by the side of the house; and here I used to swing at my ease for hour after hour, looking at the bright-coloured humming-birds flitting about and watching the busy "Jack-Spaniards," as the wild bees or hornets of the tropics are locally styled, building their clay nests under the eaves of the verandah, just in the same way as the sand-martens make their habitations at home.

I also read a great deal, for a kind neighbour luckily lent me at this time a couple of odd volumes of Captain Marryat's works, so that I had now the pleasure of gloating over the wonderful history of Mr Midshipman Easy, besides enjoying the strange episodes of Peter Simple's eventful career. Both of these books were previously unknown to my boyish ken, and I need hardly say how entrancing I found them. Even now, after the lapse of so many years, I cannot hear the titles of either mentioned, without my memory taking me back in a moment to the garden of my old island home in the West Indies—the very perfume of the frangipanni and jessamine being almost perceptible to my vivid

imagination, while my fancy pictures the scene around, and my listening ear catches the faint rustle of the wind through the tops of the cabbage palms!

Once, I recollect, when lazily rocking to and fro in my hammock, I saw a large armadillo crawl out from amidst the brushwood under the trees, he having probably come down from his cave somewhere up in the mountains for change of air. This animal is something like a tortoise, only ever so much bigger; and as the negroes esteem them very good eating, saying they are better than turtle, I at once gave Jake a hail to let him know of the arrival of the strange visitor, when my darkey hastened speedily to the spot, securing the armadillo without much difficulty. Jake was all the more delighted with his prize from the fact that my accident had prevented me from going manacou hunting with him as I had promised. He argued that the armadillo would serve as a set-off to Pompey's iguana, which had been constantly "thrown in his teeth," as it were, ever since his rival had killed it in my presence, the one capture neutralising the other.

It may be wondered that I introduce all these little details of my illness and subsequent recovery, but, "there's a reason in everything, even in the roasting of eggs," says the proverb; and, when it is considered that, had it not been for my accident, dad and mother with my sisters and myself would all have gone to England in the mail steamer together, instead of my essaying the voyage alone in a sailing ship, these incidents are naturally relevant, quite apart from the strong impression they made upon me at the time, as but for what occurred I should have nothing of any importance to tell with reference to my subsequent adventures when alone on the Atlantic.

However, to make a long story short, I may briefly state that, after a pretty long interval of lying still, Doctor Martin said one day that I might get up and move about; when the change from inaction to action had such an improving effect on me that, within a very short space, I was myself again—although, perhaps, a much paler and thinner sort of Tom Eastman than "the young rascal," as the doctor persisted in naming me, "who tried to break his neck by galloping down Constitution Hill, but couldn't because it was so tough!"

All this while, dad had said nothing to me either about selling the estate or of my going home to school; but one morning when I was able again to mount on the back of poor Prince, who had grown quite fat during his long stay in the stable, he told me that I might accompany him, if I liked, to Grenville Bay, on the other side of the island. Dad said that there was a large merchant vessel lying off there, loading sugar from one of the plantations, and he wished to

consult the captain about sending home some bags of cocoa in her. He added, that we would probably have to go off to her in a boat.

This was about a week after the doctor had released me from my hammock-prison; so, as I had not as yet had a canter on Prince since my unlucky escapade, it may be imagined with what delight I prepared for the excursion, as, independently of the pleasure of a long country ride with dad, who was one of the jolliest companions anybody could be out with, I had never been on board a real ship before. I had frequently observed vessels at a distance from the shore, when anchored in the Carenage, as the harbour of Saint George is called, or else sailing round the coast inwards or outwards bound, but had never inspected one closely.

"Golly, Mass' Tom, dis sight am good for sore eyes!" cried Jake, laughing from ear to ear with joy at seeing me well again. "Me nebber fought you ebber lift leg ober Prince again!"

"Oh, I'm all right," I said gleefully, jumping into the saddle in my old style, the pony going off instanter at a canter in his customary way.

"Take care, Tom, take care!" cried my mother after me anxiously; so, to ease her alarm at my venturing too much for one who had so recently been an invalid, I reined in Prince, and as soon as dad had mounted Dandy, we started away at a steady jog-trot, Jake following up close behind the heels of the horses, with which he could at any time keep pace when put to it, even when we went at a gallop.

Dear me! I shall never forget that ride.

Part of our way was past a wide stretching extent of primeval forest that clothed the mountain-side with green. Here were wonderful specimens of trees, some of which would rival the oaks of England—aye, even those in Windsor great park! There was the sandbox, whose seeds are contained in an oval pod about the size of a penny roll; which when dry bursts like a shell, scattering its missiles about in every direction; the iron-wood tree, which turns the edge of any axe, and can only be brought low by fire; the caoutchouc-tree with its broad leaves and milk-white sap, the original source from which all our waterproof garments are made. Besides these were a host of others, such as the avocado pear, soursop, sapodilla, and sapota, all of which, in addition to their size and grand appearance, bear excellent fruit. But it would have puzzled anyone to explore this almost impenetrable forest growth without the aid of a

cutlass to clear the path; for, tall vines, like ship's cordage, hung from the limbs of the trees and knitted their branches together in the most inextricable fashion, the lianas rooting themselves down into the earth and then springing up again for fresh entanglements, in the same way as the banyan-tree of India spreads itself.

This was the outlook from one side only of our route. On the other were to be seen patches of sugar-cane, planted with almost mathematical regularity and looking like so many fields of some gigantic species of wheat; green plantations of cocoa, with their ripe yellow fruit showing out between the leaves, similar to that of ours at Mount Pleasant; and several detached gardens, where the negro squatters were cultivating their yams and tanias, or else preparing their farina for cassava from the root of the manioc plant. The process consisted in first squeezing out, by means of an old sack and a heavy stone for a press, the viscid juice, which is a strong poison—the same, indeed, with which the Caribs used to tip their arrows in the old days of the aborigines—and then baking the flour on a griddle over a charcoal fire.

Passing through this varied scenery on either hand, our road led presently downwards through a series of valleys, clothed with vegetation and smiling in flowers. We crossed now and again some little stream rippling along over its pebbly bed, wherein were crawfish and tiny things like whitebait playing amongst the water-cresses that grew over the banks; until, at last, we reached a wide horse-shoe bay facing the wide blue sea, that stretched out to the distant horizon, laving its silver sand with happy little waves that seemed to chuckle with a murmur of pleasure as they washed the shore in rhythmical cadence.

There was but a single vessel here, and she was riding at anchor out in the offing some two miles from land, looking quite lonesome by herself in the distance.

She was a barque of some four or five hundred tons, with a broad, bluff-bowed hull that rose well out of the water on account of her not having completed loading her cargo. There was a long row of white ports along her side; and, as she rolled with the motion of the ground-swell, now setting inshore with the wind, she showed her bright copper sheathing almost to her keel.

"Is that the ship, dad?" I asked my father, gazing at her with longing eyes and wondering how we were to reach her.

“Yes, Tom, that’s the vessel I told you of, and we must now see about getting aboard if we can,” said he, preparing to dismount from his horse, whose bridle Jake had already taken hold of.

“And what’s her name, dad?” I then inquired, jumping down from Prince’s back as I spoke and giving the reins also in charge of our darkey groom.

“The Josephine of London,” he replied in regular ship-shape fashion; “Captain Miles, master and part owner.”

Chapter Four

The "Josephine"

"What!" I exclaimed joyfully; "Captain Miles! That jolly old fellow who came out to Mount Pleasant last year and showed me how to make a kite?"

"The same," replied dad. "But remember, Tom, he's not much over my age; and I do not by any means call myself an old man yet! Besides, he and I are friends of long standing, and you should not speak of him so disrespectfully."

"Oh, dad, I didn't mean that, and I beg his pardon, I'm sure," I interposed hastily at this. "What I wished to express was, that I thought him so nice and pleasant, that I was very glad to have the chance of seeing him again!"

"My dear boy, I know what you meant," said dad kindly, with his usual bright smile, the sight of which eased my mind in a minute. "However, Tom," he added quizzingly, "we must now see about getting out to the old fellow."

But this was sooner said than done.

There was the ship, it was true, and there were we on the shore looking at her; but, there between us stretched an expanse of nearly two miles of blue water, which we certainly could not cross by swimming, although dad was a pretty good hand at that, and had made me, too, a fair adept in the art for my years.

How to reach the vessel, therefore, was the question.

Dad tried waving his handkerchief to attract the attention of those on board; but the crew of the Josephine appeared to be all asleep, for nobody took any notice of the signal. Foiled in this hope, dad turned round to me again with a puzzled expression on his face, as if wondering what he should do next, though of course I could not suggest anything.

Just then Jake, who had been looking at my father very attentively all this while, as if "taking stock" of his movements, so to speak, suddenly burst into one of his huge guffaws.

"Yah, yah, massa, golly you no see for suah!" he cried out in an ecstasy of enjoyment at what he considered a rare joke. "You am look de wrong way. Look dere, look dere!"

“Look where?” asked dad, not quite making out what particular direction Jake especially wished to draw his attention to, for the darkey was whirling one of his arms round him like a windmill to each point of the compass in turn; and, but that he had the bridles of the horses slung over his other arm, he would probably have gesticulated as frantically also with that.

“Dere, dere—t’oder way, massa,” repeated Jake, nodding his woolly head as he laughed and showed his teeth, this time indicating the extreme left of the bay, to which our backs had been turned; but where, on our now looking, we noticed a little jetty running out into the sea, with a boat putting off from it towards the ship.

“Oh!” ejaculated dad; “what a stupid I am, to be sure!”

Dad’s exclamation made Jake break out afresh into a loud cachinnation.

“Golly, dis chile can’t ’tand dat,” he shouted. “Massa um ’tupid, massa um ’tupid, yah, yah!” and he almost doubled himself in two with merriment, his hearty laughter being so contagious that both dad and I could not help joining in. So there were we all chuckling away at a fine rate at the idea of our not noticing either the jetty or the boat before. We had been so blindly anxious to reach the Josephine that we had looked in every direction but the right one for the means of getting on board her!

After a bit, dad was the first to recover his composure.

“Well, Tom,” said he, “the best thing we can do now will be to ride round the bay to the point where that boat has started out from. I think I can see another craft of some sort lying alongside the jetty; and, I daresay, we’ll be able to get out to the vessel if we go there.”

As he spoke he mounted Dandy again, while I jumped up nimbly on Prince’s back; and, in another moment we were cantering along the sandy beach towards the point in question, with Jake running behind holding on to Dandy’s tail, and still laughing to himself in high glee.

On approaching the jetty, it looked much bigger than it had appeared to be in the distance. It was a long wooden pier, indeed, that projected some hundred yards or so into the sea, and it had a crane at the end for hoisting and lowering the heavy hogs-heads of sugar. Dozens of these were ranged along its length awaiting shipment, and a gang of negroes were busily engaged under a white overseer in stowing some of them into the launch of theJosephine, which was

moored right under the crane. The name of the vessel was painted in white letters on the stern of the boat, which was turned towards us as we rode up so that we could easily see it.

On dad's telling the overseer what he wanted, we learnt that Captain Miles was on board his vessel, and that the launch would be going out to her as soon as she was loaded; so we had nothing to do now but to wait until she had taken in as many casks of sugar as she could carry.

To me, this delay was not very tedious; for, as the overseer made the negroes "hurry up" with their task, I was much amused with the brisk way in which they trundled the huge hogs-heads along, running them up to the pier-head, slinging them to the chains of the crane, and then lowering them down into the launch. There was much creaking of cog-wheels and cheerful, "Yo-heave-hoing!" from the men in the boat below, as they stowed them away in the bottom of the craft as easily as if they were only so many tiny little kegs, the darkeys joining in the sailors' chorus with much good-humour.

Bye and bye the job was finished, when, room having been reserved for dad and myself in the stern-sheets, the seaman in charge of the boat told us to jump in.

Then, some of the negro gang coming on board also to help man the long oars, which, like sweeps, were ranged double-banked along the sides of the launch, she was pulled away slowly from the jetty out towards the Josephine in the offing, Jake, who had been left ashore to mind the horses, casting longing looks of regret after us. He, too, would have dearly liked to have gone off to the ship.

It was heavy work, even with the aid of the sweeps, rowing such a distance under the broiling mid-day sun, for there was no breeze to aid the boat's progress through the water, and the heavy ground-swell that was rolling in to the land of course greatly retarded the rowers. Every moment the launch plunged almost bows under into the hollow of the sea, then rising again suddenly as the waves passed under her keel, her stern sinking down level with the surface at the same time and her prow being high in the air. I thought it somewhat dangerous at first, but dad and the other men took it so coolly that I was soon reassured and quite enjoyed the motion.

It seemed ever so much nicer than swinging to me; for the up and down movement was as regular as clockwork, in rhythmical harmony with the undulations of the unbroken billows that swept in, one after another, in

measured succession from seaward—pursuing their onward course until they broke on the curving shore of the bay, inside of us, with a dull low roar, like that of some caged wild animal kept under restraint and unable to exert its full strength.

After an hour's hard pulling, the boat got alongside the ship at last, but the vessel floated so high out of the water that I could not help wondering how we should ever be able to climb on board; for the square portholes, which were the only openings in her massive wall-like sides that I could see, were far above the level of the launch, even when the swelling surge lifted us up every now and then on the top of a heaving roller.

Dad, however, quickly solved the difficulty. At once catching hold of a couple of side lines which hung down from above, he swung himself dexterously on to a projecting piece of wood, like the bottom rung of a ladder, fixed to the hull of the vessel, and stepping from this to another cleat above he went up the side as easily as if he were ascending an ordinary staircase, soon gaining the deck overhead and disappearing from my view.

"My eye!" ejaculated the sailor beside me in the boat, surprised at dad's familiarity with such a nautical procedure. "I am blessed if that there gentleman ain't an old hand at it."

"You're right, my man," said I proudly, "my father was an officer in the navy once."

"Guessed so," replied the sailor laconically. "I've been an old man-o'-war's man myself and thought I knew the cut of his jib!"

I could not imitate dad's example, though, for all that; so, they had to hoist me in like a cask of sugar, as I was not able to get up the side. I confess I was mightily pleased to find myself landed, presently, safe and sound on the poop of the Josephine by the side of dad and Captain Miles, both of whom seemed much amused at my rather ignominious entry on board the vessel. Really, I must have looked very funny with my legs dangling in the air when run up at the end of the derrick!

"Well, youngster, how did you like being strung up at the yard-arm?" said Captain Miles, who had still a broad grin on his face. "Not many fellows have been bowsed up in that fashion and cut down so speedily!"

“No,” observed dad. “I’m glad, though, that mode of execution to which you refer is now altogether abolished in the service; but I’m afraid, captain, Tom does not understand your allusion.”

“Oh, yes, I do, dad,” said I, fresh from the pages of Mr Midshipman Easy, and knowing all about the summary system of punishment in vogue in the old days on board ship. “Captain Miles meant hanging.”

“So I did, youngster,” replied that worthy cheerily; “but you seem none the worse for your experience of the operation.”

“I didn’t like it, however, captain,” said I, a little bit put on my dignity by being laughed at. “The next time I come on board I intend to mount up the side-ladder the same as dad did.”

“That’s right, my lad, so you shall,” rejoined the jolly old fellow. “But, come below now both of you and have some luncheon. It has gone eight bells, and as I feel a trifle peckish, I daresay you’re pretty much the same.”

While saying this Captain Miles descended the poop-ladder, and, beckoning dad and I to follow him, ushered us into the cabin below, where we found a very appetising meal laid out. It seemed just as if we had been expected and that preparations had been made for our entertainment.

Dad passed a remark about this, but the captain laughed it off.

“Oh, it’s nothing,” he said. “Harry, my steward, thought he would make a spread, I suppose, because I told him I felt hungry just now. It is only our ordinary fare, though; for, when we’re in harbour like this now and have the chance of getting fresh grub, we always keep a good table. At sea, after a spell, we’ve got to rough it on salt junk frequently.”

“Not like what we poor fellows had to put up with in the service,” observed dad, shrugging his shoulders with a grimace.

“Ah, we in the mercantile marine know how to enjoy ourselves,” said Captain Miles with a satisfactory chuckle. “You naval chaps are something like what the niggers say of white folks that have come down in the world out here, and try to keep up appearances without means. You have ‘poor greatness, with dry rations,’ hey?”

“That’s true enough,” replied dad; and then we all set to work with our knives and forks, demolishing, in less than no time, a grilled fowl and some delicious fried flying-fish, with the accompaniment of roast buttered yams and fresh plantains.

I don’t know when I ever had such a jolly tuck out. The long ride after my forced quietness at home, and the sea air, combined with my novel surroundings—I was so overjoyed at being on board a ship, and having a meal in a real cabin, the very height of my ambition and what I had often longed for—gave me a tremendous appetite. It was the first really hearty meal I had eaten since my illness.

“Well, Eastman,” said Captain Miles presently to dad, “I suppose you’ve come about the youngster. Do you want me to take him home with me this voyage, eh?”

Of course I pricked up my ears on hearing this question; but dad did not satisfy my curiosity, although he noticed that I almost jumped up in my seat and was all attention.

“No,” replied he, evading the subject, “I wanted to see you about shipping some cocoa. I’ve got a good lot ready, and you may as well take it as anybody else.”

“Oh, I see,” rejoined the captain, winking in a confidential way at dad, as if they had some secret between them. “We can talk over the bills of lading and so on, while the youngster has a run round to see what a ship is like, eh?”

“Yes,” said dad; and turning to me he added, “You would like to go over the Josephine, would you not, Tom, now you are on board her?”

“Rather!” I replied, delighted at the idea, but still wondering what the captain had meant about “taking me home.”

There was evidently something on the tapis.

“All right, my hearty, so you shall,” said Captain Miles. “The boatswain will take you round and show you the ropes, while your father and I have a chat about business matters.”

He then called Harry the steward, and directed him to give me in charge of Moggridge the boatswain, with instructions to show me everything that was to be seen alow and aloft in the vessel; whereupon the two of us went out of the

cabin together, leaving the captain and dad to have an uninterrupted chat over their cigars.

Moggridge turned out to be the very sailor who had been in charge of the launch which had brought us off to the ship; so, from the fact of his knowing that dad had formerly been in the navy, and that I wished to enter the same glorious service, we were soon on the most confidential terms, the good-natured fellow going out of his way to make me thoroughly acquainted with all the details of the Josephine. He first took me down to the hold, where I saw the hogs-heads of sugar being stowed, the casks being packed as tightly as sardines in a tin box. We then went through the ship fore and aft between the decks, from the forecastle to the steward's pantry. After this the boatswain completed his tour of instruction by showing me how to climb the rigging into the main-top, telling me the names and uses of all the ropes and spars; so that, by the time he had ended, my head was in a state of bewildered confusion, with shrouds and sheets, halliards and stays, stun'-sail yards and cat-heads, bowsprits, and spanker booms, all so mixed up together that it would have puzzled me to discriminate between any of them and say off-hand which was which!

However, the boatswain and I parted very good friends when he took me back to the cabin on the termination of our inspection of the ship—he promising to teach me how to make a reef-knot and a running-bowline the next time I came on board, and I shaking hands with him as a right good fellow whom I would only be too glad to meet again under any circumstances.

Dad and I stopped with Captain Miles until late in the afternoon; when, the glare of the sun having gone off, we were rowed ashore in the captain's gig. My friend Moggridge took charge of us, and a crew of hardy sailors made the boat spin ashore at a very different rate of speed to that which the heavy old launch displayed on our trip out to the vessel with the sugar hogs-heads.

Jake met us at the jetty with the horses, which he had put up in the stables of the adjoining plantation during our absence; and as we rode along the shore of the bay homeward, the sun was just setting, while a nice cool wind came down from the mountains, making it much nicer than it had been in the earlier part of the day. Skirting the bay, we could see the Josephine in the distance gradually being shut in by a halo of haze, a thick mist generally rising up from the sea at nightfall in the tropics through the evaporation of the water or the difference of temperature between it and the atmospheric air.

If our ride out to Grenville Bay had been jolly in the morning, our journey back was simply splendid.

Almost as soon as the solar orb sank down below the horizon, which it did just before we turned away from the shore, the masts and spars of theJosephine, and each rope of her rigging, were all lit up by the sinking rays of light, their last despairing flash before their extinguishment in the ocean. At the same time, the hull of the vessel and every projecting point in the coast-line of the bay stood out in relief against the bright emerald-green tint of the sea. A moment afterwards, the darkness of night descended suddenly upon us like a vast curtain let down from heaven.

But it was not dark long.

As we passed our way up the climbing mountain path that led back to Mount Pleasant, our road—bordered on the one side by the dense vegetation of the forest, which seemed as black as ink now, and hedged in on the other by a precipice—was made clear by the light of the stars. These absolutely came outen masse almost as we looked upwards at them. I noticed, too, that the sky seemed to be of some gauzy transparent material like ethereal azure, and did not exhibit that solid appearance it has in England of a ceiling with gold nails stuck in it here and there at random; for, the “lesser orbs of night” in the tropics look as if they were floating in a sea of vapour. They appear a regular galaxy of beauty and splendour, and so many glorious evidences of the great Creator’s handiwork.

Every now and then, also, the air around us was illuminated with sparks of green-coloured flame, while the woods seemed on fire from a thousand little jets that burst out every second from some new direction, lighting up the sombre gloom beneath the shade of the forest trees.

One could almost imagine that there was a crowd of fairies going before us, each carrying a torch which he waved about, now above his head, and then around lower down, finally dashing it to the ground with those of his comrades, as is the custom at the torchlight processions of the students in Germany on some festal night. As dad and I trotted along towards home, the sparks of flame appeared now rising, now falling, vanishing here, reappearing there, finally converging into a globe, or “set piece,” as at a pyrotechnic display, and then dispersing in spangles of coruscation like a fizzed-out firework.

This beautiful effect, one of the wonders of a night in the West Indies, was caused by the fireflies. Of these insects there are two distinct species, one really a small fly which seems to be perpetually on the wing, flitting in and out in the air always, and never at rest; while the other is a species of beetle that is only seen in woody regions, where it takes up a more stationary position, like the glowworm over here. This latter has two large eyes at the back of its head, instead of in front in their more natural place; and these eyes, when the insect is touched, shoot forth two strong streams of greenish light, something like that produced by an electric dynamo, while, at the same time, the entire body of the "firefly," or beetle, becomes as incandescent as a live coal.

The light which even one of these little creatures will give out is so great that I have often seen dad, just for the sake of the experiment, read a bit out of a newspaper on a dark evening with a firefly stuck in a wine-glass for a candle!

For some time we jogged along silently; but just when we were nearing Mount Pleasant I could not help asking dad what Captain Miles had meant by that question he had asked him about taking me for a voyage.

I had been dying to know what the remark referred to ever since I had overheard it, but waited, thinking that dad would tell me of his own accord; so now, as he didn't speak, I had to brave the ordeal of the inquiry.

"He wanted to take you home to England to school, Tom," replied dad briefly in an absent sort of way, as if his thoughts were amongst the fireflies.

"Really?" said I hesitatingly—"and—"

"And, I have not quite made up my mind in the matter yet, Tom. Besides which, there's your mother to be consulted," interposed dad, answering my second question before I could put it.

"And if mother does not mind, you will let me go, then, in the Josephine with Captain Miles, eh, dad?" I asked anxiously.

"I didn't say so, did I?" said dad quizzingly.

"But you meant it, dad, you meant it, I know," cried I exultantly. "Hurrah, I am so glad! I am so glad!"

Chapter Five

Good-bye to Grenada!

“Are you really so glad to leave us all?” said dad somewhat reproachfully, as I could judge from his tone of voice; for, although the stars and fireflies illumined the landscape sufficiently for us to see our way, the light was too dim for me to observe the expression of his face.

“Oh no, dad, not that,” I cried out almost with a sob at such an insinuation. “You know, you said I was to go to England this year to school; and, if I must, why I would rather sail in Captain Miles’ vessel than any other.”

“All right, Tom, I did not think you quite so heartless as your exclamation implied,” replied dad, still speaking in a sad tone; “but it’s only the way of the world, my boy. Young birds are always anxious to leave the parent nest, and you are no exception, I suppose, to the rule.”

I did not make any answer to this. I could not speak, for my heart was too full.

Presently we arrived at the entrance to Mount Pleasant, when Jake rushed forward and opened the gate leading into the grounds, and we proceeded up the carriage drive towards the house in silence, the moon, which was just rising over the tops of the mountains beyond, lighting up the garden on the terrace in front and making it look like a dream of fairyland. The flowers and foliage shone out in relief as if tipped with silver against the dark background of the house; while the cool evening breeze was scented with the fragrance of the frangipanni and jessamine, now smelling more strongly than in the daytime, in addition to which I could distinguish the lusciously sweet perfume of the night-blooming cereus, a plant that only unfolds its luscious petals after sunset.

The whole scene lives in my memory now!

“Say, Mass’ Tom,” whispered Jake to me as he took hold of Prince’s bridle on my dismounting to lead him away to the stables along with Dandy. “I’se heard what you ’peak jus’ now to Mass’ Eastman. Um railly goin’ leabe de plantashun for true, hey?”

“Yes,” said I. “I am to go to England in the Josephine, that big ship we saw to-day, if my mother consents.”

“Den, I go too!” replied Jake impressively.

“Nonsense!” cried I, laughing at this determination of his. “Captain Miles won’t take you.”

“Won’t him, dough—me ’peak to him byme-by, an’ you see den!”

“You can speak if you like,” I replied in an off-hand way as he went away with the horses; while I ascended the terrace steps and proceeded into the house to hear what mother had to say on the subject of my going away.

I found, however, when I got in, that dad had already told the news; and it came out presently that the matter had really all been arranged beforehand.

My father, I heard now, had received an offer to sell his plantation, as my mother told me, but my illness had prevented him from closing with it; and so the opportunity had slipped. Consequently, as he would still have to remain at Mount Pleasant for possibly an indefinite time, he had made up his mind to adhere to his original plan and send me home to school without further delay. He and my mother had settled to arrange a passage for me with their old friend Captain Miles even before we started on our ride to Grenville Bay, dad and the captain having seen each other in the town and spoken about the matter previously, fixing the very day of our visit, as the substantial luncheon we had on board showed.

Now, therefore, that my inclinations chimed in with dad’s views and arrangements, the thing was finally settled; and it may be imagined what a state of mind my mother and sisters were in about my going. They hugged and kissed me as if I were going to start that very minute!

Dad said that the Josephine would complete loading her cargo at Grenville Bay in about a week or ten days. She would then call round at Saint George’s for orders, and I should have to go on board at a moment’s notice, as she might sail almost immediately.

The next few days were all hurry and bustle, everybody being busy in preparing my traps—my mother and sisters seeing to my outfit, and the negro servants, with all of whom I was a great favourite, contributing all sorts of little presents, some of the most unwieldy and useless character, which they thought would either add to my comfort during the voyage or were absolutely necessary for “de young massa agwine to England!”

But, at last, all my belongings, useful and useless alike, were packed up; and one fine morning in August—I remember well, it was the day after my birthday—a regular procession set out from Mount Pleasant, consisting of my mother and dad and my sisters, not omitting myself, the hero of the occasion.

We were all mounted on horseback; for no wheeled vehicle could overcome the engineering difficulties of the mountain road, rugged as it was and intersected by wild gullies and little brawling streamlets at intervals, the latter sometimes only bridged by a narrow plank, as I have mentioned before.

To a stranger, our cavalcade would have presented quite an imposing appearance, as behind the mounted portion of the procession came a string of negroes, headed by old Pompey, carrying the three large trunks and odd boxes containing my paraphernalia, those whose services were not absolutely required to carry anything volunteering to go with the rest in order to see me off.

I had been so excited all along with the idea of going to school, which I was looking forward to as something awfully jolly from the description I had read about other boys' doings in books—for I was utterly ignorant of what English life really was—that up to now I had scarcely given a thought to anything else, never realising the terrible severance of all the dear home ties which my departure would bring about.

But, when I mounted Prince for the last time, as I suddenly recollected all at once, and gazed round at my old home, which I was probably about to bid good-bye to for ever, my feelings overcame me. At that moment I would gladly have stopped behind, sacrificing even the pleasure I anticipated from my voyage in the Josephine, and all that the future might have in store for me, rather than desert so summarily the scenes of my childhood and all the loved members of the home circle.

Dad noticed my emotion and he recalled me to myself.

"Come on, Tom," he said kindly but firmly, "you must be a man now, my boy! Be brave; for if your poor mother sees you crying she will break down utterly, and I'm sure you would not like that."

This speech of his made me stifle my sobs; and, although I couldn't get out any words to answer him, I swallowed something hard that was sticking in my

throat. Then, putting Prince in a canter, I rode up to the side of my mother, who was in front with Baby Tot.

By that time I had regained my composure and was able to talk and make fun with my little sister, who, not knowing, of course, the purport of our expedition, thought it was a party of pleasure got up especially for her gratification. She was in a state of supreme delight, crowing and chuckling away in the greatest possible glee, every now and then putting up her little rosebud of a mouth to be kissed by mother and me.

Jake, I observed, looked very serious as he ran along by the side of Prince, resting one of his hands on my pony's flanks, as was his habit when he accompanied me out riding. The other negroes, who were carrying my luggage down to town on their heads, in their customary fashion of bearing all burdens whether light or heavy, were laughing and jabbering together like a parcel of black crows; but he never spoke a word either to his dark-complexioned brethren or to me, exhibiting such a striking contrast to his ordinary demeanour that even dad noticed it and asked him the reason, wondering what was the matter with him.

"Me not berry well, massa," however, was all the answer he could get out of Jake; but the faithful fellow looked at me so wistfully whenever I caught his eye that I recalled what he had said about wishing to go in the ship with me, on the night when we returned from Grenville Bay.

He had not alluded to the subject since, though, so I really thought he had forgotten it; and now, as he did not appear inclined to talk, I believed it best to let him alone, not wishing to hurt his feelings by dwelling on the impossible.

I could see that he was much put out about something; so I came to the conclusion that his change of manner, so unlike his usual light-hearted merry self, was due to his grief at parting with me, he having been my constant companion ever since I had been able to toddle about, when my father first settled down on the plantation, at which time I was only a little five-year-old boy and he a darkey stripling.

There was no racing down the road now at breakneck speed, like that time when in my hurry to meet dad I had come to grief some two months previously. Our cavalcade went on at a sober respectable pace, reaching the town in about an hour and a half from our start.

As we were passing by the bend in the road, opposite Government House, whence there was such a good view of the harbour below, Jake spoke to me for the first time during the journey.

“Dar am de ship, Mass’ Tom!” he said, pointing out the Josephine lying out in the anchorage under Fort Saint George.

She was looking much smarter and trimmer, I thought, than when I had first cast eyes on her in Grenville Bay; for her sails were partly loosed, making her have the appearance of an ocean bird ready to be on the wing. I noticed, too, that she floated lower in the water, having evidently taken in a lot more cargo since I had been on board.

When we reached the lower part of the town by the harbour side, after descending the perilously steep Constitution Hill, dad escorted us all to a famed establishment close by, known as “Jenny Gussett’s Hotel,” and kept by a gigantic coloured woman nearly seven feet high, where all the passengers by the mail steamers who had no friends in the island, used invariably to put up. Here, after ordering an early dinner, dad took me out with him to call on a shipping agent at whose place of business he had agreed to meet Captain Miles, leaving my mother and sisters with their crowd of darky attendants at the hotel until we should come back.

The captain was punctual to his appointment like most sailors.

“Ha, Eastman,” he said when dad and I entered the agent’s store, “you’re just in the nick of time. I was only speaking of you a minute ago to our friend here. Got the youngster I see.”

“Yes, here he is,” replied dad.

“That’s all right then,” said Captain Miles. “How are you, Master Tom—glad to go to sea, eh?”

“Well—” I stammered hesitatingly, not liking to tell an untruth.

“Oh, I know,” said he interrupting me. “Sorry to leave mother and the girls, I suppose? Never mind, my boy, these partings must come some time or other, and the sooner they are over the better. I shall start, Eastman,” he added, turning to dad, “late in the afternoon, as soon as the wind sets off the land; so, you’d better send the boy aboard when the sun begins to sink. My boat is now waiting at the end of the wharf to take his traps.”

“Thanks, Miles,” replied my father; “but, won’t you come round with us to Jenny Gussett’s Hotel and have some lunch? My wife will be glad to see you.”

“Oh, has she come in to town to see the youngster off?” asked the captain.

“Yes, we all rode in,” answered dad. “The whole kit of us are here.”

“All right; I’ll come then, as soon as I’ve finished arranging matters and signing bills of lading with my agent here,” said Captain Miles cordially, adding, with one of his knowing winks to dad, “I’ve no doubt your missis wants to give me all sorts of directions about young Master Hopeful, eh?”

“You might be further out in your guess,” rejoined dad with a laugh; and presently the three of us went back to the hotel together, it being near the hour at which dad had ordered our early dinner, or luncheon, to be got ready.

The time soon slipped by at our meal, which none of us seemed to enjoy very much save the captain, who, of course, was not affected by any sad thoughts of parting, the same as dad and mother and I and my sisters were—that is excepting Baby Tot, for she looked still upon the whole thing as a joke and continued in the best of spirits.

When we rose from table, mother got hold of Captain Miles and began whispering earnestly to him, something about me, I was certain; so, in order not to overhear their conversation, I went towards the open door leading into a wide passage-way that terminated in the usual verandah common to all West Indian houses. The hotel, however, did not command such a pretty prospect as ours at Mount Pleasant, for it looked on to the street, which could be gained by descending a short flight of steps at the end of the alcove.

But, would you believe it, hardly had I reached the verandah, when, there on the top step I saw old Pompey standing in an attitude of great expectancy, with his footless wine-glass in hand, the same as was his habit at home on the plantation, although it was more than two hours past his usual grog-time!

No sooner had I appeared than out came his stereotyped formula:

“Hi, Mass’ Tom! um come rum.”

I felt sad enough at the moment, but the sight of Pompey with his wine-glass, and his quaint well-known way of expressing himself, made me burst into a fit of laughter which brought out dad from the dining-room.

“Hullo, Tom, what’s the matter?” he cried. “Ah, I see! Why, Pompey, you old rascal, you’re past your time,” he added, catching sight of the old negro at the end of the verandah. “What do you mean by coming for your grog at four bells, eh? I suppose, though, as Master Tom’s going away we must let you have it.”

So saying, dad went back into the dining-room, bringing out presently a tumbler filled with something which he handed to Pompey, the old darkey swallowing the contents with his usual gusto, and, needless to say, without any very great amount of exertion.

“There,” said dad when Pompey returned the empty glass with a bow and scrape, “go and tell the others that Master Tom wants to say good-bye, as he will start in a minute or two, and that he wishes them to come round and drink his health too.”

Pompey thereupon shuffled off awkwardly in his boots, returning soon with two of the other negroes who had come down with us from the plantation. These now had each a glass of wine in honour of my departure, Pompey managing to come in for an extra one on the sly by the artful way in which he looked at me and showed his footless measure.

“But where is Jake?” asked dad suddenly, after the darkeys had emptied their glasses.

“Me no see him,” replied Pompey, acting as spokesman for the rest. Indeed, on this occasion he seemed to abandon his customary taciturnity, for he wished me “um berry fine v’y’ge, Mass’ Tom,” when drinking my health.

“Not seen him!” repeated dad, much surprised. “Where can he be?”

“Dunno, massa. He put him Dandy an’ Prince in ’table an’ den him say um feel berry bad, an’ go way.”

“Poor fellow, he may be really ill! I must look after him,” said my father putting on his hat and proceeding round to the stables; but as he could see nothing of Jake he soon returned, for the afternoon was getting on and it was time to have my luggage carried down to the boat of the Josephine as well as for me to see about going on board also.

While my trunks were being taken to the wharf by Pompey and the other two darkeys, I had to pass through the painful ordeal of bidding farewell to my mother and sisters. The less I say about this the better!

Baby Tot could not grasp the idea that I was really going away from her until the very last moment, when, seeing the others overcome with emotion, especially my mother, who was crying as if her heart would break, my little sister clung round my neck so tightly that dad had to unclasp her tiny fingers one by one before she would release her hold of me.

As for my mother's last kiss and her broken words, telling me always to fear God and be good, whatever might betide, I can never forget them.

At length the parting was over, when dad calling me in a husky voice to come along, I proceeded with him down to the wharf, where the Josephine's boat was lying alongside the steamboat landing-stage, waiting for me to start.

Here another farewell had to be taken of old Pompey and the negro servants who had brought my traps from the hotel; but, strange to say, I could see nothing of Jake, so I had to commission one of the others to say good-bye to him for me.

At the last moment, too, Doctor Martin came up and gave me one of his hearty hand-shakes, bidding me "always tell the truth and shame the devil," pointing out at the same time that he had sent down a lot of fresh cocoa-nuts for me that had been stowed in the ship's boat with my luggage. He thought they would "come in handy," he said, for assuaging my thirst during the hot weather I might expect before getting out of the tropics. Then came the final wrench of dear old dad's last embrace and sad God-speed, after which the boat shoved off from the shore, bearing me, almost heart-broken, with all my belongings out to the Josephine, which anchored at the mouth of the harbour with her blue peter flying, her sails loosed, and every sign of departure.

"Cheer up, my sonny!" said Moggridge, my old friend the boatswain, as I sat in the stern of the boat with my face buried in my hands, for I had not the courage to look back at those I was leaving; "I thought you were a reg'lar chip of the old block, and your father told you mind, sir, to be a man."

These words put me on my mettle, so I picked up a bit and waved my handkerchief to dad, whom I could see standing still gazing after me; and, when the boat got alongside the vessel, I clambered up the side-ladder instead of allowing myself to be hoisted in as before.

"That's your sort," said Moggridge, who followed me up closely, in order that he might catch me should I tumble back. He also helped me into the entry port

and on to the deck of the Josephine, where I found Captain Miles waiting to receive me.

“Ha, here you are at last, youngster!” he cried out in welcome. “I thought you were never coming out, and that we would have to start without you. Wind and tide, you know, wait for neither man or boy! Hoist in his traps, boatswain,” he added to Moggridge, “and be as sharp as you can about it too, for the breeze is just beginning to come off the land.”

I may here mention a meteorological fact that Captain Miles subsequently explained to me. He said that this regular alternation of the sea and land breeze in warm latitudes, as in the tropics generally, when the wind blows for so many hours in the day on and off-shore, is owing to the different powers for the radiation and absorption of heat possessed by land and water, so that when the day temperature is highest on the land the alternating breezes will be stronger, and vice versa. During the day, to illustrate this fact, the radiation of the sun’s heat on the land causes the air to expand and so rise from the surface, which, creating a vacuum, the air from the sea rushes in to fill the void. At night this process is reversed, for, while the surface of the soil will frequently show in the West Indies during the daytime a temperature of a hundred and twenty degrees and more under the meridian sun, the thermometer will sink down in the evening to fifty or sixty degrees; whereas, the sea, being a bad radiator and its temperature rarely exceeding eighty degrees, even at the hottest period of the day, it is alternately colder and warmer than the land, and the direction of the wind accordingly oscillates between the two. The minimum temperature being at a little before sunrise in the early morning and the maximum somewhere about two o’clock in the afternoon, the change of these breezes usually occurs at some little time after these hours, the one lulling and the other setting in in due rotation—that is, of course, near the coast, for out in the open sea their effect is not so apparent.

In August, which is one of the “hurricane months” of the tropics, when the Josephine left Grenada on her voyage to England, the winds are more variable, blowing at odd and uncertain times; so, there was every reason for Captain Miles’ taking advantage of the first cat’s-paw of air off the land now, as otherwise, perhaps, he might not have been able to make an offing before morning, when he would lose the advantage of the current amongst the islands towards Saint Vincent, where he had to call in for some puncheons of rum and coffee to complete his cargo.

Under the direction of Moggridge, the crew made short work of hoisting in my traps and innumerable boxes, including the cocoa-nuts Doctor Martin had sent down for me, all of which Captain Miles ordered to be taken into the cabin he allotted to me on the starboard side of the ship near his own; and then, the boat itself was hauled on board by the derrick amidships which had been used for getting in the cargo, there being no davits at the side as in a man-of-war.

After seeing this operation satisfactorily accomplished, I went up the poop-ladder and walked aft to the side of Captain Miles, who was now busy about getting the vessel under weigh.

“Hands up anchor!” he roared out with a stentorian shout, and immediately there was a bustle forward of the men with much thumping of their feet on the planks and a clanking of the chain as the windlass went round under their sturdy hands. Mr Marline, the first mate, I noticed, had charge of the crew engaged in heaving, while Moggridge went on the forecastle to see that everything was clear for catting and fishing the anchor as soon as it was run up out of the water and the stock showed itself above the bows.

“Clink, clank! clink, clank!” came the measured rattle as the slack of the cable was wound round the windlass and carried along the deck to the chain locker; and then, after another spell of hard heaving, Moggridge sang out, “Swings clear, sir!”

“All right,” responded Captain Miles, jumping up on a hen-coop by the taffrail so as to make his voice go further, as well as to command a clear view of all that was going on, “Hands, make sail!”

On hearing this order those of the crew who were not engaged at the windlass swarmed up the rigging and threw off the gaskets of the foresail and mainsail, while a couple of hands ran out on the bowsprit and unloosed the lashings of the jib, the topsails having been dropped before I came on board.

“Man the topsail halliards!” then sang out the captain, and with a cheery cry the yards were run up with a will and the halliards then belayed.

“Sheet home!” was the next command, whereupon the sails were stretched out to their full extent, swelling out before the off-shore wind; and one of the men, by the captain’s orders, now going to the helm, a few turns of the spokes brought the vessel’s head round.

“Now, look alive there forward and heave up the anchor!” shouted Captain Miles.

In another minute the stock of the kedge showed above the bows, when the catfalls being stretched along the deck, and laid hold of by Moggridge, the rest of the crew tacking on after him, the flukes were run up to the cat-head to a rhythmical chorus in which all hands joined, the men pulling with a will as they yelled out the refrain—

“Yankee John, storm along! Hooray, hooray, my hearties! Pull away, heave away, Hooray, hooray, my hearties! Going to leave Grenada!”

The clew-garnet blocks now rattled as the main-sheet was hauled aft, when, the broad sail filling, the Josephine paid off before the wind; and shortly afterwards she was making her way to leeward towards Saint Vincent, passing almost within a stone’s throw of Fort Saint George, as she cleared the northern point of the harbour and got out to sea.

The jib and flying-jib were now hoisted as well as the topgallant-sails and spanker, to get as much of the breeze as we could while it lasted, so that the vessel began to make fair progress through the water; and the hands under the superintendence of the two mates were then set to work coiling down ropes and getting in the slack of the sheets as well as making things ship-shape amidships, where the deck was still littered with a good deal of cargo that had not yet been properly stowed.

I was all this time standing by the side of Captain Miles on the poop, alternately looking at the men jumping about the rigging like monkeys and at the fast-receding shore, which, as soon as the sun set, became dimmer and dimmer in the distance, until it was at length finally shut out from my gaze by a wall of mist.

“Fo’c’s’le ahoy, there!” sang out Captain Miles presently, when it began to grow dusk.

“Aye, aye, sir!” responded the voice of Moggridge, the boatswain, from forward.

“Keep a good look out, my man, ahead, or we may be running down some of those coasting craft inward bound.”

“Aye, aye, sir, I’m on the watch myself,” sang out Moggridge; but hardly had he given this answer than, all at once, he cried out suddenly in a louder tone, “Hard a-port, hard a-port! There’s something standing across our bows.”

The man at the wheel immediately put the helm up, letting the head of the vessel fall off from the wind; but, at the same instant, there came a sudden crash ahead, followed by a loud yell.

“Gracious heavens!” cried out Captain Miles, rushing forwards to the forecastle, where several of the hands had also hurried on hearing the cry of the boatswain—I going after the captain in my turn to see what was the matter, dreading some fearful disaster.

There were several short and quick exclamations, amidst which I saw, in the dim light, Moggridge in the act of heaving a rope overboard towards some dark object in the water.

“Hooray, he’s got it and has clutched hold!” I then heard somebody say. “The line has fallen just over his shoulders, and he has got the bight of it.”

“Haul him in gently!” cried the captain. “Pull easy—so!”

Next I saw a couple of the seamen bending over the side, and in another moment they helped a dripping figure to scramble on to the deck; when, as I pressed nearer to see who the rescued person was, I heard a well-known voice exclaim, in tones of earnest thankfulness and joy:

“Bress de Lor’, I’se safe!”

It was Jake, the very last person in the world, most certainly, whom I could have expected to meet on board the Josephine, if I had guessed a hundred times!

Chapter Six

The Captain's Cow

"Why, Jake!" I cried out. "How have you contrived to come here?"

"Am dat you, Mass' Tom?" he answered catching sight of me behind the captain. "Golly, I tole you so; I'se tole you I come 'board ship wid you somehow or nudder. Who 'peak de trute now, hey? golly, yah, yah, I'se so berry glad!" and the poor faithful fellow commencing with one of his hearty African laughs ended in his voice breaking into a sob of joy that evidently came from the bottom of his heart.

From hearing his words Captain Miles immediately began to "smell a rat," as the saying goes.

"You impudent black rascal!" he said, half in joke, pretending to be angry, and yet partly in earnest. "What the dickens do you mean by shipping yourself aboard my vessel in this fashion without leave or license?"

"I'se come for to go wid Mass' Tom," answered Jake meekly.

"But how did you get off from the shore and overhaul the ship?" continued Captain Miles, pursuing his inquiries, the hands around meanwhile commencing to nudge one another and exchange grins as the colloquy waxed warm between the two principal performers.

"I tell you for true, massa, beliebe me," said Jake earnestly. "Dis forenoon wen I see Mass' Tom agwine I'se go down to de warf an' dere I see um lilly boat lyin' widout nobody a-mindin' it; so I'se jump in and row out ob de harbor an' git roun' by de ole fort till I see de ship make sail. Den I'se pull, an' pull, an' pull, like de debbel, to come up wid you, an' I tinks I nebber reach de bessel, wen, jus' as I'se git 'longside an' cotch you up, de ship gib one big lurch an' squash in de boat, wen I'se trown in water an' you fish um out; dere, massa, dat's de trute, s'help me!"

"Lucky for you you didn't go squash, too," observed the captain grimly. "But, was there no one else with you?"

"No, massa, only me," replied Jake.

“Thank God for that!” said Captain Miles fervently. “I was afraid I had run down one of those fishing sloops from Cariacou, and that all hands were drowned but you. Whose boat was it?”

“Dunno, massa, I’se tell you,” answered Jake with great nonchalance, apparently giving but little thought to the little craft whose broken timbers were now floating away, far astern of us.

“Well, you’re a cool hand anyway!” exclaimed Mr Marline the first mate drily, whereat Moggridge and the rest of the crew burst into a general shout of merriment. In this even the captain himself could not help joining, although he still tried to preserve a grave demeanour before Jake, as if annoyed at his coming on board.

Jake, however, was much hurt at being laughed at; and he went on now to justify his conduct with such native dignity that those who had been making fun of him before seemed almost ashamed of their ill-judged ridicule.

“I’se know Mass’ Tom ebber since he was lilly pickaninny, an’ I lub him,” he said, speaking with a feeling and earnestness which no one would have thought of his possessing, and uttering the words in a thick choked voice. “I took de boat ’cause de boat was dere; but if dere was no boat, I’d hab swam off to de ship, for I’se boun’ to go were Mass’ Tom go, an’ if he go in ship I’se go too!”

“But, my poor fellow,” put in Captain Miles kindly to him, “your young master does not want a servant to wait on him on board the Josephine, and we haven’t room for any idlers. I shall have to put you ashore at Saint Vincent, from whence you’ll be easily able to get a passage back home again.”

“For de Lor’ sake don’t do dat, Massa Cap’en!” implored Jake, utterly overwhelmed at such an unexpected downfall of his hopes, falling on his knees on the deck and holding up his hands in the most supplicating manner. “Only let dis poah nigger go wid you an’ Mass’ Tom an’ he do any ting you want.”

“But, what can you do?” said Captain Miles, who, I could see, was relenting. He really had no idea of carrying out the stern intention which his words implied. “We’ve got no horses to groom here.”

“Ah, you dunno all I can do, Massa Cap’en,” replied the darkey eagerly, rising again to his feet now, all animation. “’Fore I go wid Mass’ Eastman, I’se help my

fadder in fishin'-boat, an' know how to make sail an' reef an' steer. You jus' try dis chile an' see!"

"Very good, we will try you," said Captain Miles good-humouredly. "But, mind, my darkey friend, you'll have to work for your passage!"

"All right, Massa Cap'en, me work safe 'nuff. See now, I'se handy boy aboard ship!" So saying, Jake at once scrambled up the rigging and in a minute or two was away up in the foretop, waving his arms about and shouting with laughter in great glee.

"Yah, yah!" he cried. "I'se go higher, if um like."

"No, that will do now," sang out Captain Miles, "you can come down and go and warm yourself, after your wetting, by the galley fire, where you'll find another darkey to keep you company. You must enter his name in the list of the crew, Mr Marline," added the captain, turning to the first mate; "and see, too, about messing him in the fo'c's'le. I daresay we'll make something out of him during the voyage."

During this little interlude, the Josephine had been making away from Grenada with the land breeze, aided by a current setting to the westward at the rate of a couple of knots an hour; so that, by the time it got dark, we had sunk the island to windward, Captain Miles having caused the royals to be hoisted, in order to take every advantage of the light air, for we had to make the best of a north-east course on the starboard tack.

Towards nine o'clock, however, the wind freshened, and as the navigation was rather ticklish, we being not yet in the open sea, the lighter canvas had to be taken in, the vessel proceeding during the remainder of the night under double-reefed topsails, courses, topgallant-sails, and her jib and spanker—for, these could be easily handed in case of any sudden shift of wind, which frequently veers round without warning under the lee of the land.

I, of course, only learnt all this afterwards, picking up my nautical knowledge by degrees from my old friend Moggridge, who took me under his tuition, promising to make a sailor of me ere the voyage was over, for I was told to turn in by Captain Miles at nine o'clock, when the lights were put out in the cabin.

In the morning, when I came on deck again, we were off Saint Vincent; but, as the current and wind were both against us, although our port was well in sight

we had to beat up to make the harbour, not dropping our anchor until late in the afternoon.

It was a beautiful spot, for we lay as it were in a circle of mountains, the tall Souffrière with its volcano peak overtopping them all.

Although we arrived late, Captain Miles did not lose any time in shipping his cargo of rum, going on shore immediately in his gig, which was still hanging to the davits astern, not having been taken on board with the other boats before leaving "my island," as I always call Grenada. Soon afterwards, a couple of heavy launches manned by negroes and each stored with several big puncheons came off to us, the rum being at once hoisted in and lowered away into the hold—the operation being achieved in less time nearly than I can describe it, for it was necessary for us to be off again by nightfall to take advantage of the land breeze; or else we might be detained at Saint Vincent another day.

Besides the puncheons of rum another piece of cargo was brought on board. This subsequently caused quite a little commotion as well as giving us all a good deal of entertainment.

Our new freight was a cow.

Captain Miles, you must know, was a bit of a gourmand, liking to have good eating and drinking when he could get them; and, as he was particularly fond of coffee with plenty of milk in it, he always carried a cow with him in his different voyages.

During his last trip from home, however, his old milk purveyor had died; and, as such animals are rather scarce in the West Indies, he was not able to procure one either for love or money at Grenada, and was at a complete nonplus till we got to Saint Vincent.

Here, fortunately, or unfortunately as it happened eventually for the poor cow, the captain heard at the last moment of a fine Alderney which a planter was anxious to dispose of, and had brought down to the town to send off to Barbadoes, hoping to find a market there for her. Captain Miles, therefore, at once closed with the planter, and the last of the launches conveying the rum puncheons to the Josephine brought off in addition this cow.

But, taking an animal of this sort away from the shore, and out to a ship lying some distance from the land is one thing, and getting it on board is another!

This the captain found presently, when, having completed all his business ashore and cleared the last of his cargo, he was rowed out in his gig to regain the vessel. He had intended making sail the moment he stepped on the deck again; but, instead of finding everything stowed and the anchor tripped ready for the Josephine to start on his arrival, he saw that her cable was still out, while the barge containing the cow was yet alongside.

Captain Miles was awfully angry. Everybody could see this; as he ordered the men in the gig to row her astern, and in a very harsh tone of voice, as he scuttled up the side-ladder and turned into the main-deck port; hook on the falls ready for hoisting her up again to the davits.

“Mr Marline!” he cried out to the first mate when he reached the deck, “what is the meaning of this? I expected you’d have been all ready to sail, and here is that launch alongside yet and the cargo not aboard!”

“All the rum’s in, sir,” replied Mr Marline quietly, for he was a dry old stick and seldom said a word more than necessary.

“But the cow, man, the cow!” retorted the captain. “Why is she not hoisted inboard as well?”

“We couldn’t manage her, sir,” replied Mr Marline with a sly grin. “The brute butts everybody that comes near her.”

“Why didn’t you sling her?” inquired Captain Miles.

“We tried to, but couldn’t,” said the mate. “She kicks so that she tumbled back twice and nearly went into the sea.”

“Oh, you’re all a parcel of nincompoops!” exclaimed the captain quite roused at this. “I’ll show you how a seaman can manage it!” With that, catching hold of the side lines, he went down the ladder again like winking and into the launch alongside.

Here, the cow, which looked even more enraged than Captain Miles, stood in the centre of the boat, with the negroes who had pulled out the live load from shore, standing up in the bows and on the gunwales, so as to be out of the reach of the infuriated animal, which every now and then made a rush at some black leg or other, making the owner yell out and try to avoid the butt.

“Pass down a whip with a spare bit of canvas,” sang out the captain, sitting down in the stern-sheets; and on receiving these articles he set to work to make a sort of broad belt to pass under the cow’s stomach, in the same way as is done with horses about to be shipped on board transports when cavalry regiments are embarking.

When he had made the sling to his satisfaction, satisfying himself that it was strong enough by attaching it to his own person and then making the crew haul him up, his sixteen stone weight being some criterion to go by, he ordered those at the derrick to lower him down again; and then, with a halter all ready, which he threw over the animal’s head, he advanced bravely towards the cow to arrange the belt under her body, thinking he could do it easily enough.

Mrs Brindle, however, was too quick for him.

Tossing off the rope bridle like a piece of straw, she lowered her head, and catching the captain in the stomach sent him head over heels backwards into the bottom of the boat, where one of the thwarts only prevented her from pursuing him further, which she would most undoubtedly have done judging by her vicious look.

At that moment, Jake, who had been looking over the side of the ship, seeing what had happened and anxious to be of service, slid down the whip-tackle into the boat. Arrived here his first task was to pick up Captain Miles, after doing which he took hold of the canvas belt the captain had prepared and dropped in his confusion at the unexpected assault.

“You let dis niggah try, Massa Cap’en,” he said. “I’se able to ride any wild hoss, and tinks I can settle de rampagious animile.”

“All right, fire away,” replied Captain Miles, rather out of breath from his tumble as well as from the punch the cow had given him “right in the wind.”

Jake thereupon, shoving the other darkeys away, climbed on to the gunwale of the launch. Then, advancing gingerly until he was right opposite the cow, and seizing a good opportunity, he jumped suddenly on her back. In a moment or so, he cleverly fixed the slings round her; while one of the other negroes, emboldened by his success, threw a noose over her head, which kept her from plunging about any longer, or at all events, from butting at everybody as she had done previously.

“By Jingo, you’re a smart fellow!” exclaimed Captain Miles with much gusto. “You’re worth all the rest of those stupid lubbers of mine boiled down together! Haul away now, Mr Marline,” he added, looking up; “I think we’ve fixed the cow this time.”

He was right; for, as soon as the hands on board manned the derrick and turned the winch handle the poor animal was raised in the air, kicking out spasmodically all the while, and wondering, no doubt, how she lost hold of her footing. When she had been hoisted high enough to clear the bulwarks, the derrick was then swung inboard and the cow lowered safely on the deck.

The empty launch with the negroes was now cast-off, and preparations made for raising the anchor again and making sail.

However, this was not the end of the cow episode by any means; for, as luck would have it, all Captain Miles’ hopes of milk with his coffee during the voyage home to England were soon summarily dispelled, the career of the animal which was to have supplied the lacteal fluid having terminated most unexpectedly.

All hands being busy getting the ship under weigh, the animal had been left standing for the time where she had been set down in the waist, the sling being unloosed from her and the end of the halter, which Jake had put over her head when she had been secured, tied to the mainmast bitts—so as to prevent her moving until the long-boat amidships, which was to form her quarters, should be made ready for her reception.

Then, when the canvas of the Josephine was once more spread to the breeze and the vessel was working out from Saint Vincent, Captain Miles told the steward to serve dinner in the cabin, it being now near sunset and long past the usual hour for that meal, which was generally on the table at “eight bells,” or four o’clock in the afternoon.

I went into the cabin with the captain and second mate, Mr Marline being left in charge of the poop; and, presently, I could see through the sliding-doors leading from the main-deck into the cuddy, which were of course left wide open, as we were still in the tropics, the steward Harry, a freckle-faced mulatto of the colour of pale ginger, bringing in a tureen of soup from the cook’s galley forward.

As he passed by close to where the cow was tethered, whether the smell of the savoury compound aroused the animal's hunger, or because Harry, coming too near, reminded her of the recent indignities to which she had been subjected, the cow all at once made a plunge at him with her head.

Harry sheered off, spilling a portion of the soup; and he was so frightened that he ran full speed with the remainder into the cabin.

He was not, however, quick enough for Mrs Brindle; for the sudden dive she made, throwing her whole might on the halter, caused the rope to snap like a piece of pack-thread. The next instant, the cow made a plunge after the mulatto steward, giving him a lift by the stern-post as he was entering the cuddy door which pitched him right on to the cabin table, where he fell amidst all the plates and dishes. There was a terrible smash, all the dinner things coming to grief, as well as the soup tureen, which he still held in his hands, the boiling contents passing over the second mate's head, and scalding his face, besides making him in a pretty pickle.

"Oh Lord, oh Lord, I'm blinded!" screamed Davis, the thick pea-soup having gone into his eyes; while the captain had scarcely time to use his favourite ejaculation, "By Jingo!" before the cow, which had followed up her successful attack on the steward by galloping after him into the cabin, catching the arm-chair that Captain Miles was ensconced in sideways, started the lashings that held it to the deck, hurling the terrified occupant in a heap in the corner—the captain being utterly ignorant of the cause of the whole catastrophe, for he was sitting with his back to the door and so had not seen the steward's somersault nor the approach of the animal like I did from the beginning of the affair.

As for me, being on the other side of the table, I escaped any harm, although I immediately bolted into the steward's pantry near me, where, shutting the half-door, I looked out from this coign of vantage surveying the scene of havoc which the cabin presently presented, for the cow tossed about everything she could reach bellowing like one of the wild bulls of Bashan all the while.

The steward had fainted away, from fright I believe; and he lay stretched on the table as if he were practising swimming in Doctor Johnson's fashion. As for Davis, the second mate, he had his face bent down in his hands, apparently unmindful of everything but his own pain, but Captain Miles speedily sprang to his feet and was starting to attack the cause of the uproar with one of the broken legs of his chair when just at that moment Mr Marline poked his nose down the open skylight from the poop above.

“What’s the matter?” he asked suavely. “What is all the row about?”

“Come down and see,” said Captain Miles savagely. “Talk of a bull in a china-shop; why, that would be child’s play to a cow in a cabin!”

Mr Marline burst out laughing at this, and so too did Captain Miles himself as soon as he had spoken the words, while I couldn’t help joining in, it was all so funny. Then the first mate came down with two or three of the hands to remove the violent animal, which had now jammed itself under Captain Miles’ own cot in his private sanctum beyond the cuddy.

But, Mrs Brindle was not so easily dislodged, one of the sailors having to get through the stern port in order to raise the cot while the other men pulled at her legs.

She was evidently determined not to be moved against her will; for, on being lugged out again into the main cabin, she quickly shook off the grasp of her captors, cantering out of the sliding-doors, with her tail in the air, bellowing still furiously and butting at those in her way.

Her course was soon arrested, however. As she bounded forwards along the deck she came to the open hatchway leading to the hold, where tumbling down on top of the rum puncheons, before anyone could interpose, she broke her neck instanter.

“It’s an ill wind that blows nobody any good,” says the old proverb, the truth of which was exemplified in this instance. If the captain lost his milk, the crew gained a plentiful supply of fresh meat by the accident, faring sumptuously for many days afterwards on roast beef and all sorts of delicate dishes which Cuffee concocted out of the carcass of the unfortunate animal.

“I wouldn’t have lost her for twenty pounds!” said Captain Miles on the poop later on, when he and the first mate were talking over the strange way in which the thing all happened.

“Humph!” observed Mr Marline slyly in his dry way; “I think she gave you one or two on account before she performed the happy despatch, eh?”

“Funny dog!” exclaimed Captain Miles, giving him a dig in the ribs by way of acknowledging the allusion to the thumps poor Brindle had treated him to, before she came on board and after; and, there, the matter ended, as far as everybody was concerned, the steward recovering from his fainting fit, and the eyes of Davis the second mate being none the worse as it turned out for their deluge of hot pea-soup, while the damages in the cabin were soon repaired. Only the poor cow came to grief!

Chapter Seven

Amongst the Islands

In spite of all Captain Miles' endeavours to effect an early start from Saint Vincent, we were not really able to weather the island that evening until many hours after our anchor was tripped and all plain sail made.

This was not due, however, either to the delay caused in hoisting the obstreperous cow on board or to the embarrassing episode that occurred after she was shipped. It was entirely owing to the failure of our moving spirit the wind; for we lay becalmed until morning under the lee of the giant Souffrière, whose dark shadow prevented the land breeze from reaching the vessel, while the next day was far advanced before we could gain an offing so as to take advantage of the light airs that then sprang up from seaward. But, then, the Josephine, bellying out her canvas, bore away on her voyage.

The wide gulf of sea which we were traversing—named after the aboriginal Caribs who ruled over its domain lang syne, and hedged in from the Atlantic Ocean by the semicircular group of the Lesser Antilles, or "Windward Islands" of the West Indies—presents great difficulties to the navigators of sailing ships; as, while the wind throughout its extent blows almost constantly in one direction, a series of cross currents set in another, making it a hard task for even experienced seamen to preserve a straight course towards any particular point when going to windward, the result of which is that "the longest way round," as in other matters pertaining to shore life, is frequently "the shortest way home!"

Taking up the chart casually, a novice would imagine that our direct route from our port of departure to the English Channel would be indicated by a line drawn between the two points and passing through the Azores; but, a sailor accustomed to tropical latitudes would know that, however feasible this might appear in theory, we could not possibly have adopted such a course. It would have presupposed, in the first case, our possessing the ability to sail straight in the teeth of the north-east trade wind, and, in the second case, that we took no account of the influence of the equatorial current, the stream of which setting westwards into the Caribbean Sea, would have drifted as so far to leeward that at the end of the day's run we must have been pretty nearly where we started from, any progress we made ahead being neutralised by the action of the stream carrying us in a lateral direction.

For these reasons, all navigators up to their work, when making the passage home from the West Indies and vice versa, instead of fighting against the forces of nature as some old seamen of the past used to do, now make both winds and tides run harmoniously in their favour by meeting them half-way, so to speak. Captain Miles, in our instance, therefore, did not wear out his crew by trying to beat to windward in order to get to the open Atlantic immediately. On the contrary, he kept his vessel well away to leeward, shaping a course for Saint Christopher's, so as to pass afterwards through the Anegada Channel, between the Virgin Islands, and reach the ocean in that way. In other words, following the example of the ready-witted Irishman who drove an obstinate pig to market by pulling him back by the tail, he deliberately steered to the north-west while really wanting to go to the north-east. But, circuitous as such a route looked, the captain was in the end a gainer by it; for, not only did he keep the wind well abeam of the ship all the way on the starboard tack, but he had the additional advantage of having the strong north-westerly current in his favour in lieu of trying to work against it.

During this portion of our voyage the weather was beautifully fine, the sky being of a clear transparent opal tint without a cloud and the sea of the purest ultramarine blue, with little merry dancing wavelets occasionally flecking its changing surface into foam.

The air, too, was balmy, and not unpleasantly warm, a fine healthy breeze blowing, which filled our good ship's sails, so that they expanded to the furthest limits of the bolt-ropes, speeding her on her way at the rate of some eight knots an hour, as rising and falling she surged through the sparkling water and left a foaming wake astern that spread out in the shape of a fan behind her track, widening until it was lost in the distance.

When I mentioned my going to visit the Josephine as she lay at anchor while taking in cargo at Grenville Bay, I think I said that I had never before been in a vessel. This, however, was not strictly accurate, for when dad came out to the West Indies from England with my mother and sisters some few years previously, I, of course, accompanied them; and as we had to cross the Atlantic in order to reach Grenada, and there was no other mode of overcoming the three thousand odd miles of ocean that lay between us and our destination except by our adventuring the passage in the ordinary way, I was then really for the first time taken on board a ship. But it must be remembered that I was only at that period a tiny baby about the size of my little sister Tot; and, therefore, my recollections of the time being rather hazy, my first real

experiences of the sea and all the incidents of the voyage came upon me with all that novelty and interest which unfamiliarity alone can produce. It is, nevertheless, only right that I should make this correction of my former mis-statement, for I wish to give a true and impartial account of all that happened to me from first to last. I am not “spinning a yarn” merely, as sailor’s say, but telling a true story of my life with all its haps and mishaps.

Now, therefore, as the Josephine dashed along, all was new and strange to me; the limitless expanse of blue water shimmering in the summer sun, with flocks of flying-fish rising in the air occasionally to seek refuge from their enemies of the deep, only to fall back again below the surface after a short curving flight, to avoid the grey pelicans hovering above to attack them there; the fresh bracing breeze, which blew in my face so exhilaratingly; the swaying motion of the vessel that gave a lurch now and then, heeling over when the wind took her suddenly on the quarter as she rose on the swell; the whistling of the cordage and creaking of timbers and rattling of blocks, combined with the cheery yo-ho-hoing of the sailors as they slacked a sheet here and tightened a brace there. Really, I was so pleased, excited, and delighted with the whole scene and its surroundings that it seemed as if I were in the ship of a dream sailing on an enchanted sea!

Presently there arose out of the deep on our starboard bow the Pitons of Saint Lucia, two twin conical rocks like the Needles, only ever so much bigger, being over three thousand feet in height. They were festooned from base to summit with beautiful evergreen foliage; and the entrance to the harbour of the island was to be seen within and beyond these outlying sentinels, stretching up inland towards a mass of purple mountains from a beach of yellow sand.

Next, we passed to the leeward of Martinique; and, then, towards sunset of the same day, as we approached Saint Kitts, islet after islet jumped up out of the sea in front of us, to the right hand and to the left. They were all misty at first, but changed their colours from slaty grey to green as we approached them nearer, although their shape was all pretty much the same—tall sugar-loaf peaks surrounded by verdure sloping down in graceful curves to the water’s edge, the surf breaking against the shore of those to leeward in clouds of spray, while the waves washed the rocky feet of those on the windward side without a ripple.

When the sun disappeared below the western horizon, Montserrat, Redonda, Nevis, Saint Christopher, and Saint Eustatius were all in sight around us; and, just at ten o’clock at night, when the moon was at the full, lighting up the

scene with its silvery beams as brightly almost as if it were day, we passed between Saint Eustatius and the island of Saba. We approached the latter within two miles, but when its north point bore west we steered for Dog Island, clearing the reefs somewhere about the middle watch.

Soon after sunrise next morning we weathered Sombrero, the last of the Antilles, and thus got fairly out into the Atlantic, leaving the West Indies behind us as we hauled our wind and bore away for the Azores—although a long stretch of ocean had to be crossed ere we might hope to reach this half-way port on our voyage.

But I have not yet described our ship and those on board.

The Josephine was an old-fashioned barque of about five hundred tons burden, built with a high poop and a topgallant forecastle, "or fo'c's'le," as seamen call it.

She was a roomy vessel, possessing great breadth of beam, which made her a staunch sea-boat in rough weather, for she could tumble about as much as she pleased without causing much damage to her timbers or risk of her stability; and this roominess, besides, allowed good accommodation aft for a large number of passengers, although in this instance I was the single solitary "landsman" aboard—that is, if a young shaver of thirteen can be dignified with such a high-sounding title!

Her officers and crew consisted of eighteen hands all told; and amongst the former Captain Miles, her master, a sturdy old sea-dog of forty-five or thereabouts, is entitled to be the first described. He had a broad honest face, with a pair of bushy, reddish-brown mutton-chop whiskers, for, unlike the sailors of to-day, the captain was always clean shaven as to his chin and upper lip, esteeming a moustache an abomination, "which only one of those French Johnny Crapaud lubbers ever think of wearing."

The next officer in rank after Captain Miles was Mr Marline, the first mate, a thin wiry north countryman, with a lot of latent fun and dry humour in him; and then came Davis, the second mate, a thick-set bull-necked dark-haired Welshman, not more than twenty-four or five years of age. He had been promoted from the foremast on account of his predecessor having died on the passage out. Davis was a very good seaman and up to his work; otherwise, his education being sadly deficient, as even I, a boy, could perceive, and his temper

and disposition being none of the best, he was certainly not very well fitted to command those with whom he had formerly associated as an equal.

My old friend Moggridge, the boatswain, and Adze, the carpenter, completed the list of those in authority; and, besides these, must be enumerated Cuffee, the king of the cook's galley; Jake, who had been put on the muster-roll as an ordinary hand; Harry, the captain's tawny mulatto steward; and ten able seamen—the finest and strongest of all these being Jackson, a smart young Cornishman hailing from Plymouth, who stood some six feet two in his stockings and gloried in such a broad pair of shoulders that he was worth any three of the other hands put together.

To complete the description of our ship, the lower portion of our cargo, stowed in the ground tier of the hold above the dunnage, was sugar and coffee, with some odd bags of cocoa from my father's plantation to make weight; but our chief freight, fortunately for us, as you will learn later on, was rum. The puncheons containing this were packed as tightly as possible fore and aft the ship above the heavy produce, reaching up amidships to the level of the main hatch, all the spaces between being so compactly filled in with the lighter samples of cargo that not even a cockroach could have squeezed itself in sideways.

In the waist of the vessel on the upper deck, ranged along the inside of the bulwarks on either hand, from the entrance to the cabin under the break of the poop to right away forwards just abaft the foremast, was a row of water-casks. A couple of these had their tops sawn off lengthwise and contained several live turtle which Captain Miles was hopeful of carrying home safely in time for the next ensuing banquet at the Mansion House on lord mayor's day, an enterprising ship's chandler in the Minories having given him an order to that effect before he left England on his voyage out to the West Indies. In a similar way, against the sides of the poop were fixed what looked at first sight to be benches for sitting down upon, but which on closer inspection I discovered to be hen-coops,—their occupants projecting their long necks and heads therefrom, in much perplexity evidently at their strange fate in being thus brought to sea; for, as was the case with myself, this was their first experience of what life on board ship was like, and the exigencies of the cabin table would most probably cause it to be their last!

It was not until the fourth day after we had set sail from Grenada that I was able to note all these particulars. Up to that time I had been too much interested with the moving panorama around me to notice things inboard; and,

besides, the motion of the Josephine, when she got lively in the seaway amongst the islands, produced an uneasy feeling which led me ere long to retire below and bewail my old home and those from whom I had been so ruthlessly severed with greater grief than I had felt before. I suffered from that fearful nausea which Father Neptune imposes as a penance on the majority of his votaries, and it was wonderful how very melancholy the sensation made me.

However, I struggled gallantly against the fell foe, and, one morning, I crawled out of my bunk early, just as the men began to wash down the decks, the first work of the day aboard ship. This was shortly after we had cleared the island of Sombrero, and when the Josephine was working her way out to sea.

At first I stopped in the waist, near the entrance to the cabin, but Davis, the second mate, who stood with his trousers tucked up showing his bare feet and legs, superintending the hands sluicing the water about from the hose attached to the head pump out on the forecastle, told me politely to sheer off, as they wanted no idlers in the way; so, I ascended the poop-ladder, and was commiserating the poor fowls in the hen-coops along the rails, when Captain Miles, who was standing close to the helmsman at the wheel, addressed me.

“Hallo, Master Tom,” said he, “got your sea-legs again?”

“Yes, captain,” I replied, “I’m all right now, thank you.”

“Beginning to feel peckish, eh?”

“Not very,” said I, for I was qualmish still, although the fresh air had considerably revived me even in the short time since I had come out of the close cabin.

“Ah, but you must eat, though, my boy,” observed Captain Miles kindly, giving me a kindly pat on the back. “An empty stomach is the worst thing in the world to voyage on. Why, you haven’t hardly eaten a bite since the other evening when that poor cow knocked our dinner all into the middle of next week! Never mind, though, breakfast will be ready at eight bells, and we’ll see whether we can’t get some lining upon your ribs, my little skillygalee.”

“I have already asked Jake to get me a cup of coffee, sir,” I said in reply to this; but, before the captain could answer me again, we both had our attention drawn to the deck below. There seemed to be some sort of commotion going on

in the cook's galley away forward, for all the men had their faces turned in that direction, and they were laughing as if at some good joke.

"Waist ahoy, there!" shouted out Captain Miles, going to the edge of the break of the poop and looking down. "What's the row forward?"

"Hanged if I know, sir," answered Davis somewhat surlily, adding more gruffly still to the hands around him, "Here, you lazy lubbers, lay along to your work, or I'll give you something else to grin about!"

"You need not haze the men like that for nothing," said the captain sharply, muttering something under his breath about "setting a beggar on horseback, and he'll ride to the—"

However, his further words were cut short by a loud shout of laughter from the men all together, as if with one accord; and then the commotion in the cook's galley increased, for I could now distinguish the sound of some violent altercation, voices being raised in anger, mingled with the noise of shuffling feet and the crash of crockery-ware.

"By Jingo, they're going it!" exclaimed Moggridge, who stood in the waist immediately below us. "They'll be like the Kilkenny cats, and leave only their tails behind!"

"What's the matter?" again asked Captain Miles. "Anybody fighting, eh?"

"Yes, sir," said the boatswain, "the two niggers. They've been at it in the caboose ever since we began to wash down decks."

"Then it's high time to stop them," cried the captain darting towards the poop-ladder with the intention of ending the fray, whatever it was.

But, before he could descend two steps, the half-door of the galley burst open outwards with a crash, when two dark figures, locked in a tight embrace and pommelling one another with immense fury, came rolling out upon the deck. They then scrambled and tumbled into the lee scuppers, where they continued to struggle still, unmindful of the foot deep or more of water, into which they were suddenly plunged, that was swishing to and fro with the motion of the ship.

"You take dat now," I heard Jake's voice say excitedly. "I mash um face well."

“An’ you take dat, you hangman tief,” cried the other with equal earnestness. “Golly, I gib you gosh!”

Then came the thud of blows, easily distinguishable above the splashing of the refuse water that had accumulated to leeward from the sluicing of the decks, with the convulsive movements of two pairs of arms and legs mingled together in a confused mass—one woolly head being occasionally uplifted above the other and immediately as quickly dragged down again. The crew all the while screamed with laughter, enjoying the combat with the utmost relish, and without attempting to interfere in any way between the angry antagonists.

“Stop the rascals, stop them!” sang out Captain Miles, jumping down into the waist and hurrying to the scene of action. “They’ll either kill or drown each other!”

Chapter Eight

Poor Jackson

As soon as the seamen heard the captain's words, uttered as they were in a tone which they well knew from experience was meant to be obeyed, several of them at once rushed to where the two darkeys were still struggling in the lee scuppers; when Jackson, the tall young sailor whom I had already noticed for his smartness, stepping forward in advance of the others and stooping down at the same time, lifted up the combatants on to their feet, holding one in each hand as easily as if the two big negroes had been only little dolls.

"Be quiet, I tell 'ee," he cried, giving Cuffee, the cook, who was the most obstreperous, a shake as he clutched him by the back of his woolly head in the same way as a terrier holds a rat; "be quiet, I tell 'ee, or I'll pitch you overboard!"

So saying, and emphasising the threat by raising Cuffee at arm's length, to the level of the bulwarks, he dragged the irate pair along to where Captain Miles was standing by the mainmast bitts, there setting them down before him for judgment.

"Now, you quarrelsome black rascals!" exclaimed the captain confronting them, "what the dickens do you mean by kicking up all this bobbery? I don't allow any fighting aboard my ship."

"It ain't me, Mass' Cap'en," said Jake eagerly, "it's dat nasty niggah dere dat make all de muss 'bout nuffin' at all!"

"Dat one big lie," retorted the other scornfully. "He come 'teal de coffee out ob de coppers, an' w'en I 'peak to him like gen'leman he hit um in the eyeball, him."

"Belieb me, Mass' Cap'en, I'se no tief," said Jake indignantly, drawing himself up and looking very much as if he were going to pitch into Cuffee again. "I'se only go in de galley to get um coffee for Mass' Tom, an' I'se ax dat poor trash dere to gib um cup in de most perliteful way as um please; an' I no sooner done dis dan he catch um crack wid one big ladle on de shin—golly, um hurt now! Den, ob course, I hit um back in brace ob shakes, an' we go down in rough an' tumble togedder."

“My, what big ’tory!” exclaimed the cook in apparent amazement at Jake’s mendacity. “Me go forrud to clean de fis’ for breakfus, an’ w’en um come back in galley, dere I see dat hangman tief takin’ de coffee, an’ den—”

“Then you had a scuffle together, I suppose,” interposed Captain Miles, interrupting Cuffee’s further harangue at this point. “Well, well, as far as I can see you were both in the wrong. Jake, you had no business to enter the cook’s galley without his leave, or touch anything there, for remember he’s as much captain of the caboose as I am on the poop.”

“Golly, Mass’ Cap’en, me no go dere afore widout Cuffee ax me,” put in Jake as Captain Miles made a pause in his lecture.

“Well, don’t you do it again,” continued the captain. “And as for you, Cuffee, I’d advise you not to be so handy with your soup-ladle again in striking your brother darkey, before ascertaining what he wants when he comes to your galley, and who sent him. There, my fighting cocks, you’d better shake hands now and make friends, as the row’s all over!”

This the two at once did, with much grinning and showing of their ivory teeth; and they then went away forwards again together on the most amicable terms, albeit arguing good-humouredly as to which of them had got the best of the fray. Jake believed that he had come off with flying colours, while Cuffee persisted that he was the conqueror, the upshot of the matter being that Jackson, to whom they referred the knotty question, decided that it was “six for one and half a dozen for the other.” With this Solomon-like settlement of the difficulty both were quite satisfied and were sworn chums ever after. I, indeed, was the only loser by the little difference between the two, having to go without my coffee until the proper breakfast hour, “eight bells,” when, possibly, I enjoyed my meal all the more from not getting anything before.

Towards mid-day, we had sunk the land entirely to the westwards, the ship being then on the wide-spreading ocean, with not a thing in sight but water—“water everywhere!”

In front, in rear, to right, to left, all around was one expanse of blue, like a rolling valley, as far as the eye could reach, while the sky above was cloudless and the wind blowing steadily, a little to the southward of east, right on our starboard beam as we steered north-eastwards.

We were not altogether alone, however, for the ubiquitous flying-fish were springing up every now and then from the azure deep, taking short flights from one wave crest to another, or else entangling themselves in the rigging of the ship, and then falling a gasping prey on the deck for Cuffee bye and bye to operate upon in his galley, whence they would emerge again fried into a savoury dish for the cabin table at dinner-time.

Bonitoes and albacore also played round our bows, and the many-hued dolphin could be seen disporting himself astern in our wake; while, at one time, a large grampus swam for some considerable period abreast of the vessel, as if showing how easily he could keep pace with us and outstrip us too when he pleased, for, later on in the afternoon, he darted away and was soon lost to sight. I had now got over all the effects of sea-sickness, a hearty breakfast having restored my equilibrium, thus enabling me to enjoy all that was going on around. The captain especially claimed my attention when he "took the sun" at noon, an operation which I watched with the most absorbed interest; and I found out afterwards the use of the sextant, and the way in which the difference between the ship's mean time and that of the chronometer below in the cabin—which showed what the hour was at Greenwich—enabled Captain Miles to tell almost to a mile on the chart what was our position with regard to our longitude, our latitude being "worked out" in a different fashion.

Then, there was the heaving of the log at stated intervals to ascertain the speed of the ship through the water, and the constant trimming of the sails; for more canvas was piled on as the breeze fell light during the afternoon, as we wanted everything spread that could draw in order to catch the slightest breath of wind there was.

Oh, yes, there was plenty to see for a novice like me! The Josephine was fresh out of port, and there were lots of things that had to be done to make her ship-shape for the long voyage before her; and, besides, had there been nothing else for the hands to do beyond taking their trick at the wheel and attending to the braces—the ordinary routine of their duty with a fair wind such as we had—the captain and first mate would have felt bound to find them something to keep their minds from mischief. Sailors are never allowed a minute to be idle on a vessel at sea save on Sundays, and then they find work for themselves, as a rule, in the way of mending their clothes and putting their chests in order.

I noticed this device on Captain Miles's part to provide employment for the men when he came on deck after luncheon; when, seeing some of the seamen lounging about in the waist, he immediately set them to pump out the bilge.

This, however, did not occupy them very long, the ship being pretty dry; for, after a thick dirty stream of ill-smelling water, mixed with a portion of molasses, leakage from the casks of sugar below, had poured into the scuppers for a few minutes, the pumps sucked, thus showing that the hold was clear down to the well bottom.

A second washing-down decks followed, to efface the traces of the nasty bilge-water; and then, Captain Miles looked about for another task to keep the hands busy.

“How is she going?” he asked Mr Marline, who had just seen to the heaving of the log, the man assisting him having not quite yet reeled in the line.

“Six knots, sir,” answered the chief mate.

“By Jingo! that’ll never do with this breeze,” said the captain. “We must get the starboard stunsails on her.”

“All right, sir,” responded Mr Marline; and thereupon a couple of men went aloft to reeve the studding-sail halliards through the jewel blocks at the end of the yard-arms, while others stood below preparing the tackle and getting the booms ready, with tacks rove for hoisting, sail after sail being speedily packed on in addition to the canvas we were already carrying.

The log was then hove again, and a couple more knots of way somewhat pleased the captain; but, a moment afterwards, seeing that the hands were out of work once more, he thought of a fresh task for them.

“Mr Marline,” he sang out presently, as he paced up and down the poop, eyeing the spars aloft and then casting his eyes forward.

“Aye, aye, sir,” was the prompt answer from the chief mate, who was standing by the taffrail behind the man at the wheel, looking aloft to see how the sails drew and then glancing round the ship occasionally, in a similar sailor-like way to the captain.

“What say you to getting the anchors aboard and unshackling the cables, eh? I don’t think we shall want to use them again now before we get into soundings, and she seems a little down by the head.”

“All right, sir,” said the mate. “I’ll go forwards and see to the job at once. Here, you idlers,” he added as he descended the poop-ladder, “spring up there on the fo’c’s’le and see about getting the anchors inboard!”

This operation, I may explain, is generally undertaken soon after a ship leaves harbour and clears the channel when outwards bound across seas; for, not only do the anchors interfere with the vessel’s sailing trim from their dead weight hanging over the bows, even when properly catted and fished, but they are a great deal in the way. In addition to this, the ship is liable to take in water through the hawse-holes, which can be plugged up, of course, when the cable chains are unshackled, although not before. As we had been, however, up to this time navigating the narrow passages between the clustering islands of the Caribbean Sea and the dangerous reefs in their vicinity, where we might have had occasion possibly to anchor at any moment should the wind fail us and the cross currents near the land peril the safety of the ship, the anchors had been left still ready for instant service; but, now that we were in the open sea, we would have no necessity for having recourse to their aid until we fetched our home port, so they might just as well be stowed away till then.

“May I go, too, and see what they are doing, Captain Miles?” I asked as Mr Marline and the crew scampered forwards.

“Yes, my boy,” he said kindly. “Only, mind you don’t get into any danger! I promised your father, you know, to look after you.”

“Oh, I’ll take care,” I replied with a joyous laugh at getting the permission; and, away I followed the others to the forecastle, where I had been longing to go ever since the early morning, when, it may be remembered, Davis ordered me back to the poop on my attempting to pass forwards as I first came out of the cabin.

If it was jolly watching the progress of the ship from aft, it was ever so much more delightful from my new coign of vantage; for, as she dived her head and parted the waves with her bows, the water dashed up on either side in a column of spray like a fountain. The sunlight falling on this refracted the most beautiful prismatic colours, a perfect rainbow being formed to leeward which was ever being broken up and then arching itself anew into a sort of emerald and orange halo in front of the vessel’s prow.

From where I stood on the knight heads, in the centre of the forecastle, just under the shadow of the bellying sails, the sea appeared much nearer to me, swelling up to the lee-rail as the Josephine tore along through it in ploughing

her course onward; and yet, the outlook conveyed a better idea of its vastness than when I was on the poop aft and more elevated above the surface level, for the immense plain of water, in constant surging motion—now flat as a meadow, now ridged with curling waves as far as the eye could reach, and then again scooped out into a wide hollow valley covered over with yeasty foam, looking as if a giant custard had been poured over it—extended to where the curving horizon met the sky-line in the distance, our ship, in comparison with the limitless expanse, being only as it were a tiny cork, floating on the ocean of blue and blown along as lightly before the wind!

The fore-staysail, which had only recently been hoisted when the studding-sails were set, being now found to be in the way of getting in the anchors, as it prevented the hands from working freely, Mr Marline ordered the downhaul to be manned as soon as the halliards were cast-off. The sail was then loosely stowed for a while, and a double-purchase block and tackle rigged up in its place on the stay.

Mr Marline then sang out to Moggridge to cast-off the shank painter securing the best bower to the starboard side of the ship, this being the easiest anchor of the two to handle, for it was to windward, clear of the sheets of the head-sails; whereupon, the lifting gear being attached, the ponderous mass of metal was soon hoisted up above the cat-head and swayed inboard by means of a guy-line fastened to one of the flukes.

The command was then given to lower away, when, the anchor being deposited on the deck of the forecastle, it was made snug close to the foremast bitts, so that it could not shift its new moorings as the vessel rolled.

The chain-cable was next unshackled from the ring in the anchor-stock and rattled down into the locker in the fore-peak; after which, the starboard hawse-hole was plugged up to prevent any water from finding its way below through the orifice. Thus, in a very little time, half the task the captain had set the men to do was accomplished, the seamen working with a will and singing cheerily as they laid on to the falls of the tackle, “yo-ho-heaving” all together, and pulling with might and main.

The other anchor, however, being to leeward, was a little more difficult to manage, for it was submerged every now and then as the ship canted over, pitching her bows into the sea and splashing the spray up over the yard-arm; but, sailors are not soon daunted when they have a job on hand, and soon the shank painter of this was also cast-off and the purchase tackle made fast.

“Hoist away, men!” cried Mr Marline.

“Run away with the falls, you lubbers,” echoed Moggridge, who was as busy about the matter as the first mate and doing two men’s work himself; but, although the usual chorus was raised, and the sailors tugged away with all their strength, the anchor would not budge from its resting-place on the cat-head.

“The tackle has fouled the jib-sheet,” said Jackson, who had been pulling like a horse at the rope’s end, and now looked over the side to see what prevented them from lifting the port bower. “Shall I get over and clear it, sir?”

“Aye, do,” replied the mate; when Jackson got over the bows in a jiffey, holding on with one hand while he used the other to disentangle the purchase tackle, and not minding a bit the water, which rose up as high as his neck when the ship dipped.

“Haul away, it’s all clear now!” he called out presently; and he was just stepping inboard again when, the Josephine suddenly luffing up to the wind, the jib flapped, and, the sheet knocking the poor fellow off his balance, he tumbled backwards into the sea, without having time even to utter a cry.

“Man overboard!” shouted Mr Marline at the top of his voice.

For a moment, the wildest confusion seemed to reign throughout the vessel, the hands scurrying to the side; and looking over into the sea below, where we could see Jackson’s head bob up for an instant; but as we gazed down he was drifted rapidly astern and quickly lost to sight in the trough of the waves.

The hubbub, however, only lasted an instant; for almost as soon as the mate’s shout had been heard aft, Captain Miles’s voice rang through the vessel in brief words of command, sharp and to the point.

“Stand by, men,” he cried. “Hands ’bout ship!”

The crew at once jumped toward the braces, singing out “Ready, aye, ready,” as they cast them off, some going to the lee-sheets to haul in there.

“Helm’s a-lee!” then came from aft, followed by the orders “Tacks and sheets!” and “Mainsail haul!” when, the Josephine’s bows paying off under the influence of the tacked head-sails, the yards were swung round in a trice; and, within

less than five minutes the vessel was retracing the same track she had just gone over in quest of the missing man.

A man was sent up in the foretop, while Captain Miles himself ran up the ratlines of the mizzen shrouds to look out; and, at the same time, preparations were made for lowering the gig, which fortunately was still slung from the davits astern, not having been yet housed inboard with the other boats amidships—that being the next job the captain intended seeing to after the anchors were got in.

I, of course, was as much excited as anyone, and remained on the forecastle, looking out eagerly for any sign of Jackson, although I could not see him anywhere. I believe I was so confused with the ship having gone round on the opposite tack, in order to go back on her course, that I hardly knew in which direction to look for the unfortunate man, for what had before been ahead of the ship was now necessarily astern from her reversing her position.

In another minute, however, the look out in the foretop discerned Jackson, and he hailed the deck at once.

“There he is! there he is!” he sang out.

“Where?” cried Captain Miles impatiently.

“About four cables’ length off the weather bow. I can see his head quite clear above the wash of the sea; and he seems swimming towards us.”

“All right then, keep your eye on him, so as to pilot us! Mr Marline,” continued Captain Miles, “lower the boat at once with four hands; we can’t go close enough without it to the poor fellow, for we are to leeward of him.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” replied the chief mate, who had gone aft and was seeing to the falls of the boat; which presently, with himself in the stern-sheets and four hands to pull the oars, was lowered down all standing, the helmsman “luffing up” at the proper moment, so that the way of the ship might be arrested to prevent the gig being upset before getting on an even keel in the sea, it being a rather ticklish thing to launch a boat from a vessel under sail.

Luckily, however, the manoeuvre was safely accomplished without any mishap, the fall tackles being unhitched the instant the gig touched the water; and then, the boat’s crew shipping their oars without delay, she was pulled off to

windward of us in the direction indicated by the look out man in the foretop, who with his hand extended pointed the course to be steered.

The Josephine meanwhile gathered way again slowly and followed astern of the boat, although somewhat more to leeward, the wind being almost in her teeth and the ship having to sail close-hauled.

After a little time—for we had run nearly half a mile before going about and some minutes were consumed in getting the ship round on the opposite tack—we approached the spot where the accident had occurred; then, all of us could see Jackson plainly from the deck.

He was swimming grandly; now rising up on the top of a rolling wave, and then, as he surmounted this, sinking for a moment from sight in the hollow of the next, but making steady progress towards the ship all the while. Every now and again, too, he lifted one of his hands out of the water on commencing his stroke, as if to tell us he was all right and in good heart, noticing that we were coming to his rescue. The boat, the while rowed ahead of us as fast as the men in her could pull, putting their backs into the oars with all their strength, although making for the gallant swimmer in a slanting course to that of the Josephine.

Nearer and nearer we sailed, but much more slowly than all hands on board could wish, for the breeze was very light; nearer and nearer the gig approached Jackson, until we could see the very expression of his face.

He was actually grinning, and appeared from the movement of his mouth once when on top of a roller, to shout out some chaffing exclamation to us, seeming to regard the whole thing as a huge joke; and, Captain Miles was just about issuing some order about backing the main-topsail in order to heave the ship to, so as to get him and the boat aboard again, when, all at once, our anticipated joy at welcoming the poor fellow was turned into dismay by a startled cry from Jake, who was standing up in the weather rigging near me.

“Golly, Mass’ Tom!” he yelled out, loud enough for all to hear him, his black face changing nearly to a sickly sea-green colour with horror and consternation. “Dere’s one big shark swimmin’ right ahind de poor buckra. O Lor’, O Lor’, he jus’ up to him now!”

At this time the ship was not quite a cable’s length from the unfortunate man, who was about a point off our port bow; while the gig couldn’t have been half

that distance away from him; and, no sooner had Jake's startling announcement of the shark's proximity alarmed us all at the new and terrible peril threatening the swimmer, than the crew, led by Captain Miles, shouted out a concentrated cry of warning. "Ahoy! Look out! Shark!"

The words came out almost simultaneously, as it uttered by one voice, thrilling through the air with their fearful meaning, when, hardly had the sounds died away than we could see that Mr Marline and those in the gig with him heard us; for, recognising the urgency of the case, they redoubled their exertions to reach Jackson in time, so as to frustrate the intentions of his terrible antagonist. They seemed to put fresh steam in their oars, pulling all they knew against the choppy sea and wind, both of which were against them, counteracting their efforts and pressing the boat back as they urged it forwards.

From the fact, however, of our being to leeward of him and the wind bearing our shout away, Jackson unfortunately did not appear to hear us. At all events, he made no sign in response whatever, still swimming onwards in the direction of the ship, but leisurely, as if ignorant of any new source of danger.

Captain Miles grew intensely excited, as, indeed, we all were by this time; so, jumping up on the poop bulwarks and holding on to the mizzen shrouds, he repeated the cry of warning, all hands taking it up as before in one hoarse shout.

"Shark! shark! Look out, man alive! He's now close in upon you, and coming up fast astern!"

This time Jackson caught our hail, but still, evidently mistook its import. He thought we only called to him by way of encouraging him to strike out more vigourously for the ship, and he waved his hand in acknowledgment of the signal; then he breasted the waves anew in fine style, although taking it quite easy as if thoroughly confident in himself and not a bit alarmed.

The reason he made for the Josephine was that he did not perceive the boat, which he had not seen lowered; and, besides this, it was every now and then hidden from view as it sank down between the ridges of the rollers, while, in addition, his face was turned in the opposite direction to that in which the little craft was approaching him.

The captain was in a perfect agony.

“Shark! shark!” he again screamed, more than cried, out. “For heaven’s sake, strike out, man, or you’re lost!”

Then, all at once, Jackson appeared to grasp the meaning of the warning; and, looking behind him hurriedly, he caught sight of the cruel monster that was swimming after him, stroke by stroke and ready to sheer up alongside when it thought the proper opportunity had arrived for seizing its prey.

It must have given the poor fellow an awful sensation!

He could not but have realised the fearful doom that possibly awaited him; for we could, in a moment, even at that distance, notice his face change—a terror-stricken look coming over it in place of its previously buoyant expression. The brave fellow, however, uttered never a word, but only continued swimming on towards us in grim desperation.

“Pull, Marline, for God’s sake, pull!” shouted out Captain Miles to the mate and those with him in the boat; but, although the men made the water churn up over the bows of the gig in their mad haste to urge it forwards, the relentless shark was quicker in its movements and crept up closer to poor Jackson.

It was close in his rear, while the boat was yet thirty or forty yards away; and then, like a flash of lightning, we saw the monster’s gleaming white stomach as it threw itself over on its back and opened its wide maw lined with rows of serrated teeth.

“My God!” exclaimed Captain Miles, turning away his head, “they are too late!”

A sympathetic groan of anguish ran through the ship, and I could not help bursting into tears as I jumped down from the gangway, not daring to watch the end of the tragedy; but I thought I heard one agonised scream from the poor fellow, which must have escaped his lips just as the cruel teeth of the shark gripped its unresisting victim, telling that all was over.

After this, for one single moment, there was a still silence as of death around me, the men appearing to hold their very breaths in excess of emotion.

Chapter Nine

A Water-Spout

Then, the next instant, a wild frenzied roar of joy echoed fore and aft the ship, making the Josephine quiver almost down to her bottom timbers.

“Hooray!”

I could scarcely believe my ears; but, as I looked up in surprise and wonder I caught sight of Jake’s ebony face all aglow with delight, his eyes rolling about like a vessel in a heavy seaway and his mouth expanded from ear to ear. He was evidently about to indulge in one of his usual huge guffaws when especially highly pleased and unable to contain himself, as he evidently was now.

“Golly, dat splendiferous!” he cried out in ecstasy. “Um beat cock-fightin’ nohow!”

“Bravo, well done!” I heard Captain Miles’s voice exclaim also at the same time, with a joyous heartiness utterly indescribable.

“Why, what has happened, Jake?” I asked, quite puzzled.

“Wat happen’, eh, Mass’ Tom? I tell um sharp! De sailor man lick de shark arter all! Him dibe under de fis; as um go to grab him; an’ den, dey catch de nasty debbil one big crack wid um boat-hook, an’ pull Mass’ Jackson into der boat. Golly, I’se so berry glad, Mass’ Tom! I’se a’most cry wid joy, for true.”

And then, not content with this expression of his feelings, the sympathetic darkey, sliding down from the rigging where he had been perched, looking on at the terribly exciting scene taking place a moment before in the water, tumbled himself over on the deck in paroxysms of merriment, perfectly unable to restrain himself and keep still.

When I now looked over the side of the ship, which by this time was hove-to, the gig, with Jackson seated in the stern-sheets by Mr Marline, was close under the port quarter, and the rescued swimmer with those who had saved him in the nick of time were just preparing to come on board.

Presently, Jackson and the mate mounted the side-ladder amidst a perfect ovation from the crew, all hands cheering like mad and pressing forwards to

shake the fist of him whom they had never expected to see again. After this the gig was veered astern and hoisted up once more to the davits, and theJosephine, bearing round and filling her sails, again resumed her north-east course on the starboard tack. The job of making the port anchor snug inboard was completed later on, when the men had sobered down somewhat from the excitement which had reigned through the ship from the moment Jackson had first fallen overboard—it having been an awfully anxious time throughout his peril by drowning, his hairbreadth escape from the shark, and his ultimate rescue.

Later on, Moggridge told me how the poor fellow escaped from the very jaws of death.

Jackson, he said, when he became aware of being pursued by the bloodthirsty monster, instead of losing his presence of mind, as most men would have done under the circumstances, remained perfectly calm and collected, having once before had an encounter with a shark in his native element.

He swam on steadily towards the ship, apparently unmindful of his enemy; but, he carefully kept his weather eye opened, and when he saw the brute going to turn on his back in order to make a snatch at him, he at once dived under the shark's body, thus circumventing his attack. Before the monster could recover itself and make a fresh onslaught, Moggridge said, the chief mate caught it a pretty tidy whack over the head with a boat-hook, while Jackson was hauled into the gig at the same time by the other men.

It was a wonderful escape, however, and nothing else was talked of on board for days after.

Strange to say, too, the shark, as if determined not to be easily balked of its prey, followed the ship steadily; and this fact, of course, kept the incident fresh in our minds, even if we had been at all inclined to forget it, the hideous creature's bottle-like fin ever perceptible in our wake being a constant reminder!

"He's bound to hab somebody for suah," said the captain's mulatto steward Harry, who by the way was the person who had given out that agonised shriek which I had fancied to be poor Jackson's death knell. "Shark nebber follow ship for nuffin'!"

“No,” observed Captain Miles grimly; “this beggar sha’n’t at all events, if I know it!” and he paced up and down the poop, as if revolving the matter in his mind.

This was the third day after the affair had happened, and the captain was quite incensed at the shark’s pertinacity; for, morning, noon, and night, whenever we logged over the side, there could be seen the sea-pirate’s long sinewy body, floating under our stern and always keeping pace with the ship whether she was going fast or slow—although, as we had little or no wind, the latter was generally the case.

“I fancy, Mr Marline,” said the captain, soon after replying to Harry’s rather frightened observation, the mulatto being very timid and of a cowardly nature, as the fact of his fainting when the cow invaded the cabin would readily tell—“I say, Mr Marline, I think it’s time for us to give that joker down there a lesson, eh?”

“Perhaps you’ll find him too artful to take a hook, cap’en,” answered the mate. “He seems to me an ‘old sojer,’ from the look of him and the regularity of his movements. Just see him now looking up, as if listening to what we were saying!”

“Well, we’ll try him anyway,” said Captain Miles, telling Moggridge to bring the shark hook aft, as he wished to attempt the capture of our unwelcome attendant.

“Aye, aye, sir,” replied the boatswain, going forwards and presently returning with a large steel hook, much about the same size as those they use in butchers’ shops for hanging meat on. A piece of chain was attached to this by a swivel instead of rope or a line, which, although good enough for other fish, the saw-like teeth of the monster of the deep would quickly have bitten through.

“Is the tackle all sound?” asked the captain.

“Aye, aye, sir; sound enough to catch a whale,” responded Moggridge, proceeding to bait the hook with a four-pound piece of salt pork which completely concealed the barbs; and then, a stout half-inch rope having been fastened on to the end of the chain, the whole apparatus was thrown overboard close to where the shark was patrolling the water under our stern.

He sheered off a bit on hearing the splash; but afterwards soon swam up to where the baited hook was towing in our wake, smelling at it cautiously as if to see whether it was advisable for him to bolt the savoury morsel or not. Then,

with a disdainful swish of his screw-like tail, he turned round in the water and resumed his station further astern, as if he saw through our attempt to entrap him, and despised it.

“I thought so,” said Mr Marline. “He’s too old a bird to be caught by chaff. You won’t hook him in a blue moon!”

“Don’t you be too cocksure of that,” retorted Captain Miles. “Sharks, I have noticed, frequently resemble cats in the way they will nibble at a bait, and pretend they don’t care about it, when all the while they are dying to gobble it down—just in the same manner as you’ll observe pussy, if you offer her a nice bit of meat, will sniff and turn away her head as if rejecting the morsel with disdain, affecting to make you believe it beneath her notice, only the next moment to abstract it slily from your hand, glad enough to get it! You’ll see presently, Mr Marline, that our friend there will go at the pork again, I’ll bet anything.”

“All right, cap’en,” replied Mr Marline. “I only hope, I’m sure, that your anticipation will prove correct;” but, from the sly quizzical smile on his face and the dry way in which he spoke, I don’t think the mate believed in our hooking the ugly brute, all the same.

After a little time, I noticed two small fishes coming up towards the bait and poking their pointed noses into it as if taking observations, and I called Captain Miles’s attention to them.

“Oh, that’s a good sign,” said he. “Those are pilot-fish, which always accompany his majesty Mr Shark in the way of aides-de-camp, as you call those smart gentlemen in gay uniforms who are usually seen prancing about the general at a review of troops ashore. Whenever you see the little chaps, the shark himself is never far off, for they precede him as his scouts to warn him of danger as well as tell him if there’s anything worth grabbing in the offing. If it wasn’t for them I believe he’d fare rather badly, as his own sight is bad—fortunately for poor fellows that fall in the water in the way Jackson did t’other day!”

“But, captain,” I remarked, “they must be very bad guides if they do not tell the shark about the hook.”

“Aye,” he replied; “something like ‘the blind leading the blind,’ eh? Still, you know Moggridge has taken care that the bait carefully conceals the snare within, and the pilot-fish are none the wiser. See them now!”

As I watched, I noticed first one and then the other of the little fish smell at the piece of pork, making their observations apparently, after which they swam back to the side of the shark, where they remained for a moment on either side of his snout, as if they were making their report upon the tempting object and giving their master all particulars.

Then the shark, with a fluke of his tail, also advanced closer to the bait, which just then, by a twist of the rope attached to it, the boatswain jerked away.

This was enough for Master Shark, who, thinking he was going to lose the coveted morsel, at once sheered alongside of it, turning over on his back and opening his terrible-looking cavern of a mouth in the same way I had seen him do when he tried to catch poor Jackson. The recollection of that made me shudder all over!

The next moment the monster had bolted both bait and hook, as well as a couple of feet of the chain; but when he turned to sheer off again he was “brought up with a round turn,” as sailors say, by the rope tightening suddenly, the jerk almost making him turn a somersault in the water.

He was not altogether captured yet, however, and his struggles to get free were tremendous. Really, his jaws must have been pretty tough to have not given way under the furious flings and writhings he made to release himself; for the strong half-inch manilla rope that held him tethered was stretched like a fiddle-string, its strands all quivering with the strain upon it.

First to one side of the ship and then to the other the brute bounded in turns, making the sea boil around him like a whirlpool, until finally, after half an hour’s fight of it, he gave in and lay quiet, although not dead yet by any means.

As soon as the shark began to flounder about, I noticed that the pilot-fish went away, leaving him alone in his extremity; and on my mentioning this to Mr Marline he took the opportunity of pointing a moral for my especial benefit.

“It’s just the way in the world, Master Tom,” said he. “Foolish companions lead many a young fellow into a scrape; but as soon as they see him in the mess into which they were the means of inveigling him, they scuttle off, abandoning him to his fate and probably laughing at his troubles too.”

“Aye,” put in Captain Miles, wishing also to improve the occasion; “and if that shark had not been so madly impetuous in rushing at the hook he would never have been caught; in the same way as somebody told me of a certain young gentleman, who, not looking before he leaped, as the proverb says, and only thinking of the end he had in view, galloped down a hill and came to grief—getting a tumble which laid him up for weeks!”

“Oh, Captain Miles,” said I, “you don’t think I’m a shark, do you?”

“Well, not quite so bad as that, youngster,” he replied with one of his cheery laughs; “but, quite as impetuous sometimes, eh, Master Tom?”

I made no answer to this thrust, knowing there was some truth in it, my mother having frequently to call me over the coals for doing things on the spur of the moment, which, as she was aware, I always regretted afterwards.

This thoughtless impulse is a great fault, as I know to my cost; for, it has led me into many a scrape—sometimes to the danger of my life!

While we were talking the shark was still struggling in the water; but when he grew tolerably composed, only an occasional splash of his tail showing that he yet lived, the men began to make preparations for hauling him on board.

The bight of a rope was made into a running knot and hove round the body of the animal; when, the men hauling away with a will at the other end of the line, which was passed through a snatch-block hung in the rigging, the captive was soon bowsed up to the mizzen chains.

No sooner, however, was he got out of the water than the hampered monster appeared to be imbued with fresh vitality, lashing his tail about and splintering the wood-work of the bulwarks as if it had been brown paper; but when the slip-knot was drawn tighter this controlled his frantic movements a bit, and Jackson, who was allowed precedence of the rest of the sailors from his previous acquaintance with the savage brute, then advanced with a sharp butcher’s knife, which he had borrowed from the cook, in order to give his old enemy his quietus.

Taking care not to get within reach of either the jaws or ponderous tail of the shark, he leaned over the side of the ship and stabbed it in the neck; after which, with two long slashing cuts he severed the head, which quickly splashed down into the sea under the counter, sinking to the bottom at once from the mere weight of the bone it contained. Jackson then proceeded, by the

captain's orders, to rip open the animal's stomach; but it was found to contain nothing digestible but the piece of pork which had led to the brute's capture, the shark evidently having been lately on short allowance.

When, however, Jackson extracted the hook from the bait, he started back suddenly as if he had received a blow, clutching hold of the shrouds to steady himself.

I thought he was going to faint.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Captain Miles; "what's the matter?"

"See here!" replied the young sailor, holding up in his hand something dark and soft looking, with a bit of ribbon fluttering from one end.

"Well, what is it?" repeated the captain.

"My cap," said Jackson solemnly; "and, but for the mercy of God I also might have been in the same place!"

It gave us all a thrill, I can tell you, the sight of this old cap, which must have floated off Jackson's head when he dived to escape the rush of the shark. The brute had swallowed it, no doubt, greedily, thinking it had got the owner.

As for Jackson himself, when he clambered up over the side again and came inboard, his face was as white as a table-cloth. I did not hear him, either, joking about the deck all day afterwards in his usual way; although the young sailor, besides being the smartest of the hands at his work, had hitherto been the life of the crew, always laughing and chaffing the others, as well as being the first to lead a song on the fo'c's'le of an evening. The startling discovery of his cap in the shark's stomach, coupled with the reflection that, had not Providence intervened in his behalf, he might have also been swallowed up, seemed to have completely sobered him for the time.

The other hands, however, were not much affected by the incident; and, presently, when the bight of the rope round the shark was unloosed and the body allowed to drop overboard, Moggridge sang out in a triumphant voice: "Now we've got rid of Jonah, we'll have a shift of wind at last!"

"Why does the boatswain say that?" I asked Captain Miles. "What had the shark to do with the weather?"

“Well, you see, my boy,” he answered, “sailors are generally superstitious, and they always think that killing a shark brings good luck of some sort. Now, the best sort of luck we can have would be a good stiff south-wester, or something of that sort, to drive us on our way across the Atlantic, as we have experienced nothing but light breezes since we left the islands, barely making five hundred miles’ distance from Sombrero. We’ll never get to England at this rate in a month of Sundays.”

Unlike most prophecies referring to the weather, which, as a rule, must generally be made after the event to be correct, that of the old boatswain, curiously enough, turned out a true one, for, although we had been only favoured with light winds from the time of Jackson’s escape from the shark and all the while the ill-fated brute followed in our wake like a phantom of evil, not many hours elapsed after we had captured the animal before a strong southerly breeze sprang up. This, shifting round later on more to the westwards, came right astern of the vessel—thus enabling her to spread studding-sails and sky-sails, exposing every rag of canvas she could carry from truck to deck.

The wind, too, fortunately, was not a cat’s-paw either, like the shifting airs we had previously had, for it lasted us ten days at one stretch, carrying us well to the south-east of Bermuda and almost more than half-way to the Azores.

During all this time, no very remarkable incident occurred on board, save that, whether owing to change of air or through some deficiency of their native diet, three out of the half a dozen turtle, which Captain Miles was hoping to carry home for the lord mayor’s banquet, died one by one. They were hove over the side in the same fashion; and, as I watched their shelly backs floating astern, I could see flocks of sea-birds settle down on them, evidently rejoicing in having such an unexpected feast. A pig, too, was killed one day, supplying us in the cabin with savoury roast pork, which was an agreeable change from the salt beef and boiled fowls that were our ordinary fare—although, as the hen-coops were becoming rapidly untenanted, I should not have much longer to complain of any monotony of the latter item of our diet, I thought.

But, if there was nothing to chronicle of any stirring character I enjoyed the voyage immensely, being as happy as the day was long.

It seemed like paradise to me, sailing on and on before the genial western wind over the wide blue sea, with an azure sky above unflecked by a cloud in the

daytime and studded with a glorious galaxy of stars at night that made the heavens look like a casket of jewels.

Before long, I became quite a sailor too, being able to make my way aloft to the cross-trees without help, and I was learning by familiarity every rope whose name Moggridge had before taught me; for, when the captain saw that I was careful through his repeated cautions, and also had Jackson to look after me, he withdrew the embargo he had placed on my mounting the rigging. Indeed, he was kind enough to let me do duty as an "extra hand," as I loved to consider myself, in Mr Marline's watch, or when he himself was on deck.

Another great delight I had consisted in going out on the bowsprit and fishing for bonitoes and dolphins with a bit of red or white cloth tied to a hook, in the same way as one goes "reeling" for mackerel in the Channel; and many a savoury supper, cooked surreptitiously by Jake in his friend the cook's caboose, had I on the sly at night in the fo'c's'le, when Captain Miles thought I had turned in and was snug asleep in my bunk!

Day after day passed alike, with the exception, of course, of Sundays, when the captain read prayers on the poop to the hands clustered round, all dressed out in their best shore clothes, and with the decks especially holystoned in honour of the day—the ship the while making some couple of hundred miles every twenty-four hours on her onward way, while scarcely shifting a sail or altering a brace from week's end to week's end.

It was getting on towards the end of August, the wind having continued fair from about the middle of the month and the weather being all that could be desired; when, one morning, that of our fifteenth day out from Grenada, I recollect, I noticed that Captain Miles looked rather anxious after coming on deck, shortly before our breakfast hour, "eight bells," according to his usual custom when everything was going on all right.

He first glanced aloft, sailor-like, to see that everything was correct with the rigging and the sails all drawing, and then he cast an eye forward, noting the orderly arrangements there; finally, walking across to the binnacle in order to observe what course the ship was steering, and asking Mr Marline, who had charge of the morning watch, how she was going.

"Eight knots good, sir, last heave of the log," promptly said the mate.

“That’s all right,” observed the captain; “but, I don’t like the look ahead. It seems to me as if there’s going to be a change.”

“Indeed?” replied Mr Marline; “I haven’t noticed anything at all unusual. The wind has kept steady from the westwards ever since I came on the poop at four bells, the same as we left it overnight.”

“But, the glass is going down, Marline,” rejoined Captain Miles; “and don’t you notice the sea is getting a bit cross off our port bow? It strikes me we’ll have a shift of wind presently from the eastwards, if nothing more. However, we oughtn’t to grumble, for ten days of such fine weather is rather unusual in these latitudes, you know, at this time of year.”

“Yes, certainly,” replied the mate; “we’ve made good use of the time, too.”

“Aye, that we have,” replied the captain. “I fixed our position last night by a couple of lunars.”

“And I suppose it corroborates your observation of yesterday, eh?”

“Pretty nearly,” said Captain Miles; “calculating for the distance we’ve run since, I should think we’re somewhere about 30 degrees North and 52 degrees West.”

“Well, that’s strange!” exclaimed Mr Marline. “We’ve got to the limit of the north-east trade without having once the benefit of it from the day we started, the winds having been south-east and southerly till they shifted round to the westwards!”

“So they have,” said the captain; “still, that has been all the more lively for us. But I don’t like this change brewing up. Look at the clouds now!”

“Ha, they’re getting up at last!” replied the other. “I see you were right, the change will come from the eastwards.”

Up to now it had been a beautifully bright morning, the sky without a scrap of vapour to obscure its lucent expanse, and the sea lit up with golden sunshine that made it appear bluer somehow or other; but, even while Captain Miles and Mr Marline were speaking, a low bank of cloud arose along the eastern horizon, and this, spreading gradually up towards the zenith, soon shut out the half-risen sun and his rays, casting a sombre tinge at the same time on the ocean below.

“All hands shorten sail!” shouted the captain, and the studding-sail halliards being let go by the run, the Josephine, which a moment before had looked like a bird with outspread wings, had these latter clipped off in a jiffey, the light sails bagging with the wind like balloons as they were hauled down; and, soon afterwards, the booms projecting from the yard-arms on which they had been rigged out, were sent below and laid with the other spare spars along the bulwarks in the waist.

While the crew were busy at this task, the strong breeze, which but a short time before had filled our canvas, gradually died away until there did not seem to be a puff of air stirring, the larger sails now hanging loose or else flapping idly against the masts.

Captain Miles, however, did not stop merely at taking in the studding-sails, for the royals were next furled as well as the topgallant-sails; and then, under reefed topsails and courses, in addition to her jib and spanker which were still set, he awaited what the weather might have in store for his vessel. An experienced seaman, such as he was, when forewarned, as in the present instance, by a falling barometer, always prepares for eventualities of the worst possible character, never leaving anything to chance or neglecting to take proper precautions. By not doing so many a gallant ship with all hands on board is lost through the carelessness of bad navigators.

The cloud in the east, meanwhile, rose higher in the heavens, showing a bit of clear sky for a moment at its base, when it began to travel towards the ship at great speed, but in a very eccentric fashion, whirling round and looking as if it were dancing on the surface of the water.

“I can’t make it out,” said Mr Marline in a puzzled sort of way. “There must be a good deal of wind at the back of it; but, why doesn’t it keep a straight course towards us, eh sir?”

“It’s a whirlwind, I fancy,” replied Captain Miles; “I’ve seen a good many in the South Atlantic, near the African coast, although never one before in these latitudes so far from land.”

“Are they dangerous at all, captain?” I asked, rather anxiously.

“No, Tom, not unless you got in the vortex of one, when it might twist the spars out of a ship perhaps, though I never saw any mischief done by one myself. Mind your helm,” added Captain Miles to the man at the wheel, whose office at

present was a sinecure, for the ship was almost becalmed and the rudder swaying to and fro from port to starboard as it listed. “If the wind catches us suddenly we may be taken aback, and I want you to be ready when I give the word.”

This made the sailor who was “taking his trick” all alert, instead of lounging over the spokes as he had been doing previously, listening to our talk.

Presently, a quick puff of air came from the west again, and the Josephine began to gather way; but almost in an instant afterwards the wind shifted right ahead, coming down with the cloud, and the yards were at once braced round, the vessel being headed towards the north.

The cloud approached rapidly now on our weather bow; and, as it got nearer, we could see that its bottom edge, which was attenuated to the proportions of a slender pillar of vapour, seemed to be united to the water, the sea, where it joined the surface, being greatly agitated, foaming up in columns of spray that were circled round and round and then drawn up in corkscrew fashion into the denser body above.

“Why, it’s a water-spout!” exclaimed Mr Marline in great surprise.

“So it is,” said the captain, a bit startled and perplexed too. “Look sharp, Marline, and see to the hatches being battened down and the scuppers open; for, if the blessed thing bursts immediately overhead, it will flood our decks with a deluge of water worse than if we had shipped a heavy sea.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” answered the other, scuttling down the poop-ladder to attend to these orders; but he had hardly left the captain’s side ere a terrific gust of wind struck us, coming from the same direction as the water-spout.

The instant after, the wind shifted round to the opposite quarter, and then a series of squalls, hot and strong, seemed to assail us from almost every point of the compass at once.

“Hands shorten sail!” roared out Captain Miles again, using the palms of his two hands before his mouth for a speaking trumpet. “Be smart, men! Some of you brail up the spanker here and man the jib downhaul. Right! Now, away aloft the rest of you; we must have those topsails close-reefed. Cast-off the halliards—there—cheerily, men; that’s the way to do it!”

No sooner were the hands down from the topsail-yards, however, than he had them up again to take in the courses, which had already been clewed up and were now furled; the Josephine lying-to under close-reefed topsails, with the fore-topmast staysail set to keep her in command of her helm.

She did not look so gay as she had done earlier in the day, with all her snowy plumage spread before the favouring breeze; but, she was all the better prepared to battle with the elements, and now steadily and sturdily awaited their onset.

The struggle was not long delayed.

Closer and closer came the whirling water-spout, surrounded by columns of misty spray and accompanied by the fierce wind. The sea was agitated with violent eddies that rocked the ship to her centre every moment; and, above the shriek of the constant squalls tearing through the rigging, and the splash of the boiling water at the foot of the terrible cloud column, we could distinguish a peculiar hoarse sucking noise, as if the whole herd of Neptune's horses were drinking their fill, and letting us know about it, too!

Chapter Ten

Disrated

I can't say what the rest felt; but I know that I, for one, was frightened when I heard that strange gurgling noise and saw the great black thing, spinning round like a teetotum and swirling up the water, coming down on our ship as if to overwhelm her!

The squalls, which succeeded each other from different directions in rapid sequence, were even more dangerous than the water-spout; but Captain Miles was too good a seaman to be easily beaten, even by the most adverse circumstances.

Telling off some of the best hands to the fore and main-braces on either side, so that these could be let go or hauled taut in an instant as the wind shifted, thus necessitating the vessel changing her tack with similar rapidity, he went to the helm himself; and from this point, with the assistance of Moggridge, he conned the ship as coolly as if he were in charge of a yacht trying to weather the mark-boat in a race so as to get to windward of her competitors!

The captain was trying to make as much northing as he could, as well as endeavouring to run out of reach of the water-spout, which latter, although it gyrated about in the water so queerly and seemed moving every way at once, came up more from the eastwards, travelling to the south of west apparently; and, expert seaman that he was, in spite of the veering wind, which backed round every moment, he gallantly manoeuvred so as to gain his object—sailing ahead between the squalls, as it were.

"Ready about!" he would call out one minute, when the main-topsail was backed and the fore-yard swung round; and, almost as soon as this was done and the weather braces handed, the cry "'bout ship!" was again repeated, when the Josephine was brought once mere back to her previous bearings.

Such tackings and beatings about, surely, no ship ever underwent before in so short a time!

"By Jingo, he's a sailor every inch of him!" I heard one of the old hands of the crew murmur in admiration as he pulled in with a will the weather braces for about the sixth time in as many minutes; and, truth to say, I could not help sharing the feeling of respect all the crew had for our captain, who, easy-going as he was generally in fine weather, letting the first mate then attend to the

working of the ship, he was “all there,” as they said, when the necessity for prompt action in any emergency called for exertion and made him show himself in his true colours.

But, struggle to outstrip it as much as he might, the water-spout came nearer and nearer to us, bearing down still broadside-on upon the ship. As I stood close to the captain and Moggridge, who alone were on the poop besides myself, Mr Marline and Davis the second mate being in the waist, looking after the men at the braces amidships, I noticed that the pillar of cloud became more transparent in proportion as it decreased in size from the upper portion, until it seemed almost perfectly so at the lower extremity where it touched the sea. I observed, too, that a small inner column of equal diameter, looking like a glass tube, went up the middle. This, evidently, was the water which was being sucked up into the mass of vapour above as if by a syphon.

Fortunately, just as it seemed almost touching the ship, when the whirling waves round its base made us oscillate from side to side, the Josephine, heeling over to her chain-plates from a sudden rush of wind that appeared to accompany it, the portentous column of vapour darted off almost at right angles to its former course; and then, the cloud, having taken up more of the sea-water than it could contain, burst with a loud hissing sort of report, the contents falling around us in the form of a heavy downpour of rain which sluiced our decks down, but happily did no further damage.

“Thank God!” exclaimed Captain Miles reverently, taking off his cap and looking upwards in grateful recognition of the providential care that had watched over and protected us from the fearful peril which had threatened us; and his thanksgiving was participated in by more than one other, I knew, for I could see Moggridge’s lips moving in silent prayer, while I felt inclined to fall on my knees, my heart was so full of joy and gladness at our narrow escape.

I was overpowered with a feeling of wonder and awe.

Strangely enough, there seemed some strong connection between the water-spout and the wind; for, no sooner had the column of vapour broken up, than the heavy clouds dispersed away to leeward. The sun then came out again, and the squally weather calmed down to a gentle breeze from the south-east that enabled us to haul round again on our proper course, the ship presently being covered anew with canvas and the reefs in the topsails shaken out.

When all danger was over, though, the whole thing puzzled me very much.

“What is a water-spout?” I asked Captain Miles later on in the evening after dinner, as he was having a quiet cigar on the poop before turning in. I saw that he then looked inclined for a chat, and thought it a good opportunity to seek for information.

He answered my question in the Irish way, by asking me another.

“Did you ever see a whirlwind when you were at Grenada, Tom?” he inquired.

“Yes,” I replied, “I recollect a long time ago noticing one at Mount Pleasant once, and wondering at the way in which all the loose straw in the stable-yard was circled round and round, as if in a funnel, and then drawn up into the sky.”

“Well, then,” said Captain Miles, “the celebrated Dr Franklin has demonstrated, if I recollect aright, that a whirlwind on land, and a water-spout at sea, arise from similar general causes, and may be considered one and the same thing.”

“But, what is the cause of them?” I asked now.

“The action of opposing atmospheric currents, Tom, if you can understand what I mean. Two contrary winds meet: a vortex therefore ensues; and, any cloud that happens to be between these opposing currents of air at the time is condensed into a conical form and turned round with great celerity. This whirling motion drives from the centre of the cloud all the particles of vapour contained in it; consequently, a vacuum is thereby produced in the body of it; and, as nature abhors a vacuum in every case, the water of the sea lying below the overhanging mass is carried up, in centrifugal fashion, and in a sort of way by capillary attraction, into the vacant centre of the cloud cylinder.”

“Why does it not stop there?” said I. “That one just now burst.”

“Ah, that fellow was like a greedy boy who has eaten too much, and has to disgorge after he has filled his little stomach too full! But, some water-spouts carry their contents on to the land, where, when the clouds have been attracted by mountains or some lofty object, they may do great damage by wrecking houses and inundating the country for miles round. At sea, they are not half so dangerous, having plenty of room there to expend themselves without effecting much injury, except a ship should be right beneath them when they fall to pieces.”

“Do you think, sir,” I then inquired, “that one would have sunk us, if it had burst over the Josephine?”

“Well, I hardly know, Tom,” answered Captain Miles reflectively. “Although it looked terrific enough at one time, I am not inclined to believe now that it would have been attended with any very serious calamity to our ship, had even the whole quantity of water it contained fallen on our decks. If you recollect, I ordered beforehand the hatches to be battened down and the scuppers in the waist cleared. Besides, the cylinder or spiral column of vapour, you observed, was very like a glass tube in the centre of the water-spout, and this coming in contact with our masts and rigging it would have been at once broken, when the surrounding air rushing into the vacuum to restore the atmospheric equilibrium, the torrent of water would have been forced sideways instead of descending perpendicularly, coming down merely as a heavy tropical shower, similar to those you have been well acquainted with in Grenada. I have heard of some vessels being damaged by water-spouts, but I have never come across anyone who happened to be on board one of them at the time, so I rather fancy the tale was one of those generally ‘told to the marines.’”

So, laughing it off, the captain finished his little scientific lecture at this point, while I went below to my bunk, wishing to get undressed before Harry the steward came to douse the light in the cabin, which he always did sharp to time.

If the water-spout did us no actual damage it certainly served as a very bad omen. It took away the favourable breezes, which, before its advent on the scene, had sped the Josephine so gaily on her way home to England; and the weather for some days afterwards was not nearly so pleasant, tedious calms and contrary winds preventing our making the rapid passage Captain Miles anticipated from our good running at the beginning of the voyage.

We were now in the region between the regular trade-winds and what are termed “the anti-trades or passage winds,” above the tropic of Cancer. This is a particular portion of the ocean between the parallels known to sailors as the “Horse Latitudes,” where there is generally a lull met with in the currents of air that elsewhere reign rampant over the sea; and, once arrived within the precincts of this blissful zone, the ship tossed about there for a week at a stretch, hardly making a mile towards her wished-for goal—only rocking restlessly on the bosom of the deep.

There is nothing so irksome as calm weather at sea, to those at all events whose duty lies upon the waters and who do not go on shipboard for mere pleasure.

So long as the wind blows, whether favourably or not, there is something to do. If it be fair, there is the cheering prospect of counting the number of knots run when the log is hove, and knowing that one is getting each hour so much nearer one's destination; while, if King Aeolus be unpropitious, there is all the excitement of fighting against his efforts to delay the vessel, and the proud satisfaction of making way in spite of adverse breezes.

But, in a calm, nothing can be done excepting to wait patiently, or impatiently, for the wind to blow again; and, consequently, all is dreary stagnation and dead monotony—the captain ever pacing the poop in not the best of tempers, with the men idling about the decks, or else occupied in the unexciting task of unreeving rope yarn, to keep their hands from mischief, and, perhaps, polishing up the ring-bolts as a last resource!

Under such circumstances, it is not at all to be wondered that the crew of a vessel usually get discontented; and, should her officers be in the least inclined to be tyrannical, an ill feeling is produced which sometimes leads to an outbreak.

Hardly a single mutiny ever occurred on a ship at sea save in calm weather; at other times the hands have too much to do even to grumble, in the way that sailors love to do ashore, comparing their nautical experience to "a dog's life"—albeit they never give up the sea all the same!

On board the Josephine, however, all went along pleasantly enough, although we were becalmed and the seamen, had plenty of leisure time for airing their grievances.

Captain Miles, it is true, did not come on deck looking jolly and beaming with good-humour, as he used to do when we were bowling along before a stiff breeze; but he was not a bit cantankerous, and if there was no legitimate work to occupy the crew with, he did not go out of his way unnecessarily to "haze" them by inventing new sorts of tasks, as a good many other masters of vessels are in the habit of doing in similar cases. As for Mr Marline, he was of a most even disposition, taking all things that came with his usual equanimity and never giving a rough word to anyone.

Davis, the second mate, whom I have already mentioned as having been promoted from the fo'c's'le, was a very different sort of man; for, being without education and any good principle, he took advantage of his position, whenever the captain's eye was not upon him, to bully those with whom he had previously associated on an equality. He was "very much above them now," he thought, and showed it as it was in the nature only of a low-minded fellow to do.

Like most "Jacks in office," he was always trying to assert his position; and, as a natural result, he was not by any means in good favour with the men, who resented his overbearing way all the more from the fact of their having formerly been hail-fellow-well-met with him, which of course they could not readily forget, if he did.

Still, things went on pretty smoothly on board while the calm lasted, despite the little roughnesses which the second mate's way of evincing his authority produced—and which I could not avoid noticing, for I'm sure he used to be "down" on me whenever he had a chance of calling me to account for going where I had no business to, as I confess I sometimes did, although I used to be encouraged by the men, and Mr Marline would wink at my escapades. We all found it terribly dull, though; for, even the fish were too lazy to come to the surface to be caught, and so we were deprived therefore of our old pastime of angling for them from the bowsprit in the afternoons and evenings.

Day after day, the Josephine rolled her hull from port to starboard and then back again to port on the tumid sea, which, save throbbing with a dull heavy swell, had now lost all its life and action:—day after day we looked in vain for a breeze from sunrise to sunset; day after day our watchful longing was all in vain; there, day after day, for over a week, we rolled and lay!

Captain Miles used to come up regularly on the poop at noon to take the sun, from a sense of duty; but it was almost a useless task, as we hardly varied a mile in our position from the commencement of the calm, the vessel remaining close in with the fiftieth parallel of longitude and in latitude thirty-two North.

Mr Marline liked to chaff the captain about this, telling him that his sextant wanted polishing up a bit and that the glasses were wrong. However, that all went for nothing with his chief, who well knew where the fault lay, fully understanding that the instrument was not to blame; but, as regularly as he brought out the sextant he used to laugh at Mr Marline's stereotyped joke.

As related in Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner":—

"Day after day, day after day

We stuck, nor breath nor motion;

As idle as a painted ship

Upon a painted ocean!"

Had it not been for the two darkeys, Jake and Cuffee, I don't know what we should have done for fun.

These comical fellows were a constant source of amusement to us; for, although they did not come to fisticuffs again, they were always quarrelling and making friends afterwards in the oddest way possible. Their disputes usually arose from some little trifle concerning their order of precedence, each being highly jealous of his dignity, and resenting in a moment any fancied slight or want of proper respect on the part of the other.

When Jake came on board in the summary way in which he "took his passage" at the beginning of our voyage, of course he had no wardrobe, or anything to wear save what he stood up in when he emerged dripping from the sea after the capsize of the boat in which he had come off to the ship. Captain Miles, however, had given him some cast-off slops, and the hands forward had also rigged him out from their chests, so that in a short time he made a very presentable appearance. This was especially the case on Sunday's, when his dress was most conspicuous, Master Jake being something of a dandy like most negroes, and anxious to take the shine out of his fellows.

Somehow or other Cuffee the cook got jealous of this feature in his brother darkey's character.

On week-days he did not mind submitting to any slight superiority Jake might have over him in his sailor-like rig; but one Sunday the latter donned an old blue coat that had been presented to him by Mr Marline. It was ornamented with brilliant brass buttons, and the effect was completed by a bright bandana handkerchief which he had begged from me, and this, contrasting with a white shirt and duck trousers, made his toilet so thoroughly effective that Cuffee was greatly aggrieved.

“You tink youself one fine gen’leman now, I s’pose?” he said, with a snort of indignation, when Jake went down into the waist in all this grand array after prayers on the poop. “Fine fedders make fine birds, yah, yah!”

“Me tinks what I like,” replied Jake nonchalantly, proceeding forward to the topgallant forecastle, where he sat down in such a lordly manner that Cuffee, unable to stand it any longer, hurriedly went into his caboose and bringing out a bucket of dirty water pitched it over Jake with much heartiness, sousing him from head to foot.

“Dere, you big fool of niggah, take dat!” he cried triumphantly. “Guess dat’ll take de shine out ob your ole coat, wid yer grandy airs an’ bumptiousness!”

The men on the fo’c’s’le shouted with laughter, and Jake rushed to resent the affront; but they held him back until his temper evaporated, and then the two made it up somehow, for afterwards I saw that Jake was enjoying a savoury mess of lobscouse which Cuffee had cooked for him in amends for the bucket of greasy water.

Jake, however, paid out the cook for the indignity a little later on; for, when Cuffee came up on the forecastle while the hands were there yarning in the evening, he gave him the cold shoulder.

“Wat for you come hyar?” he asked the poor cook. “Dis is de place for sailor man, not for de idlers aboard. You go back inter yer ole caboose, cookee!”

There was another laugh at this, and Captain Miles hearing what had been said, every word being distinctly audible on the poop, began speaking to Mr Marline about the imitative habits of negroes.

“They are just like monkeys,” he said; “and, in dress and in language will copy anyone they think superior to them, no matter how ridiculous their imitation may be—a sort of burlesque of the original.”

“Yes,” replied Mr Marline. “Jake, I have noticed, has taken Jackson for his model on week-days. Have you observed how he copies him in every particular?”

“Well, he couldn’t have a better study for a thorough sailor,” said the captain, adding, to my great delight, for I was very proud of poor Jake, who was faithful to me to the death; “and the darkey, mind you, Marline, has studied Jackson to

good effect, for he's already a smart seaman. He's as quick aloft as anyone on board when any sudden call comes."

"He's all that," answered Mr Marline heartily; "but I was going to observe, that, while Jake copies Jackson for his week-day model, he tries to imitate you on Sundays."

"Me!" exclaimed Captain Miles bursting into a loud laugh. "You, you mean, with that swell blue coat that you gave him, and which you used, no doubt, to win all the ladies' hearts with ashore, when it was in its prime!"

"Oh, no," retorted the mate, smiling too. "When Jake has got his Sunday rig on, he walks up the poop-ladder to prayers with all your dignity. Why, anyone would take him to be the skipper of the ship!"

"Talking of prayers and niggers," said Captain Miles at this point, turning the conversation, as he thought the mate was having a sly poke at him, "I heard one day a little time back a rather good yarn about two darkeys, and, as it was told by a clergyman at a missionary meeting, I don't suppose there can be any great harm in the story."

"Well, heave ahead with it," interposed Mr Marline.

"You see," began the captain, "these two niggers—we'll call them Josh and Quashee for shortness—happened to be in a boat which got drifted out to sea accidentally, from the tow-rope slipping or something else; and, they didn't know their danger till suddenly they found themselves far from land, with no oars in the boat and no means of getting to shore again. To make matters worse, too, the sea began to get up on account of the wind rising."

"I wish it would do so now," said Mr Marline with much emphasis.

"So do I," returned Captain Miles with equal heartiness; "but, as there isn't any chance of that as far as I can see, I may as well go on with my story."

"Do, sir," said the other.

"Well, then," continued the captain, "as soon as Josh and Quashee realised their peril, of course they got into a great funk; but, after puzzling their brains as to the best means of getting back, and shouting themselves hoarse in calling for help, they gave up the thing as a gone case, sitting down on the thwarts

and bewailing their fate. Josh, the younger negro, however, had the most go in him, and presently he roused up.

"'Say, Quashee,' he asked of the other, 'can you pray, sonny?'

"'No, Josh,' replied Quashee gloomily. 'I nebber learnt, nohow.'

"'Can you sing hymn, den?' questioned his brother in misfortune again.

"'No, Josh,' answered the other still more gloomily. 'Um can't pray, can't sing hymn, can't do nuffin'!'

"'Den,' said Josh as if a brilliant idea had suddenly struck him, 'we must hab collection—must do sumfin' to git out ob dis hole, an' I know when dey don't pray or sing in de chapel dey always hab collection; so we'll hab one now!'"

"I wouldn't mind betting," observed Mr Marline, when he had done laughing at this anecdote, "that the clergyman who related the story did it as a sort of introduction for 'passing round the hat' at the very meeting where you heard it!"

"That's just precisely what he did!" replied Captain Miles, joining in the other's laugh; "and, it was a very good introduction to a collection, too, I think!"

It was on a Sunday evening that the little fracas between Jake and Cuffee occurred. This squabble terminated amicably enough; but the next day, Monday, a bit of a real row happened on board, which did not end quite so agreeably to one of the persons concerned.

It was a blazing hot day, with the sun like a ball of fire in the heavens above and the sea steaming below with the heat. The atmosphere was close and hazy, making it so stifling that one could hardly breathe freely—just exactly the sort of weather, in fact, that is met with on the West Coast of Africa at the mouths of some of those pestilential and swampy rivers there that have been the death of so many gallant officers and seamen annually sent to the station for the purpose of putting down the slave-trade and protecting greedy traders in their pursuit of palm-oil and gold dust!

During the afternoon of this day, when the sun was about its hottest, making the pitch melt and ooze out from the seams of the deck planking, Davis, who had charge of the starboard watch, came up from below to relieve Mr Marline.

He was late in coming to his post, and I could see he had been drinking, a habit he had lately taken to indulging in, especially after the calm set in; and, as he mounted the poop-ladder, he certainly did not look particularly amiable, for his dark eyes were glaring and his tumbled hair gave him a most ferocious appearance.

The men were mostly doing nothing, lying along the waist under what shelter they could find from the fiery rays of the scorching sun; for, although there was an awning over the poop, there was nothing forwards to shield them from the heat unless they crouched under the lee of the bulwarks and water-casks.

Davis didn't like to see them taking it easy in this fashion, so, catching hold of a marlinespike which someone had left on top of the cabin skylight, he began rapping the rail at the break of the poop with it.

"Come, rouse up there, you lubbers!" he cried. "I'm not going to allow any caulking in my watch, no matter what the first mate chooses to let you do. Tumble up!"

The men stretched themselves and rose up grumbling, whereupon Davis pitched upon Jackson, who had been asleep under the long-boat and was the last to show a leg, not hearing the second mate's call until a messmate awoke him.

"Hi, you, Jackson!" he roared out. "I'll give you something to cure your laziness! I'll haze you, I will, you hound! Get a bucket of grease from the cook's caboose and slush the mainmast down."

"I'm no hound, sir!" retorted Jackson angrily, drawing himself up to his full height and flaring up angrily at Davis' uncalled-for abuse. "The mast doesn't need slushing; it was only done over the day before yesterday."

"What, you dare to answer me, you mutinous dog!" roared out Davis, raised to a pitch of fury by the seaman not recognising, as he thought, his authority as second mate and officer of the watch. "I tell you what, you shall slush that mast down from the main-truck to the bitts; and look sharp about it, too, or I'll make you!"

"Make me!" repeated Jackson scornfully. "I'd like to see you lay a finger on me!"

Davis fairly foamed at the mouth with passion at this, the more particularly as the other men, grouped below in the waist, were sniggering and passing sly jokes from one to another about the affair.

He started to go down the poop-ladder, brandishing the marlinespike savagely, with the evident intention of attacking Jackson and trying to compel him to obey his orders, utterly unnecessary and vindictive as they were; but, what from having been drinking heavily of late and the fresh air and exposure to the sun having increased the intoxicating effect of the rum which he doubtless had just swallowed before coming on deck to take charge of the watch, he reeled off the ladder as soon as he got to the bottom—falling down all of a heap right in front of the cabin door at the very moment that Captain Miles, who had been roused up by the altercation, was coming out to see what all the noise was about.

“Mr Davis!” cried the captain sternly. “What is the matter?”

The second mate scrambled to his feet, but he could not hold himself steady and he only muttered some utterly incomprehensible words, his power of speech vanishing with his equilibrium.

“I dunno, canshay,” he murmured helplessly.

“Faugh!” exclaimed Captain Miles in accents of the deepest disgust. “The man is dead drunk. Take him away at once to the fo’c’s’le some of you. He doesn’t come into my cabin again if I know it!”

Chapter Eleven

Bad Weather

Later on in the afternoon, some couple of hours or so after he had been carried into the forecastle, Davis, sobered down by his rest, came aft again. He did not, however, enter the cabin or go up on the poop, but remained hanging about the waist, as if uncertain what to do, evidently "smelling a rat," as the saying goes.

Captain Miles was prepared for this, Moggridge, the boatswain, who had made many voyages with him, and in whom he placed implicit trust, having related all that had occurred; so, although he saw Davis approach, he waited a while till the watch was relieved, when, advancing to the break of the poop, he hailed the whilom second mate below.

"Davis!" he cried, "I have got something to say to you."

The other had lost all his defiant air now and looked very sheepish and crest-fallen—so much so, indeed, that he seemed unable at first to answer the captain.

"Yes, sir," said he at last, looking up and then dropping his eyes again in an instant, unable to stand the captain's straightforward glance.

"I'm sorry to have to say," continued Captain Miles, speaking slowly and distinctly, so that every word he uttered was heard fore and aft the ship, "that you, a responsible officer of this vessel, came on duty three hours ago in a state of intoxication. The fault would have been bad enough in one of the ordinary hands, but is doubly so in a man having charge of the lives of those on board and the safety of the ship and cargo. Besides, it is not merely on a single occasion that you have so grossly behaved, as I have noticed of late that you have been several times under the influence of liquor."

"But, Captain Miles, sir," interrupted Davis at this point. However, the captain soon silenced him.

"Hear me out, sir," he cried, his voice getting sterner and more energetic. "Not only have you given way to that cursed habit of drink, but you have also, I have perceived—for I've had my eye upon you when you have little known it—exercised your authority over the crew in a most unmanly and tyrannical fashion. Now, I have always prided myself on the fact of my ship being a comfortable one, and I have never found a hand who has sailed with me once

objecting to ship for a second voyage if I wanted him. This I have achieved by treating the men as I would wish to be treated myself, and not by bullying and hazing them unnecessarily as you have done repeatedly, especially this afternoon when you relieved the port watch."

The captain paused here a moment, and I declare I felt quite ashamed for Davis being thus spoken to before all the men; but he did not seem to mind it much, for he began to resume his old bumptious manner, shrugging his shoulders in a careless way and glaring round at the listeners as if he would have liked to eat them.

"I was drunk then," was all he said, however, in extenuation of the last offence with which the captain had charged him.

"That is no excuse for your conduct," replied Captain Miles; "in my opinion it rather puts it in a worse light. I have nothing further to add, save that I deeply regret ever having promoted you from your station forwards. You are a good sailor, I'll say that for you, but you haven't got the sort of stuff in you that officers are made of! The only thing I can now do, to atone for my error of judgment in mistaking my man, is to send you back again to your old place in the fo'c's'le, where I think you'll find yourself far more at home than you were on the poop. Davis, you are no longer second mate of the Josephine! I disrate you on account of your unfitness for the post, and you will now return to your former rating, as I have restored your name to the list of the crew. You will be in Mr Marline's watch, and I hope you'll do your duty as well as you used before I brought you aft."

He did not say any more; and Davis, without answering a single word, slunk forwards towards the forecastle, anxious, apparently, to hide himself from observation. Although he had tried to brave it out when the captain first began to speak to him, even his hardened nature had to succumb before the contemptuous looks of the men he had so long bullied, the more especially as they now openly displayed their joy at his abasement.

Thus ended the first act of the little drama; and I then noticed that Captain Miles turned to Mr Marline, with whom he exchanged a short whispered conversation. After this he advanced again to the break of the poop, and hailed for a second time the lower deck.

"Jackson!" he called out.

“Aye, aye, sir!” instantly responded the stalwart young Cornishman, coming out from amidst the others who had gathered in a cluster in the waist to watch the progress of the row between the captain and Davis.

Jackson quite overtopped the rest of the crew by a foot; and, as he walked up to the foot of the poop-ladder, with his fine head thrown well back on his broad shoulders, he seemed afraid of looking no man in the face—presenting a marked contrast to his late antagonist, whom he passed on his way aft.

“I have summoned you, Jackson,” began Captain Miles—speaking out distinctly as before, so that all hands could hear—“to inform you that Mr Marline and myself think you are the best man on board to fill the vacant post of second mate just vacated by Davis. I have been told of your recent altercation with that person when he was in authority over you; but, taking into consideration your previous good conduct and prompt obedience to the orders of myself and Mr Marline on all occasions, as well as your general proficiency as an able seaman, we have not allowed this little matter to affect our decision, and I have no doubt you will in future discharge your duty as ably as an officer of the ship as you have hitherto done as a foremast hand. You had better, therefore, move your chest aft and take the second cabin next to the steward’s pantry, hitherto occupied by Davis, whom I have just disrated and sent to fill your place in the fo’c’s’le. Men,” added the captain, raising his voice a little higher, “you will please consider Mister Jackson to be the second mate of theJosephine, and treat him respectfully as such.”

No one seemed more surprised at the ending of the affair than the newly-promoted foremast hand.

Twirling his cap in his two hands and fidgeting first on one leg and then on the other, he looked the very picture of confusion.

When he was told to come forwards, he expected no doubt to have been called to account for his insubordination, whereas here he was actually selected to fill Davis’s billet!

He couldn’t make it out at all, and stared open mouth upwards at the poop unable to utter a word of thanks or anything.

“Come up here, Mr Jackson,” said Captain Miles kindly, seeing how dumbfounded he looked; wherefore, the modest fellow, actually blushing at the unexpected honour bestowed on him, mounted the poop-ladder in a much

more gingerly fashion than he would have done if he had been told to take his trick at the wheel or exercise some sailor's job aft. However, as soon as he got alongside the captain and Mr Marline, they both shook hands with him, in order to give him a proper welcome to his new station, and the steward singing out a few minutes afterwards that dinner was ready, he was invited down into the cabin to "christen" his promotion, as it were, by partaking of that meal, in token of his being admitted to a social equality with his superior officers.

I may add, too, that if his sudden rise in rank was unexpected, Jackson did not take long to settle down to his new duties, proving himself ere long a much better officer in every way than his predecessor. The men, too, were not in the least jealous of his being placed over them, but executed his orders with alacrity; for, he exercised his authority judiciously, remembering his former position—albeit he was ever a rigid and impartial disciplinarian.

"After a storm comes a calm," says the old adage, but the reverse of this axiom holds equally good at sea.

It was so, at all events, in our instance; for, after our ten days of stagnation on the rolling ocean, a change came almost as suddenly as the calm had set in, the weather breaking towards the close of the very day that had witnessed the downfall of Davis and Jackson's elevation to the dignity of the poop.

Every evening during the continuance of the calm, as I think I have mentioned, the sun went down below the horizon like a ball of fire, while a thick misty fog afterwards enveloped the sea; but this day when we came on deck after dinner, about the middle of the second dog watch, the sky, for a wonder, was quite clear, and the glorious orb sank to rest with some of that old splendour of his which I had noticed when we were threading our way amongst the islands. Long after he had disappeared, too, from view the heavens were lit up with a ruby radiance which was reflected below in the water, making it look like a crimson ocean.

"We're going to have a change at last, Marline," said Captain Miles rubbing his hands together. "It is better late than never!"

"Aye," responded the first mate who stood by the binnacle; "the question, though, is, what change?"

"Hang it, man," exclaimed the captain testily, "anything is preferable to this confounded calm."

“Well, I don’t quite agree with you there,” said Mr Marline drily; “there is such a thing as changing for the worse. Have you looked at the glass, eh?”

“’Pon my word, I have not once glanced at it this evening! Dear me, what on earth could I have been thinking of?” ejaculated the captain in a sort of apologetic way, darting down instantly below to consult his unfailing guide, the barometer, which I suppose he had looked at so vainly for many days past that he had given up the instrument as incorrigible.

In another moment, however, he was on deck again, rubbing his hands as triumphantly together as before.

“Pooh, nonsense, Marline!” he cried, “you’re an old croaker, saying that the change would possibly be for the worse! Why, the glass is rising, man, rising steadily; and, I’ve no doubt we’ll have a splendid breeze ere nightfall, and glorious weather.”

“All right, sir, we’ll see,” was the mate’s cautious answer.

Meanwhile, the after-glow faded out of the sky and the stars began to come out in batches, especially to the north-west, where they shone as bright as diamonds, blinking and twinkling with various colours as one looked at them steadfastly, and seeming ever so much larger than usual.

A faint stir in the air also became perceptible, and the idle sails, that had so long flapped against the yards lazily only with the roll of the ship as she lurched to port or starboard with the ocean swell, were crumpled out a bit, as if they half felt inclined to expand their folds; but there was not wind enough for this, so they presently flattened themselves again, determined, apparently, to take it easy.

The time then came to set the first watch, from eight to midnight, of which Jackson, now, as second mate, took charge, when the captain went below, saying he was going to turn in early, so as to be ready when the breeze came, giving strict instructions to be called as soon as any change was apparent. Mr Marline, however, did not go below; so I remained on the poop with him and Jackson, the two walking up and down the deck and talking together while I stood by.

The sky was wonderfully clear now, the firmament being studded with the greater constellations, and myriads of the lesser lights of the night powdering the heavens with their golden dust everywhere.

But this was not for long.

Shortly before nine o'clock a peculiar moaning noise came over the sea. It was like a sort of hushed sob of pain, resembling somewhat the sound of a number of voices wailing in chorus in the far distance.

"What is that?" asked I of Mr Marline in alarm.

"I'm sure I can't tell you, my boy," he replied; "I don't think I ever heard such a queer noise before. If we were off the banks of Newfoundland, I should think it a fog-horn blowing somewhere about. But, we're several hundred miles to the southward of Cape Race and the night is too clear for fogs. It is one of those mysterious voices of the sea that are for ever reminding the sailor that, no matter how wise he may think himself, he does not know everything!"

"I imagine it's the wind coming, sir," observed Jackson deferentially, after listening to what Mr Marline had said. "When I was once on a voyage in the China Seas I noticed just such a sound before we had a thundering typhoon upon us, giving us hardly time to clew up."

"Perhaps you're right," said the first mate; but after giving a glance up and around the sky, and noticing that the stars still shone out from the blue empyrean, he added, "there does not seem much chance of a gale now, though."

"We'll see, sir," laughed Jackson, paraphrasing Mr Marline's observation to the captain. "We'd just as clear a night off Hainan, when our blow came on there at a moment's notice!"

"All right, we'll see," replied Mr Marline, using his stock phrase, and the two continued to walk up and down chatting about other matters, while I went and sat down close to the taffrail, looking out over the sea and wondering what the moaning sound of the ocean meant. I let my imagination wander over the old stories I had heard of the mermaids below, and how they sang their weird songs of lament whenever a storm was coming, anticipating the shipwrecks that would follow and the invasion of their coral caves by the bodies of drowned mortals, over whom they are said to weep tears of pearl; and, in the flickering light of the stars, that seemed to come from underneath the purple deep and not be shining down from above, I almost fancied I could distinguish the sirens looking up at me from below the water with sad faces, as they combed their long weed-like tresses and raised their wailing croon.

Presently, however, I observed the star reflections suddenly disappear from view; and then, the water grew greyer and greyer, until I was hardly able to see it at all under the stern of the vessel, a hazy obscurity enveloping all below and around.

I roused myself with a start, thinking this effect was produced by the gloom of night, and that I had fallen asleep while weaving my quaint fancies anent the mermaidens; but a couple of sharp strokes of the ship's bell sounding through the still air at that moment told me it was only nine o'clock. I then recognised the fact that I must seek some other reason for the sombre tone of the sea, as I knew well enough that the little beacons in the sky that had before lit it up, were not in the habit of drawing on their hatches until it was pretty nearly time for the sun to set about getting up for his day's work, unless something out of the common was going to happen.

Looking up, therefore, I was surprised to see a dense black cloud now covering over the heavens like a pall.

It must have crept up from somewhere almost instantaneously; for, twenty minutes before, the sky was clear and bright, while now it was totally obscured from the horizon to the zenith, the angel of darkness seeming to be treading over the face of the deep.

Just then, away ahead on the starboard bow to the eastwards, a window appeared to be opened for an instant in the dense veil, from which a vivid flash of lightning came forth, making the darkness even more visible as the cloud closed up again.

"Shall I go and hail Captain Miles now, sir?" I heard Jackson ask Mr Marline near me, although I could not clearly make out either of them in the thick gloom—indeed, I could not see to the other side of the deck, or perceive the mizzen-mast even.

"No, I hardly think there's any need yet," I distinguished Mr Marline's voice say in reply. "It's only a flash of lightning—nothing to make a fuss about, for there isn't a breath of wind stirring yet."

"It's coming though," the other rejoined. "I can smell it."

"You've a better nose than I have then," said Mr Marline with a laugh; but, he had hardly got out the words, when there came a terrific crash of thunder right

overhead, sounding so fearfully near and grand and awful, that it seemed as if the roof of heaven had broken in!

I jumped up at once from my seat and went towards the binnacle, where Jackson and Mr Marline were standing; for, although I wasn't actually afraid of the thunder, still one likes to be by the side of some one else when it peals out so dreadfully, the sense of companionship lessening the fear of danger, I suppose.

"Hullo, Master Tom, not turned in yet?" cried Mr Marline, seeing me by the light from the compass and appearing to be very much surprised at my not having gone below to bed.

"No, sir," I said. "I stopped up to wait for the wind."

"Ah, I'm afraid you'll have to wait longer," he replied. "This'll be nothing but a tropical thunder-storm, and probably we won't have the ghost of a breeze after it has gone over."

"I think differently, sir, begging your pardon," said Jackson, interposing at this point; "and, if you don't mind, Mr Marline, I'd like to have the lighter sails taken off her, in case it comes on to blow."

"All right, please yourself, my dear sir; you're in charge of the deck," answered the first mate drily. "Though, mind you, I think you're giving yourself trouble for nothing. I wouldn't, however, call the captain till we really know whether we're going to have a squall or not."

"Very well, sir," said Jackson, "I won't call him; but I'll have the upper canvas in, for it's just as well to be on the safe side, especially as I do think we're in for something."

"With all my heart," replied Mr Marline cheerfully, seeing that Jackson was timid about exercising his new authority against his opinion, although he appeared to feel strongly in the matter. "Have in the rags by all means. I daresay it will save some trouble bye-and-by."

"Very well, I will," said the other; and, calling the starboard watch, who were idling about and having a quiet caulk in the waist, he soon made them set about reducing the Josephine's canvas—there being no necessity yet for summoning "all hands," as there was not a breath of air stirring, while the sea had hushed its monotonous roll, calming down to the quiet of a mill-pond.

Previously to this, the ship had been under all plain sail, so as to be ready for the wind when it chose to visit us again; but, in a very short time, under Jackson's supervision and sharp, rapid orders, the courses were clewed up, the flying-jib hauled down, the topgallant-sails furled, and the spanker brailed up. In this half-dressed rig the vessel was now prepared to meet any sudden squall;

while, should a favourable breeze come, sail could readily be added on—a much easier job to accomplish than that of taking in canvas in a gale!

In the interim, although no further thunder was heard, and we only saw the one vivid flash of forked lightning that had accompanied the fearful peal which made me vacate my seat by the taffrail, the heavens grew blacker and blacker, the darkness settling down on the ship so that one could hardly see one's hand even if held close to the face; but, after a bit, a meteor-like globe of electric light danced about the spars and rigging, making the faces of all those aft look ghastly with its pale blue glare. They seemed just as if they were dead.

A second or two later, some heavy warning drops of rain, as big as saucers, fell on the deck, with a dull splashing noise; and while we were all waiting with some anxiety for what was to be the outcome of all this atmospheric disturbance, Captain Miles ascended the poop-ladder, his face being distinctly illumined by the meteor, which was apparently at that moment hovering about the slings of the main-yard.

The captain had been roused out by the sound of the men's feet busily trampling about the decks and the hauling of the ropes, as the main topgallant halliards and sheets were cast-off and the clew-lines and bunt-lines manned during the operation of taking in sail, so he came up expecting to find that the long-wished-for breeze had overhauled us; but he only saw, instead, the vessel as motionless on the water as when he went below, albeit now almost denuded of her canvas.

After glancing round the ship, whose every outline was brought out in relief by the meteoric light, he warmly praised Jackson for his precaution in reducing sail.

"You've done quite right," he said, "only you haven't quite gone far enough, my boy. I think we'd better have the courses furled and the topsails reefed. We're in hurricane latitudes and this is the very month for them. I don't like the sky at all."

"Watch, ho!" thereupon shouted Jackson. "Up you go and furl the mainsail."

This was soon accomplished, after which there was a scurry up the ratlines forward and the foresail followed suit, and thus, the topsail halliards were let go and the yards dropped on the caps for the men to lay out and double reef the upper sails, when they were again hoisted up only about a third of their former size, and looking like slabs of board against the masts, everything being hauled taut.

"We'll have it soon now," said Captain Miles—"hark!"

As he spoke, there was a rumbling noise in the distance, approaching nearer and nearer every second, and then, there came another deafening roar of

thunder right over our heads, followed by a deadly zigzag sheet of lightning, not a flash, that lit up the whole sky.
“Look sharp and batten down the hatches, the rain is close on the heels of that, I know,” cried the captain; but the men had hardly time to execute his order ere the heavens seemed to open and a deluge of water fell on to the ship, as if some reservoir above had suddenly burst. It literally swept down like a cataract, and almost beat me down to the deck with its force.
It hardly lasted a minute, but in that brief spell it filled the scuppers just as if we had shipped a heavy sea, of course wetting us all to the skin.
Next there was heard the same moaning noise along the surface of the ocean that we had heard at first, and then, as the rain stopped, a terrific gust of wind from the south-east caught us just abaft the beam, the ship heeled over until her yard-arms dipped, and we thought she was going to “turn turtle,” or capsize.
“Hard up with the helm!” screamed out Captain Miles, Mr Marline jumping to the spokes of the wheel at the same time to help the man steering, when, fortunately, the Josephine payed off handsomely, righting again at the same moment, to our great relief.

“Brace up the yards!” then shouted the captain; and, in another instant, the vessel was dashing along madly towards the north-west, scudding before the rapidly risen gale, even with the little canvas she carried, at a greater rate of speed than she had ever attained with every sail set. She was going twelve knots, good, and increasing her velocity apparently each moment, the sea not yet having had time to get up and nothing interfering with her progress through the water, although the wind shrieked and howled destruction after her as it urged her along.

Chapter Twelve

The Tail-End of a Hurricane

Immediately the sudden blast of wind struck the ship, the meteor-like ball of fire, which had previously hovered about our rigging lighting up the dense gloom of the atmosphere, suddenly disappeared, leaving us for a moment in darkness; but this was only for a brief spell, as the gale—at the same time that it forced us to cut and run before its tremendous impulse, scudding away to the north-west at right angles to what should have been our proper course, which was to the northwards and eastwards—dispelled in a very short time the overhanging mass of vapour that shrouded the sky. The clouds cleared away, as if by magic, disclosing the blue vault of heaven open above us for the stars to shine down at their will; while the moon presently coming out, the ocean was displayed in all its vastness to the extreme limits of the horizon.

But, what a different scene was now presented to our gaze to that which we had looked upon but an hour agone!

Then, the sea, with the exception of a faint throbbing swell as if proceeding from the deep breathing of Neptune below the surface, seeming to rise and fall with rhythmical regularity, was calm and still, unbroken by even the tiniest ripple; now, as far as the eye could reach, it was all life and motion, the billows leaping up and tossing their heads, crowned with wreaths of curling spray and growing larger and larger each moment in volume as they dashed onward madly before the wind.

The ocean coursers seemed, indeed, like a pack of hounds pursuing the ship, gnashing their teeth in surf as they missed their prey, and then gathering themselves up again together to renew the chase, rolling against each other, boiling in eddies, clashing, dashing, swelling, breaking in sheets of foam, and presenting one seething mass of moving waters.

Nothing is so wonderful as this sudden getting up of the sea after a spell of calm weather.

It is like the sudden uprising of a giant in his wrath - one moment it is sleeping quietly, the next far and wide it is in a state of mad commotion, threatening destruction to those who brave the perils of the deep.

The Josephine sped bravely before the gale, unmindful of the stormy billows blustering after her, her speed enabling her easily as yet to outstrip the rollers,

although she was only scudding under close-reefed topsails. She was not too heavily laden; and, being a good sea-boat, she rose easily on the lift of the waves, almost skimming the surface like one of Mother Carey's chickens, and jumping, as it were, from billow to billow as the wind urged her onward.

"If we keep on long like this," observed Mr Marline grimly to the captain, "we'll soon lose all our easting, and have to begin our voyage over again!"

"Never mind that," cheerfully answered Captain Miles. "The gale will only drive us into the Gulf Stream at the worst; and then, we'll have the assistance of the easterly current there in making our way home, when we have the chance of bearing up on our course again. We won't lose much in the end, you'll see."

"All right, we'll see," said Mr Marline. "But, don't you think, sir, we may be running into the worst part of the gale?"

"No, Marline, no; I don't believe that," replied the other. "You'll see that it will blow itself out presently and calm down to a steady breeze, when we'll be able to haul our wind, making that fair for us."

"Don't you notice, though, captain," urged the mate, "that those clouds also sheer off in a contrary direction, showing that the upper currents of air are not affected by this wind at all—a proof that it is a sort of cyclone or hurricane?"

"And if so," retorted Captain Miles, "it began in the south-east, where it is still blowing from; so, when it veers, it will be to the south and west, making a fair wind for us, as I said before."

"Very good; you know best, sir," said Mr Marline in a way that showed he was still unconvinced.

But the captain had not done with his reasons yet.

"Just consider, Marline," he continued, "we couldn't very well wear the ship now with this thundering wind and following sea, or try and heave her to—the only thing left for us to do if we don't scud. Indeed, I think we must get some more sail on her as it is; for those rollers are getting too heavy and gaining on us, and, if we don't keep ahead of them, why, they'll poop us, that's all!"

"Do you think the masts will stand it, sir?" queried the first mate, glancing aloft, where the spars were bent like whips and the rigging as taut as fiddle-strings.

“Stand it? Of course they will,” replied the captain. “I’ll back them to stand anything, if the stays only hold.”

“And I’ll guarantee that they will not carry away,” retorted Mr Marline, who had specially seen to the setting up of the rigging and was confident of the job being well done, being rather proud of his handiwork.

“Well, then, we’ll have the mainsail on her,” said the captain, to put an end to the discussion. “You’d better go and rouse up the other watch, Mr Jackson; it will be a rough bit of work, I fancy.”

The second mate then went forwards, shouting, “All hands, ahoy!” and, shortly afterwards, the men were clustering in the shrouds, making their way as well as they could against the force of the wind, up the ratlines to the main-yard, the whole watch being employed on the job so as to get it done quickly.

As they lay out along the foot-rope they were almost blown away; but, holding on “by the skin of their teeth,” they managed to cast-off the gaskets, when, the clew-lines and bunt-lines being let fly, the huge sail at once bellied out in puckered folds, banging about as if it would soon thump the mast out of the ship.

“Now, tumble down smart, men!” cried the captain. “Look alive and bring the sheets to the capstan.”

Then, in a few more minutes, foot by foot, the clew-garnet blocks rattling the while like a lot of tin kettles, the ends of the mainsail were hove in nearer the deck, when it became fairly distended before the powerful breeze, which, catching it now full, seemed to make the Josephine leap out of the water as if she were going to fly—although, the next instant, she dived down with a heavy plunge forwards that sent a great green sea right over her bows on to the forecastle, whence it poured down like a cataract into the waist, flooding the main-deck and floating aft everything movable into the cabin.

We had already two men at the wheel, a vessel running before the wind being always more unmanageable than when sailing close-hauled or on a bowline; but this additional sail-power made the ship yaw and break off so continuously that two more hands had to come and help the others in the steering. It was ticklish work; for, if she were once allowed to broach to, one of the pursuing waves would soon leap over the taffrail, and then it would be a case for us!

The rest of the crew, too, were set to work rigging up relieving tackle, in case the tiller ropes should part; for, one moment the stern would be lifted high out of the water and the next sunk in the trough of the sea, causing a great strain on the rudder, which banged from port to starboard every instant, causing constant work in putting the helm up and down so as to preserve a straight course.

Preventer stays were also set up to take away some of the leverage from the masts, everything being made as snug as possible under the circumstances; and so, we drove on before the gale, going wheresoever it liked, until, as the captain said, it had time to blow itself out—although there did not seem any early prospect of this at present!

During all the bustle that was going on, I had managed to remain on deck unperceived; but now that matters had calmed down and nothing more urgent called for attention, Captain Miles, looking round the poop, caught sight of me.

"Hullo, Tom!" he cried, "what are you doing here? You ought to have been in your bunk hours ago."

"I only stopped up to see the storm," I said. "Mr Marline saw me on deck some time since and said I might remain."

"Did he? Well, then, it's all over now, and there'll be nothing fresh till morning; so you can go below like a brace of shakes."

With these words, he hustled me off the poop, good-naturedly, not losing sight of me until he had seen me go down the ladder and into the cabin—much against my inclination, I must confess, as I wanted to see all that was going on.

Of course, as I had to go down, there was no use in my not turning in when I got there; but I stayed awake for a long time, listening to the thumping of the sea against the sides of the ship and the creaking of the timbers; while my cot swayed to and fro, hoisting me up to the deck planking one second, and then almost capsizing me on to the floor, until I at last sank to rest, wearied out with the motion and longing for the morning to come.

Harry, the steward, awakened me quite late.

"Here, you sah, Mass' Tom, rouse up!" he sang out close to my ears, making me jump out of my bunk in a brace of shakes. "It am gone eight bells an' break-fuss ready long time."

Captain Miles had already had his early meal, I found, when I had dressed and got out into the cabin saloon; so, after making a hurried repast, for I was anxious to see how the ship was getting on, I followed him on deck.

The sea looked awful!

Far and wide, it was covered with broken waves and sheets of foam, the huge billows fighting and struggling together in mad turmoil; while the wind shrieked as it tore through the vessel's cordage and almost blew me back as I essayed to mount up the poop-ladder.

The Josephine was still plunging on before the gale, as I had last seen her the night before, only that the mainsail had been torn away, although the tattered fragments were left clinging round the yard-arms, one or two longer pieces streaming out like pennants from the leech at each end of the spar, and some other strips had clung to the fore-rigging as they were blown away.

The foretop-sail had been furled, and the ship was driving on with only her close-reefed main-topsail set; but preparations were being made as I got on deck for hoisting the mizzen staysail, so that we might more easily bring her head round to the wind in case of its showing any sign of shifting.

This, however, was but a last resource, which could only be adopted in the extreme peril of being taken aback. There is no more ticklish operation than that of wearing a ship in a heavy sea where there is a strong following wind; and Captain Miles, for one, I could see, intended to let the vessel drive on as long as the gale lasted, unless it should try to head us, when of course he would have no alternative left but that of laying-to.

He did not seem a bit uneasy as yet, though; for he greeted me quite cheerily when I at last managed to clamber up on the poop and make my way aft to where he was standing, holding on to everything I could clutch to maintain my footing. The ship was rolling from side to side like a porpoise, and the wind nearly blew the hair off my head, my cap having gone away to leeward the first step I took up the ladderway on emerging from the cabin after breakfast.

"Well, Master Tom!" the captain shouted in my ear, the noise being so great that it almost required a speaking trumpet to make anyone hear at a great distance—"how do you like this weather, eh?"

"A jolly sight better than the calm," I said joyously. The wind seemed to get in my head and make me excited in a similar way as it is supposed to affect cats;

for I felt inclined to sing with glee as I braced myself up against the blast and clung to the binnacle rail, surveying the wild scene around in a perfect frenzy of delight. Sea and sky were mingled together; and the ship presented a grand spectacle as she nobly struggled against and overcame the combined strength of the elements trying to vanquish her efforts at escape!

“A good breeze is certainly better than a calm, Tom,” observed Mr Marline in response to my jubilant remark; “but, it all depends what sort of a wind it is, for, if it blows your vessel the wrong way, the question arises whether the former state of things be not preferable.”

“Belay that sea-lawyering, Marline,” interposed Captain Miles. “I never saw such a fellow for taking a gloomy view of everything! Here we were rolling about in a calm for days upon days as if they would never end, while now we are bowling away before a brisk south-easter; and yet you are not happy!”

“But in what direction are we going, eh, captain?” slyly inquired Mr Marline.

“A point or two off our course, I admit,” replied the other; “but still we are going, and that is the great thing. We are not lying still like a log on the ocean.”

“How far have we run, sir, do you think, since last night?” I asked Captain Miles when Mr Marline made no further attempt at conversation.

“I shall take a sight of the sun presently, my boy,” he answered, with one of his odd winks, giving a quizzical glance at Mr Marline, as if telling me he thought he had shut him up for the time; “then I shall be better able to tell you. However, as we’ve been running twelve knots an hour good since four bells in the first watch, we ought to have made over a hundred miles or so from our last stopping place.”

“And where shall we get to if we continue running on the same as now?” I next inquired, thinking of what Mr Marline had said.

“To the Banks of Newfoundland, I suppose, if the same wind holds; but, I’m of opinion that we’ll have a change as soon as we fetch the Gulf Stream, when we shall be able to shape a straight course for the Channel.”

“And what is the Gulf Stream, captain?” I then asked.

“Bless the boy!” he exclaimed, “I never saw such a chap for questions; why, you’re almost as bad as Mr Marline! Well, if you must know, the Gulf Stream,

or ‘Florida Current’ as it is frequently called, is something very like a river of warm water, some eighty to three hundred miles wide, flowing through the surrounding ocean from the Gulf of Mexico to Europe in a circular nor’-east by east direction. Starting from between the Dry Tortugas and Cuba, it skirts the eastern shores of the United States, then passing across the Atlantic to the south of the Banks of Newfoundland, where it branches off into two currents in mid ocean, near the Azores. One of these streams steers north, along the shores of Norway, while the other leg sweeps onward to the English Channel, circling round the Bay of Biscay and then pursuing a southerly course along the Spanish coast until it meets the great equatorial current coming up from the south Atlantic. Uniting now with this, the double current flows back westwards to the place of its birth, only to renew its onward course again from the Caribbean Sea.”

“But what causes it?” I said.

“Well, that is a disputed point,” replied the captain. “One authority says that the Gulf Stream ‘is caused by the motion of the sun in the ecliptic,’ and I think there is a good deal of reason in this. Another philosopher puts it down to the influence of the anti-trade and passage winds blowing from the west to the east along the zone in which the stream travels; and I think much might be said about that argument, especially as the westerly current south of the tropic of Cancer is undoubtedly caused by the trade-wind. A third scientific gentleman ascribes the stream to the fact, that the earth being a globe, the water on the equator is higher than that of the tropics, and the lower stratum of fluid circles round constantly in its endeavour to reach into the bigger volume beyond its reach; but I can’t say much for this theory myself, Tom.”

“But how do you know the Gulf Stream from the rest of the ocean?” I here asked.

“As easily as you can distinguish a marlinespike from a capstan-bar,” answered Captain Miles. “It is not only bluer than the surrounding water, through which it flows, as I’ve told you, like a river, but it is also several degrees warmer; for, when a ship is close to the stream and sailing in the same direction in which it is running, a bucket of water dipped from the sea on one side of the vessel will show an appreciable difference of temperature to that procured from the other. Besides, my boy, there’s the Gulf-weed to tell you when you are within the limits of the current; however, you’ll see lots of the weed by and by, no doubt, before we finish our voyage.”

“You said, captain,” I observed, “that the great currents of the ocean are produced by the trade-winds?”

“Undoubtedly,” he replied. “Blowing with regular force on the surface of the sea, they cause it to move in the same direction in which they are travelling; and, this motion once acquired, the ocean stream keeps up its course far beyond where its original propelling power directly acted upon it. The ‘Great Equatorial Current’ is produced by the south-east trade, the Gulf Stream, as I’ve just explained to you, by the western or passage winds; and the branch of the latter current that skirts the British Isles and Southern Europe, until it falls in again with the northern portion of the Equatorial Current, by the north-east trade-winds. Thus, the circle is completed, the water being ever in motion round the centre of the tropic of Cancer, just in the same way as the winds of this region are.”

“But what causes the trade-winds?” I next asked.

“You young rascal!” said Captain Miles, shaking his fist at me in a jocular manner, “I’ll have you keel-hauled if you utter another question! I will answer you this one, however—but it is the last time, though, mind that! The sun, my lad, is the source of the winds of the globe, as it is the prime agent of heat and life. The atmospheric air being heated by the solar orb at the equator, where its force is necessarily the greatest, ascends. This creates a vacuum, which the surrounding air hastens to fill, causing thus a constant indraught from both the north and south towards the equator; and the fact of the opposing winds meeting at this point produces those very calms which vex us poor mariners. There, Master Tom, that’s all I can tell you; for, I must see about my sextant now to consult the great luminary we have been talking of, so as to see where our scudding has taken us to.”

Captain Miles’s mission after his sextant, however, was a vain quest to-day, for a mass of fleeting clouds were continually passing to and fro across the zenith, obscuring the heavens so much that not a single peep of the sun could be had either at noon or later on.

The wind now, too, began to come in violent gusts, striking the ship every now and then with a force that seemed to bury her in the water; while the sea got rougher and rougher, looking as angry as it was possible to conceive.

Presently, with a loud report, the main-topsail split in half, and then the pieces blew away bit by bit ahead of the ship like paper kites, the useful foretop-sail

which had been again set in the afternoon being now the only sail left on her; but, still, on she plunged through the waste of waters as madly as ever, the sky getting more and more overcast as the day wore on, and a heavy bank of blue-black clouds gathered together right in front, to the north-west, whither we were trending.

“Don’t you think, captain,” said Mr Marline, who had returned to the poop after having a short rest below—he having remained on deck while the captain had turned in during the early part of the morning watch—“I say, don’t you think we’re running into the very jaws of the gale again?”

“It certainly looks like it,” replied Captain Miles shaking his head. “We must try and lay her to, if we can, though I dread the job! See to the hands being ready to set that mizzen staysail; it will help her head round when we ease off the yards.”

This sail had been bent all ready the night before, and now with great difficulty was hoisted; but then came a greater difficulty, that of getting the ship about—for, what with the gusty wind and the heavy sea it was a very perilous proceeding, the vessel running the risk of being pooped as well as broaching-to.

“We’ll have to wear her!” said the captain, after thinking over the matter a bit. “Send a hand or two forwards to see to the fore-staysail, so as to be ready for hoisting it when I give the word!”

Jackson, to whom this latter order was addressed, immediately went forwards on the forecastle, accompanied by a couple of other men; although the three found it a serious matter to escape the thick green seas the vessel took in over her bows as she dived into the trough of the waves, washing the decks fore and aft. After a struggle, however, they managed to climb out to their station, getting the fore-staysail ready to haul up as the captain had commanded, although he only meant to use it in case the topsail carried away as we wore ship, which was very possible.

Then, watching our opportunity when the Josephine was rising on the crest of a gigantic wave that had rolled up astern to poop her, but had fortunately instead passed underneath her keel, the helm was put up and the fore-yards easied round.

She answered the rudder; but one sea came in over her quarter just when she was fully exposed to the side force of the wind. Luckily, however, everything

held; and, as the foretop-sail got gradually taken aback the mizzen staysail drew, casting her stern round, so that her head at last faced the wind and sea. The vessel plunged fearfully, but held her own grandly, not falling off again as we all expected.

“By Jingo, she’s a beauty!” exclaimed the captain in high delight at the success of the manoeuvre. “I never saw a ship behave better in my life! I was frightened of her at one time, I confess.”

“So was I,” said Mr Marline, much relieved by our now being hove-to and better prepared to meet any change of wind. “She’s all right now, though!”

He had spoken too quickly, however, “counting his chickens before they were hatched,” according to the old proverb; for, no sooner had he got out the words than for one single instant the gale lulled, coming to a dead stand-still, and the very next moment it began to blow from the exactly opposite direction—the storm proceeding now from the north-west quadrant instead of the south-east, and the headquarters of our fresh assailant being the thick bank of black clouds we had noticed in front of our previous position before wearing ship low down on the horizon.

We had evidently only got round in the very nick of time.

Otherwise, there is little doubt that the Josephine, meeting the wind from this new quarter full butt, would have been taken aback. Now, from her change of position it struck her aft, making her scud again before it as she had previously done—strangely enough causing her to retrace the very same course she had just passed over, in almost a straight line!

“Square away the yards!” shouted out Captain Miles, while the men at the wheel shifted the helm to prevent the vessel from broaching-to; and, in another moment we were pitching and tossing through the choppy head-sea which we had now to meet, the ship rolling from side to side, and tumbling about like a whale in its death flurry, as she raced on ahead again before the stiff north-western blast.

“Well!” exclaimed Captain Miles presently, “of all the sudden changes of wind I ever encountered on the ocean, this beats everything! It has literally jumped round the compass.”

“I fancy it is the tail-end of the hurricane,” said Mr Marline. “It is a very lucky thing we wore ship in time.”

“Lucky, you call it?” rejoined Captain Miles gravely, eyeing the foremast anxiously the while, fearful of anything being carried away, when we would be left to the mercy of the cruel waves. “Man alive, it is only through the mercy of Providence that we are not now sunk fathoms deep below the sea!”

Chapter Thirteen

On our Beam-Ends

Up to now, although we had experienced bad weather for two days and the special gale before which we were driving had lasted some eighteen hours at a stretch, no serious accident had happened on board, the Josephine being as sound and staunch in every way as when she left port, with the exception of losing her mainsail and having her rigging, perhaps, rather tautly stretched.

The galley fire had been put out once or twice by the heavy seas which we took in over the bows, but Cuffee, with the cordial co-operation of his brother darkey, Jake, was easily able to light this again; and the men, having their rations regularly and little or no work to do—save taking their trick at the wheel, when four would have to go on duty together at once—had nothing to grumble at. Everything, indeed, proceeded comfortably enough while the ship was scudding first one way and then the other—"doing diagonals," as it were, across her latitudes!

Down below in the cabin all had been what sailor's term "a hurrah's nest" ever since the gale began, the loose water knocking about the decks having washed all sorts of odds and ends together and kept us always wet; while the rolling of the vessel from side to side, like a pendulum, as she ran before the wind had smashed most of the crockery-ware and glasses in the steward's pantry, besides causing the benches round the saloon table and the chairs to fetch away from their lashings.

For days past, our meals had resembled amateur picnics more than anything else—whenever we were able to get them, that is, the old regularity of breakfast and lunch and dinner being completely abolished; for the captain and Mr Marline and myself had to take odd snacks and stray bites at various hours whenever opportunity and appetite allowed their indulgence.

Harry, the steward, was at his wit's end to get things in proper keeping.

No sooner had he cleared up one batch of breakages and made matters ship-shape than over would sway the Josephine hard to port; when, bang would go something else, undoing in one instant the work of hours of labour in putting the place below in order.

"Lor' a mussy, me nebber get tings right nohow!" he would exclaim, setting to work again; and then, a sea would come floating in over the combings of the

cabin bulkhead, tumbling him over and washing him aft amidst the debris, almost drowning the man before he could fish himself up again and set to his task anew. His toil, like that of Sisyphus, was ever being renewed when on the verge of completion.

To me, however, all these little disagreeables seemed immensely jolly; so, whenever the captain or Mr Marline or Harry happened to get capsized in this way down in the cabin during the day, it sent me at once into fits of merriment, the fact of my being washed off my feet as well only adding to the enjoyment of the joke, for I could grin quite as much with my own head in the scuppers and my mouth full of water as I would when the others were similarly situated.

“Bless the boy!” Captain Miles said. “He’s a regular sailor. He laughs at everything.”

And so I did; especially one afternoon, when a sea coming in suddenly so jammed Mr Marline inside an arm-chair, whose seat had given way, that the watch had to be called below to extricate him. The mate took the matter with great good-humour, I may add, only saying to me, “Ah, never mind, Master Tom, we’ll see who’ll laugh best bye and bye.”

Jake used to sneak down on the sly to put my bunk in order so that I might be more comfortable, having, like most pure negroes, a thorough contempt for the mulatto steward. He believed him quite incapable of looking after me properly.

“Him only poor trash, Mass’ Tom,” he would say to me; “he can’t do nuffin’, I’se like to come an’ look after um cabin for young massa, when I’se in watch below.”

Then, the good-natured fellow would scrub away energetically at the floor, deluged with water, and fix up things straight for me; making the place far more neat and tidy in five minutes than Harry the mulatto could have done if he had been all day over the job. He eclipsed the steward in his own line, while proving himself as good as any seaman in the ship.

Jake was a handy chap, indeed, all round, for he was of very considerable assistance to Cuffee in the galley when the stormy weather interfered with the cooking; so, Captain Miles did not object to his coming to look after me in this way. He “winked at it,” as he said.

During the evening of the day on which the wind shifted round to the north-west, the sky somewhat cleared and the night was fine and starlight; but the

gale seemed to blow with all the greater vehemence as the clouds dispersed. It increased to the strength of a hurricane towards one o'clock in the morning, when, the fore-topsail and mizzen staysail blowing away, the ship had to content herself with running under bare poles, careering through the water faster than ever. She had certainly never realised such speed since she had been launched.

I was awake when Captain Miles came down at this time to consult the barometer, and I could hear what he said to Jackson, who had accompanied him below for something or other, the two talking together just outside my bunk.

"I'm sure I can't make it out at all," the captain said in rather a hopeless way. "Here's the glass keeping as high as possible, and yet the gale shows no token of lessening. What can it mean?"

"These cyclones are queer things, sir," responded Jackson. "I was in two while in a China trader, and sha'n't forget them in a hurry."

"I could understand it," continued Captain Miles as if reasoning with himself, "keeping on like this if we were in the Gulf of Mexico now, for it looks like what they call a norther there; but I've never heard of one of those winds being met in the Atlantic."

"It's something out of the common, sir," observed Jackson. "It's a cyclone, or hurricane, if I ever was in one, and I don't see as how we can do better than we are doing, sir."

"Well, we simply can't," said the captain. "We are running before it as hard as we can with only our bare sticks showing, for the vessel won't stand a rag of sail; so, it is utterly impossible to lay to and brave it out."

"Quite so, sir," responded the other. "All we can do is to carry on and trust to running out of it into calm weather. We ought to have made a long stretch to the southwards by now."

"So we have, Jackson," said Captain Miles. "We're now, I fancy, pretty well back where we lay so long in the calm, although perhaps a trifle more to the eastwards; but, if we run on much further, I'm sure I don't know where we'll bring up!"

There the conversation ended and I went off to sleep soon afterwards, although the creaking of the timbers and roar of the sea sounded terrific, making noise enough to drown the sound of everything else. I couldn't hear a footstep on the deck above me—all was hushed but the terrible turmoil of the elements.

I got up about six o'clock. I knew the hour by striking a match and looking at a little watch my father had given me just before I left home; for, it was all dark in the cabin, the ports and scuttles being closed and the dead-lights in the stern being up, while the doors in the bulkheads were drawn to, so as to keep out the sea from rushing in when a wave came over the forecastle.

Opening one of the sliding panels with some difficulty and pushing it back far enough for my body to get through, I emerged on the main-deck, thence managed to scramble on the poop, where the captain and Mr Marline were standing as well as Jackson, all holding on to the rigging. None of the officers had turned in all night, but I noticed that none of the hands were visible except the men at the helm, the captain allowing the rest to keep snug in the forecastle until they were wanted, for heavy seas were washing over the rails every now and then or coming in from the bows and sweeping the ship fore and aft, so there was no use in exposing the men unnecessarily when there was nothing really for them to do, as was the case now—no sail being set and only the wheel having to be attended to.

Ahead, astern, to the right hand and to the left, the sea was nothing but a mass of foam, while the air was thick with flying scud that was chopped off the heads of the great rolling waves every instant and whirled to leeward by the wind. This seemed sometimes actually to beat down the water and make it level with its tremendous strength, the billows springing up, after each gust, like india-rubber balls that had been pressed flat and then suddenly released, for they spirted up into the air, flinging their crests aloft one brief moment only to be decapitated the next by the sweeping scythe-like blast.

Far and wide, the ocean presented a magnificent picture of awful grandeur and howling desolation.

Above, the sky was of a dull leadenish hue, and there was nothing anywhere to be seen beyond sky and water save the poor Josephine tearing along through the chaotic maelstrom, labouring and groaning heavily as she rolled from side to side, dipping her yard-arms from time to time with each lurch, with the wind shrieking and whistling the most wonderful harp music through the rigging—nothing to be seen but the restless, roaring, heaving sea stretching away, like a

boiling cauldron of soap-suds, to where the gloomy heavens met the angry horizon.

At mid-day, more from curiosity than anything else, as we had lost all track of our dead reckoning, Captain Miles had the log hove, when it was found that the vessel under her bare poles was going close on fourteen knots an hour. The force of the wind on her hull and spars was quite sufficient alone to achieve this speed, for the yards were braced square and the helm kept as steady amidships as the send of the waves would allow and the four men in charge of the spokes could manage.

And so, we continued all that day and night, the gale still keeping up to the same pitch when the fourth morning broke, with never a sign of cessation, while the sea was, if possible, rougher than before, causing us to ship the water over our bows continually.

Captain Miles was fairly cornered.

“I tell you what, Marline,” he said towards the afternoon, “I don’t think there is now any possible chance of the wind backing again; so, as she’s taking in such a lot over the bows, we must try and get some sail on her, to rise out of the trough of the sea.”

“I don’t believe the mast will stand a rag, should we be able to hoist without its being blown to pieces,” replied the first mate despondingly.

He seemed to have lost all heart, unlike the captain and Jackson, who were both still brave and cheerful, keeping up the spirits of the men. These latter, I could see, were beginning to lose their courage too, going about their duties with a sort of dogged stubbornness unlike their old ready way.

“Well, we’ll try it at any rate. But, first, we must see to securing the masts. Get up a spare hawser and we’ll rig a fresh stay round the head of the foremast, and then we’ll set the foresail. That will lift her bows out of the water, if it only holds.”

So saying, Captain Miles yelled out for the watch below, and the men presently came out from the forecastle, Davis, the whilom second mate, along with them, the lot shambling unwillingly along the deck to the galley, where they clustered in a body.

“Now, men,” said the captain, “we must try and get some sail on the ship, or else we’ll have all our timbers crushed in forwards by these seas; who’ll volunteer to go aloft and help stay the foremast? It’s risky work, and I don’t like to order anyone to go.”

Not a soul spoke in answer for a minute or so, and then Davis stepped out a pace in front of the others.

For a moment I was lost in admiration of what I conceived to be his pluck; but, the next instant, I perceived I had been too hasty in jumping at this conclusion.

“What do you take us for, Cap’en Miles?” Davis sang out sullenly. “Do you think that men are dogs to waste their lives for nothing? Why don’t you go aloft yourself, if you are so anxious about the job?”

Captain Miles turned quite white, as he always did when his temper was up. He was then ready to dare anything, like most men of a deep nature.

“So I will, you mutinous scoundrel!” he cried; and he was just making his way down the poop-ladder to go forwards, when Jackson, almost jumping over his head, outstripped him, being down in the waist and up to the loiterers in a jiffey.

“Come on, you cowards!” the brave fellow exclaimed, clambering up into the fore-rigging and making for the top. “Who’s man enough to follow me?”

There was no lack of volunteers now.

First one, and then another, scrambled likewise into the shrouds and climbed up after Jackson, only Davis being left below in his glory out of the whole watch.

Even he too was following; but, on Jackson shouting out something about his “not wanting any lubbers to help him,” Davis sneaked back into the forecastle.

The others then set to work vigorously, rousing up the end of a spare hawser, which had been coiled round the mainmast bitts, and securing it round the foremast head. The ends of this stout rope were then hauled aft and made fast to the main-chains on either side, when, a purchase being rigged up and brought to the capstan, the hawser was hove taut—thus serving as a double preventer stay, to support the great strain there would be on the foremast

when the fore course should be set, the mast even now bending before the gale although no sail was as yet on it.

“Now, men, loose the foresail!” shouted Captain Miles, much pleased with the sharp way in which the task had been accomplished through the men’s promptitude. “Mind, though, and come down as soon as you’ve done it, for one doesn’t know what may happen!”

“Aye, aye, sir, all right,” sang out Jackson in reply; and under his orders the gaskets were quickly cast-off and the bunt dropped, when the men shinned down the rigging and ran the sheet aft, the sail blowing out like a big white cloud over the forecastle before the tacks could be belayed.

Fortunately, while taking in sail on the night of the thunder-storm, Jackson had caused the foresail to be reefed before being clewed up, and this precaution now stood us in good stead, as, instead of its being spread to its full extent, only a portion of the sail was exposed to the wind. This, however, was quite sufficient; for, small as it was, it tugged at the restraining ropes like a giant endeavouring to free himself from his bonds, flying out from the yards with spasmodic jerks and pulling at the mast in a way that showed that, if the spar had not had additional support, it would probably have been torn bodily away out of the ship.

The Josephine, though, soon felt the difference of having the sail on her; for, instead of now bowing to the seas and taking them in over her head, she rose buoyantly, dashing along, of course, with greater speed than before.

Captain Miles was quite triumphant over it.

“There, Marline, what do you think of that?” he said, rubbing his hands with much gusto. “Didn’t I tell you so?”

“Yes, sir, so you did,” answered the other; “but we’ll wait and see how long it lasts.”

“Bah! it will last our turn,” said the captain, with a laugh at Mr Marline’s obstinate retention of his own opinion. “Anyhow, it has eased the ship already.”

“It hasn’t eased the steering, though,” retorted the mate. “We’ll want six men at the helm if she goes on jumping like this. She’s worse than a kangaroo now.”

“Better leap over the waves than under them, having a ton of green water come over our bows every minute. Steady, there!”

“Steady it is, sir,” replied Moggridge, who was acting as quartermaster.

“Keep her so, and mind to let her off when she seems inclined to broach to. I think we’ve seen the worst of it now, and can pipe down to dinner.”

“I’m sure I sha’n’t be sorry to have a fair mouthful to-day,” said Mr Marline with a melancholy smile. “I haven’t known what a good square meal was since the gale began, and think I could do justice to one now.”

“So could I,” replied the captain; and he went below to give Harry the steward some especial orders on the subject, the result being that the last pair of fowls occupying the nearly tenantless hen-coops were removed screaming to the cook’s galley, to reappear an hour afterwards on the cabin table at the first regular dinner we were able to sit down to together for four days. The ship, although racing on still before the gale, was now riding more easily and rolling less, while no heavy seas came dashing aft from the forecastle to wash us all up in a heap pell-mell into the stern-sheets, as had hitherto been the case at meal-times—a moving mass of legs and arms, crockery-ware, savoury dishes, and table furniture in general!

When I again went on deck, the ship was going beautifully, tearing through the water like a racehorse and parting the waves on either side of her bows as if she were veritably ploughing the deep, the crests of the sea rising in foam over the fore-yard and floating in the air in the shape of spindrift and spray far astern.

The sky, too, had somewhat lost its leaden hue, clearing towards the zenith, where one or two odd stars could be seen occasionally peeping down at us through the storm rack that flew overhead like scraps of fleecy wool. This cheery prospect told us to be of good courage, leading us to hope that if we only waited patiently we might expect fine weather bye and bye.

At nine o’clock, the greater portion of the heavens was quite unobscured, the moon shining out, although looking pale and watery and with a big burr round her that showed the still unsettled condition of the atmosphere; the wind, strange to say, continuing to blow with almost as great force from the north-west as when it began, nearly forty-eight hours before.

“I’m afraid we’re going to have a nasty night of it,” said Captain Miles, who had just then come up from below with his sextant. “Still, I’m glad to see our old friend the moon again, however greasy she may look. I haven’t been able to take an observation since Monday; so we’ll see what a lunar may do in the way of fixing our position.”

Just then, there was a break in the haze that had caused the watery appearance of the fair orb of night; and Captain Miles, taking advantage of the opportunity, took his angles, a sight of two of the constellations also helping his calculations, and giving him data to work upon. He then went down to his cabin again to work out the reckoning.

“Guess where we are, Marline?” he said when he came up for the second time. “I don’t think you’ll be able to tell within a degree!”

“Somewhere between the forties, I should think, with all this scudding about north and south,” replied the other.

“Well, I make it that we’re just about 33 degrees 10 minutes North, and 41 degrees West longitude. What do you think of that, eh?”

“Never!” exclaimed the first mate.

“But, it’s true enough,” returned Captain Miles. “I assure you I’ve tested my reckoning in every way, those star altitudes enabling me to correct my lunars. Yes, Marline, you see we did not lose so much by carrying on to the north as you fancied we would; and this blustering north-wester has now taken us almost eight hundred miles in the very direction we wanted to go. If we had lain to, as you wanted at first, we should now have been considerably to the southward of our position, and would probably have had to beat up northwards again; whereas now, as soon as the gale is blown out, we’ll be right in the trades for home.”

“And won’t we touch the Gulf Stream, then?” I asked.

“No, my boy, thank goodness, we’re a long way from that; but if you’re anxious to see the Gulf-weed I told you about, we’re now in its native home, a region called the Sargasso Sea.”

“The Sargasso Sea!” I repeated. “I never heard of that before.”

“No, I don’t suppose you have,” replied Captain Miles in answer to my implied question. “It is a name applied to a calm expanse of the ocean between the Gulf Stream and the Equatorial Current, and is called so from the Sargassum, or Gulf-weed, which is continually found floating there—that is, when the wind is not too strong, as now, to blow it elsewhere. You’ll see plenty of the stuff as soon as the gale lulls, which it must do now, I think, in a very few hours.”

“Are you going to carry on still before it, sir?” asked Mr Marline.

“Of course,” answered the captain. “The ship is sailing easily and not straining herself, as she would do if lying-to; and we can’t run into any harm following the same course till morning. I intend to work the gale in the same way as a friend of mine once treated a runaway horse. It first started off to please itself, and then he made it keep up its pace to please him; so, as the wind has chosen to blow us along at its own sweet will all this time, it shall now drive the ship at my pleasure. What do you say, Master Tom, eh?”

“I say it’s a very good plan, captain,” I replied laughing.

“Well, my boy, I’ll tell you of another good plan, and that is to go below and turn in, as I purpose doing. Mr Marline,” added the captain to the first mate, “please take the first watch. I’ll relieve you at midnight; I don’t think there’ll be any change before then.”

With these words, Captain Miles, who had been on deck almost continuously now for two days and nights, went down to the cabin to have a couple of hours of much-needed repose; and taking his hint as an order, good-humouredly as it was spoken, I followed him at once.

Nor was I anything loth either to go to my bunk; for I had eaten a hearty dinner which made me feel drowsy. After I had turned in, too, there being no excitement to keep me awake, and the ship being quite safe, there being now every prospect of the gale coming soon to an end, I slept like a top—Harry the steward having to wake me again next morning to tell me that breakfast was ready, and coming twice to shake my bunk before I would turn out.

When I subsequently went on deck, I could soon see that the weather had altered for the better.

Although the sea was still rough, the clouds had cleared away from the sky entirely, not a speck of hazy vapour being discernible anywhere, while the sun was shining down brightly and warmly, enlivening the whole scene around and

making the ocean, in spite of its still rough condition, almost look pleasant; the white wreaths of spray, broken-off by the wind from the tops of the waves, glistening with the prismatic hues of the rainbow as they were tossed up in the air on clashing billow meeting billow.

On board the ship, also, matters had considerably improved, only two men being required at the helm in place of four, for the vessel was ever so much more easy to steer; and, I could see preparations being made in the waist for bending a new main-topsail and mizzen staysail in place of those that had been blown away when we were in the vortex of the hurricane.

It was a difficult job getting the remains of the old main-topsail off the yard, the wind blowing still with great force and the men having to hold on with all their might. But, after an hour's labour, the task was accomplished, and then the new piece of canvas was sent up into the top by the halliards, where, after being bent and close-reefed, it was sheeted home and the yard hoisted up again, spreading the sail.

The mizzen staysail followed suit; and then, seeing that the ship bore the pressure pretty well, Captain Miles ordered the fore-topmast staysail to be hoisted. This brought the Josephine more up to the wind, the vessel now sailing with it about a couple of points abaft the beam.

She heeled over tremendously, burying all the lee bulwarks under water, with the sea rushing along her channels like a mill-race; but, she held to it bravely, and we all congratulated ourselves on having weathered the storm and carried out Captain Miles's boast of making the gale serve his purpose, thus turning a foul wind into a fair one.

Towards mid-day, the captain took an observation, which amply corroborated his lunars of the previous evening, we being found to be in 32 degrees North latitude and 40 degrees West longitude, the slight difference between this and his former reckoning being due to the distance we had run during the night.

The wind still held up, however, and although we were carrying more canvas than we really ought to have had on the ship in such a gale, Captain Miles was just thinking of setting the spanker and bending a new fore-topsail, when, as if it had been all at once shut off from its source, the strong north-western wind in a moment ceased to blow.

At this time there was not a single cloud on the horizon anywhere, the sky being absolutely clear and beautifully blue; but I noticed something like a white wall of water on our port bow advancing towards the Josephine.

The sight resembled an enormous wave raised up to twenty times the height of those in our more immediate vicinity.

“Look, Mr Marline!” I cried. “What is that there to the left?”

He glanced where I pointed, and so did Jackson, the latter singing out the moment he caught sight of the wave to the two men at the wheel, who were Davis and a German sailor, “Down with the helm—sharp!”

“Hullo! what’s the matter?” exclaimed Captain Miles, hearing the order and raising himself up from the cabin skylight where he had been bending over his log-book, in which he had been jotting down an entry. “What’s up now?”

“Something uncommonly like a white squall, sir,” hurriedly explained Jackson. “It’s coming down fast on us from windward, and will be on us in a jiffey. Down with the helm sharp, don’t you hear?” he called out a second time to the helmsmen.

Captain Miles, quite startled now, looked round, and seeing the great wave of water, now quite close, borne before the coming wind, repeated the order to put down the helm more sharply still, adding also to the watch on duty:

“Cast-off the topsail sheets and let everything go by the run!”

Whether Davis heard the order to let the ship’s head fall off and wilfully disobeyed it, on account of its coming from Jackson, whom he hated, or whether he was paralysed with terror at the approach of this new danger, after our having passed through all the perils of the cyclone, no one could say; but he not only did not turn the spokes of the wheel himself, but he absolutely prevented the other man from doing so.

Seeing the vessel did not answer the helm, the captain and Jackson together darted aft, dragging away Davis and fiercely jamming the wheel down as hard as they could.

The movement, however, came too late.

Before the Josephine's bows could pay off, a terrific blast of wind, worse than anything that had yet assailed her, struck her sideways. Over she was borne to leeward, dipping and dipping until her yard-arms; and then, the tops of her masts, touching the water, becoming gradually immersed as the ship canted.

At the same moment, too, with a loud double report, the foresail and main-topsail blew out of the bolt-ropes, floating away in the distance. But this relief, great as it was, did not right the ship, for the huge white wave, following the gust, forced her over still more on her side; and, in less time than I have taken to tell of the occurrence, the Josephine was on her beam-ends and every soul on board struggling in the water for dear life.

"Hole on, Mass' Tom, hole on!" I heard Jake's voice cry somewhere, as I sank beneath the rocking surges that were in an instant cresting over the poop. "Hole on, Mass' Tom, hole on!"

I tried to battle with the sea, but it bore me down, and down, and down.

And then—I felt I was drowning!

Chapter Fourteen

In Dire Peril

Jake's voice seemed ever so far away in the distance, and there was a confused sort of humming, buzzing noise in my ears; while some heavy weight on the top of my head appeared to be pressing me down, although I struggled frantically to free myself.

It was all in vain, though.

I was whirled round and round in an eddy of the sea; and soon my efforts ceased.

Then, all at once, when almost the sense of suffocation had passed, I felt a hand grasp my collar at the back of my neck; and, oh, gracious heaven! I was dragged above the surface and drew once more a breath of air. I took in a gulp of water with this; but, in spite of the water, the air was the sweet essence of life and I breathed again!

I had been in a dream before—a terrible dream; now I came to myself, and my recollection returned.

The buzzing sounds that had previously echoed through my brain resolved themselves into the hoarse shouts of the crew of the Josephine; the exclamations of the sailors being mingled with the roaring, crashing break of the waves as they washed over the wreck, and the creaking and rending of the timbers of the poor ship, while, nearer yet to me, I could distinguish the cheering cry of faithful Jake:

"Hole up, Mass' Tom, um got um safe now. Hole up an' take good breff; we'se all right, an' ebberybody safe!"

At the same moment that he spoke Jake lifted me up on something which I could feel with my feet, and I opened my eyes.

At first, I was almost blinded by the sea-water which had got into them, and the salt spray which continually dashed over my head; but, in a minute or two, I was able to see where I was and grasp the situation.

The ship was lying over on her starboard side, with her decks submerged up to the hatches, and her masts horizontal on the surface of the sea; but, the whole

of her port side was clear out of the water, and, although the waves were breaking over this, still the major part of the quarter and a portion of the poop were almost high and dry in the intervals between the following rollers that ever and anon swept up to their level.

On this after part of the ship, Jake had managed to clamber up, lugging me along with him; and, as I looked round, I could recognise Captain Miles and Mr Marline, as well as several others of the hands, who had sought such a vantage-ground of safety.

Away forwards, the Josephine was completely buried in the huge billows that were constantly surging over her; but here, too, clinging on to the main-chains was another group of sailors, amongst whom I could make out the tall figure of Jackson, with Cuffee and Davis close beside him.

Captain Miles perceived me almost as soon as I saw him.

“Ah, there you are, Tom!” he cried. “Thank God you are not lost! I made a hard grab at you when the ship heeled over, but missed you; and thought that the skylight hatch carried you away overboard when it lifted.”

“Me watchee him sharp, sah,” explained Jake. “I’se see de squall comin’ an’ run aft for tell, an’ den I clutch hole Mass’ Tom, an’ here we is!”

“You’ve saved your young master then,” exclaimed the captain; “so, Tom, you’ve got to thank the darkey instead of me! But, how many of us have escaped?”

As he said this, Captain Miles glanced about and appeared to be reckoning up the list of the crew on his fingers, for I could see his lips move.

“Marline, you’re all right, eh?” he went on presently, speaking out aloud.

“Oh, yes, I’m here, thanks to Providence,” said the first mate with almost a sob in his voice. It told better than words his gratitude to the power on high that had preserved him.

“And Jackson, I see, with Davis and Cuffee,” continued the captain, running through the names of the survivors as far as he could make them out.

“There’s Adze, the carpenter, too, in the main-chains, with those two German sailors, Hermann and Gottlieb; while there are five more of the hands alongside me,” said Mr Marline looking round, too, and taking stock.

“But, where’s Moggridge?” asked Captain Miles, missing the boatswain at that moment and not seeing him anywhere. I felt my heart sink at the thought that he was gone.

“Here I am, your honour,” however, sang out the old fellow, climbing up over the stern gallery. “I almost lost the number of my mess; but I’ve managed to cheat Davy Jones this time.”

“That makes, with Master Tom here, just sixteen souls, out of eighteen we had on board, all told,” said the captain. “Anybody seen the steward?”

“No, he isn’t here, poor fellow,” replied Mr Marline. “He was below in his pantry at the time the squall struck us, and must have been drowned before he could scramble out.”

“There’s only one other, then, missing,” said the captain. “Count the hands again, Marline.”

The first mate did this; and, then, it was found, on hailing Jackson in the main-chains—the sea at present making a breach between us and dividing our forces—that the other sailor was a man named Briggs, who had been ailing for some days past. He had been in his bunk in the forecastle when the ship capsized, so his fate was almost as certain as that of Harry, the mulatto steward.

All things considered, though, it was a great mercy, from the sudden nature of the calamity, that so many of us should have been saved. But for the fact of the accident having occurred in the afternoon, when the majority of the hands were fortunately on deck aft, many more lives would undoubtedly have been lost.

However, albeit temporarily preserved from the peril of a watery grave, our outlook, clustered there together on the outside of the partly-submerged vessel, was a very sorry one; for, the sea was still running high, and the waves were breaking over us in sheets of foam, and, although the sun was shining down and the air was comparatively warm, this made us feel most uncomfortable. Besides, the continual onslaught of the rolling billows necessitated our holding on to everything we could get a grip of, to prevent ourselves from being washed away.

We had to lie along the side of the ship, grasping the mizzen rigging, which attitude was a very wearying one; for, the sea would lift us up as the swell

surged by, and then, we had to take a fresh grip, our feet sliding down the hull as the billow retired and the vessel sunk down in the hollow.

“I say, Marline,” called out the captain presently, “as you are nearest the signal halliards, do you think you can manage to run them clear?”

“I’ll try, sir,” answered the other; and Moggridge, who had now crept alongside the mate, helping him, the two contrived to haul out the rope in question.

“Now, who’s got a knife handy?” next inquired Captain Miles.

There was half a dozen replies to this question; but, ere the article wanted could be passed along, the old boatswain had drawn out his from his waistband by means of the lanyard slung round his neck, and was busily employed in cutting up the signal halliards into short lengths of about a fathom each.

“Ah, I see you guessed what I was after,” said the captain noticing this. “If we lash ourselves to the rigging here, it will save us a world of exertion and trouble, besides leaving our hands free for other purposes.”

“Aye, aye, sir, I know’d what you want,” responded Moggridge, and passing down the pieces of rope as he cut them off, all of us were pretty soon well secured from being washed away, each man helping to tie up his neighbour in turn.

“Golly, massa, dis am a purdicafirment!” ejaculated Jake, grinning as usual, and with his ebony face shining with the spray; “I’se ’gin feel want grub—um precious hungry.”

“I am afraid that’ll not be our only want, my poor fellow,” said Captain Miles in a melancholy voice; but rousing himself a minute afterwards he added more cheerfully, “Wait till the sea gets down, and then we’ll try to improve our condition. I wonder, though, how these other fellows are getting on in the chains amidships? Jackson, ahoy!”

“Hullo, sir,” came a faint hail in answer, from amid the breaking seas further on ahead of us, where only a black spot of a head could be seen occasionally emerging from the mass of encircling foam.

“Are you all right there?” sang out the captain.

“We’re alive, sir; but nearly tired out,” replied Jackson in a low weak tone.

“Can’t you try, man, to work your way aft and join us,” urged Captain Miles, comprehending how exhausted the young seaman and his companions there must be. “There’s plenty of room here for all of us, and you’ll not be so much worked about by the sea.”

“The waves are too strong for us, sir,” cried out the other, but his voice now seeming to have a little more courage in it, for he added after a bit, “I think we can manage it, though, if you will make fast the bight of the topsail sheet and heave the end to us. It will serve us to hold on by as we pass along the bulwarks.”

“All right, my hearty,” answered Captain Miles, he and a couple of the sailors beside him doing as Jackson had suggested.

Then, the captain himself, undoing his lashings, seized one of the brief intervals in which the after part of the hull rose above the sea; when, standing on his feet, while his legs were held by the two sailors, he hove the end of the rope towards Jackson, who, clutching hold of it, secured it to the main-shrouds, whence it was stretched taut to the mizzen rigging, thus serving as a sort of life-line by which the men could pass aft.

When this was done, the men with Jackson in the main-chains crept cautiously along the bulwarks, half in and half out of the water, clutching on to the topsail sheet hand over hand, soon joined us on the quarter galley—the young second mate being the last to leave, waiting until his comrades were in safety.

The passage from the one place to the other was perilous in the extreme; for, the waves surged up sometimes completely over the poor fellows’ heads, when they had once abandoned their footing and had only the frail swaying rope to support them against the wash of the water. They were roughly oscillated to and fro, hove up out of the sea one minute and lowered down again into it the next.

It was a wonder some of them did not fall off, getting sucked under the keel of the ship; but, gripping the life-line with a clutch of desperation, their passage across the perilous bridge was at last safely accomplished, when the entire sixteen of us, including my own humble self, were at length gathered together in one group on the counter-rail below the bend of the poop. The new-comers

were then lashed to the mizzen rigging like the rest of us, and we all waited with what hope and patience we could for the sea to calm down.

By this time, it was late in the afternoon; and, presently, the sun sank down away to the west in his ocean bed, surrounded by a radiant glow of crimson and gold that flashed upward from the horizon to the zenith.

The wind had died away too, the last violent squall which had been so disastrous to the Josephine, having been the expiring blast of the hurricane; so, although, as I've said, the sea still continued to run high, the waves rolled by more regularly and with an equal pulsation, as if Father Neptune was rocking himself gradually to sleep. The old tyrant was evidently; exhausted with the mad rioting in which he had recently been indulging, and the thrashing which the gale had given him!

There was no sleep for us, however, excepting such hasty little droppings off into brief forgetfulness that our worn-out bodies gave way to for an instant; for we were constantly being roused up, almost as soon as our wearied eyelids had closed, by the sudden rush of the spent wash of some broken wave wetting our already wet garments. This banished all thoughts of repose; and, when the darkness of night came on, it was cold and dreary in the extreme, the hours seeming to drag out to the length of a lifetime.

Poor faithful Jake lay close to me so as to protect me as much as possible from the wash of the sea; and I found out, when morning light came once more to cheer us, that he had actually stripped off a guernsey vest, which Captain Miles had given him to save him from exposure on the night of the thunder-storm, and had fastened this round my shoulders in order to keep me warm!

I shall never forget Jake's thoughtful action, I believe, as long as I live, for it made a great impression on me when I discovered such a striking proof of his devotion; and, as I now retrace the incidents of the past, the incident stands out prominently in evidence of a negro's brotherly love.

Why, his black skin always seemed white to me ever after. Aye, although born an African, his heart was truer than that of many a European, whose complexion is only a trick of colour!

During the night we were all silent; but, when the sun rose in the east, flooding the sea with the rosy tint of dawn, hope came back to us and our tongues were unloosed—the more especially as the force of the waves had considerably

lessened, hardly a scrap of spray being now washed over us, while the blows of the billows against the side of the ship were no longer heard.

The sea really was calming down at last.

God was watching over us!

“Say, captain,” said Mr Marline, who was the first to bestir himself, “do you think there’s any prospect of our righting the ship?”

The captain was asleep, I believe, for the first mate had to repeat his question twice before he could get an answer.

“I’m sure I hope so,” at last sleepily muttered Captain Miles, with a portentous yawn—“only wait till the swell calms down and we’ll see about it.”

“But it is calm now,” rejoined the other.

“Then wake me again when it is calmer,” replied Captain Miles; and then, he turned on his side and proceeded with his nap as coolly as if he were comfortably tucked up in his nice swinging cot in the cabin.

“Well!” exclaimed Mr Marline, “of all the cool, self-possessed men I ever met in my life, you beat the lot!”

He was talking to himself, but the hands heard him, and there was a general snigger all round, the captain’s very composure having given confidence to all. The men believed that he would not have taken things so quietly unless he had some sure hope of our speedy release from such a precarious position.

“He is a rare brave un,” put in Moggridge. “I’ve sailed with him man and boy for many a v’y’ge afore this, and I allers found him the same, calm and plucky in danger, and keeping a stiff upper lip when in perils that frighten other folk. Captain Miles, sir, is a man as a sailor should be proud to sail under—that’s what I says!”

“Eh, what, what?” murmured the captain, half waking up on hearing his name spoken, and lifting his head from between his clasped hands.

“I was a-saying, sir, as how you knew what’s what,” replied the boatswain, “and I don’t know of any other man I’d say sich of.”

“Belay that,” said Captain Miles, rousing up now and rubbing his eyes. “Ah, it’s morning, I see! Well, Mr Marline, and how goes it?”

“As well as can be expected under the circumstances,” answered the other.

“Bother circumstances,” rejoined the captain; “we must make the best of them we can. Now, let us see what’s to be done.”

“Do you think we can right her, sir?” asked the mate repeating his old query.

“Right her? yes, certainly, if we can cut away the masts. She’s not water-logged, and all sound below, I fancy, as far as I can see; for the hatches have been battened down since Monday.”

“But she’s rather down by the head, sir,” said Mr Marline, as the two rose on their feet and proceeded to look round the vessel as well as they could from the top of the poop bulwarks, whence they surveyed her position and surroundings.

“Ah!” exclaimed Captain Miles, “the fore-peak must have been left open when those spare sails were got out, so that she has taken in some water there. Never mind, though, there’s a stout bulkhead separating the compartment from the main hold, and, if there’s no leak below, we’ll be all right.”

“But, the masts have been working the decks all this time,” suggested the mate, “and if the sea has got in through the straining of the timbers we must sink in time.”

“Sink your grandmother, Marline!” retorted the captain, “you forget that our main cargo is rum, which is ever so much lighter than water, and more buoyant. As long as we have that below we’ll float, never you fear! But, the job is to cut away the masts if we can; she’ll never right, of course, till that is done. A pity your rigging was so well set up, Marline! If the sticks had only gone by the board when the squall struck us we’d be all right now.”

“I don’t know that, captain,” replied the other. “If the masts had been badly stayed they would have gone in the height of the hurricane; and then, where would we be now?”

“Not in the Sargasso Sea, I fancy,” said Captain Miles with a hearty laugh. “But we can’t do anything yet, though, till the sea has gone down more. Men,” he added, “keep your pecker up! Providence having watched over us thus far will

now not desert us, I am confident, and we'll yet weather on Mr Marline's circumstances!"

All hands gave a cheer at this hopeful speech, and the sun having by this time dried our soddened clothes besides warming us, we began to feel more comfortable and easy, the captain's words giving us fresh courage.

Towards noon, however, the heat brought on a most terrific thirst, which was all the more painful from our not seeing any chance of relieving it; for, although, like the "ancient mariner," we saw "water, water everywhere," there was not a drop of the wholesome fluid, as far as we knew, that we could drink.

In this dire calamity, Jackson proved our guardian angel.

"I say, captain," he called out, after climbing along the bulwarks down into that part of the waist of the ship which was clear of the sea, letting himself swing down by the end of the topsail halliards which were belayed to the side, "there's one of the water-casks lashed here that did not fetch away to leeward with the rest when she canted over; and it's full too. If anyone has got a hat, or anything that I can draw off the water in, I will start the bung and we can all splice the main-brace."

"Hurrah!" shouted Captain Miles. "That's the best news I have heard for many a day. Here, Marline, pass him down my wide-awake. Mind how you drive out the bung, Jackson, and have something ready to close up the hole again; or else, all the contents of the cask will be wasted 'fore the hands are served round."

"I'll take care, sir," replied the young seaman, who had now turned the end of the topsail halliards into a bight round his body, so that he could swing down in front of the water-cask and yet have his hands free.

Then, taking out a marlinespike, which had caught in the rigging somehow or other, he managed, after several blows on either side of the cask, to start the bung. This, from the position in which the ship was lying, was now horizontal instead of perpendicular; so, as soon as it came out, the water flowed at once into the captain's wide-awake hat, which Jackson had under the bung-hole, stopping up this again with the cork as soon as the hat was full.

Mr Marline was bending down from the bulwarks above him to receive the strange jug when the other handed it up to him, and he passed it on to Captain Miles, who allowed me to have the first drink.

It tasted like nectar—better than any draught I had ever had before or since!

Captain Miles himself then took a gulp of the grateful contents of his old hat, passing it on to Moggridge; and, when emptied, as it very soon was, the wide-awake was filled and refilled by Jackson until every man had satisfied his thirst—the last to enjoy the water which he had been the means of procuring being the brave young seaman himself, just in the same way as he had been the last to quit the post of danger when helping his shipmates out of the main-chains.

Quenching our thirst gave us all new life; so, later on in the afternoon, Captain Miles set the men to work casting off the ropes as best they could with the idea of freeing the masts. However, we could do nothing without an axe, for no man had anything handier than his clasp-knife, which naturally was of no use in helping to cut away the cordage and heavy spars that kept the ship down on her beam-ends.

What was to be done?

We were all in a dilemma, one man suggesting one thing, and another proposing a fresh plan for getting rid of the masts; when, Adze, the carpenter, who had said nothing as yet, spoke for the first time.

“I left a large axe o’ mine,” he said quietly, as if saying nothing particularly worthy of notice—“I left a large axe o’ mine in my bunk in the fo’c’s’le; and if ary a one can git down theer, he’ll find it on the top side to his starboard hand as he goes in.”

“But, the fo’c’s’le’s full of water,” said Mr Marline, “and a man must be a good diver to creep in there and get the axe under eight or twelve foot of sea! Besides, I daresay it will have been washed away from where Adze put it in his bunk, the lurch of the ship having shifted everything to leeward.”

“It war to leeward already in the top bunk, I tell ’ee,” rejoined the carpenter; “an’, bein’ that heavy, I spec’s it’s theer right enough. Only I can’t dive, nor swim above water for that matter, so it’s no use my going after it.”

“I’ll go, massa captain,” shouted out Jake, who had been listening eagerly to this conversation. “I’se dibe like porpuss an’ swim like fiss.”

“I know that,” said Captain Miles laughing. “I recollect the way you came aboard my ship. But you can try if you like, darkey. If you find that axe, you’ll be the saving of all of us, and give a fair return for your passage, my hearty!”

Jake did not need any further persuasion.

Making his way along the bulwarks, he clambered on to the main rigging, now lying flat across the capsized vessel, until he came to a clear space between the mainmast and the forecastle, from whence the boats and cook’s galley had been washed away. Jumping into the water at this point, he swam towards the spot where he thought the entrance to the forecastle should lie, for the sea was washing about forward, and nothing to be seen above the surface but a small portion of the port bulwarks near the dead-eyes of the fore-shrouds and a bit of the port cat-head.

Jake then dived below the water, disappearing from our view for a few seconds that seemed interminable as we waited.

“I hope he hasn’t come to grief,” said Captain Miles anxiously. “So many things have been carried away and jumbled up in a mass there forwards, that the poor fellow might get fixed in and be drowned, without the chance of saving himself.”

But his alarm was quite unnecessary, Jake rising above the water in another moment and scrambling up into the main rigging, in a very hurried manner, as if something was pursuing him.

His face as he turned it towards us was almost green | with fright, and we could hear his teeth chattering | with fear and cold combined.

“Well,” sang out Captain Miles, “I’m glad to see you out of that hole alive. But, what’s the matter, my man? have you got the axe?”

“N–n–n–no, Mass’ Cap’en,” stuttered Jake, making his way aft again along the bulwarks, “got no axe nor nuffin’. Dere am duppy or de debbil in de fo’c’s’le. Bress de Lor’, dis pore niggah only sabe him life an’—dat all!”

Chapter Fifteen

A Gleam of Hope

“You one big fool!” Cuffee, the cook, screamed out at hearing Jake’s startling announcement, which made us all laugh in spite of our anxiety. “How can duppy come in de daylight, hey? You only see yer own black face in water, an’ tink um debbil.”

“Duppy,” I may explain, is the negro’s common name for what they call a ghost, or anything uncanny.

However, paying no attention to his brother darkey’s reasoning as to the impossibility of such a nocturnal visitor appearing under the searching rays of the sun, Jake stoutly maintained his own opinion.

“Dere was sumfin’ white dere, I swar,” he said, as soon as he had secured his footing on the bulwarks again, well out of the water. “I see sumfin’ white an’ cold, an’ he grab me by um leg.”

“That must have been poor Briggs’s body floating about in the fo’c’s’le,” observed Captain Miles. “I forgot to tell him of it before he dived down. Hi, Jake,” he added speaking out louder, “you needn’t be afraid. I know what it was you saw.”

“D’ye, massa?” said Jake somewhat distrustfully, as if only half believing this. “Golly, it um berry mysteferious. I’se tink—; but, Jerrybosalum, look dar, Mass’ Cap’en, look dar!” he suddenly exclaimed, his voice again changing to a tone of intense horror, while he looked the picture of abject terror, his eyeballs rolling and his teeth chattering as before. “Duppy come catchee me, for suah! Dere he am comin’ up wid him long claw—dere he am—dere he am!”

We all rose up on the side of the bulwarks, as if with one accord, looking in the direction to which Jake’s trembling hand pointed, where, between the meshes of the rigging away forward in front of the mainmast we could dimly discern a long sinuous greenish-white body gradually rising to the surface of the water that covered the lower part of the deck.

The mysterious thing seemed to make after the negro, although no apparent movement was perceptible, while its colour became more luminous as it got nearer.

Jackson was closer than any of us to Jake; and, as he stood up in the main-chains to help the negro up, he perceived what the object was that had frightened him, for he could see down into the water clear of the rigging, which somewhat hampered our view.

"Why, it's a shark!" he called out. "It is a big fellow too—larger than the brute that nearly tackled me the other day."

"A shark, Massa Jackson, for true, hey?" said Jake, turning round to assure himself of the fact; and, then, seeing his pursuer to be of no supernatural origin, as he had supposed, but only one of the ordinary, if ugly, denizens of the deep, his alarm disappeared instanter and he burst into a fit of laughing—his African nature being as susceptible as that of a child, his moods varying in a moment.

"Yah, yah," he roared, "me no 'fraid ob shark; I'se tink him ider one duppy or de debbil, for suah, when um touch me on de shin-bone!"

"I'se tole you so, Jake," said Cuffee with great contempt. "You'se nebber see duppy in de daylight. You'se only big fool to tink so."

"Berry well," rejoined the other, "you hab your 'pinion an' I hab mine! If you was down dar in water jus' now, an' see dat long ting snouzle by um leg, lookin' so white an' dreffful, I guess you'se frit too!"

If Jake, however, was now pleased at seeing his fancied ghost turn out to be a shark, this was more than we were. Captain Miles could hardly conceal his chagrin.

"Confound the hideous brute!" he exclaimed. "He's the very last visitor I cared to see. He will prevent any further attempt being made to get that axe out of the fo'c's'le—if it is there, as Adze says."

"It's theer sure enough, cap'en," put in the carpenter hearing this remark. "I wish I could only swim and I'd precious soon fetch it myself!"

"All right, Adze, I don't doubt your word," said the captain apologetically; "but the shark has put an embargo on it now at any rate."

"I'm afraid it just has," observed Mr Marline, to whom Captain Miles had really been speaking when the old carpenter overheard him. "You can't expect any sensible man to dive into the water when such a nasty sort of neighbour is

close at hand. I wouldn't like to venture, for one, I confess; and I don't think I'm a very great coward."

"No, Marline, no; I'll answer for that," replied the captain warmly. "Your worst enemy wouldn't accuse you of any want of pluck, and really I should not' care about undertaking the job either, for that matter."

Jake, though, wanted to make another effort to recover the axe, his courage rising with the emergency, especially as he could notice how disappointed we all were.

"Me nebber mind shark," he cried, drawing out a long clasp-knife which he carried in his belt, and opening the blade, which he now brandished about in a most ferocious way, showing how he would make mincemeat of the sea-pirate if it attacked him. "I'se not 'fraid ob him one lilly bit. I tell you wat, I'se gib him goss if um kick up any bobbery wid me!"

So saying, he was preparing to plunge again into the water, when Captain Miles ordered him to refrain, having to repeat his command twice before the brave fellow would stop from making the venture.

"No, Jake," said the captain, "I can't allow you to risk your life in such a foolhardy way for what may be only a wild-goose chase. Wait awhile and see if the brute is going to remain here. Perhaps, too, there may be some more of his comrades about; they generally hunt in couples in stormy weather."

"All right, massa, me wait an' see," responded Jake submissively, sitting down on the bulwarks again; and then, we all watched the shark to see what he would do, and whether, as the captain had suggested, there were any more of his species about, coming up to help him in keeping us prisoners.

Unfortunately, Captain Miles's fears proved but too well founded. Very shortly afterwards, no less than three other sharks appeared, hovering about the stern of the ship and swimming immediately under the counter, where we were clustered together, as if keeping guard over us. The one that had pursued Jake took up his station within the interior part of the submerged vessel, patrolling backwards and forwards in the water that covered the deck of the poop up to the mizzen-mast. This fellow, the first in the field, seemed to say to us grimly, "You sha'n't escape me here, at all events!"

"Oh, Captain Miles!" I cried. "The sharks are going to wait until we drop off into the sea one by one, and then they will eat us all!"

“Not a bit of it, my boy,” said he hopefully, to cheer me up. “They’ll soon be tired out and will then swim away and leave us to see about righting the ship. Don’t think of them, Tom; they can’t touch any of us where we are.”

“But how long can we stop like this?” I asked despairingly.

“Long enough to bother the sharks,” he replied. “They haven’t pluck enough to wait when they see they’ve got no chance; for, they’re born cowards at heart, as all sneaking things are!”

Jake also sidled up to me at the same time and somewhat restored my equanimity, saying in his light-hearted way, “Golly, Mass’ Tom, we kill um all first wid um knife ’fore dey touch you!”

The afternoon waned on; so, as the sharks exhibited no signs of yet leaving us, and the evening was closing in, Captain Miles ordered the men to lash themselves again to the rigging for fear of their tumbling off in the night and so falling a prey to the brutes—otherwise, there was no great need of the precaution, for the sea was almost now calm, the waves having quite ceased to break. Only a heavy swell lifted the ship up at intervals, letting her roll down again, and swaying gently to and fro with a gentle rocking motion which would have sent us all to sleep but for the hunger which now kept us awake with a nasty, gnawing pain at the pit of our stomachs.

Our thirst was appeased, Jackson having swung himself down to the water-cask and served out another drink all round shortly after the sharks had made their appearance, as they could not approach near enough to the waist of the ship to interfere with his movements, the deck there being clear of water. But, oh, we did feel hungry!

“I believe I could a’most eat anything now,” said Moggridge plaintively, chewing away at a piece of leather which he had torn off one of his boots.

“Only hold out and we’ll get something soon,” replied the captain, who tried nobly to keep up the spirits of the men. “We’ve got water, and that is more than many a poor fellow has had when in as bad a plight as ours. Let us be thankful for what we have got and for having our lives spared so far! To-morrow, if the sea be calm, as there is every reason to hope it will be, we’ll probably be able to fetch something out of the cabin; while, if the worst comes to the worst, I’ve no doubt we’ll be able to pick up some crabs and shell-fish from the Gulf-weed floating around.”

“Right you are, sir,” said Moggridge, ashamed of having spoken. “I see lots of the stuff about us now.”

“Is that the Gulf-weed you told me about, captain?” I asked, pointing to some long strings of what looked like the broken-off branches of trees, with berries on them, that were washing past the hull of the Josephine on the top of the rolling swell.

“Yes, Tom, we’re now in the Sargasso Sea, its own especial home. Indeed, this region is especially so called on account of the ‘Sargassum,’ or weed, in the Portuguese tongue. You ask Mr Marline and he’ll tell you all about it, being learned in such matters.”

The first mate, however, did not wait for me to question him.

Taking the captain’s observation as a hint to say something to occupy the attention of the men and myself, and so keep us from thinking of the sharks and our painful position, he proceeded to narrate all he knew about this curious marine fungus. He had a good deal to say, too, for Mr Marline was a well-read man and took a great interest in all matters of science.

It was certainly a very novel situation in which to give a lecture, but the sailors were glad enough to listen to anything to make the time pass. They were very attentive auditors, even Jake appearing interested, although he could not have understood much of what he heard.

“The Sargasso, or weedy, Sea,” said Mr Marline, “so called from the berries, like grapes, ‘sarga’ in Portuguese, extends from about the eleventh parallel of latitude to 45 degrees north, and from 30 degrees west longitude to the Bermudas, and even further west, so that we are about in the middle of it now. Almost the entire portion of this space of the ocean is covered by a peculiar species of sea-weed, termed by botanists the ‘fucus natans,’ which is found nowhere else in any great abundance except in the Gulf Stream, which, skirting along the edge of the Sargasso Sea, bears away portions of the floating substance in its progress from the Gulf of Florida eastwards. The western current to the south of this region also sometimes detaches masses of the weed; but its main habitat is the Sargasso Sea, where, there being no eddies or streams either way and little or no wind generally, the sargassum accumulates in great masses, presenting frequently the aspect of an immense marine meadow.”

“I think, sir,” I interposed at this point, “I read once in the Life of Columbus, that, when on his first voyage beyond seas from Spain, his sailors almost mutinied and wanted him to put back on account of their fancying they could never pass through the weed?”

“They did,” replied Mr Marline. “The men thought Columbus had sold his soul to the spirits of evil, and that they were in an enchanted sea, but the brave old Genoese navigator surmounted their fears in the end! I can better, perhaps, explain, Tom, the reason for the weed accumulating so hereabouts, by likening, as Maury did, the Atlantic Ocean to a basin. Now, if you put a few small pieces of cork or any other light substance into a basin, and move your hand round it so as to give the water it contains a circular motion, the bits of cork will be found to float to the centre and remain there. Well, here, the Gulf Stream is the circular motion of our great basin, while the Sargasso Sea is the centre, and it is in consequence of the continual current circling round it that the weed stops there in such quantities—as you will see most likely in a day or two, when the ocean gets rested after the great storm we have had, which has somewhat put things out of their proper trim.”

“And does the weed grow to the bottom?” I asked.

“Bottom? Why, there are no soundings here under four miles, and it would take a pretty long root to stretch to such a depth! No, the sargasso weed floats and lives on the surface. When examined closely, it is found to have an oblong narrow serrated leaf of a pale yellow colour, resembling somewhat in form a cauliflower stripped of its leaves, the nodules being composed of a vast number of small branches, about half an inch long, which shoot out from each other at a sharp angle, and hence multiply continually towards the outer circumference of the plant, each extreme point producing a round seed-vessel like a berry. A great number of little crabs, barnacles, and small shell-fish are generally found attached to the weed, as Captain Miles mentioned just now when he said we might find something to eat amidst the branches of it in an emergency. It is wonderful sometimes to see with what regularity the weed is arranged across the ocean when the wind blows. It looks then exactly like a meadow does after it has been fresh mown and the grass is left upon it in long swathes by the scythe at equal distances apart.”

“There, Master Tom,” put in Captain Miles here, “I think you know now all that Mr Marline can tell you about the Sargasso Sea and the weed to be found there. It’s about time we all turned in now for the night, for the sun has set and

it will soon be dark. Have all you men," he called out aloud, "lashed yourselves securely?"

"Aye, aye, sir," they answered one by one, Moggridge coming last.

"Then good night, and good cheer, my lads!" he cried. "Keep your peckers up, and to-morrow morning. I daresay, we'll see our way out of this predicament. I don't think it is going to blow any more, so you may compose yourselves to rest as cosily, my lads, as if you were in your bunks here, without fear of anything much troubling you, for the sharks can't harm you!"

The sun had set by this time and the evening grew gradually dark, for there was no moon, as the heavens were overcast; but still, the wind did not get up again, and the motion of the ship being easy enough we lay along the side of the ship very comfortably, most of the men soon falling asleep, and I soon following their example.

It must have been towards morning, for a dim sort of light was beginning to be perceptible in the east, we were wakened up by a terrible yell.

A moment afterwards a heavy splash sounded in the water alongside.

"Good heavens! what is that?" cried Captain Miles, starting up and trying to peer through the darkness, so as to see who was missing. "Anyone gone overboard?"

"Yes, sir," answered Jackson's voice presently, as if he had waited to reconnoitre, "it is one of the German sailors, poor Hermann. He has probably slipped his lashings and slid down the side. I'm afraid the sharks have taken him, for he has never called out once!"

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed the captain, raising a hail.

"Hi, hullo!"

But, there came no response; and so, Jackson's surmise must have been correct. The man had evidently fallen in his sleep, through the slipping of the rope which had secured him to the rigging; and he must either have been drowned at once or fallen a victim to the maw of one of the sharks, whose movements we could hear in the water still below us.

The accident, however, wakened us all up thoroughly, and we waited anxiously for daylight.

When this came, however, a terrible scene was enacted before our eyes.

No sooner had the rising sun lit up the ocean and enabled us all to see each other distinctly, than I noticed Davis, who was close to Jackson, staring at him in a most peculiar manner.

I never saw in anyone before such a fixed steady glare!

The man seemed out of his senses or bewildered by something, for his eyes moved about strangely, although with a savage gleam in them, while his hair appeared to bristle up.

“Well, what is the matter?” said Jackson at length, after enduring his gaze for a moment or two, waiting for the other to speak. “Do you want water? Shall I get you some?”

This apparently broke the spell which was upon the wretched man, whose constitution had been much enfeebled by his drinking habits—making him thus less able to contend against the exposure and privations | we had been subjected to than the rest of us.

The minute Jackson spoke, he uttered a queer sort of half-groan, half-shriek; and having previously, I suppose, untied the rope with which he had been lashed to the rigging, he made a dash at the second mate with both his hands, trying to grip his throat and strangle him.

“You devil!” he cried, foaming at the mouth with passion, “you’ve taken my place and brought me to this.”

Jackson easily repulsed his struggles to do him any injury; but, before he and the other sailors could secure the madman, he sprang to his feet and, shouting out something which we could not distinguish, jumped right down among the group of sharks that were still swimming about under the stern.

There was a heavy plunge, followed by a wild scurrying to and fro in the water of the moving fins; and, a moment after, when the sea had got still again, a circle of blood on the surface alone told of the unhappy man’s fate.

The incident saddened us all very much, taking away our hopeful thoughts and courage alike; so we waited on listlessly for what we now believed must shortly be our own doom, not a soul speaking a word or even looking at his neighbour for some time afterwards.

Jackson was the first to recover himself.

The sight of the cruel sharks under the ship's counter and the memory of our two shipmates, whom they had already devoured, appeared to prey on his mind and make him furious.

"I can't stand this any longer," he cried. "I must try and kill one of these brutes, captain, or die in the attempt!"

Captain Miles thought he had gone out of his senses too and spoke soothingly to him; but Jackson soon showed that if he had become insane there was a method in his madness.

Rising on his feet, he walked on the top of the bulwarks to the main-shrouds, and clambering out on his hands and knees along these, made his way to where a long wooden handspike, that had been used for heaving round the windlass, was floating under the rigging.

Picking up this and cutting off a good length of the topsail halliards, he came back to where we all were, and proceeded to make a running noose at the end of the rope.

"What are you going to do?" asked Captain Miles, not quite certain yet of Jackson's sanity.

"I'm going to try to get one of the sharks to come close enough to give him a taste of this handspike," said the stalwart young fellow, drawing himself up to his full height, and looking round with a determined expression on his face that I had never seen there before. "If I can only get them all to come to the inside of the ship, I shall do for one or two, I know."

"Golly, Massa Jackson, me help you wid um knife," exclaimed Jake, entering with much animation in the other's project. "S'pose we fiss for um wid sumfin', so as make um swim roun' t'oder side ob ship, hey?"

"That's a good idea," said Captain Miles, and he offered Jake his hat to use as a bait, but the darkey shook his head at this.

“No, tankee, Mass’ Cap’en, I’se got sumfin’ better nor dat,” he exclaimed, pulling off the guernsey with which he had sheltered me the first night we were exposed on the wreck. “Dis do ebber so much betterer. Shark smell um, an’ tink he hab dis niggah, yah, yah!”

As he laughed, he tied one end of a bit of the signal halliards, which he had used to lash himself to the rigging, to the guernsey, lowering it down to a short distance above the surface of the water, where he kept it dangling.

One of the sharks rose towards it, another coming up soon after in its train; and then Jake kept continually shifting the rope round that portion of the taffrail of the poop which was above the sea, the sharks following in chase of the deceptive bait until he had lured them round to the inside part of the ship to join the one who was still on sentry there.

This was just what Jackson wanted; so he now proceeded to climb out along the mizzen rigging until he reached the point where the sea lapped it, when he arranged his running noose underneath, tying the loose end of the rope to the shrouds in a double hitch.

Jake then manoeuvred the baited line nearer to where the second mate had stationed himself, climbing out into the mizzen rigging too; when, as the leading shark turned over on its back and bit at the guernsey, Jackson slipped the running knot over its tail, pulling the noose in so that it held tightly. Then, seizing the handspike, he began belabouring the monster in a way that must pretty well have astonished its weak nerves, Jake the while stabbing it in the tail-end of the body with his long-bladed knife.

There was a terrific scuffle in which the water was tossed high in the air; but, after a minute or two, the shark broke the rope and managed to get away, although it was so seriously injured that it still remained on its back, and a quantity of blood poured out from the wounds it had received.

This made the crippled animal’s comrades set upon it, tearing it to pieces between them; and, while they were gorging themselves with the dissevered carcass, Jake dived into the sea under the fierce creatures, stabbing them wherever he could with such effect that his onslaught frightened the whole lot away—not a shark being visible in the vicinity within a few minutes after the commencement of the fray!

“Jerryboosalum!” exclaimed Jake, when, presently, he emerged all dripping and triumphant from the blood-stained waters. “We pay out dem debbels for ebberybody now. You nebber see dem come back hyar agin, I’se bet.”

Nor did we.

There was no doubt of the rapacious brutes having been finally scared away.

“You’re a couple of brave fellows,” cried Captain Miles when the two avengers climbed back in again on to the poop bulwarks, after thus carrying the war into Egypt, routing the foes that had kept us so long prisoners, and prevented us from doing anything towards righting the ship. “Now, I think, we can make another attempt to find that axe of the carpenter’s in the fo’c’s’le, if you are not too tired, Jake, to go in after it again?”

“Bress you, no, Mass’ Captain, me no tire’ at all! Me get axe in brace ob shakes, if um dar,” answered the willing fellow, laughing and showing his shining ivory teeth as he opened his mouth from ear to ear; and, almost as soon as he had uttered the words, he ran along the bulwarks towards the fore part of the ship, scrambled out into the main rigging, and dived into the sea immediately over the opening into the forecastle, at the same spot where he had previously gone down.

Once, twice, he came up to the surface again to take breath after a lengthened stay under the water; but, each time he rose with empty hands.

A third time he reappeared, still unsuccessful; and then we began to give up hope, although watching him all the while with the most intense anxiety.

None spoke a word, hardly daring to move.

Our interest in his actions was keen to intensity!

Our fate seemed trembling in the balance.

Once more he dived.

This was the fourth time he had ventured beneath the sea in his search for the coveted weapon, which was to free the ship from the cumbersome masts and top-hamper that kept her down on her beam-ends.

Unless we got the axe we would never be able to right her again; and we all regarded this dive of Jake's as the last chance, although we did not exchange a syllable—our looks expressed our thoughts.

Jake now remained longer below than he had yet done, so we feared some mishap had befallen him; but, just as Jackson was preparing to dive down into the water that covered the forecastle, to see what had become of him, the plucky darkey popped up above the surface, holding something in one hand as he swam with the other towards the main rigging.

Our hearts beat high with expectation.

In another minute, Jake had mounted into the shrouds, when our suspense was quickly relieved; for, no sooner had he clambered near enough to the ship's side to get a support for his feet, than he raised himself erect.

"Golly, Mass' Cap'en," he sang out in feeble accents, being now pretty well exhausted with his repeated efforts, "I'se got him at last! I'se got him at last!"

At the same time, he lifted up whatever it was he held in his hand, and tried to wave it round his head in token of his victory.

It was Adze's axe.

"Hooray!" shouted Captain Miles at the extreme pitch of his voice, and the responsive cheer we raised in chorus might have been heard more than a mile away.

Chapter Sixteen

Righting the Ship

“Now, men!” cried out Captain Miles, when our excitement had calmed down a little, “we’ve got the axe; but, the next thing we have to do is to use it, so as to release the ship as soon as we can. I think, my lads, I ought to have the first turn.”

So saying, taking the axe from Jake, he made a slash at the end of the hawser which had been rigged up over the head of the foremast, when, the strands being cut through after a couple of heavy strokes, the rope parted, curling up like a whip and flying up in the air with a pretty sharp report.

“Now, Mr Marline, it’s your turn,” said the captain, having thus set an example in commencing the work; and then, the first mate, nothing loth, attacked the main-shrouds, severing them clear to the chain-plates, when he handed over the axe to Jackson, who also did wonders with the weapon towards clearing away the heavy rigging that had so long resisted the efforts of the men with their clasp-knives.

The sea by this time was quite calm, thus greatly facilitating our labour; but, from our not having had any food for two days, all hands were very weak, and it took them a much longer time to free the ship of all her rope hamper and cordage than they would have achieved the task in if they had possessed their proper strength. It was, therefore, quite late on in the afternoon when the rigging on the port side was all detached, although Jake had recovered the axe at noon, and we had set to work immediately afterwards.

This, however, was only a preliminary to the real labour that lay before us—that of cutting away the masts, a much more serious matter.

The ship, it must be recollected, was lying completely over on her starboard side, with all her spars extended horizontally flat along the surface of the sea, which washed up to the hatches; so that, even amidships, the water was too deep for the men to have stood on the deck, even if they could have found foothold; there. Away ahead, the bows were completely submerged right up to the fore-chains, the ocean swell washing right through the Josephine fore and aft, right up to the poop.

Luckily, however, the upper portion of the mainmast bitts projected out of the water, so, Jackson, climbing down on to these and supporting himself as well

as he could by balancing his body with his feet | extended outwards straddle-ways, commenced to slash away at the mast here; while the rest of the men, under Mr Marline's directions, proceeded to clear away the rigging and unreeve those ropes which they were able to reach, in order to leave the spar clear for Jackson to work upon it freely.

It was a terribly tough job, though, the young seaman having to waste a part of each blow in the water that covered the foot of the mast. This neutralised his efforts, but he could not help it, for the axe splashed in the sea before touching the wood.

After a short spell, Jackson, quite feeble from hunger and exhaustion, had to give in, when Moggridge took his place, chopping vigorously at the mast as long as he was able. Then, another sailor took a turn at it, and so on, until each had had his go; when Jackson, rested a bit and refreshed by a long drink of water, began anew, making the chips of the hard wood fly as well as the sea, which he splashed up at every stroke the spray going into his eyes and almost blinding him.

All the men worked with the greatest perseverance in spite of their weak state; and, just before sunset, when the mast was about half cut through, it gave signs of at length yielding, sundry sharp cracks being heard as its natural buoyancy forced it to rise, the different purchases that previously held it to the deck being also now severed.

"Bravo, men, one spell more all round, and we'll have the spar loose!" cried Captain Miles, going down into the waist himself to head this last attack, and taking a longer turn with the axe than anyone.

Blow after blow was then rained upon the heel of the mast, all working with fresh courage and determination as the ponderous piece of timber gave way before their efforts, a wide gaping hole having been now made in it by the axe.

"Look out and stand clear!" shouted Jackson, catching on to the same old sling he had rove out of the topsail halliards by which he had lowered himself from the bulwarks, and swinging himself out of danger. "It's coming at last!"

At the same moment, a scrunching, wrenching sound was heard, followed by a long, loud crack; and then, up floated the mainmast cut off close to the deck, although still attached to the ship by the rigging on the starboard side—which

could not be reached, of course, at present, being under water, and the sea covering it to the depth of ten or twelve feet.

The effect of this relief to the ship was at once apparent, the forward portion of the wreck sensibly rising out of the sea, and the top of the forecastle being now visible, as well as the whole of the port bulwarks up to the cat-head on that side; while the main-deck below us, and the upper portion of the poop, became slanting at an angle towards the water on the starboard, instead of being almost perpendicular to it as before, thus showing that the centre of gravity was changed and the vessel recovering her stability.

“Bravo, men!” exclaimed Captain Miles joyously, delighted at such confirmatory proofs that his hopes of righting the Josephine were not unduly sanguine. “As soon as we get the foremast clear she’ll come up all standing, never fear! Can’t you see how the poor thing is trying hard to free herself now?”

As the portion of the floating mast that was inboard now rose out of the water as far as the main-top, a party of the men with Moggridge scrambled on to it and began cutting away the various cross ropes, halliards, clew-lines, and so on, that held it to the fore and mizzen spars. The yards had now floated too, although the upper portion of the mainmast bearing their weight, as it slewed over, pressed on the starboard bulwarks, remaining in that position from the calmness of the sea, which had not motion enough to drift it away.

“If only a slight breeze would spring up now, so as to rouse a little more swell, we’d float clear of this wreck,” observed Mr Marline. “Half the weight of the mast still tends to keep the ship down to leeward.”

“Ah, we don’t want it rough yet,” said the captain. “The foremast is the main thing to get rid of now; and, unless the sea keeps still, we’ll never manage to cut that away, for it is still more under water than the mainmast was.”

“I forgot that,” replied the mate; and then, both went along the bulwarks forwards to where Jackson was beginning operations at the other spar.

If the mainmast had proved stubborn and unyielding, this was twenty times more so, the great difficulty being that there was no vantage-ground to be had, in the shape of a firm footing, from whence to ply the axe.

“It’s no use, sir,” said Jackson, when the captain had come abreast of the spot where he was standing, in the fore-rigging, trying vainly to reach the mast below. “I can’t even touch the timber, much less make a blow at it!”

“Well, all that can be done,” replied Captain Miles, “is to lighten it as much as possible. Cut away what rigging you are able to lay hands on, and if the sea gets up in the night it may work free.”

“All right, sir,” said Jackson; so, he and the gang with him went to work with a will, slashing here and there at the cordage connecting the mast with the port side of the ship.

Meanwhile, Jake had been very busy, proving himself quite as useful as the rest.

Swimming like a fish he had gone into the sea near the wreck of the mainmast; and, with that long knife of his, which had done so much damage to the sharks, he began cutting away the fastenings of the topgallant-yard, although leaving the lee-braces intact, so that the spar could be hauled in by and by.

Moggridge was on the mast, too, and, with his gang of men, was operating on the tressel-trees to free the lower yard; so that, before it was dark, the whole stick of the mainmast was nearly clear. Only the shrouds and stays on the starboard side now held it to the hull; and, consequently, when it felt inclined to shift its position athwart ship it could easily do so.

Jackson, and those with him forward, having now done as much as they could to cast-off the foremast gear, Captain Miles hailed them to come aft.

“I think,” said he, “if we can only contrive to cut away the mizzen, and a breeze springs up, as there seems every prospect of from these clouds to windward, then, through the greater buoyancy now possessed by the ship amidships and astern, the foremast will go of its own accord. At all events, we can try it; for, as you say, there isn’t any chance of our getting rid of it by any unaided efforts of our own.”

The lighter spars that Jake and Moggridge had detached were now hauled in and made into a sort of raft, upon which Jackson and the whole lot of the crew clambered, proceeding to attack the mizzen-mast, the lower part of which spar was just out of the water.

Slash, bang went the axe with a will, wielded by hands nerved with all the strength of desperation, each man cutting away as long as he could, and then another hand taking his turn. Even I was busy with a knife, sawing away at the thick ropes, and doing what I could to help the others.

The mizzen, being of considerably less diameter than the mainmast, took a much less time to conquer; so, soon it gave way with a splintering crash, the jagged heel floating up in the same way as the other, and working about freely as the rigging was severed so that it could easily pass overboard.

“Now, men, we may cry a spell,” said Captain Miles when the task was accomplished. “Nothing more can be done now. We must wait for a breeze to clear away the wreck, when, I’ve no doubt, the ship will right again.”

“I’m sure I hope so, dear captain!” said I fervently. “Do you think she really will?”

“Not a doubt of it, my boy,” he answered. “She would have never come up so far if she had meant to stop on her beam-ends. See, now! Why, I can almost stand up here on the poop, the deck has risen so much already. By the morning, I hope she’ll be right end uppermost again.”

“But, how about our lodging for the night?” suggested Mr Marline. “If we lie along the bulwarks, in the same way as before, and the ship rights suddenly in the night, we’ll be all thrown in the water.”

“I have thought of that,” said Captain Miles. “We’ll brace up this raft of spars here close in under the bulwarks inboard, and then we’ll be on the safe side of the hedge if she comes up while we’re napping! Let us have another drink of water now, Jackson, my lad, and turn in for the night, for I’ve no doubt you’re all pretty tired. I’m sorry I can’t pipe down to supper.”

“You are not more sorry than I am,” put in Mr Marline drily. “I could eat with the greatest gusto the skeleton of my grandmother’s cat now!”

This speech of his had the very effect he wished of making the men laugh at their privation. Judging by my own feelings, they must have felt terribly hungry and empty; for, instead of two days, it seemed two years since I had tasted food.

I was fairly famishing!

There was no chance yet, however, of our getting anything to eat; so, in accordance with Captain Miles’s directions, preparations were now made for our accommodation during the night, as the evening was beginning to close in and darkness to settle down on the face of the deep, veiling the waste of waters from the gaze of us poor shipwrecked fellows.

The loose spars detached from the masts were hauled up lengthwise along the bulwarks on the inner side of the poop, where they were lashed securely so as to form a sort of shelf; and, on this, all hands now settled themselves as comfortably as they could—Captain Miles with Mr Marline and myself being on the after part of the structure, while Jackson with the others bunked down nearer the break of the poop; but, each man was separately tied, for greater precaution, in case of the sea getting up again and the waves breaking over the vessel.

While we had been moving about exerting ourselves, the sense of hunger had not been so apparent, although all experienced its gnawing pain in a greater or less degree; but now, resting quietly, doing nothing and having to bear all the suspense of waiting for what might turn out possibly to be only an uncertainty on the morrow, the ravenous feeling that assailed us became almost unbearable, several of the men moaning and groaning in their sleep.

As for myself, I know that when I dozed off in fragmentary snatches of sleep I dreamed of all sorts of splendid banquets, with nice dishes such as I had often tasted in the West Indies when dad gave a dinner-party; only to waken up in the still darkness and hear the melancholy wash of the sea surging up against the ship's hull, with the creaking noise the masts made as they surged to and fro on the swell.

Up to midnight, as far as we could tell the time, no breeze came; but, towards morning, a slight wind arose, when the sea became agitated, as we could hear from the sound of it breaking over the hull forwards, the ends of the masts worked to and fro more boisterously, grinding against the starboard bulwarks and tearing the timbers away bit by bit.

"Ah!" I heard Captain Miles say, as if talking to himself, "this is our chance if it only does not get too rough."

The sound of his voice woke up Gottlieb, the remaining German sailor, who was lying near Jake, the latter being next me as usual.

This man had taken the loss of his countryman a good deal to heart. Our hardships, besides, had affected his health; for, all of us noticed how ill he looked during the day when working at clearing away the masts.

"I vas die!" he now exclaimed.

“Dying? Nonsense, my man, not a bit of it,” cried Captain Miles. “Keep up your courage, and you’ll be worth a hundred dead men yet.”

“Ach nein, I vas die, I knows,” replied the other, speaking solemnly in deep low tones.

His German accent and mode of speech seemed to come out more strongly now than I had noticed before; and it flashed across my mind how I had once read somewhere that, when a man is at his last, though he may have lived amongst strangers for years and spoken a foreign tongue, he will then naturally go back to the language and thoughts of his own country.

“Shall I get you some water?” asked Jackson, who was also awake and heard what Gottlieb had said.

“Nein—no. I want not water, not nothing,” returned the other. “Listen, I’ve got to tell you sometings before I vas die. I did not speak before for fear to make mischief. You remember my poor frients Hermann?”

“Aye,” said Captain Miles, now keenly attentive. “Poor fellow, he fell overboard and got caught by the sharks.”

“Dat is what I vant explain,” painfully whispered the German, his voice failing him. “Hermann vas not fall overboard. He vas throwed over.”

“Thrown over! How—by whom?” exclaimed the captain quite startled.

“He vas throw over by Davis—he one bad man.”

“Davis?” cried Captain Miles, all of us eagerly listening.

“Ye–es. Davis, he grab holt of poor Hermann and say, ‘ah, you rascal, Jackson, I have you now,’ and den he pitch him over the side. Poor Hermann, he give one yell, for he vas sleep and not awaken yet, and den dere vas a splash and de sharks swallow him up!”

“Good heavens, man!” cried Captain Miles, “why did you not tell us of this before?”

“I vas afraid, and de man is now dead too; so I did not speak,” answered the other slowly.

“Yes, he’s dead and gone to his account! I suppose we need not talk about him any more,” said the captain, deeply moved, adding a minute after, as if unable to keep his emotion to himself, “But, he was a scoundrel! I say, Jackson, you had a lucky escape from him last night!”

“Thank God, sir, yes,” replied the young seaman. “He took a grudge to me from the first, before ever you promoted me, and that, of course, made him hate me afterwards more than ever. I did not think, though, he would have tried to take my life. I suppose that was the reason he looked so very strangely when he tried to clutch me before he jumped into the sea?”

“Not a doubt of it,” said Mr Marline. “He seemed thunderstruck, I know, for I particularly noticed his look. He must have been surprised at seeing you there alive, when he thought he had already settled you for good and all!”

“Well, he has met his own punishment,” answered Jackson; “and I do not bear him any ill-will now—or ever did for that matter. Let him rest.”

“Aye,” said Captain Miles; “but, how’s Gottlieb going on—are you better, my man?”

But, there was no answer to the captain’s question; and Jackson, bending over the German sailor, found his heart had ceased to beat, his body already becoming cold.

“Golly, Mass’ Cap’en,” called out Jake, “him ’peak de trute dat time, suah, him dead as door-nail!”

This news made everyone silent, each man thinking how soon his own time might come; and we anxiously awaited the morning.

During the sad episode that had occurred the wind had risen, beginning to blow pretty strongly from the westwards. The sea, too, had got up, for short choppy waves were dashing against the stern of the ship and throwing their broken wash over us. This made our situation less comfortable than it had been previously, our worn-out bodies and hunger-stricken frames not being able to stand the exposure so well now as at first.

The masts, also, were grinding against the bulwarks and making a horrible din, the crunching of the timber work and splintering noise of the planks almost deadening the noise of the sea and preventing us from hearing each other speak. Not that we felt much inclined for conversation, answering for myself;

for, I was chilled to the bone from the cool evening air penetrating my wet clothes, which got more and more saturated as the waves came over the poop, while I was faint with hunger and exhausted from want of sleep.

Thus the weary night passed, the sky being clouded over so that even the lights of heaven could not shine down to cheer us up; and, to add to the bitterness of our unhappy plight, our hearts were full of the untimely end of poor Gottlieb, the German sailor who had passed away so suddenly from amongst us, and the shocking disclosure he had made just before his tired spirit sought eternal rest, of the treachery of Davis—whose terrible fate, in front of our very eyes, seemed a just judgment for his murder of Hermann and foiled vengeance on Jackson, the latter of whom had evidently only escaped with his life through the wretched man's mistake.

At last, when it seemed as if we could hold out no longer, a faint gleam appeared in the east lighting up the horizon, and morning dawned gloomily upon us; but, a heavy mist hung over the sea and it took the rays of the rising sun a long time to pierce through this, albeit there was light enough for us to survey the scene around.

The ocean now, instead of rising and falling with the sullen swell that had given motion to it the day before, was covered with short broken waves that rolled up from the westwards with the wind, dashing against the partly-submerged vessel and throwing clouds of spray over those portions of the hull above the surface of the water, a large share of which we also came in for.

This motion of the sea, we could perceive, had considerably altered the position of the masts that had been cut away, for they were rolling over and grinding down the starboard bulwarks, the inboard ends working themselves gradually fore and aft the ship, the lee side of which had risen quite a couple of feet higher out of the water during the night.

"Another good wave or two will send all that hamper adrift," said Captain Miles, looking round and calculating our chances.

"Yes," replied Mr Marline, "they are coming from the right direction too, for if they broke over us abeam, then the foremast could not free itself. Now it possibly may, from the leverage it has against the fo'c's'le."

"You're right," said the captain; "and here comes a good-sized roller that may finish the job. Look out, lads, and hold on!"

Onward, as we gazed astern, came a large green sea, with a white angry crest, swelling larger and larger as it got nearer, until it almost hung above the poop before breaking.

“Hold on, lads, hold on!” cried the captain, repeating his previous warning, when, with a dull thud the mass of water broke, covering us all with a sheet of foam that drenched us through and through, almost swept us away from our lashings—the spars that supported us being lifted up from the deck and then dropped again as suddenly.

At the same time, there was a heavy crash heard forward, and the ship lurched as if she were going to founder. She quivered all over, and her timbers creaked and groaned.

Next, she rolled heavily more over to starboard, as the wave which had broken over us sped onwards, washing the waist and forecastle; and then, with another great crash the mizzen and mainmasts rolled into the sea, and the port side of the ship that was under water rose up clear.

The foremast, which had broken away when we heard that great crash forwards had been snapped off just below the slings of the fore-yard, and had followed its companions overboard, although still towed alongside by the stays and starboard rigging that also held the other spars; and, the next instant, with an upward bound the Josephine righted. At the same moment, the water that had filled the cabin and waist and forecastle poured out on either side through the scuppers and broken bulwarks; while the sunken part of the poop and lower deck rose high and dry again as we looked on, hardly believing that what we had so anxiously awaited and striven for had come to pass at last.

“Thank God!” exclaimed Captain Miles in a voice faltering with emotion; while several of the men, quite unnerved, burst into tears.

Chapter Seventeen

"A Baker's Dozen"

"Do you know what day it is?" observed Captain Miles presently, as we were all busily engaged freeing ourselves from the lashings that held us to the spars, preparing to stand on the deck once more in an upright position and stretch our sadly cramped legs, our movements for so many hours having been much restricted.

"No," replied Mr Marline, taking the question to himself as he stamped his feet vigorously to restore the circulation of the stagnant blood. "I have lost all count nearly of time during this awful week!—Saturday, is it not—or Monday?"

"You are a little behind in one guess and too far ahead in the other!" said the captain quietly. "It is Sunday, the seventh day since our trials began."

"Well," responded the other; "it is a lucky day for us, whatever it may be, sir. I confess I never expected such a fortunate ending as this to our sad misfortunes. I had made up my mind that we must go to the bottom; and pretty soon too, after the wind rose again!"

"I hoped for the best," answered Captain Miles, shaking himself like a big Newfoundland dog, and stepping gingerly along the poop as if half afraid to walk. "I never despaired even in our darkest hour; and I'm glad to say I didn't, for I trusted in Providence! But come," he added, with all his old brisk manner restored in a moment, smiling cheerfully, "we must see about getting things ship-shape around us; for it would be a poor return for the mercy we have received to sit down idly now and do nothing to help ourselves. Look alive, men, there's plenty to see to!"

There was; so much, indeed, that it almost seemed a puzzle where to begin.

Our first consideration was the masts, which were still attached to the hull by all the starboard rigging, and were banging against that side of the vessel with each send of the sea, threatening to knock the lower timbers in; so, a working party being quickly organised under the indefatigable Jackson, the axe was called into use again and the remaining shrouds cut away, the fore and main-braces being passed round the stump of the foremast, which stood some twenty feet or so from the deck, in order to prevent the span from going adrift when the shrouds parted.

The lee rigging, tautened by the strain of the masts dependent from it, was soon severed; and then, the ship being more buoyant, floated away some yards leeward—the spars veered out to the length of the braces, serving as a sort of breakwater and keeping the waves from coming in over the bows as she tended, for her stern at once coming round caused her to ride easily, head to wind, just as if she were anchored.

"Now, men," cried Captain Miles when this was managed, and no pressing danger stared us in the face, "we must now see whether we can't get up anything to eat from the after-hold. I daresay you fellows feel a bit hungry, eh?"

You should have only seen the look on every face when he said this!

The very idea of food made all ravenous; and it was as much as Captain Miles could do to prevent the hands from rushing in a body into the cabin.

The men seemed inclined to eat him when he put out his hand to stop them.

"Take it coolly!" he sang out, pushing one or two back that had pressed forwards. "I will see that you've not long to wait. Jake, you know your way below, I believe?"

"Iss, massa," replied the darkey with a broad grin. "Harry bery often sen' me down to get stores when um busy."

"Ah, the poor fellow, I had forgotten him," ejaculated the captain, entering the cabin at once and going towards the steward's pantry; but he had to pick his steps carefully, the place being heaped up with a variety of things that had been swept out of the different berths by the sea, and were washing up and down for more than two days.

As Captain Miles had surmised, the mulatto had been drowned inside the little apartment devoted to his use; for there his body was now found, the colour of the skin nearly white through the action of the water. The corpse was brought out and laid reverently under the break of the poop by a couple of sailors whom the captain called into the cabin for the purpose; after which he and Jake then proceeded to unfasten the hatches leading down into the after-hold in search of provisions for the living, there being plenty of time to attend to the obsequies of the dead later on when our more urgent needs were supplied.

Cuffee the cook during this interval had gone forward to look after his old galley; and loud was his lament to find it washed away, its weight having

parted the strong lashings that secured it to the ring-bolts in the deck when the ship capsized.

“Boderation!” he exclaimed. “How can um cook w’en dere’s nuffin’ to cook, an’ no place to cook in?”

“Belay that grumblin’ o’ yourn, darkey,” cried old Moggridge, who had been poking about amongst a heap of the debris of ropes and broken spars and gear that were piled in a heap between the windlass bitts and the top of the topgallant forecastle. “I do believe your blessed old caboose hasn’t been washed overboard arter all! Here it is, only on its beam-ends like the ship was an hour ago; but I daresay all your pots and pans are all right inside.”

“Golly, bosun, does you mean dat?” exclaimed Cuffee, going up quickly to where Moggridge was standing, inspecting the mass of heterogeneous things that had fetched up in the corner, consisting of a portion of one of the anchor-stocks, the men’s clothes and traps washed out from their bunks, mess-tins, and all sorts of stray dunnage. “You tell me de galley am right an’ safe, for true, hey?”

“Why, there it is, you ugly varmint! Can’t you see it for yourself?” retorted the old seaman, rather nettled at having his word doubted.

“Lor’ a mussy, dere it am!” ejaculated Cuffee, highly delighted when his own eyes confirmed the fact. “Golly, Bosun, we can cook sumfin’ now!”

“I don’t know how you’re going to manage that as it stands,” said Moggridge sarcastically. “Strikes me you’d better see about rigging it up properly first!”

“I’se spec’ you’ll help, Massa Bosun,” hinted the darky cook in an obsequious way; “you clebber man, Massa Moggridge, an’ knows how to bowse tings up.”

“Oh, yes; I don’t want any of your blarney now, Cuffee. I fancy we’re all hungry enough to eat anything raw when we gets it, without botherin’ about cooking to-day at any rate!”

A grunt of assent came from all the hands standing by at this remark; and I then turned round to see what Captain Miles and Jake were about in the cabin. I had not yet entered that apartment, the finding of the steward’s dead body having scared me away. The pallid corpse looked so ghastly and terrible!

As I turned to go to the after portion of the vessel I was almost afraid that I should see the dead body of the steward again; but on reaching the entrance to the cabin I noticed a tarpaulin covering it in the corner, and I went hastily by, turning my face away, and bolting within the swing doors.

Here, if the jumble of miscellaneous odds and ends under the break of the forecastle had struck me as strange, the confusion was ever so much worse; for, nothing having been washed out, the entire furniture of every separate berth, as well as of the main saloon, were mixed together in one indistinguishable mass—clothes, books, food and crockery-ware, perishable and imperishable goods alike, all mingled in one inharmonious whole.

Blankets, bedding, and pillows were piled on the chairs and benches that had surrounded the centre table, which article, with its legs upstanding, was jammed into the captain's own sanctum, half in and half out, like the cow had been; while the fragments of plates and dishes, coffee-pots and glass-ware of all description, were scattered on the floor in every direction. Captain Miles's sextant and the tell-tale compass, that used to hang from the middle of the ceiling of the deck above, reposed peaceably together on the top of a double Gloucester cheese. Every variety of eatable was mixed up higgledy piggledy with articles for table use, and all sorts of known and unknown garments.

My trunk had not escaped the general destruction, the new outfit with which I had been provided being all spoilt; while some pictures and various cherished mementoes of my old West Indian home shared the fate of Mr Marline's wardrobe and the captain's kit.

Indeed, the sea had performed its scouring work so well, that it would have puzzled a wiser man than Solomon to have decided what was each individual's personal property, the whole having been thrown together like one of the odd lots at an auction sale.

After surveying the medley for a few moments, my attention was attracted to Captain Miles and Jake, the latter of whom was down within the store-room under the hatch in the stern-sheets, only his woolly head projecting, handing up several tins of potted meats and bags of biscuit to the captain; while the latter was placing these as he received them on a clear space of the deck from which he had swept the broken refuse away, checking off the things as Jake ferreted them out from below, his head bobbing down and up again each moment.

“There,” said Captain Miles, as I came up to the two; “three bags of biscuit, four seven-pound tins of boiled mutton, two tins of preserved vegetables, one ham, one cheese, six pounds of coffee, and one firkin of butter. I think that will do. But, where is the sugar I told you to get out, Jake?”

“Here he am,” replied the darkey, handing another bag up. “Dat’s fine sugar, sah, for de cabin table.”

“And where is the other sort?” asked the captain.

“Um here too; but cask too big for dis chile to lift.”

“Then you must get out more in something smaller, for the men’s coffee in the morning,” said Captain Miles. “I don’t want them to be treated differently to myself, and I know I like sugar in mine.”

“Yah, yah, massa too good,” laughed Jake; but he proceeded to obey the captain’s orders, and another bag was soon added to the pile on the floor of the cabin awaiting distribution.

“Now, Tom,” said Captain Miles to me, “run and call in a couple of the hands to take out their rations. I’m going to serve out the grub at once, and we may as well all eat together.”

It should be mentioned that all these preparations, although I have taken so long to describe them, did not take up much time, the captain knowing from his own feeling that the men were all starving, and not keeping them an instant longer without food than he could help.

On receipt of his order, therefore, I hastened away, returning almost immediately with one of the sailors and Cuffee, who asserted his right of coming for the food; but, while I was absent Jake had procured a knife that was used for opening the tins of preserved meat out of the steward’s pantry, where, from its being hung on a hook, it had escaped being lost among the other débris. With this useful little article he now proceeded to take off the tops of the cases containing the boiled mutton, Cuffee and his assistant parcelling the same out under the captain’s eye.

The cabin table had been set upon its legs again and the provisions placed upon it, when the men being ordered to file in, Captain Miles distributed a small portion of the meat with a couple of biscuits to each. He advised them to

eat slowly and moderately, saying that if they did otherwise they would feel very badly afterwards, on account of having gone so long without food.

Mr Marline and Jackson and myself were also rationed out in similar fashion, each and all of us, irrespective of position, being treated on an equality and Captain Miles himself only taking the same quantity that he gave us; then, when all had thus broken their fast, the men were dismissed and allowed to carry off away forward the greater portion of the provisions that had been got out for them, although with strict injunctions still to eat sparingly, at all events on this first day of their tasting any nourishment. They were likewise told to be careful not to drink too much water, Jackson, who had charge of the cask, being ordered to use discretion.

"We are only thirteen all told now aft—a baker's dozen, men," said the captain, "and I wish to carry you home in good health with me to England; so, mind what you are after, for my sake if not for your own! We have weathered the gale, and stuck to the ship though bottom upwards, for nigh on three days, braving the perils of the deep in the way of sharks and such like; consequently I think it would be hard lines on me if I couldn't fetch you safe into port in the end."

"You're a real good sort, Cap'en Miles, that's what you are!" cried Moggridge—acting as spokesman for the rest by general consent apparently, for the others gave a subdued sort of cheer that seemed to intimate their acquiescence in his remarks—"and I thinks as how we'd be no better nor brute beasts if we weren't to act as how you advises, eh, lads?"

"Aye, aye," chorused the rest affirmatively.

"That's all right then," said Captain Miles. "You can see I don't want to stint you, for I've only given you these few supplies to carry you on until we can get to the ship's stores in the main hold. You may go forward now, and I'd recommend you to get out all your duds and hang 'em out to dry as soon as you can, so as to have a shift bye and bye, and that'll do you as much good as the grub."

The hands then retired from the cabin, leaving only the captain and Mr Marline and I there, Jackson going out into the waist too, in order to draw some water and serve it out by the captain's directions.

“Oh, Captain Miles!” I exclaimed when we were thus left together, “all my clothes are spoilt.”

“And oh, Master Tom!” he retorted, “how about my poor chronometers? They’ve stopped and will never go again, I suppose, till they’ve been put in dry dock in London and had a thorough overhaul, salt water not agreeing with their constitutions as it does with some folk. By Jove, though, Marline, I never thought of that before. I shall be puzzled how to get my longitude bye and bye, I fancy.”

“My old watch is going, sir,” said the mate. “I set it by the ship’s time before our capsize, and it goes pretty correctly, for I didn’t forget to wind it up all the time we were spread-eagling on the bulwarks.”

“You didn’t?” cried the captain. “You’re a wonderful fellow, Marline, and you ought to be Archbishop of Canterbury or something! You say you set it by the ship’s time on Thursday?”

“I don’t know what day it was, sir, but it was the last time you took the sun,” replied the other.

“Then, at that time, I recollect, we were in 32 degrees north latitude and 40 degrees west longitude. Ha, humph, I see! That will give us pretty well the time at Greenwich, with a little deduction. It’s all right, Marline, I have it. Mind, though, you don’t let the old turnip run down.”

“Turnip, indeed!” exclaimed Mr Marline in pretended indignation, winking at me. “Just you hear him, Master Tom!”

“Well, well, I beg its pardon and yours,” said the captain laughing; “but, let us get out of this disgraceful hole and go out on deck to see what the weather is like. Jake!”

“Iss, massa,” replied the darkey, who, I forgot to mention, remained behind when the rest of the crew went forwards.

“I’m going to make you steward in poor Harry’s place,” said Captain Miles.

“Iss, massa,” responded Jake, greatly pleased at the honour thus bestowed on him, and making a low how with a scrape back of his left foot, according to negro etiquette, in acknowledgment of the favour.

“Look out, my lad, and make matters snug here as well as you can. You may call in your brother darkey the cook to help you, if you like.”

“Golly, massa, me do him much betterer own self,” replied Jake grinning hugely. “Dat Cuffee bery lazy sometimes.”

“Well, well, that’s like the pot calling the kettle black, I fancy,” said Captain Miles smiling. “However, you can please yourself, and get any of the hands you may want to assist in lifting back the bunks and so on in their proper places—some of the things may be too heavy for you. At all events, make the saloon presentable before we come down again, and swab up the deck.”

“That’s a willing fellow,” he added to Mr Marline, as we went out and mounted the poop-ladder. “I never saw a negro so handy, so plucky, and so willing.”

“Thank you, Captain Miles,” I said, taking the compliment to myself, as having a sort of family ownership in Jake.

“Why, what have you got to do with it, Tom Eastman?” he asked in his humorous way, poking fun at me.

“Well, captain, I don’t think you’d ever have seen him on board if it hadn’t been for me,” I retorted.

“You’re right there, but I’ll thank you for his passage-money, then, Master Tom,” said he, laughing at his joke and I too joining in, our wonderful good fortune having restored all our spirits amazingly.

The sun now came out and the day became bright and cheerful, with a gentle soft breeze blowing from the south-west which was just sufficient to curl the crests of the waves and make the sea sparkling, the heavy waves of the morning having lessened considerably and the whole expanse of the ocean dancing before our eyes in the warm light of the noontide.

“I see,” observed Mr Marline, “the hands have quickly acted on your advice about drying their clothes.”

“Aye, poor fellows; and time enough, too, for they haven’t had a dry rag on them, I believe, since last Monday.”

“You forget you have been in the same plight,” replied the other, as we looked at the long strings of shirts and trousers and guernsey frocks hanging from

ropes that were stretched from the stump of the foremast across the deck forwards, all fluttering in the wind and making the ship look as if she were dressed with bunting in honour of some royal birthday.

“And so have you too, Marline, as well as this young shaver,” returned the captain good-humouredly; “but I was not thinking of ourselves; for, we’re both young fellows, like Master Tom here, and able to brave anything. Hasn’t the ship suffered, though, poor old thing!” he added as he glanced sympathetically over her and saw all the damage, which, first the gale, and then our subsequent cutting away of the masts, had effected.

“Aye, she doesn’t look as trim as when she left port,” said Mr Marline.

Nor did she by a long way!

The mizzen and mainmasts had been cut down close to the deck, while the butt-end of the foremast stood up only some twenty feet or so above the forecastle—a jagged broken piece of timber, with the stays and other ropes stretching away from its head to the wreck of the spars tumbling about in the sea in front of us. The bowsprit alone remained intact of all our sticks, the gale having even spared the jib-boom; while the martingale and dolphin striker, with the shrouds on either side of the projecting spar were still all standing.

Looking inboards, the helm and steering apparatus were undamaged, as was also the binnacle, although this had a severe list to starboard; but, the skylight in the centre of the poop had been swept away, as well as a portion of the bulwarks on the side that had been under water, the rasping of the mizzen-mast having sawn them off flush with the deck.

This was the case, too, below in the waist, where the starboard timbers had been carried away nearly to the fore-chains, which probably had acted as a buffer and stayed further destruction in that direction; and it was only owing to this that the galley and pump-box had been saved, as otherwise both would have been swept overboard along with the dunnage I had noticed collected under the lee of the forecastle.

“Well, we mustn’t grumble,” said Captain Miles after meditating a bit over the damage with a serious face. “Our lives have been spared and the ship floats; so, there you have two things to the good, to balance our account on the other side of the ledger!”

“You’re right, sir,” replied Mr Marline; “but have you sounded her yet to see if we have shipped much water?”

“Aye, I did that a long time ago, while you were dreaming,” said the captain with a chuckle. “Old Adze the carpenter saw to the matter as soon as we righted. She has taken in very little in the main hold; but the fore-peak is full, as I thought, through some careless fellow not putting on the hatch and battening it down again after we got up these new sails. However, we can’t see about clearing it out yet, for the pumps are smashed and it will take Adze all day to-morrow to get them in working order again. Besides, I don’t want the men to do more than is absolutely necessary to-day, for it is Sunday, as I told you before; and we ought, in more ways than one, considering all we have gone through, to observe it as a day of rest.”

“I quite agree with you, sir,” replied Mr Marline; “and if I had not thought so, you would have seen me long ere this on the fo’c’s’le, getting up a jury-mast or something.”

“Let you alone for that,” said Captain Miles. “But, Marline,” he added the next moment, “there is one thing we must do presently. I thought it best to leave it until sunset, before letting all hands turn in and have a good night’s rest; and that is—”

“To bury the steward,” suggested the other.

“You’ve guessed rightly,” said he; “so now, as I see the men taking in their clothes, which are by this time dry enough, I should fancy, from their exposure to the sun and wind, I think I’ll give them a hail.”

This he did; and bye and bye, as the orb of day sank below the sea, the body of Harry, tied up in a piece of tarpaulin and with a heavy piece of chain-cable attached to the feet to make it sink, was committed to the deep, Captain Miles reading the impressive burial service, for those lost at sea, out of a prayer-book which he had recovered from the debris of the cabin and put in his pocket for the purpose.

This was our religious observance of the day. It was a great contrast to the prayers on the poop which we had on the previous Sunday, when the ship, in all the glory of her fine proportions, with her lofty masts towering into the skies, was rolling on the calm bosom of the ocean, with her idle sails spread vainly to the breeze that would not come; now, she was but a battered and

dismantled hulk. The breeze we had wished for had come at last and waxed into a strong wind, which had ultimately developed into the hurricane that had done all the mischief—the final result of which was the present burial of our drowned comrade!

“Lads,” cried Captain Miles when he had finished reading the service and the body had disappeared below the surface of the restless sea, “you can go and turn in now, all that like. Mind, you have a good caulk until early to-morrow morning, when you’ll have to rouse out sharp, all hands, for there be lots to be done!”

We who were on the poop also went below soon afterwards to the cabin, where we found that Jake had cleared out all the debris and arranged the place so neatly that one would scarcely have imagined it had ever been in the state of confusion we noticed when first entering it.

Our bunks, too, were all arranged comfortably, with dry blankets spread in each; and I know that I, for one, was so glad to lie down on anything like a bed again after the two nights’ exposure outside the ship, that I dropped off to sleep the moment I turned into my cot—the remark the captain had made about our being now thirteen in number, or a “baker’s dozen,” running in my head as a refrain to my dreams, although my rest was not in any way disturbed. The baker’s dozen, however, made me think of bread on my waking up in the morning; for, I felt more hungry then than on the previous day, when the first morsel of food I tasted almost choked me.

Chapter Eighteen

We beat up for the Azores

It was early dawn when the unwonted sound of feet bustling about over my head on the deck, which I had not heard now it seemed for an unconscionable length of time, roused me up to the realisation of our having at last been relieved from our terrible peril and the privations we had suffered whilst the ship was on her beam-ends.

Oh, what joy it was to think we were all safe on board the Josephine again!

Hunger, one of the most painful of the sufferings we had experienced, and indeed the one which I felt the most of any, was now banished completely to the realms of the past; and I had presently trustworthy evidence of this, Jake appearing at the door of my cabin and bringing in a steaming bowl of coffee and some biscuits, as a sort of "little breakfast" before the larger and more substantial meal was ready—the galley being already fixed up properly and Cuffee having resumed his culinary duties with all his paraphernalia in train.

When I got out on the poop, I noticed that the hands had not been idle while I was sleeping, so much already having been accomplished in the way of restoring the ship to an effective condition that the men must have set to work long before daylight, I was certain.

Moggridge was just going down the poop-ladder as I mounted it, on his way forward to execute some order Captain Miles had given him.

"Fine morning, Master Tom," he said.

"It is," I responded, "a regular jolly one; but, how busy you all are!"

"Aye, aye, young master, we can't afford to wait when there's so much to be done and so precious little time to do it in."

And then he was off in a jiffey.

Captain Miles was sitting on the port bulwarks, which were intact, polishing up his sextant.

"Good morning, captain," I said.

“Morning,” he answered absently, so much engrossed with one of the eye-pieces of the instrument that he couldn’t even look up.

I felt like the idle little boy in the story-book, who went and asked, first, the horse to play with him, and then, when that sagacious animal refused to accede to his request, on the plea of having his master’s business to attend to, he tried to induce various other quadrupeds to come and amuse him, only to meet with a constant refusal—the idle boy having in the end to go to work himself, finding idleness, without companions to share it, the reverse of pleasure.

Everybody on board seemed too much engrossed with some task in hand to attend to me; even Jake, when I went below again, could hardly spare me a word, for he was intent on polishing up the saloon table again, trying to efface the effects of its long immersion in the water from the surface of the mahogany—a somewhat vain task, I may add, as the wood never recovered its original tone.

I then went forwards, only to see the men there working like bees. Not a soul even raised his head to glance at me as I passed by.

Adze, the carpenter, was up to his ears in the pump casing, which he had fixed again over the well amidships, after first taking out the valves and fitting new suckers to them. Cuffee, too, was blowing away at the galley fire till his black face looked like that of a red Indian; and, as for Mr Marline, he was in his element, as he always was when overseeing anything connected with the rigging of the ship, enjoying himself to his heart’s content in setting up a jury-mast to take the place of our broken foremast. He had made the men lash the topmast and topgallant-mast to the fragment left of the original spar, securing it with back-stays and preventers on the port and starboard sides before getting up the shrouds. These latter, of course, would have now to be reduced, in order to suit the diminished height of the new mast, whereon the topsail-yard would have to do duty for the old fore-yard, and the topgallant one be transferred into a topsail-yard.

Mr Marline seemed rather proud of his handiwork; so, this made him more conversational than anyone I had yet tried to talk to.

“Ha, Tom,” he said, “you’re just in time to see us cross our yards again—not a bad job, eh?”

“No, sir,” I replied; “have you been long over it?”

“Ever since daylight.”

“And have all of you been equally busy?” I asked.

“Bless you, yes! As for Cuffee, he roused out poor Moggridge early in the middle watch, to help him to fix the galley, bribing him with the promise of some hot coffee. That started the hands; for, the boatswain must needs hail Adze to see after the pumps, and hearing them stirring about, I came on deck and employed the idlers in getting the spars alongside, as the sea was as calm as a pond. Then, I set them to work unreeving the gear and making things snug for setting up our jury-masts, of which this is the first—a downright seamanlike piece of work I call it.”

“So it is, sir,” said I to please him, seeing him looking up at the new foremast admiringly; “and, I suppose, Mr Marline, when you’ve finished rigging this, you’ll begin setting up a new mainmast.”

“Aye, my boy, and a mizzen too after that! You shall see the old barquey spreading her canvas bravely again before I have done with her.”

Presently, Adze called out that he had made the pumps act at last.

This brought down Captain Miles from the poop; when, a party of the sailors at once setting to work, the bilge-water soon rose from below and flowed in a stream in the scuppers.

Half an hour’s spell served to make the pumps suck dry, showing that the main hold of the ship was clear; and, seeing this, the captain turned round and hailed Mr Marline with a triumphant shout.

“There, Marline,” he cried, “what do you think of that, eh? Who was right and who was wrong?”

“Well, sir, you were a true prophet this time,” replied the first mate equally well pleased at the result, although it went against his own prognostication; “I only hope you’ll get the fore-peak free as easily; for, then, we’ll float on an even keel.”

“All right, my boy, so we will,” said Captain Miles; and he then ordered the hands to bend the end of the hose down into the forepart of the ship below that

part of the forecastle where the men bunked, the other end of the hose being attached to the pump cylinder.

This job was a heavier one than that of clearing the main hold, the men having to be relieved in spells; but, after several hours' hard work, the bows of the ship were sensibly lightened of the extra water ballast we had carried here, and by the afternoon this part of the vessel was also clear.

Meanwhile, however, Jake had announced that breakfast was ready and on the cabin table. This was the first hot meal we had had the chance of partaking of now for four days, and it may be imagined with what gusto we all enjoyed it I should add that, Captain Miles, liking good living himself, took care that the men all round had an equally good spread, sharing his own private stores liberally, so that those in the forecastle fared as sumptuously as we did.

The captain did this out of his own innate good nature; but, had he been generous merely as an act of policy, it could not have served him in better stead, the sailors working all the afternoon and far into the night with all the greater willingness in setting the ship to rights as a return for the kindness he had displayed. None wanted driving to make them stick to their several tasks.

Mr Marline had believed that when the fore-peak was clear of water the Josephine, which until then had her bows almost level with the sea, would have recovered her proper floatation; but, although her head now rose, she displayed a decided list to starboard that became the more apparent as her head became elevated more and more.

"Some of the cargo must have shifted," said Captain Miles; and with him, true sailor as he was, to discover a fault was to suggest a remedy.

"We must take off the battens of the main hatch," he cried. "Mr Marline, stop rigging those sticks for a bit. It is far more important for our stowage to be true before we take any more of the heavy spars on board; for, if we meet with any bad weather, we may turn the turtle again and not come out of it so cleverly as we managed on the first occasion!"

"All right, sir," replied the mate, ordering the hands under his orders on the forecastle to move aft, where, under the captain's directions, the hatches were taken off and the cargo exposed to view.

A pair of shears were then rigged up over the hold, on which a running tackle with blocks and falls was rigged; when, after several puncheons of rum had

been hoisted out, it was found that the lover tier of the cargo had lurched over at the time the ship careened.

It took many hours to alter the arrangement of the sugar casks below, the rum having to be all hoisted on deck first; but, the hands working zealously, the job was at last accomplished, the ship soon afterwards righting properly, with her deck now horizontal to the plane of the water instead of being at an angle with it as before.

The puncheons of rum were then again lowered down and stowed securely and the hatches put on again. The men after this ceased their toils for the day, it being close on to sunset.

On the third day, the rigging of the jury foremast was completed and the head-gear all attached to it, new sails being bent to the yards in the place of those that had been blown away. Fresh halliards and running ropes were also rove, so that on an emergency, if the wind arose suddenly, we could have made sail on the one mast, and thus made a shift of battling with the elements.

Fortunately, however, the weather remained beautifully calm, only a slight breeze springing up for a short time during the first hours of the morning watch. The light wind had hardly sufficient power to give motion to the bull of the vessel, and so the task of setting up the other masts and rigging was satisfactorily proceeded with.

The mainmast caused the greatest trouble, the remains of the heel having first to be taken out; although Mr Marline luckily thought of this when we were re-stowing the cargo on the previous day. Otherwise, we would have had a second sorting out of the contents of the hold.

The shears used for raising the rum puncheons not being strong enough to lift the mainmast, which was a very heavy piece of timber weighing several hundredweights, the main and fore-yards, with the mizzen topmast, were set up as a triangle over the place where the spar had to be stepped—the ends of the yards being fixed firmly against the bulwarks on either side and lashed together at the top. This “crab” was then raised in the air by a tackle and purchase, the falls of which were brought to the capstan and run up by the crew as if they were weighing anchor.

Then, the mainmast was slung just about its balancing centre and hauled inboard through the broken bulwarks—which had not yet been restored on purpose until all the spars were hoisted in.

The falls were now again manned; and, the sailors heaving away with one of their animating choruses, up went the spar in the air above the vacant hole in the deck from where the old part of the heel had been removed—guys being belayed on either side to make it drop in true when it was right over the place for its reception.

It did not take long to fix it now perpendicularly; although, as the spar had been severed some feet from the deck, the new end of it was more slender than the old, and so required packing round with pieces of wood driven in by mallets to make it secure.

Next, the standing rigging was set up after being first shortened; and Adze had a good deal of blacksmith's work to do in making fresh bolts and eyes, converting Cuffee's galley into a temporary forge for this purpose. All the ropes and blocks having been carefully collected beforehand and sorted, this labour did not consume half the time that one would have thought.

On the fifth day, the mizzen-mast was also got back into its place.

Then the yards were crossed and sails bent on the mainmast; and the Josephine appeared to show nearly as much top-hamper as she did before the gale, only that all the masts were much shorter than before, the foremast especially being only an apology for the former spar.

However, the change made a wonderful improvement in the appearance of the ship; and when the broken bulwarks were patched up, which was done on the last day of the week, she was herself again.

On the Sunday that followed the righting of the ship we had our prayers on the poop as usual, Captain Miles returning especial thanks to the great Ruler of the deep for all the mercies we had received; and, as a fair wind sprung up in the evening of the same day from the south, we set sail once more, moving away from the spot where we had been refitting.

"I don't think," said Captain Miles, "that we've drifted twenty miles either way since this day week; for there's no current hereabout, and we've had little or no wind."

“We’re then still about the centre of the Sargasso Sea,” observed Mr Marline.

“Aye,” responded the other; “so Master Tom will have ample opportunities within the next fortnight or so for studying all you told him about the Gulf-weed, for I’ve no doubt we’ll presently pass through lots of it.”

“Shall you shape a straight course for the Channel, sir?” asked the first mate, looking at his watch as he did so in a very self-satisfied sort of way, it seemed.

“You may well observe that time-piece of yours carefully,” said the captain with a sigh, although he smiled as he spoke. “On that little article depends all our navigation—that is, until we meet with some passing vessel to correct our reckoning, and I don’t suppose we shall come across many of these, for we’re out of the track of all voyaging over this part of the Atlantic save those homeward-bound from the Cape. I intend to make for Flores, the westernmost island of the Azores, as we’re short of water; besides, by my pursuing that course we shall get up into the trades, and bye and bye fetch the Gulf Stream, which will render our passage shorter to the Channel.”

“Very well, we’ll see,” said Mr Marline, unconsciously using his old stereotyped form of answer to almost everything.

“I believe,” cried Captain Miles laughing, “that if anybody asked you to accept a thousand pounds you’d reply, ‘I’ll see about it!’”

“You just try me and see,” replied the first mate drily to this remark, joining in the captain’s laugh; but I noticed that the other did not take up the offer.

Through our detention by the calm, in addition to the scurrying to and fro we had during the hurricane and the long time we remained a helpless log on the waters, it was now considerably more than two months since we had left the West Indies; and, as the Josephine did not sail so well now, besides having light and variable winds, it took us more than another fortnight to reach Flores and sight the Morro Grande—a mountain some three thousand feet in height, rising high in the clouds above Santa Cruz, the capital of the island.

But, for days before this, we sailed through that wonderful Sargasso Sea, the circumstances of whose being Mr Marline had explained to me during the fearful night we passed clinging to the capsized hull of the ship, exposed to the cruel wash of the pitiless waves; and, as we ploughed over this submerged meadow of sea-weed in the centre of the Atlantic, I could not help recalling the mangrove swamps and lagoons of the tropic island in which my childhood had

been passed, wondering the while, too, whether the Josephine would not be reported as lost through the protraction of her voyage—for she was expected to reach England by the middle of September at the latest, and it was now October.

Why, if news came to Grenada that we were given up at Lloyd's, poor dad and mother would be in a terrible way about me, I knew!

The day of the receipt of such intelligence would be a sad one at Mount Pleasant, where all had loved me and would miss me now more than ever.

These thoughts, however, were but idle fancies, I reflected when we sighted Flores; for, even if we had been given up, the news would now soon be sent on that the old ship was still to the fore. So, when Captain Miles had taken in fresh water and provisions, besides buying a new chronometer, and then shaped a course direct for the English Channel, I looked forward anxiously to relieving my parent's anxiety as much as I did at the realisation of my boyhood's dream of seeing London and going to school.

Chapter Nineteen

Dad

My tale will soon come to an end.

After leaving Santa Cruz, we had a fine steady wind from the north-west, right on our quarter, all the way to the chops of the Channel; and this enabled us to accomplish the intervening twelve hundred miles of distance in ten days' time.

We were equally lucky in getting up to the river, although it was well on in the month of October, when easterly winds generally prevail; for, without requiring the assistance of a tug, after making the Lizard, we passed up towards London in fine style, walking at a great rate by Dunnose, Beachy Head, Dungeness, and all those other landmarks that mariners know so well.

When we got to Gravesend, I had a great surprise; for, who on earth do you think should come off to the ship as we anchored in the stream, waiting for a pilot to take us up the river to the Saint Katherine's Docks, where we were bound? The very last person in the world whom you or I could possibly have expected to meet me there!

Who do you think?

Why, dad!

Yes—he; and none other.

It seems that shortly after I sailed in the Josephine, the gentleman who had made him an offer to purchase Mount Pleasant when I was ill—and then backed out of the bargain because dad would not immediately come to terms—renewed the proposal, and dad accepted at once.

Then, as he had nothing remaining to keep him out in the West Indies, he took passages in the next mail steamer home for my mother and my sisters and himself, arriving over here even before I could have expected to reach England had all gone well with our ship.

When they got to London, however, news came from Lloyd's that the Josephine was lost, as our boats, which had been swept away in the hurricane, had been picked up by a homeward-bound ship.

Needless to say, dad and all my folk were heart-broken at hearing this.

Hardly, however, had they become reconciled to my death, as they thought, than a fresh piece of intelligence was passed on from Flores, narrating how we had touched there, all well on board; so, as soon as we were reported as being sighted in the Channel, dad was on the watch to be the first to greet me, coming down specially to Gravesend to board the ship as soon as she entered the river.

I need not describe the meeting with dad in the first place, nor the way in which my mother and sisters, dear little Tot included, welcomed me?

Hardly!

Jake must have the last word, though; for, it was only through his faithfulness that I had been preserved during all our perils on the sea.

You must remember that, not only did he save me from drowning in the first instance, when the vessel capsized; but, it was mainly through his watchful attentions that my life was saved during the time that I was exposed on the hull of the ship while she was on her beam-ends.

“Golly, Massa Eastman,” he cried out to dad the moment he put foot on board the Josephine, “I’se look arter Mass’ Tom, as I promiss, suah, and here he am, sah, safe an’ sound!”

So I was; but, in spite of that, I have never forgotten my experiences of the Sargasso Sea, nor The White Squall.

The End