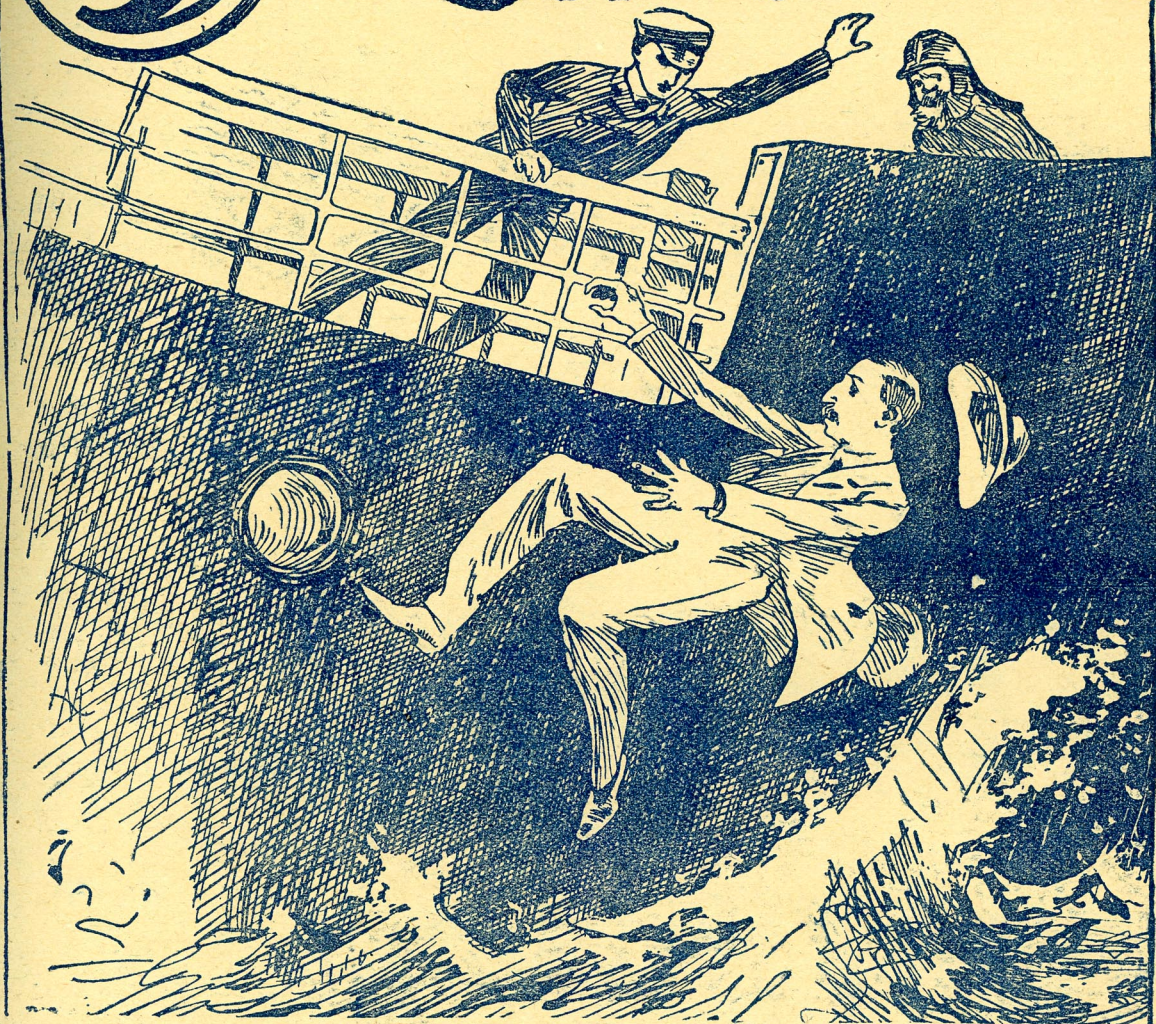


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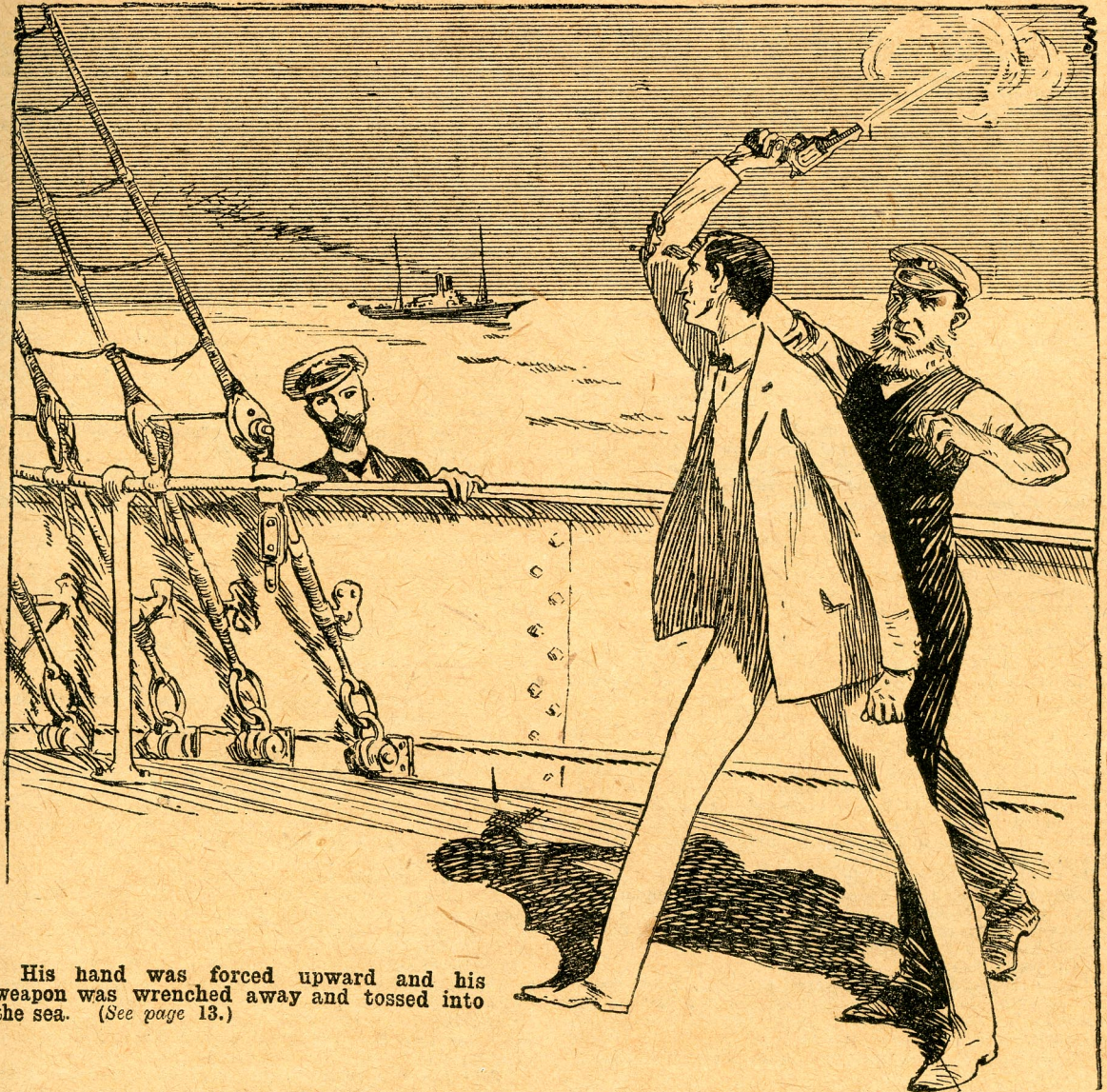
THE CLUTCH OF THE CORMORANT



Maurice stopped, irresolute, and at that moment a roll of the ship pitched him into the sea. His wild clutch missed the rail, and down he went into the frothing waves.

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His hand was forced upward and his weapon was wrenched away and tossed into the sea. (See page 13.)

THE CLUTCH OF THE CORMORANT.

By CHARLES HAMILTON.

The Captain of the "Endymion"—An Unwelcome Passenger.

"The Cormorant!"

Captain Holroyd's hands closed upon the rail with a convulsive grasp. From his frank and almost boyish face the colour had suddenly faded.

The man in the boat looked up, caught his startled glance, and nodded coolly.

"Glad to see you, Holroyd! I was almost afraid that I should miss the 'Endymion,' after all."

"What do you want here, Craig Carton?" The young captain's voice was hard and strained.

The man came swiftly up the ship's side before he answered:

"I want a passage in your vessel." Craig Carton stepped closer to the captain, and lowered his voice. "Don't be a fool! I am going to sail in the 'Endymion.' You can't prevent it, so you had better take it quietly. You need not be alarmed. I am not the Cormorant now. I am done with that. I come as a peaceful passenger. Honour bright!"

Ernest Holroyd made a gesture of contempt.

"You are as great a scoundrel now as you ever were! You cannot deceive me."

But, defiant as his words were, he subdued his voice, so that only this man could hear him. And Craig Carton noted it, and smiled.

"Be that as it may, I mean no harm to you, Holroyd."

"If you mean me no harm, then, leave my vessel," said the young captain slowly.

Craig Carton shook his head.

"I tell you I must sail in the 'Endymion.'"

"There are a hundred other vessels in the Thames bound for the same port."

"I have selected the 'Endymion.'" Craig Carton smiled.

"For the sake of auld lang syne, you know."

"Suppose," said Captain Holroyd, with a sudden gleam in his eyes—"suppose I were to fling you into the river?"

"An idle supposition. You won't." But, as he spoke, Carton kept a wary eye upon that sturdy young captain.

"Come, Holroyd, for your own sake don't behave like an ass! If you force me to show my power, you know you're helpless in the clutch of the Cormorant!" Craig Carton's eyes glittered, and his teeth came together with a snap. The expression upon his thin face was not unlike that of the rapacious bird he named. "Am I to sail in the 'Endymion?'"

Holroyd choked back his rising rage.

"Yes," he said curtly.

Carton made a mocking bow.

"Thanks! My things are in that boat. Have them placed in my cabin, please. Of course, you are going to give me a cabin?"

"You shall have a stateroom."

"Again, thanks! By the way, when do you sail?"

"When my passengers come aboard."

"You are waiting for them?"

"Yes."

"If they don't soon appear you will sail without them, of course?"

"No. That would be impossible."

"Impossible, at my request?" said Craig Carton, with extreme significance.

Captain Holroyd met his eyes steadily.

"Don't go too far, Carton. I shall not ruin myself for your sake. For, if you do your worst, you can only ruin me."

"That's true," said the Cormorant reflectively; and, with a pleasant smile: "I see that I shall have to draw the line somewhere."

"And now kindly get off the bridge. I never allow passengers here."

Craig Carton smiled again, and descended.

Captain Holroyd leaned heavily upon the rail. His clear-cut, bronzed face wore a stunned look. His lips were drawn and tense.

"Good heavens! am I never to be rid of that fiend? Is my whole life to be darkened by him? Must I always writhe helplessly in his merciless clutch?" the young man groaned inwardly. He looked at the river, swirling past the anchored ship. "Is not death better than such a dog's life?"

For an instant the temptation assailed him. It would be so quiet, so restful, under the dark waters—all storm and strife at an end. But he flung the thought from him. His manhood, his British pluck, revolted against the cowardice of it. And, besides, there rose before his mind's eye a vision of a sweet girlish face, with soft blue eyes, crowned with chestnut hair—a face which had long been to him, in times of doubt, as a guiding star.

He shook his head resolutely.

"No; never that! It would be a cowardly surrender. I'll fight it out to the end!"

The voice of his chief mate—a brisk Scotsman named Sandys—called him from his sombre reflections.

"The passengers, sir."

Captain Holroyd's features cleared at once. Light leaped into his eyes. In the coming boat he saw the face he had visioned a few moments before—a sunny face, with sunny eyes and smile. The Cormorant was to be his passenger, but he forgot that in the pleasure of welcoming Maud Newcome to the "Endymion."

"Have you waited for us, Captain Holroyd?" asked Mr. Newcome, a portly gentleman with a somewhat fussy manner.

"Yes, sir."

"That is unfortunate. It was Maurice's fault. You know it was, Maurice. But there need be no more delay. You have our things on board?"

"All stowed away, sir."

"Very good. I think I'll go below. I can't stand the smell of the river, and the noise really makes my head ache."

Captain Holroyd had scarcely a chance of exchanging a word with Maud before she went below with her father. Maurice, her brother, remained on deck. He was not a prepossessing young man to look at just at present. His face had the pallor which is the effect of dissipation, and he wore an expression of sullen irritability. Ernest Holroyd guessed that he did not willingly embark for this voyage.

"Your stateroom is ready, Mr. Newcome."

"I suppose I can remain on deck if I choose?"

Captain Holroyd could have shaken him with pleasure; but, instead of that, he answered politely:

"Oh, certainly! Only we shall be busy, and I don't think you'll find the deck very comfortable."

"I didn't come here to be comfortable."

Master Maurice stalked away to the quarter, and began to smoke. Holroyd smiled grimly. The young man's rudeness had roused his ire for a moment. But that cigar would avenge him.

The "Endymion" was soon a scene of intense activity. Captain Holroyd issued orders sharply and clearly from the bridge. The big steamer crept out into the broad estuary of the Thames.

Captain Holroyd was too occupied to think anything about

Maurice Newcome till the "Endymion" was in the German Ocean. When he glanced at the young man the cigar had disappeared, and Maurice was holding to the rail with both hands, his face like chalk.

"Serve the cub right," murmured Holroyd. But he remembered that this was Maud's brother, and he called out to a seaman: "Help Mr. Newcome below."

Maurice was glad of the assistance. He wanted to get out of sight, as Holroyd guessed. The sailor deposited him in the cuddy, and left him there.

As he sat weakly on a sofa, a cool, drawling voice came to his ears.

"Hallo! On the sick-list—eh?"

Maurice did not reply.

"Feel bad? Why, by thunder, it's young Newcome!" And Craig Carton, the Cormorant, stared at the young man in undisguised amazement.

The meeting did not seem to afford Maurice much pleasure. He looked extremely sullen.

"What the dickens are you doing here, Carton?" he growled ungraciously.

"I was just going to put that question to you. You ain't voyaging for enjoyment, I can see," remarked Carton, with a critical look at Newcome's chalky face.

"I am going to New Orleans."

"As the 'Endymion' is going there, I could have guessed that without any tremendous mental effort," smiled Carton.

"What are you going there for?"

"Because I've no choice in the matter," snarled Maurice.

"I am under my father's orders."

Craig Carton nodded intelligently.

"I see. The old governor thinks you've been going the pace a bit too strong, and reckons that a sea-voyage will set you up, and break off evil associations." He grinned. "The old man didn't count upon your meeting an ancient pal on board this gallant bark—eh?"

Maurice looked at him suspiciously.

"Why are you here? Captain Holroyd said there were to be no other passengers."

"He made room for me at the last moment. You see, I'm an old friend of his," the Cormorant said, in his airy way.

"I never imagined Holroyd was that kind of fellow," said Maurice slowly. "He doesn't look it."

"You can't judge cigars by the picture on the box," smiled Craig Carton. "But, I say, was the elderly gent who came down a while ago your respected governor?"

Maurice nodded.

"And the lady—the sweetest little—"

"The lady is my sister, and I will trouble you to leave her unmentioned!" said Maurice, with unusual fire in his look.

"Your pardon," said Craig Carton, with a wave of his hand to dismiss the subject, "but—"

But the "Endymion" rolled just then, and Maurice, gripped by a fresh attack of the mal-de-mer, began to gasp and gurgle, and no longer listened.

Craig Carton passed up the hatchway, with a cigarette between his lips, and the cormorant-like intensified upon his thin, rapacious face.

"All's fish that comes to my net," murmured he. "The captain is not so fast in my clutch as this sullen, white-faced wastrel. What a beauty the girl is! I anticipate a pleasant voyage."

The North Foreland was vanishing on the starboard quarter. The "Endymion" left a black trail of smoke behind as she steamed on to the Straits of Dover.

There was a keen wind from the North Sea. But Craig Carton turned his glance astern, and stood looking steadily back, careless of the spindrift lashing into his face. It was almost as if he expected to see some familiar craft issuing from the broad estuary the "Endymion" had lately left.

Captain Holroyd caught his look, and started at seeing his expression. He asked himself why the Cormorant was so sharply scanning the sea astern. Had Craig Carton a fear of pursuit? Calling to mind the character of his passenger, Holroyd thought it extremely probable. Carton could not have forced himself into the "Endymion" simply for the sake of a free passage. Undoubtedly he had a reason for wishing to leave London suddenly, and not by one of the regular passenger ships.

Holroyd's face clouded. His eyes, too, now sometimes turned anxiously astern.

Almost a Tragedy—Craig Carton's Courage—Holroyd is Puzzled.

While the "Endymion" was in the chops of the Channel, Craig Carton kept the same watchful eyes upon the sea. It was not until the Atlantic was heaving round the steamer that he appeared to be quite at ease.

Upon one occasion he found Captain Holroyd's eyes upon him, and knew at once that the young skipper had divined his

secret uneasiness. That, however, appeared to give him no concern.

Holroyd, intending to take him by surprise, questioned him abruptly one day.

"Why have you fled from England, Craig Carton?"

But Carton was not to be caught napping.

"Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies," he answered coolly.

"It is clear to me that you have committed some crime for which you may be pursued."

"Who knows?"

Carton shrugged his shoulders. The captain looked at him steadily.

"Keep your secret, then. And yet——"

"Pooh! Don't waste your breath in threats you dare not fulfil. You cannot break the hold I have on you. If a gun-boat overhauled us, she would take me back. And she would take you also, to stand your trial for——"

"Silence!"

"As you like. But you see how matters are. We stand or fall together."

"I believe you are the greatest scoundrel on earth!" Ernest Holroyd said slowly. "You, more than anyone else, know how innocent I was of any wrongdoing in that hateful affair."

"Could you make the world believe it?"

The captain's head sank a little.

"Heaven help me, I cannot!"

"Or——Craig Carton smiled with feline cruelty——" could you make Maud Newcome believe it?"

Ernest Holroyd started and turned pale.

"Why do you mention her name?"

"Pooh!" said Carton contemptuously. "Do you think I haven't guessed your little secret?"

"Craig Carton, you tempt me to hurl you into the sea!" said Holroyd hoarsely.

"Don't forget that I carry a revolver, and that I'll kill you like a dog if you try it!"

"Ah, it isn't your revolver that stops me!"

The captain went away looking very thoughtful.

"By thunder, I shall have to keep an eye upon him!" Craig Carton muttered. "He may be dangerous later on! So he does love Maud! Fool to give his secret away!"

Craig Carton made himself very pleasant to Maud Newcome and her father. He could be engaging when he chose, and he chose now. But Maurice regarded him with sullen dislike. He had his reasons for that.

And yet it was through Maurice that Carton succeeded in getting into Maud's good graces, as we shall see.

If Mr. Newcome had taken Maurice to sea for the purpose of breaking him of bad habits, he had not wholly succeeded. More than once the young man was found with glassy eye and reeling step, and Captain Holroyd did his best to keep his disgraceful state a secret. Maurice had supplies of intoxicants in his own baggage, as Holroyd soon guessed; and, as the elder Newcome was half-owner of the "Endymion," it was not easy for the captain to deal with Maurice as he would have dealt with another passenger. And, besides, there was Maud to be considered.

In the Atlantic the sea was a little rough for the first few days. Upon a windy afternoon Captain Holroyd saw Maurice Newcome emerge from the cuddy with unsteady steps and an idiotic smile upon his face. The skipper frowned.

"Drunk again! The beast! I'd clap him in irons if it were not for his sister!"

As the "Endymion" was rolling in the heavy sea, it was by no means safe for a man in Maurice's condition to be above decks. Captain Holroyd called out to Sandys to take the wretched young man to his stateroom.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

The chief mate started towards Maurice. But the young man was just intoxicated enough to be obstinate and quarrelsome. Seeing Sandys coming, he retreated to the gangway, shouting angrily that he could take care of himself.

Holroyd's lips tightened. At any moment the drunken fool might go overboard now. Sandys looked up to the bridge for instructions.

"Collar him!"

The mate stepped upon the gangway. Newcome gave a howl of defiance and began to stagger away. But Craig Carton headed him off at a call from Sandys. Maurice stopped, irresolute, and at that moment a roll of the ship pitched him into the sea. His wild clutch missed the rail, and down he went into the frothing waves.

Captain Holroyd's hand flew to the telegraph, and the engines were reversed at once; but no man on board had much expectation of picking up the young man alive—with one exception. Craig Carton had stopped one instant to reflect; then he tore off his jacket, spat out his cigarette, and sprang into the sea after Maurice.

A shout of admiration burst from those who saw the action,

for it was a very plucky and risky thing to do. The Cormorant, with all his many faults, did not lack courage.

By luck more than anything else Craig Carton reached Maurice and clutched him. The immersion had sobered the young fellow, and he was battling for life, but very feebly; for he could not swim, and was frightened out of his wits. Carton's grasp upon his collar kept him up just as he was going down for the last time.

"Keep quiet, you silly duffer!" said Carton, in his ear.

And, as the frantic man continued to struggle, he gave him a thump upon the head which effectually quietened him.

Carton was a splendid swimmer, but he was hard put to it to keep Maurice afloat in the rough sea till the "Endymion's" boat came up. But for the seaman-like promptness of Ernest Holroyd, the affair might have ended fatally for both of them. But not a second had been wasted, though it seemed to Carton an age before he felt Holroyd's helpful grasp.

Ernest hauled them into the boat. In his anxiety for Maud's brother he had left the steamer to the care of Sandys, and gone in the boat himself. His relief at the rescue of Maurice was equalled by his astonishment at the part played by Craig Carton.

Craig Carton, completely exhausted, sat panting while the boat was pulled back to the "Endymion." Holroyd sometimes looked at him in a puzzled way. He could not make out why the heartless adventurer, as he had always believed Carton to be, had risked his life to save Maurice's. He knew that the two men had been acquainted before they came on board the "Endymion." But he knew, also, that they were not friends. Besides, Carton was no man to run risks for friendship's sake.

Back on the "Endymion," Maurice was taken down to his stateroom, and Mr. Newcome and Maud were informed of the accident, but not of what had caused it. The roughness of the weather had kept them below, so this was the first they knew of it.

"There is no danger, Miss Newcome. Your brother has merely had a ducking," Captain Holroyd said reassuringly. "He will soon be himself."

"But how did it occur, Captain Holroyd?"

Ernest coloured a little. He was no hand at deception, but he hated to tell her the truth.

"He fell overboard, Miss Newcome. The weather's rough, and he's a landsman, you know."

Maud's blue eyes rested upon his face. She thought there was something behind this, but she asked no questions about it.

"I heard the sailors say that someone jumped into the sea to save him. Who was so brave?"

Captain Holroyd wished with all his heart that he had been in Craig Carton's place. How sweet to read gratitude and admiration in that lovely face! But he could only answer simply:

"It was Mr. Carton."

"Mr. Carton?" Her tone expressed surprise as much as anything else. "Your friend?"

"Yes-s," said Holroyd slowly, "my friend."

"How noble of him! Oh, I must thank him!"

Craig Carton came out of his stateroom just then. He had changed his clothes, and looked as natty as ever. Perhaps he had been listening, and purposely appeared at that moment.

Maud turned to him at once. Her thanks, her gratitude, were sweetly expressed. Craig Carton played the modest hero to perfection. Holroyd, who felt instinctively that Carton had acted only from some utterly selfish motive, listened with disgust to his well-turned replies. If duty had not called him away he might have betrayed his impatience. As soon as he was gone, Maud put to Carton the question she had not asked the reticent skipper:

"Do you know how my brother came to fall overboard?"

"Did not Captain Holroyd tell you?"

"He did not."

Carton thought he saw how to make capital out of the adventure in more ways than one.

"Better ask Mr. Maurice," he said evasively.

He knew the explanation that Maurice was likely to give.

Maud was puzzled and curious. As soon as her brother was able to converse, she spoke to him upon the matter.

"I suppose that fellow Carton is putting on airs for pulling me out of the water—posing as a hero, and that sort of thing!" young Newcome said, with a sneer.

Maud looked quite distressed.

"Maurice, how can you speak so of the brave man who saved your life at the risk of his own?" she exclaimed.

"Bah! Craig Carton isn't the fellow to——"

He stopped abruptly.

"What made you fall overboard, Maurice?"

"It was all Captain Holroyd's fault!"

"Captain Holroyd's fault?"

Maud's blue eyes opened in wonder.

"Yes, it was. He wanted to send me below, and I wouldn't go. Why the dickens should I be ordered about by a confounded

sailor? But for him, I shouldn't have got on the gangway; and, if I hadn't been there, I shouldn't have gone overboard!"

"But, Maurice, surely Captain Holroyd has a right to give orders upon his own deck?"

"He has no right to bully me!" said Maurice sulkily. "And I won't be bullied, either!"

Maud remembered the skipper's unwillingness to explain the cause of the accident. Was it indeed the truth that Holroyd, whom she had always admired, had played the petty tyrant? She coloured with mortification at the thought.

When Captain Holroyd saw her again there was a change in her manner. He was accustomed to frank cordiality from Maud Newcome. Now, in voice and look, there was a touch of ice. The captain, ignorant of any offence he could possibly have given, was puzzled and pained.

Holroyd's Advice—Craig Carton Shows His Hand— Face to Face.

"I want to ask your advice, Captain Holroyd."

Mr. Newcome spoke gravely. His rather ruddy face wore an unusually serious expression.

"I am entirely at your service, sir."

Ernest wondered what was coming.

"It is about my son," said Newcome slowly, and with an effort.

"Maurice?"

"Yes," Mr. Newcome leaned forward and lowered his voice.

"It was very considerate of you to conceal from my daughter the true cause of Maurice's accident, but I wish to know the truth. He was intoxicated?"

Captain Holroyd nodded.

There was a pause. Then the merchant said slowly:

"You are a young man, not much older than Maurice, but I have great confidence in you, and I do not hesitate to ask your advice and assistance."

"You do me honour, Mr. Newcome."

"I will explain how matters stand. You know Maurice. He is not bad, but weak—terribly weak. Under the influence of bad companions, he seems to have no will of his own. He has been very wild. Lately he fell into the clutch of a man who is responsible, I have been told, for the ruin of many reckless young men. He is a human bird of prey. He is known by many names; but amongst his associates he is nicknamed the Cormorant—a name which well defines his nature and his profession."

Captain Holroyd felt a chill.

The Cormorant!

This explained the acquaintance between Craig Carton and Maurice, and the latter's half-hidden aversion.

Mr. Newcome did not notice the effect of his words upon the young skipper.

"This scoundrel—the Cormorant—led Maurice through a course of dissipation, bleeding him all the time, and at length my son's debts were so large and pressing that he was compelled to confess all to me. I paid them—a great loss to me—on condition that he reformed. He promised. But he is too weak to be relied upon. As I have business in New Orleans, I thought the opportunity good to break off all his old associations by faking him with me. Besides this, I depended much upon the influence of his sister. She is a noble girl, and, with all her faults, Maurice is very fond of her."

Captain Holroyd had observed that, and he regarded it as young Newcome's only redeeming point.

"But the worst of all his habits—drunkenness—seems to have clung to him," continued Mr. Newcome, looking very distressed. "That is why I ask your advice. What am I to do?"

Now, as Mr. Newcome was Maud's father, Ernest Holroyd liked to be considered by him as a friend and adviser. It made him hope that the merchant suspected his love for Maud, and did not disapprove of it. But the role of adviser had its drawbacks. By pleasing Mr. Newcome he might very easily make Maurice hate him. And might not Maud come to sympathise with her brother, to whom she was deeply attached? But in times of doubt our sailor hero, with sailor-like simplicity, usually solved the difficulty by deciding what was his duty, and doing it, careless of consequences.

"Do you wish for plain advice, Mr. Newcome?"

"Certainly."

"I will give it, then. It is not the wine at my table that overcomes Maurice. He has it in his cabin, and it came aboard amongst his things."

"Then he deceived me."

"No doubt. Yet, under the circumstances, I should rather pity than blame him."

"Thank you, captain. But your advice?"

"Have you firmness enough to have your own way?"

"Rely upon me."

"Then make him throw the lot out of the porthole."

Mr. Newcome considered for some minutes. Then he looked up, with tightening lips.

"I'll do it! He shall obey me! Thank you, Captain Holroyd."

Ernest had no great opinion of Mr. Newcome's firmness where his son was concerned, and he was rather curious to see whether the merchant would really act upon his advice. There was a sound of angry voices in the son's stateroom a little later. Then came a succession of slight splashes. Bottle after bottle was being tossed through the porthole.

"By Jupiter, he's done it!"

When Holroyd saw Maurice again, the latter was scowling and sulky. He came up and spoke to the skipper.

"I know what I owe to you, my fine fellow," he said, "and I sha'n't forget it in a hurry."

It was the thought of Maud that kept Holroyd from collar-ing him and flinging him off the bridge.

"Get down, please!" the captain said curtly.

Maurice looked defiant for a second. But he went down. There was something about Holroyd which awed his weak and vacillating soul.

The resentment Maurice felt towards the captain did not escape Craig Carton's notice. He soon wormed the cause of it out of young Newcome.

"Holroyd is a meddling ass, and I'll make him smart for it if I get a chance," Maurice declared wrathfully.

Carton chuckled. Antipathy between Holroyd and Maud's brother suited the game he was playing.

What his game was for some time Holroyd had no idea. Carton, on the strength of his rescue of her brother, had become very intimate with Maud, and Mr. Newcome was extremely cordial to him. When Holroyd observed this, he wondered what the merchant would think if he could know that Craig Carton was "the Cormorant," to whom more than to anyone else he owed his son's excesses. But Holroyd could not speak.

Maurice Newcome at length began to dimly discern what the Cormorant was aiming at.

The coolness between Maud and Holroyd continuing, Carton was constantly her companion. Captain Holroyd was too busily occupied to see what Maurice, idle, and perforce sober, discovered after a time.

"I want to speak to you in private, Carton," Maurice said abruptly, one evening.

Craig looked at him coolly.

"The time has come!" he silently exclaimed. Aloud he said, "Come into my stateroom, Newcome."

He seated himself negligently upon the edge of his bunk, and nodded towards a chair. Maurice, however, remained standing.

"Fire away, Newcome!"

"I want to tell you, Craig Carton, that I can see what you are after, and that you have got to clear off."

Carton opened his case and selected a cigarette.

"What do you mean, Newcome?"

"You know very well what I mean," Maurice broke out angrily. "I won't have you always with my sister. It's pollution for you to breathe the same air with her. I've been a weak fool not to see it and stop it before. Oh, I know your game! You know my father's rich, and by playing the heroic, you've got into his good graces, and now you dare to presume—"

"I presume to think of marrying a forger's sister? I admit it."

He lighted his cigarette.

Maurice turned deadly pale.

"You infernal scoundrel!"

"Don't be a fool, Newcome! I am going to marry Maud, if I can contrive it. And I think I shall be able to contrive it, for you will help me."

"I help you? I'll kill you first!" cried Maurice, in a white heat of rage.

"Rats! You haven't pluck enough to kill a grasshopper, and you know it!" Craig Carton answered with contempt. "Say a single word against me to either your father or your sister, and as soon as the 'Endymion' reaches New Orleans, you shall be arrested on the charge of forgery. I think you know that I am a man of my word. You are nothing to me. Cross me, and I'll crush you!"

Maurice panted.

"Do you think I'll let a scoundrel like you approach my sister?"

"Either that, or you go to Portland."

"Oh, you fiend!"

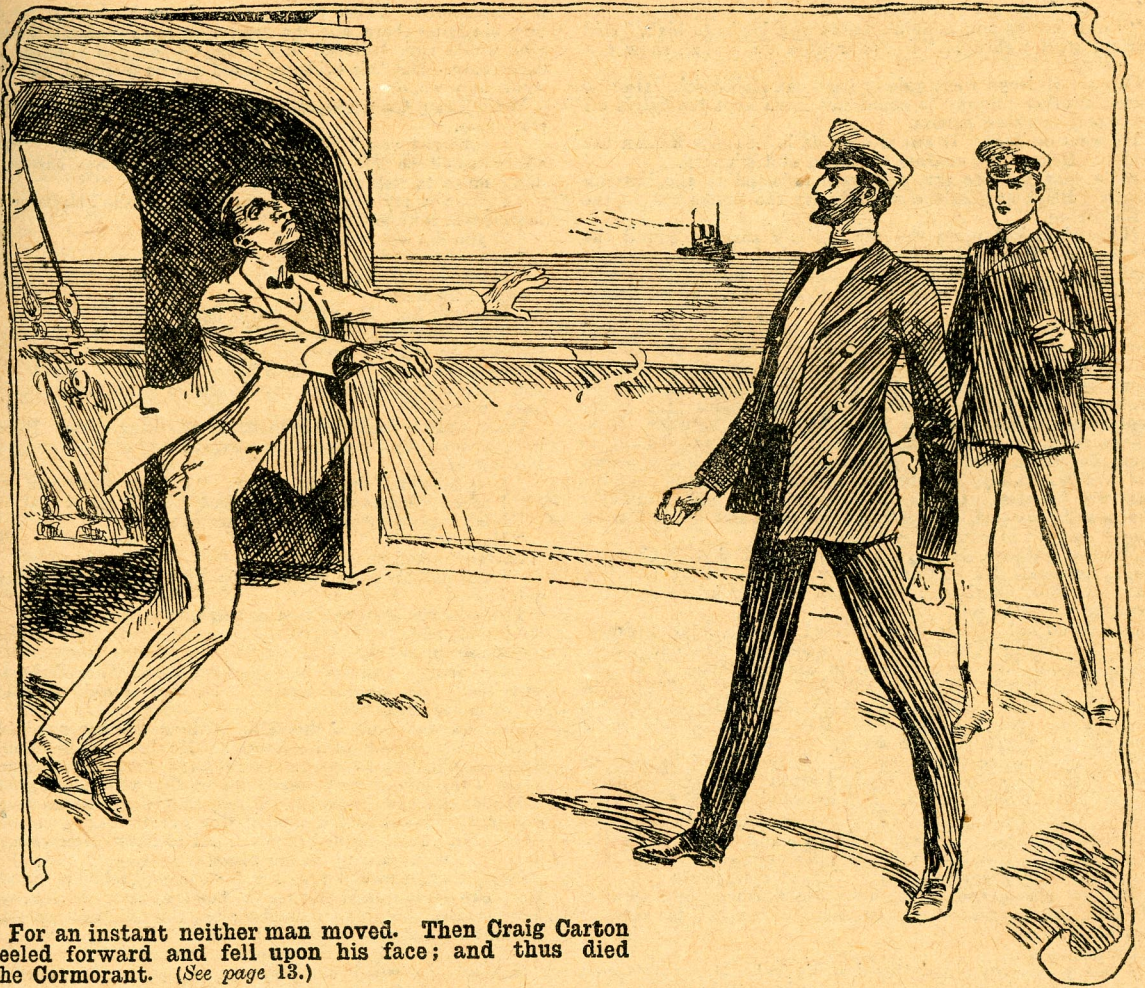
Craig Carton shrugged his shoulders.

Maurice left the room with unsteady steps, and white as a sheet. In the cuddy he met Captain Holroyd coming out of his cabin.

Ernest looked at him sternly. But he soon saw that it was not wine this time.

Maurice faced him with a look of hatred.

"What secret of yours does Craig Carton hold, that you let



For an instant neither man moved. Then Craig Carton reeled forward and fell upon his face; and thus died the Cormorant. (See page 13.)

him curse this vessel with his presence?" he said, with savage bitterness.

Holroyd started.

"What are you driving at?"

"Oh, we're in the same boat!" said Newcome, with a sneer. "Craig Carton is your friend about as much as he is mine." Then a sudden recollection crossed his mind; he came closer to the captain, with his eyes gleaming. "Holroyd, tell me the truth. Have I guessed correctly that you care for—you know whom?"

Holroyd was absolutely astounded.

"Tell me the truth!" cried Maurice roughly.

"I do." Holroyd lifted his head proudly. "I do. What then?"

"Then, if blood and not water flows in your veins, you will not allow Craig Carton to live through the night!" hissed Maurice, in his ear.

The next moment he was gone. Holroyd, with his brain in a whirl, looked after him dazedly.

What did he mean?

Holroyd stood still, rooted, thinking, thinking, thinking, forgetting everything else.

The wild words could bear but one meaning. Craig Carton dared to think of loving Maud Newcome. He had some power over Maurice, which reduced him to impotence. Craig Carton, the sharper, the pariah, the human cormorant, dared to think of Maud in that way! The veins stood out upon the captain's forehead. The fiercest rage burned in his heart.

He looked up suddenly. Craig Carton stood in his doorway. There was a cigarette between his lips, and upon his thin face a cynical smile.

"Hallo, Holroyd! You look as if you had just seen Davy Jones!"

Holroyd advanced towards him. Carton receded into the room. His smile maddened Holroyd. With teeth set and eyes ablaze, the sailor sprang into the stateroom, hardly knowing what he intended to do.

"Stand back, please!"

Craig Carton's revolver was looking him in the eyes.

Bitter Foes!—A Blow in the Dark—A Mysterious Pursuer.

Ernest Holroyd, with a tremendous effort, calmed himself. It was not fear of Carton's revolver that influenced him. But the sight of the weapon brought to his mind, with a sudden shock, the consciousness that it was the rage of murder that was burning in his heart.

He stood, silent, with perspiration in beads upon his brow, and his eyes dilating.

"I thought that would bring you to your senses." Craig Carton nodded to the revolver with a complacent smile. He was utterly ignorant of the real cause of Ernest Holroyd's change of aspect, attributing it all to his own readiness with his pistol. "But really, skipper, this is a fool's game you are playing. If you succeeded in throttling me here, as you seemed to intend, you would be hanged for it. You must know that."

"I was mad for the moment." Holroyd's look grew fierce again. "I have heard that which might make a gentler man than I am kill such a scoundrel as you like a mad dog."

"Indeed," drawled Carton lazily. "And what have you heard?"

"Is it true that you dare to cast your eyes towards Miss Newcome?"

"You dare! Why should not I also dare? Are we not birds of a feather, my gallant captain?" said Carton, laughing in the face of the sailor.

Holroyd clenched his hands. A tense quiver ran through his powerful limbs.

"You hound! You cowardly hound! You are not fit to live! But I will baffle you!"

"Will you? Remember that the tragedy of the 'Elspeth' has not yet been forgotten."

"If you force me to extremes—"

"I only advise you to think before you begin to blab," said Carton, with a shrug. "If you trouble me, I shall show you no mercy."

Captain Holroyd went quietly from the stateroom. Had he stayed another minute he could not have kept his hands off that cool, mocking demon.

He went on deck. It was already dark. Sandys was on the bridge. Below, the engines throbbed and grunted.

Stars spangled the sky, and were reflected in the heaving waters. Black against the starlight lay the smoke-trail of the "Endymion."

Holroyd looked upon the sea, quietly surging round the great ship. His head and his heart ached, but the thought that had come to him in the Thames did not recur to him now. For he had not only himself to consider. Maud was in danger!

He had hoped once that she had seen his devotion, and thought not unkindly of him. For two years he had adored in silence, for he could not speak till his position was assured. Now he was half-owner of the vessel he commanded, and the profits of this voyage, he expected, would place him in independence. But now this cloud had arisen between them. There could be no mistake about it. Maud was distant to him; her frank cordiality was gone. Perhaps he had shown his love too plainly, and she was trying to show him that his case was hopeless. Under the circumstances, was it unlikely that a self-possessed, insinuating adventurer like Craig Carton might succeed in winning her heart?

With a sentence, Holroyd knew he could shatter Carton's hopes for ever. He had only to say to her—"That man is a liar, swindler, charlatan; that man made your brother the drunken wreck he is!"

But dared he? What would follow? Arrest, trial, disgrace, ruin, for Craig Carton would assuredly denounce him. Would Maud Newcome believe in his innocence, if all the world condemned? Why should she? He was nothing to her. He groaned aloud as he thought of it. He could bear a punishment, even if undeserved. But that she should think him guilty! Could he bear that?

Was not Maurice right after all? Maud would be safe, at least, if the sea closed over Craig Carton. He tried to drive the haunting thought away. But he could not get rid of it.

Meanwhile, Craig Carton had come on deck for a smoke in the cool night air. He saw Holroyd standing alone by the quarter-rail, and smiled cynically. He sauntered to the taffrail, and, leaning against it idly, lighted a cigarette.

He was alone, and in shadow. He finished his cigarette. He took out his case; it slipped from his fingers. He stooped to pick it up.

Crash!

A heavy belaying-pin clattered at his feet. He straightened up, his face white and tense, his whole body quivering.

Someone had hurled the belaying-pin with terrific force at his head. It had struck the woodwork against which he had been standing; his stoop had saved him from the missile by sheer luck. If it had struck him! He shuddered. He knew that he had been within an ace of death.

With a glitter of rage in his eyes, Craig Carton sprang towards the place where he had seen the captain. He almost ran into Holroyd, who was coming towards him.

"What was that?" asked the skipper.

"You don't know, of course!" sneered Carton.

"How should I know? I heard a crash—"

"Made by the belaying-pin you threw at my head!"

Holroyd made a gesture of amazement.

"Are you mad?"

"No, I am not; and I am not a sheep to be slaughtered at your will!" Craig Carton was reckless in his rage. He did not care who heard him. "Do you think you'll be rid of me so easily. I will denounce you to your crew!"

"You are dreaming," said Holroyd coldly. "If anything was flung at you, it was not flung by my hand."

His tone almost carried conviction. And yet, if Holroyd had not thrown the belaying-pin, who had done so? Craig Carton looked at him with suspicious doubt.

He thought of Maurice Newcome. But he dismissed the idea. Maurice hadn't courage enough for such an attempt. He was quite sure of that.

It must be Holroyd, and yet—

Several men had drawn near the spot, attracted by the angry voice of Carton. If Holroyd was the culprit, his nerve was magnificent; for he turned to the hands, and said:

"Someone has flung a belaying-pin in this direction. Mr. Carton thinks it was flung at him. Does anyone know who did it?"

There was a buzz of surprise, but no reply. Craig Carton had cooled a little by this time. He did not repeat his accusation of the captain. It dawned upon him that an open rupture would be the worst possible policy for him.

Captain Holroyd ordered a search for the offender. He was

not discovered. There was no clue of any kind. But for the iron pin lying there, and the deep dent in the taffrail, the seamen would have believed that Craig Carton had imagined the occurrence. But this evidence could not be disputed, and they could only wonder.

When Craig Carton went below, Holroyd followed him to his stateroom.

"I expected you," said Carton, closing the door. "This affair cannot be left where it is. My escape was narrow. I don't mean to risk another like it."

"I give you my word that I did not throw the belaying-pin," the captain said coldly.

"If you did not, who did?"

"I can think of no one but—"

"Maurice Newcome?"

Ernest nodded.

"It wasn't he. He would never dare."

"Then the only conclusion I can come to is that there is someone among my crew who has reason to hate you. You have ruined many men. You have been a bird of prey since you were a boy. Possibly my fore-castle holds some man you have injured."

Craig Carton looked disquieted at the suggestion. Even to him, favoured by Fortune as he was, the way of the transgressor was not easy.

"It is possible," he said slowly. "I never knew you tell a lie, I admit. I accept your assurance. Let it go at that."

"I have more to say—an offer to make."

"Make it."

Carton looked suspicious.

"I will hail the next passing ship, and transfer you to her if you choose."

The adventurer broke into a laugh.

"Thank you!"

"You refuse?"

"Decidedly! I prefer the risks I run here. The 'Endymion' suits me." He laughed again. "Do you think you will get rid of me so easily?"

Holroyd went out of the cabin without another word. Hot hatred was surging in his breast. He had not thrown the belaying-pin, but a weight would have been lifted from his heart if the missile had beaten out the life of Craig Carton.

While Holroyd paced the bridge that night he came to a resolution. If he saw a sign of Carton's becoming successful in his suit, he determined to speak out to Maud Newcome, and defy the Cormorant to do his worst.

Craig Carton locked his door for the night before he slept. He woke at midnight to hear a hand upon the lock. He listened, clutching his six-shooter; but the unknown passed on, without any attempt to force the door.

"This is getting lively!" muttered Carton.

But he slept till morning soundly enough. He ascended to the deck soon after dawn. Captain Holroyd was looking to the north-east through the bridge binoculars. Craig Carton with the naked eye could see only a black bar of smoke against the sky.

There was nothing in that apparently to alarm him. He could only note that the smoke-bar was growing thicker and blacker every moment. This told him that the stranger was drawing nearer, and, as the "Endymion" was no crawler, the distant steamer must be moving at racing speed. Why did the thought leap into his mind that she was trying to overtake the "Endymion"? He had his reasons.

He stepped up on the bridge, and walked over to the end where the captain stood.

"Will you let me have a glimpse, please?"

His unusually subdued manner and quiet voice surprised Captain Holroyd. He nodded assent, and allowed Carton access to the binoculars. He watched the adventurer's face while the keen, hawkish eyes peered through the glasses at the racing steamer. Amazement seized him as he saw every vestige of colour fade away from the anxious countenance. There rushed into his mind the recollection of Carton's backward glances at the Thames on the day of sailing. Was this the enemy the Cormorant feared?

Craig Carton raised his head. He was trying to calm himself, but Holroyd could see that he was labouring under an almost uncontrollable sense of terror. Holroyd knew him to be ordinarily a brave man, and he wondered.

"What's the matter, man?"

For once the captain's manner towards his enemy was almost kindly.

His voice seemed to brace Carton. His courage came back to him. He pulled himself together.

"Nothing."

He stepped to the bridge telegraph and gripped the handle. Before Captain Holroyd could interfere, he had signalled "Full speed ahead!" to the engineer. The skipper sprang towards him.

"What the devil are you doing?"

"Saving my life, captain!"

"Your life?"

"Yes, my life. And you are going to help me, Captain Holroyd," said Craig Carton coolly.

Craig Carton's Peril — A Stern Chase — Holroyd's Resolve.

Captain Holroyd took a long look at the man who was called the Cormorant.

Craig Carton's face was grimly set. He was cool and collected now. With life or death in the balance he needed to have all his wits about him.

"I don't understand."

Captain Holroyd spoke slowly, with his eyes fixed upon the adventurer.

Craig Carton gave a mirthless laugh.

"You can see yonder steamer? You can see that she is pursuing the 'Endymion'?"

"On your account?"

"Certainly!"

Holroyd's eyes glittered.

"On board that vessel you have foes?"

"Bitter foes!"

"They seek your life?"

"They do!"

"Is that a reason why the 'Endymion' should fly? You are a curse to me. You thrust yourself upon my ship against my will. Why should I care what becomes of you?"

Carton drew a deep breath. Never had he stood in so slippery a place. Never had he so required all his resources of craft and cunning. It was for his life he had to fight.

"I do not expect you to care what becomes of me. My death would be gratifying to you. Of course, I understand that. But, all the same, you are not going to hand me over to yonder crew of cut-throats?"

"Why should I not?"

There was no softening in the skipper's sunburnt face. He could not be expected to pity the man who had mercilessly blackmailed and persecuted him.

He had stretched out his hand towards the handle of the bridge telegraph. Carton interposed.

"Wait a bit! We must argue the point, and meanwhile we'll have the 'Endymion' at full speed. It will always be possible to slacken afterwards."

Captain Holroyd assented to that.

Churning out long lines of foam, the "Endymion" flew along through the blue waters. The engines throbbed and panted. The firemen toiled and sweated. The unusual speed evoked curious comments for'ard. The crew did not yet understand that the "Endymion" was pursued.

Carton jerked his thumb towards the black bar of smoke that kept pace with the "Endymion."

"Do you know what that vessel is?"

"I have examined her. She is a steam-yacht, British built; but she has a Dago look about her."

"I can tell you more. She is the 'Colomba.' She was built on the Clyde, and is pretty nearly the fastest thing afloat."

"Have you been aboard her, then?"

"Once. She is Italian, and her skipper is after me for my life. What I have done to earn his enmity does not matter. If the 'Colomba' overtakes the 'Endymion' I shall be murdered. Yes, yes, I understand that you don't care a rap. That isn't the point. I shall not tamely submit." He clicked his teeth viciously. "I carry a six-shooter. I am a dead shot. I shall make a fight for my life. It will be impossible for you to hush the affair up. At the first port you'll have to tell the tale; for, if you don't, your passengers or your crew will. Can you face that? Where will you be when the papers are full of the story of how a British captain and crew stood quietly by while their passenger was foully murdered?"

Captain Holroyd nodded. He hadn't looked at the matter in that light before.

"You will scarcely be able to explain that this Mr. Carton was abandoned to his assassins because he held a guilty secret of yours."

Another nod. Craig Carton saw light ahead.

"Moreover, it is doubtful if your crew would stand quietly by while I was fighting for my life. They are mostly Englishmen, and I would wager a good deal that they'd lay hold of marlinespikes and capstan-bars and wade in on my side, whether you liked it or not."

Holroyd could not help admitting that this was extremely probable. It wasn't likely that thirty Britons would stand with folded hands while a countryman of theirs was murdered by a parcel of foreigners.

"Whether my pursuer and his Italians would win or not I can't say. Perhaps they would. And, if they did, there isn't the slightest doubt that they would scuttle the 'Endymion,' and send every soul on board to the bottom to cover up their act of piracy."

Ernest Holroyd thought of Maud. Carton, watching him narrowly, saw that he had won. The expression of anxiety fell from his face like a mask displaced. He affected to yawn as he opened his cigarette-case.

"Have you decided, captain?"

"Yes."

Carton lighted a cigarette.

"And your decision?"

"I will save you."

"Thanks!" He blew out a little cloud of smoke towards the distant yacht. "If you pit the 'Endymion' against the 'Colomba' I do not fear for the result."

Captain Holroyd looked at him grimly.

"You are not out of the woods yet, Carton. My ship is a goer, but she is heavy with cargo, and I'll see you—somewhere before I'll jettison a single case or bale of it."

"I don't ask that. The yacht can outclass your vessel, in point of speed. But she won't be near you before night if you keep at full steam. And after dark you'll give her the slip."

"But they know our destination, or they couldn't have followed us like this from London. They have only to keep on the same tack."

"But during the night you'll change your course, and you'll get to New Orleans by a roundabout route. At dawn to-morrow they won't know in which direction to look for you," Carton replied coolly.

"I'll think of it," Holroyd said shortly.

Craig Carton sauntered away, smoking unconcernedly. Holroyd, looking at him, could scarcely believe that he was the same man whose face had blanched with deadly fear a quarter of an hour ago, as he looked upon the pursuer for the first time.

Bitterly as he had reason to hate Carton, he could not but admire his splendid nerve. Pursued by implacable foes yonder, menaced by a secret enemy on board the "Endymion" itself—in fact, circled by perils, the adventurer was cool, self-possessed, cynical, as of old.

The black smoke from the "Colomba" was steadily coming nearer, but the yacht was not yet visible to the naked eye. The men of the "Endymion," however, were now aware that there was a pursuit. They were filled with amazement. Piracy on the high seas, in the twentieth century, was incredible. But, then, why was the "Endymion" running from the stranger?

When Mr. Newcome came up, he was surprised to find the "Endymion" racing through the seas like a liner bent upon breaking the Atlantic record. He at once wanted to know the reason for such an unusual consumption of coal.

His surprise was not diminished by Holroyd's explanation, which was given in the hearing of the crew to satisfy their curiosity.

"You can see, Mr. Newcome, that yonder vessel is chasing us."

Mr. Newcome took a peep through the bridge-binoculars, and nodded.

"Certainly she appears to be doing so, Captain Holroyd."

"She has been doing so since dawn."

"But why should we run?"

"That's what I am coming to. Mr. Carton assures me that he had in London a quarrel of some kind with certain Italians, who are following him to take his life."

"Come, come, Captain Holroyd, the days of Captain Kidd are over! This sounds altogether too much like a romance," the matter-of-fact merchant declared.

"I assure you it's the fact, Mr. Newcome," Craig Carton broke in, with a side glance at Maud, who was with her father. "If yonder yacht overtakes the 'Endymion,' my life will not be worth a snap of the fingers!"

Miss Newcome's blue eyes were full of sympathy at once. A man whose life is threatened, who meets his peril fearlessly, must always be interesting to a woman.

"I am convinced of the reality of the danger," Ernest Holroyd went on quietly. "To save bloodshed, I intend to elude the Italians. But, as I am responsible for Mr. Carton's presence aboard the 'Endymion,' of course I shall bear the loss incurred through the additional consumption of coal."

"Nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Mr. Newcome warmly.

"Do you think I shall grudge a little coal for the safety of the man who saved my son's life? Mr. Carton, we'll do our best to keep out of the way of yonder scoundrels. But, if the worst comes to the worst, I don't doubt that there are plenty of men here who'll stand by you." He looked at the seamen, who had edged near to hear what was said. "What do you say, my lads?"

The seamen gave a cheer. There was little doubt as to what they would do.

"Thanks, Mr. Newcome! Thanks, my brave friends!" Craig Carton was in his best vein now. "I know British seamen will not look on idly and see an Englishman murdered. But it is due to you to explain why I am so pursued." There was a hush of expectancy. Only Captain Holroyd knew that a lie was coming. "I was the means of saving a man who had been



"Stand back, please!" Craig Carton was looking him in the eyes.
(See page 5.)

marked as a victim by the Anarchists. It is for this that they seek my life."

"We'll stand by you, sir!" exclaimed the grizzled old quartermaster of the "Endymion." "I reckon there's enough Englishmen here to knock the stuffin' out of any number of darned Dagoes!"

That was the sentiment of the crew. Now was the time for Captain Holroyd to chime in with a hearty, sailor-like speech. But he didn't; and Maud, who had expected to hear him declare his willingness to defend his passenger at the cost of life, ship, and cargo, was disappointed. She told herself sadly that her earlier estimate of Ernest Holroyd had been an erring one.

Ernest, from her involuntary expression, divined something of her thoughts. He knew he was lowered in her eyes. But what could he say? Craig Carton was scoring all along the line.

The seamen went back to their work. The passengers cleared off the bridge, and Holroyd, with a bitter smile, saw Craig relating to his interested listeners a fuller tale of his Anarchist peril. Never had he hated the Cormorant as he did then.

When he went into the charthouse, Maurice Newcome followed him. Holroyd looked at the young man curiously. He strongly suspected that it was Maurice who had flung the belaying-pin the night before. But he did not tax him with it.

"What does this cock-and-bull story mean?" young Newcome said abruptly. "Craig Carton never did a good deed in his life. If he has offended the Anarchists, it was by swindling them somehow."

"Really—" began Holroyd. But Maurice interrupted him without ceremony.

"Look here, Holroyd, you needn't try to pull the wool over my eyes. It won't work. Craig Carton has some power over you, or he wouldn't be aboard the 'Endymion' at this moment. You are in the Cormorant's clutch—and so am I."

It was useless to deny it.

"Understand, however," said Holroyd, "that I have never done anything to give him a hold over me. Of the crime he can charge me with I am as innocent as a babe unborn. Circumstances, and his infernal ingenuity, have placed me in his power."

"Are the people in yonder yacht really Anarchists, do you think?" Maurice said slowly. "Oh, you can speak freely; we're in the same boat, though there's no love lost between us; and I know when to keep my mouth shut!"

"I think that is a lie of Craig Carton's," Holroyd answered frankly. "The Anarchist story is bosh."

"And his pursuer is someone he has robbed or swindled in some way?"

"I haven't the least doubt of it."

"And they mean to murder him," said Maurice, drawing in a deep breath.

"So he says. And I believe him."

Maurice came closer to the captain. His face had paled. His eyes had a furtive glitter.

"Ernest Holroyd, are you mad enough to save him, when his death means freedom for us both?"

Holroyd drew back.

"I must save him."

"Madman! Why?"

"Villain as he is, I don't know if I should have the heart to give him up to his murderers. That, however, is not the point. My crew would stand by him, and there would be bloodshed."

"You could order them—"

"I could not order them to leave him to death. What would the world say when the story came out? Besides, they would not obey such orders."

Holroyd went on to point out, as Craig Carton had done, the perils of an encounter with the Italians.

But Maurice was not convinced.

"All the same, if I were in your place, I'd let them have him, at any and every risk," he said.

"I can't!" Holroyd shook his head decidedly.

Maurice gave him a vicious look.

"You're thinking of what Maud would think of you!"

"I do not deny it. But that is not all."

"But, imbecile that you are, don't you see that Craig Carton has resolved to make Maud his wife?" Maurice ground his teeth with fury. "I can say nothing. He holds me in the hollow of his hand. It is you who can save her!"

"And I will!" Holroyd answered firmly. "If necessary, I will expose him in his true colours to Miss Newcome, and dare him to do his worst."

"Would you dare?"

"You shall see."

"But"—a moment's reflection had shown Maurice a new danger—"if you do so, and his game is up, he'll round on me for revenge. Do you care for Maud? Will you see her brother at the bar of the Old Bailey?"

The young captain groaned. How many haunting fears would vanish at the death of Craig Carton! And in the wild world was there a man more worthy of death?

"It's no use talking about it," he said curily. "And now—I'm busy."

"You're a coward, Ernest Holroyd!" said Newcome bitterly, as he stepped out of the charthouse.

Ernest did not reply to the taunt. A pin-prick could not hurt him now.

Maurice went back to his stateroom to think. His white face was stubborn in its expression.

"The Italians shall overtake the 'Endymion.' Suppose they scuttled us, as he suggested? Better death for Maud than the love of the Cormorant! Better death for me than this dog's existence!" His lips trembled; he shuddered violently. He was afraid of death—wildly, horribly afraid of it. "But it won't come to that. It's only a trick of Carton's to deceive Holroyd. Anyhow, we'll run the risk. I'll stop the 'Endymion' somehow, and the fellows yonder shall have their victim!"

If Maurice sought for an opportunity of delaying the "Endymion" he did not find one that day. The steamer raced on in the sunshine. The engine-room was suffocating. The lascar firemen grumbled as they toiled. Every now and then a fainting man was dragged on deck and soured with buckets of seawater. Vessels were sighted, but vanished like the houses seen from an express train. But closer crawled the smoke-cloud astern, and in the afternoon the form of the yacht could be easily made out from the deck of the "Endymion." She was



His wild clutch missed the rails, and down he went into the frothing waves. (See page 3.)

getting nearer and nearer, and Craig Carton won Maud's admiration by the cool way in which he calculated the distance gained by the yacht since dawn.

"But would not the ship steam faster if part of the cargo were sacrificed, Mr. Carton?" the girl asked, with a truly feminine disregard of the cash side of the question.

"Doubtless. But that would be too heavy a loss for Mr. Newcome and Captain Holroyd. And, really, it will not be necessary. The captain expects to elude the yacht by changing his course when darkness falls."

"Ah! so it does not really matter if they draw nearer, so

long as they don't overtake us before dark? And you think they will be thrown off the track, then?"

Craig Carton did think so, or he would not have been nearly so cool about it. But he did not say so.

"I cannot say," he replied. "That is, however, what I hope."

"But if they come up with us, there are enough men here to beat them off," said Maud.

"The fact is," said Carton, "I have my doubts as to whether I should be justified in allowing blood to be spilt upon my

account. My life is, after all, worth little. I am alone in the world. I have few friends—none who really care for me."

His voice had a melancholy cadence. Maud, who had no idea that he was acting, felt a thrill of compassion.

"Don't say so, Mr. Carton." Her voice was softly sweet. "On board this vessel there are some who can never forget the debt of gratitude they owe you."

"It is kind of you to say so, Miss Newcome, though what I did was little enough."

"You risked your life."

"I care little for my life. Indeed, if yonder vessel boards us, I am half inclined to let them kill me if they will, rather than allow other lives to be lost in my defence."

It was about the last thing Craig Carton would really have thought of doing. But how was Maud Newcome to know that?

"That would not be right, Mr. Carton. It is noble, generous of you. But such a sacrifice is not demanded."

"I confess," said Carton, in a low voice, "that during the past week I have grown to value my life more than ever before. If I thought, Miss Newcome, that you could learn to value it too, I should be the happiest man under the heavens."

There was no mistaking his meaning. The colour rushed into Maud's cheeks. Before she could reply, Carton said hurriedly:

"But I have no right to say this now. Forgive me!"

And he left her, and walked for a while with a gloomy air.

Maud stood alone, surprised, and perhaps not displeased, the colour coming and going in her fair face.

One pair of eyes alone had noted the little scene. When Carton was with Maud, Holroyd's eyes were usually upon them with jealous intentness. He saw the blushes of the startled girl, and a hand of ice seemed to grip his heart. Did she care for the adventurer, then? Was it possible? Had he delayed too long? He could have cried aloud in the agony of the thought.

How lovely, how sweet, she looked as she stood there in the sunset!

"My darling—my darling!" the young captain cried, under his breath.

He looked at Craig Carton. Did the adventurer really love Maud? Surely even his stony heart could not be insensible to so much beauty and sweetness? But his love was not likely to be either deep or lasting. It was money he wanted.

"I will speak to-night," said Holroyd. "Come what may, she shall know the Cormorant in his true colours."

Unveiling the Past—A Victim's Victim—"I Love You!"

"She shall know the Cormorant in his true colours!"

He had made up his mind, and, with his usual courage, he was ready to face the consequences.

"Night fell, dark, and a little windy. The yacht "Colomba" vanished from sight. Darkness blotted her out. There was some suppressed excitement on the "Endymion." Would she throw off her tenacious pursuer? The speed was reduced to half, and the helm shifted. Instead of heading for the Bahama Islands, the "Endymion" fled southward for Caribbean waters. Through the Caribbean Sea and the Yucatan Channel she was to gain the Mexican Gulf and her destination, New Orleans. If the Italians went blundering on in the dark towards the coast of Florida, as seemed most likely, they would miss their prey to a certainty.

No one thought of sleep that night. The situation was too strange and strained.

Mr. Newcome several times observed his son with uneasiness. Maurice was pale, restless, disturbed. He answered absently when spoken to. The merchant began to suspect that the young man was not quite sober.

"Hadn't you better go to your bunk, Maurice?" he said, as they rose after the evening meal.

"What for? I'm going on deck."

Mr. Newcome, looking decidedly distressed, laid a detaining hand upon his shoulder.

"Don't, my dear boy. Captain Holroyd will be sure to send you down, and—"

Maurice broke from him with an impatient laugh.

"The dickens! Do you think I am drunk? I sha'n't fall overboard again, I promise you!"

He went up the companion steadily enough.

"Papa!"

Mr. Newcome looked unsteadily at his daughter. Hitherto Maurice's little escapades had been hidden from her. But upon this occasion he had allowed his anxiety to master his discretion. Maud was looking concerned.

"Well, my dear, what is it?"

"Was Maurice intoxicated the day he fell overboard, when Mr. Carton picked him up?"

The merchant coloured and hesitated.

"He was? I have wronged Captain Holroyd, then."

"Captain Holroyd! How have you wronged him?"

"Maurice told me that Captain Holroyd ordered him below for no reason—in fact, played the bully—and—and—"

"Maurice had no right to say such a thing!" Mr. Newcome exclaimed indignantly. "Captain Holroyd would be the last man to play the bully. I have the greatest regard and esteem for him. Why, one reason why I chose this vessel for my voyage to New Orleans was to place Maurice in contact with Ernest Holroyd, whose example, I hoped, might bring him to a better sense of honour and manhood!"

"How I have misjudged him!"

"You shall know the facts, Maud. Maurice was intoxicated, and in danger, therefore, of going overboard, and the captain very justly endeavoured to send him below, where he would be safe. It was by attempting to elude Mr. Sandys and Mr. Carton that Maurice fell into the sea."

"And that is why the captain would not tell me the cause of the accident!" exclaimed Maud. "Papa, I have not been—been nice to him, and all because of that. I ought to ask his pardon."

"I noticed you weren't such friends."

Mr. Newcome had not been pleased by his daughter's coldness to Ernest. He liked the frank, manly sailor. He had thought of him as a possible son-in-law, and was pleased by the idea. He had looked for this voyage to bring matters to a satisfactory arrangement.

"But I had better go and look after Maurice," he added, and passed up the companion.

He left the girl in a pensive frame of mind. The steward bustled in and out. Then she was alone. There was a dreamy look in her eyes. Of whom was she thinking? Not of Craig Carton.

Mr. Newcome found his son talking, in an obscure corner, with a couple of lascar firemen, who had been sent up for a spell of rest upon the reduction of the "Endymion's" speed. The coaly Orientals had been loud in their grumbling at the extra work entailed by the racing of the steamer. Their protests had been silenced, discourteously but effectually, by the heavy boot and fist of the chief engineer. They were as full of spite as of fatigue. Their black eyes were glittering as they listened to Maurice.

Mr. Newcome, seeing his son apparently harmlessly occupied, joined Craig Carton, who was aft, searching the shadowed sea with a night-glass. At the same time Captain Holroyd, relieved by Sandys, left the bridge and went below. He wanted to speak to Maud alone, and now was his opportunity.

To his surprise, Maud coloured a little on seeing him, and rose, speaking first.

"Captain, I want to ask your pardon."

He looked astonished.

"Mine, Miss Newcome?"

"Yours. I have heard the true story of my brother's accident. I know what caused it. I did not know at the time, and—and I misjudged you."

"I do not understand."

"You ordered Maurice below for his own sake. He refused to go. I—I thought—"

"I see!" Captain Holroyd saw, and smiled grimly. "As you did not know how necessary it was for your brother to be taken below, you thought I was playing the petty tyrant."

"Forgive me!"

"Freely! I am glad you spoke, Miss Newcome, and I thank you for your frankness. I understand now— But let that pass. I came down to ask a favour of you. I have something to tell you. Can you spare me ten minutes?"

"With great pleasure."

Her cordiality made his task easier.

"We are friends, are we not, Miss Newcome?"

"I hope so."

She smiled.

"Then I claim a friend's privilege of talking about myself." Her blue eyes opened a little. Captain Holroyd was not much given to talking about himself.

"I want to relate to you an incident in my life some years before I entered the service of Mr. Newcome. Don't think I am chattering idly. The matter concerns you, as you will understand when I have finished."

"Concerns me?" said the girl, in wonder.

He nodded gravely. Her curiosity was aroused.

"Please go on."

"I will be very brief. A few words, indeed, will tell you all. I was very young when I made the acquaintance of the man who has been the bane of my life—a man who has as many aliases as fingers, but who has become generally known amongst the sharpers who are his associates as the Cormorant—a name he well deserves, for he is a human bird of prey."

Maud Newcome started.

"The Cormorant!"

"Have you heard of him?"

"Yes."

She did not say that she had heard of him in connection with the follies of her brother. But Captain Holroyd knew that. The whole story of Maurice's weakness was not known to Maud.

But she knew he had been dissipated and reckless, and that her father considered the Cormorant chiefly to blame for it.

"This man was then the supercargo of the 'Elsbeth,' and I was second mate. The chief mate—an Italian named Cazalet—was a chum of mine. He took me into his confidence when he began to suspect that the owners and the captain and supercargo had plotted to scuttle the 'Elsbeth' for the insurance money. Captain Reynolds soon discovered that we were keeping our eyes upon him. The pair then attempted to draw us into the plot. They admitted that the 'Elsbeth' was nothing more or less than a coffin-ship, and that the owners had agreed to pay two thousand pounds for the destruction of her. They offered us equal shares if we would join them."

"And you refused?"

"We refused. Cazalet declared that we would neither join nor permit any foul play, and that at the first sign of it he would appeal to the crew. The scoundrels seemed intimidated by that. They engaged to abandon the scheme. The same night, while Cazalet and I were on deck, I heard a splash. It was the chief mate falling into the sea. A moment later two men sprang upon me. I should have followed my messmate to a watery grave, had I not laid hold of a belaying-pin just in time, and struck out in self-defence. I knew my danger at once. The plotters, rather than abandon their scheme, had resolved to get rid of both of us. I kept them off, and the seamen came running up to see what was the matter. Their plan, of course, could not be carried out then, for they could not murder me in sight of the men; but the supercargo, with a fiendish cunning I had never believed a human being capable of, shouted to the crew to seize me, and that I had murdered Cazalet. I was dumbfounded by the accusation, and half stunned by a blow I had received in the struggle. My incoherent denials could not outweigh the authority of the captain, who instantly backed up his confederate. I was clapped into irons and dragged below. Captain Reynolds said I was to remain so till we reached port and I could be tried. But I knew that, thus secured from interference, he meant to scuttle the 'Elsbeth.'"

Holroyd broke off abruptly.

"Do you believe me, Miss Newcome?"

His tone was almost pleading.

"Every word."

"You understand that the captain and the supercargo told a very different story?"

"But I believe you."

He gave her a grateful look.

"Thank you, Miss Newcome!"

"But go on. How did you escape that peril?" Her interest was keenly aroused.

"Some of the crew had a suspicion of the captain's game, probably from hearing words dropped by Cazalet and me. For self-preservation, they broke the bonds of discipline, and kept such a watch upon Reynolds, that he found it impossible to carry out his scheme.

"We arrived in port, with everything against me. The captain and supercargo were ready to swear to a quarrel between Cazalet and me, and to seeing me strike him and knock him overboard. Of what use would it have been for me to tell the facts? I had no proof of a design to scuttle, as no scuttling had taken place. The plotters, furious at being deprived of the expected reward of their villainy, were eager to swear my life away.

"Perhaps it was weak of me, but when some of my sympathisers from the fore-castle secretly effected my release, just before we entered port, and gave me a chance of escape, I decided to profit by it. I slipped into the sea, and was picked up by an outgoing craft. The result was in my favour. I was supposed to be drowned. And, while Captain Reynolds still made his charge against me, the police did not search for me. Holroyd was my mother's name; I gave it as mine when I was picked up by the 'Eurydice,' and I have borne it ever since."

"Then it is not your real name?"

"My real name is Ernest Lavington. Favoured by the supposition that I was dead, I began a new life. I had to recommence at the foot of the ladder. But I worked my way up. I hoped to lead a respected and honourable life. I have done so. It might even have been a happy one, but for one circumstance. I had changed greatly, but when, by ill-luck, I came in contact with the supercargo of the 'Elsbeth' again, he recognised me. Ever since that meeting he has blackmailed me mercilessly."

Maud's eyes were wet with tears.

"He had given up the sea; he now played the villain ashore. He was called the Cormorant. I agreed to pay him for his silence, though it was in my heart to kill him. His hold upon me was complete. Whatever chance I should have had if I had stood my trial was gone now. By my fight and my change of name I had as good as condemned myself. The Cormorant knew it, and he had no pity. Miss Newcome, the thought of slaying that demon came many times into my mind. I might have yielded at last, but I came to know one

in whose presence I should not dare to stand with the red stain of murder upon my soul."

Maud felt a strange thrill of emotion. She could not fail to guess to whom he was referring.

"For a time the Cormorant was satisfied with the money I paid him regularly. But at last he has left me no resource but to defy him. He had a reason for leaving London hurriedly—some ill-deed, I believe. He forced himself on board my vessel. I dared not refuse him. As soon as I saw his evil face in the boat alongside, I knew that he had come to demand a passage. Judge of my feelings—for you also were to be my passenger."

She looked at him in astonishment.

"This is the revelation I have to make, for the sake of which I have unveiled my past to you. This wretch has dared to entertain towards you, Miss Newcome, designs which leave me, as a man of honour, no course but to acquaint you with his true character."

She was very pale.

"Is it possible that you refer to Mr. Carton?"

"Craig Carton—murderer, blackmailer, my enemy, and your brother's!"

The girl pressed her hands to her temples. The revelation dazed her.

"But, then, Maurice must know. Why has he not told us?"

"Perhaps he dares not."

She looked scared.

"You mean that Carton has some power over him?"

"I am afraid so."

"Oh, it is dreadful—dreadful! And yet he saved Maurice's life."

"For the sake of paying court to you, Miss Newcome. Maurice knows that well; and that is the cause of what you have perhaps deemed his ingratitude. But I do not deny that the fellow is brave, and almost as reckless of his own life as of other people's." The captain rose. "Miss Newcome, you will hear later a very different version of my story. May I hope that you will continue to place faith in mine?"

"I shall always believe you, Captain Holroyd. And I will confess to you that I have always had a lurking distrust of Craig Carton, for which I have often blamed myself. I see now that it was a true instinct. But"—her voice faltered—"will the man denounce you now?"

"I am sure of it. He hates me. He will fulfil his threat!"

"And you dare this for my sake!" she exclaimed, with a strange break in her voice. "Oh, Captain Holroyd, what have I done to deserve that you should be so generous to me?"

In her tone, in her humid eyes, the captain thought he read something which brought a mad pulsing of joy to his heart. Forgetting everything but the love he could no longer conceal, he cried:

"Oh, Miss Newcome, can you not see that I love you—that I worship the planks you press with your feet?"

Her face was flooded with colour. Her lips parted. But what she would have answered cannot be said, for at that moment the grimy face of the chief engineer was thrust into the cuddy.

"Beg pardon, sir, but there's something amiss with the engines."

Captain Holroyd wished the engines and the engineer at the bottom of the sea together.

"Excuse me, Miss Newcome."

And, with reluctant steps, he followed MacTaggart to the engine-room.

Maud was alone again. There was a strange, soft light in her eyes.

Baffled Flight—The Italian Comes Aboard—A Startling Recognition—A Duel to the Death—Light at Last.

"The engines have broken down!"

Such were the words that fell from the lips of Captain Holroyd when he came up from the engine-room a quarter of an hour later.

One can imagine the feelings with which Craig Carton heard the news.

He sprang upon the bridge, fronting the captain, with parted teeth and eyes that fairly flamed.

"You hound! You have planned this for the sake of getting rid of me!"

Holroyd's hand was raised to strike. But he reflected that yonder vessel was bearing death to the Cormorant, and the blow was not given.

"You are mistaken," he said coldly. "I have done my best for you."

"Is this your best?"

"There has been foul play, the engineer thinks," the captain went on calmly. "My suspicion falls upon the firemen. Be that as it may, the damage cannot possibly be repaired under twenty-four hours. There is, however, one hope for you, Carton. The 'Colomba' may pass us without seeing us. We are already some distance from our former route."

The adventurer shook his head. He had little hope of that. Craig Carton, usually so cool, composed, calculating, seemed to be crushed by the catastrophe. He stood with his arms folded, his head bent down. His rage had passed, leaving him moody, sullen.

"Cheer up, Carton!" Mr. Newcome clapped him on the shoulder. "Even if they come up with us, we sha'n't leave you in the lurch. The crew will stand by you to a man. We shall beat them yet."

Carton did not reply. He scarcely seemed to hear. Mr. Newcome felt a touch on his arm. He turned, to see his son. Maurice was as white as a corpse, and his eyes glittered feverishly.

Surprised, and a little alarmed, the merchant allowed his son to lead him below. The young man carefully closed his cabin-door before he began to speak.

"What's the matter, Maurice?"

"I want to talk to you, father. Listen to me. You must stop all this nonsense about defending Craig Carton when the Italians overtake us."

"What, would you have us desert him in his extremity? I am surprised to hear a son of mine say so!"

"You do not know who he is."

Mr. Newcome looked at him.

"Have you forgotten the human vampire who made me what I am?" said Maurice, in a low, fierce voice. "I was always weak and irresolute. I confess that. But I was never a gambler, never a drunkard, never a felon till I met the Cormorant. He ruined me, body and soul! He cheated me, black-mailed me, made my life a burden! Do you think I'm fool enough to miss a chance of getting out of his clutches?"

Mr. Newcome did not yet understand.

"Is the Cormorant on board the 'Endymion,' then?"

"Why are you so dense? Craig Carton is the Cormorant!"

The merchant passed his hand over his brow in a dazed way.

"Why did you not tell me before?"

"Because I dared not—till I had made sure of that demon! Because he threatened me with penal servitude!" Mr. Newcome gave a gasp of horror. "Are you beginning to understand? He holds a cheque, endorsed by me, which would send me to prison if he produced it!"

"Good heavens! My son is a forger!"

"I was drunk; I scarcely knew what I was doing. It was all that fiend's work!" hissed Maurice. "He knew it was a forgery, and promised to let me redeem it. When I offered the money, he coolly told me that he preferred to keep me in his power, and refused to give up the cheque. I have been his slave ever since. It was the thought of that which has been my ruin. He kept the prison gates constantly before my eyes. I could only forget the terror when I drowned my senses in drink."

Like most weak men, Maurice was a furious hater. He stammered with rage as he poured out his tale. The merchant listened, with his brain in a whirl. After all, Maurice was as much deserving of pity as of blame. Unstable as water, weak as wax, he would have made a good man in good hands. But he was not formed to stand alone.

"My poor boy! Oh, the scoundrel!"

"But that isn't all. I did not turn upon him until he drove me to desperation. Can you guess what he has dared to design?" He almost choked with passion. "He has coolly told me that he is going to marry Maud, and that I must help him."

Mr. Newcome clenched his hands.

"Ah, you feel as I do, then?"

"But what are we to do?" said the merchant. His look and tone expressed sheer helplessness.

"Do?" Maurice gave a fierce laugh. "When he spoke to me of Maud I decided what to do! I swore that he should die!"

"Die?" stammered his father. "But—but that is murder!"

"We seem to have changed natures," Maurice said cynically. "It is I who am strong now, and you who are weak. Last night it was only an accursed chance that saved Craig Carton from death!"

Mr. Newcome had heard the story of the belaying-pin. He looked at his son perfectly aghast.

"Maurice, was it you?"

The young man nodded coolly.

"It was I. But I failed. As soon as I learned that deadly enemies were upon the track of Craig Carton, I resolved that they should have their victim. I think I've contrived it."

"Surely you did not—"

"Surely I did. I bribed the lascar firemen to cause a breakdown of the engines, and they've done it."

It seemed to Mr. Newcome that it was not his son, but a stranger, who was talking to him. Could this indeed be Maurice—this man of desperate schemes? He did not know how hatred and revenge, once given rein, can transform a nature. The worm had turned at last with a vengeance.

"I haven't told you all this for talking's sake," continued

Maurice. "I want you to understand that Craig Carton must be given up—or, at least, left to take his chance. His Anarchist yarn is all moonshine. It's someone he has wronged who is after him—perhaps some poor devil in his clutch, like myself."

"But, if he dies, the forged letter may come to light."

"It is sure to be among his things on board the 'Endymion.' You are the owner of the vessel. You can look for it when he's gone."

"But Captain Holroyd—"

"He won't stand in your way. Can't you see that he's head over ears in love with Maud?"

"Leave me alone for a while," Mr. Newcome said slowly. "I must think it out. I'm in a fog at present. I don't know what I ought to do."

Maurice shrugged his shoulders, and left him alone in the stateroom.

Meanwhile Maud Newcome had found an opportunity of asking Captain Holroyd a question.

"We shall be overtaken, after all. Will you defend that man from his enemies?"

"I have no choice in the matter. My men will stand by him. I must place myself at their head."

"And if he is saved," she said musingly, "he will denounce you?"

"I do not doubt it."

"But perhaps gratitude—"

Captain Holroyd laughed bitterly.

Gratitude was left out of the Cormorant's composition. But, Miss Newcome—he lowered his voice—"are you displeased by what—I said a while ago?"

She smiled softly, sweetly.

"Could I be displeased by what I was proud and happy to hear?"

"Miss Newcome"—he caught his breath—"is it possible that—that you care for me?"

"It is more than possible, Ernest. It is true."

His face was luminous with joy. But soon it clouded.

"Ah, I had no right to speak, when I shall soon be a fugitive or stand in a felon's dock! When I thought I could be sure of the Cormorant's silence, I dreamed of this. But now—"

"Now you need my love more than ever," she murmured, the darkness hiding her blushes.

"My darling!"

Some time before dawn Sandys came on the bridge to speak to Holroyd.

"We don't hear anything of the yacht, sir. Maybe she passed on towards Florida."

"I hope so, Sandys."

"But have you noticed Carton, sir?" The chief mate lowered his voice. "He seemed a plucky fellow, but this breakdown has knocked him all of a heap. If he wasn't a friend of yours, I should think—"

"He isn't a friend of mine. I detest him, and he hates me. What do you think, then?"

"Then I'll speak out. Doesn't it seem as if he thinks that yonder fellow, when he comes up, will have something to say to us, which will prevent us from siding with him against the Italians? That's the only way I can account for his being so scared."

"It is possible," Holroyd said thoughtfully.

We need not say how anxiously the men of the "Endymion" looked for dawn.

Craig Carton peered through the rising mists with haggard eyes.

He was the first to see the smoke-cloud lying against the east. The yacht was less than two miles distant.

There was a buzz of deep-drawn breath when the "Endymion's" crew knew that the "Colomba" was heading directly for the disabled steamer.

The yacht's siren began to croak. Captain Holroyd answered it, and then the stranger signalled for some minutes.

"What does he say?" cried Carton hoarsely.

He did not understand the code.

"He says he wants to come aboard and talk. He is willing to come alone."

"Let him come," said Carton, with a dark glitter in his eyes.

His hand had slid into his pocket, as if to make sure that something was there. The captain exchanged a glance with the chief mate. Both understood what was in Carton's mind.

Holroyd answered the stranger. A boat dropped from the yacht and pulled for the "Endymion." Holroyd threw a whisper to Sandys.

"See that he doesn't do any mischief. Whoever the Italian is, he sha'n't be shot down without warning."

Sandys was quite of the same opinion. With a muttered "Ay, ay, sir!" he passed from the bridge. In an apparently careless manner he drew close to Craig Carton. The latter, hungrily watching the yacht's boat, had no eyes for the chief mate.

As the boat drew nearer, every heart beat hard. Maud stood

leaning upon her father's arm. They were too anxious to think of remaining below. Mr. Newcome was pale and agitated. He had not been able to decide what course he should pursue. Maud's eyes were fixed upon Captain Holroyd. She wondered to see the change that came over his face as the boat drew nearer.

Holroyd looked like a man stunned by a mental shock. His eyes almost started from his head. His lips parted. His breath came thick and fast. With shaking hands he grasped the bridge rail. But for its support, he would have fallen.

"The same—the same! Oh, Heaven is merciful!" the girl heard him mutter.

And her wonder deepened.

The Italian captain came lightly up the side, leaving his seaman in the boat. It was a fine show of confidence in British honour, for he knew that the Englishmen believed that he came as an enemy.

As his head came into full view, at a range at which it was next to impossible to miss, the hand of Craig Carton was withdrawn suddenly from the pocket, with something glittering in it. In a moment more a death-shot would have sped.

But Sandys' grip was upon him at once. His hand was forced upward. A futile bullet went skimming towards the rising sun. Then, before he could grapple with his assailant, his weapon was wrenched away and tossed into the sea.

"No, you don't," said Sandys coolly.

Craig Carton glared at him like a wild beast. But he did not spring. His treacherous attempt had failed. It was worse than useless to assail the mate. He folded his arms across his chest, with a bitter laugh.

The Italian captain—a fine-looking fellow of about thirty—gave a single glance at the man who had tried to murder him. A derisive smile played over his swarthy face. He saluted Holroyd.

"Signor, I have followed you from London to demand that that man be given up to me."

Holroyd still looking dazed, did not reply.

"I have force at my disposal, but I shall be very sorry to use it."

"I guess we could give you as good as you sent, Mr. Dago!" called out the "Endymion's" quartermaster.

The Italian smiled.

"I don't think so, my man. But, before innocent blood is shed, let me tell you how that fiend in human form has wronged me."

"Go easy skipper! We know you're a blooming Anarchist!"

"Did he tell you so?"

"Yaas."

"He lied, then. I am a seaman. I have sailed under the English flag." He looked at Holroyd. "Shall I speak before we declare hostilities, signor?"

Holroyd nodded. He seemed unable to use his tongue.

"Years ago that demon Craig Carton was supercargo of the vessel of which I was chief mate. He plotted with the captain to scuttle her, the pair being hired by the owners to swindle the insurance people. The second mate and I stood against the crime. One night, while we were off our guard, they tried to get rid of us. Taking me by surprise, that scoundrel hurled me into the sea. But I did not drown as he supposed. It was in the South Seas. I floated till morning, and was picked up by a Polynesian canoe. They took me to their island—a place ships never touched at. For years I lived there, amongst savages, almost a savage myself, never seeing a white man, always watching the sea for the sail that never appeared."

The Italian's eyes began to sparkle with rage. He was in fierce earnest, and his words carried conviction to his listeners.

"At last a pearly took me off. When I reached London, and inquired after my old vessel, what do you think I learned?"

There was a hush of expectancy.

"The two rascals had been unable to carry out their scuttling scheme. In revenge they had accused the second mate—my best friend—of murdering me, and he, in attempting to escape, had been drowned."

A murmur rose from the crew.

"Then I swore the vendetta. I kept my escape a secret, in order to track down the scoundrels more surely. The captain I soon found." His eyes glittered. "His fate will be known when the sea gives up his dead. The search for Craig Carton was longer, for he had left the sea and changed his name. He had become a sharper and blackleg, and it was through this that I found him. For by the death of a relative in Italy I had become wealthy, and the wealthy were his prey. In a man who came as a guest to my own yacht I at last found my foe." He paused, his eyes flashing upon Carton. "He recognised me. He eluded me then. But I tracked him. I learned through the detectives I employed that he had fled in craven terror from the city—that he had gone on a merchant vessel in the hope of throwing me off the scent." He laughed grimly. "He might as well have tried to elude a bloodhound!"

He ceased to speak.

Then Captain Holroyd started forward with a great cry. "It is true, then! It is no chance resemblance! You are Cazalet!"

The Italian looked at him attentively.

"That is my name. Who are you?"

"Look at me! Don't you know Ernest Lavington?"

"Ernest Lavington! He is dead!"

"No more than you were!" The Italian, convinced, gripped his outstretched hand. "Cazalet, it does me good to look upon you! If I had only dreamed of this—" He broke off, and shot a fierce glance at Craig Carton. "You demon, you knew it was Cazalet who followed us!"

Carton had given up hope. In that mood he was reckless. He burst into a laugh of mockery.

"Do you think I should have told you?" he asked cynically.

"Yes, I knew it, and it amused me hugely to see you flying from the man you would have given worlds to meet!"

Captain Holroyd turned to his wondering crew.

"My lads, Captain Cazalet has told only the truth. I was second mate of the 'Elsbeth.' My real name is Lavington. Thank Heaven I can use it again now! I was accused of murdering my best friend. And ever since Craig Carton discovered that I was not dead—as the world imagined—he has black-mailed me mercilessly. What does such a man deserve?"

"Chuck him overboard!" cried a score of voices.

"No, no! But—"

"He is my prey!" cried Cazalet fiercely. "Ernest, my old friend, do not stand in my path. Not even for your sake can I pardon him. Men of the 'Endymion,' do I ask more than is just? He sought to murder me as I stepped aboard this vessel. But that is not my method. I wish to fight him fairly—man to man—and slay him, as I fought and slew his confederate! If I fall, my men have orders to steam away, without molesting this ship. But fight him I will! Is it not my right?"

"Ay, ay!" went up a mighty shout.

A gleam of hope went over the face of Craig Carton.

"I accept the challenge!" he cried. "I fear no man! If I had known that such was Cazalet's intention, I would have faced him in London. I fled from the assassin's knife—not from a fair fight. Let me meet him. I am prepared!"

Captain Holroyd could not have prevented it if he had wished to do so. But he did not wish. It was, after all, the best way out of the difficulty.

"Let me take you below, Miss Newcome. You must not see this."

The girl willingly descended with him to the cuddy. There the captain took her in his arms.

"Maud, do you know what this means to us? Cazalet is alive! The truth is out! I can face the world fearlessly, bearing my own name. Maud, then—then you will be my wife?"

"I will be your wife."

He kissed her tenderly, and left her. He was wanted on deck.

The preliminaries were soon arranged. Cazalet stood erect—vengeful in look. The Cormorant faced him, his face mocking, reckless, cynical, as always. Yet he was very pale. Did he know at that terrible moment that he was doomed? If so, he faced his doom with cool, disdainful courage.

The pistols were loaded. Sandy dropped a handkerchief for the signal.

Two reports blended into one.

For an instant neither man moved. Then Craig Carton reeled forward, and fell upon his face.

"The game's up!" he muttered. "It's hard luck. I don't complain. A spasm of agony crossed his face. He gasped for breath. "Tell Newcome he'll find his cheque in my trunk. Destroy it. Holroyd, I—I'm sorry."

And so died the Cormorant.

The avenger departed in the yacht. The "Endymion," as soon as her engines could be got into working order, steamed on to New Orleans.

Craig Carton was buried at sea.

Cleared of the false charge which had so long darkened his life, Ernest resumed his real name, and Maud was betrothed to "Captain Lavington."

The loosening of the Cormorant's clutch was even more beneficial to Maurice than to Ernest. After the forged cheque was found and destroyed, he seemed a new man. The change gladdened his father's heart. Maurice, indeed, had had a severe lesson, and his reformation now promised to be permanent. To Ernest he became very cordial.

"Let us be friends," he said one day, holding out his hand to the young captain. "Let bygones be bygones."

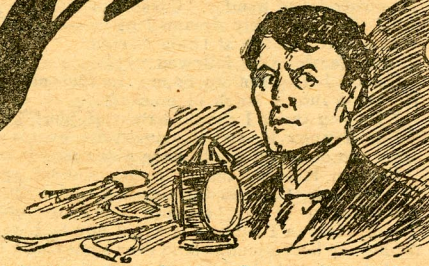
"With all my heart!" answered Ernest.

How pleased and gratified Maud was by this reconciliation we need not say. Her cup of happiness was full.

THE END.

Next Wednesday, HIGH JINKS, by S. Clarke Hook.

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MARY ATLIN, Wallace Lorrimer's sweetheart.
SEPTIMUS MURGATROYD, a scientist and schemer, known to
 have perpetrated many frauds and crimes. He meets
 his death at the hands of Lo Feng, a Chinaman whom
 he betrayed into the hands of the police.

The chase after the murderer, Septimus Murgatroyd, takes Sexton Blake in turn to New York, Montreal, Chicago, and the Far West. On the prairie, just as Murgatroyd is about to be arrested by Blake and the New York detective, Jefferson Hart, an avenging Chinaman, Lo Feng, who has been bitterly wronged by Murgatroyd, appears upon the scene, and stabs the scoundrel to the heart. Blake's work in America is at an end, but he does not return immediately to England, for on Septimus Murgatroyd's body are found documents relating to a secret gold-mine of fabulous wealth in South Dakota. The two detectives resolve to find and work the mine, and go to Red Dog Valley, from which place the secret mine is about ten miles distant. Jefferson Hart has a quarrel with Black Bill, a bullying miner of Red Dog. The two detectives, taking one Red Rob, a gigantic miner with red whiskers, into partnership, set off in quest of the secret mine, and find in a hollow of the hills a deserted log-built ranch. To them comes Single Eye, who implores Sexton Blake to seek out a white man who has wronged him, and upon whom he has sworn to be revenged. Blake discovers, by painting a moustache and beard on the photograph Single Eye gives him, that the man is none other than Black Bill! The police are taken in pursuit of the ruffian, but the redskin is the first to come up with him. A mighty struggle takes place, and Black Bill is flung over a precipice at the Serpents' Gap, to meet his death on the jagged rocks below.

A DEAD MAN'S DIARY.

The Box Found in Black Bill's Shanty—A Mystery Solved—Pete Bidderby on the Watch—An Attack by the "Toughs" of Red Dog—Single Eye to the Rescue.

Not for long did Sexton Blake rest inactive at the lone ranch in the hills.

Single-Eye, his vengeance achieved, bade farewell to the "great white tracker," predicting solemnly that some day Single-Eye should return and repay the great service the detective had rendered.

"You've repaid us in advance, esteemed redskin pard," protested Jeff Hart, "for you've located the mine for us, and helped us to gather in the good red gold!"

Shaking his head in dissent, the Indian chief leapt into the saddle, and rode off north-westward to the hunting-grounds that were still left to the remnants of the "great Sioux nation."

Charlie the Waif, safe for ever from Black Bill's brutality, was now installed as one of the occupants of the ranch. Hart and Red Rob found the boy a useful and willing assistant both at home and at the mine.

Watching the departing redskin till he was a mere speck

on the horizon, Blake brought out and saddled his own horse, and told the others offhandedly that he was going for a ride as far as Red Dog.

"Hyur, don't you get runnin' into trouble single-fisted, pard!" cried the New Yorker, running out of the ranch after the Englishman. "Thar's them down thar as won't hesitate to avenge Black Bill."

But Blake was in the saddle now, and had set spurs to his horse.

"If I'm not back within twenty-four hours, Hart," he shouted back to his comrade, "you and Rob can come over to Red Dog to fetch me."

By a roundabout route, for he had his own good reasons for not wishing to be seen, the detective made his way to Red Dog Valley, and tethered his horse within a little cove on the hillside.

Below him lay the sleepy hollow of Red Dog, its peaceful silence broken only by an occasional burst of drunken laughter from a roystering crowd in the drinking-saloon.

But the Red Dog Hotel had no attraction for Sexton Blake to-day. He gave the place a wide berth, and made his way cautiously to the rear of one of the log-built shanties that lined the rough waggon-trail through the valley.

"Yes, this must be the place," he muttered. "It was out of this shanty that Black Bill came that morning, I'll swear!"

All his natural habits of caution marked Blake's movements as he stealthily approached the cottage. He listened for some moments, then knocked at the window and on the door cautiously, but at the same time loudly enough to be heard by anyone within the house.

"Nobody here!" he mused. "I'm in luck! Now to search the residence of the late William Dagson, the bully of Red Dog! It will be curious if there's nothing here to throw a light on the identity of little Charlie!"

A pocket-knife sufficed to press back the window-catch, and a moment later the detective was within the little three-roomed shanty, making a hasty but thorough search.

Ah! here was what he wanted—an oblong wooden box, stuffed full of papers!

The detective could scarcely repress a cry of satisfaction. Herein, surely, he would find something of value. Another quick glance around, then Blake turned to depart.

As he left the shanty by the back door, as stealthily as he came, a man who had been watching Blake's manoeuvres through the dingy lace curtains at the window slunk back into the shadow of a bush.

Not till Blake was half-way up the hillside did the watcher venture forth again.

It was Pete Bidderby!

As his lank figure rose from its hiding-place, a hard fight was going on in Pete Bidderby's mind. For some moments he could not decide how best to use the discovery he had made.

Should he inform the vigilants of Red Dog Valley that a robbery had been committed? In that event, Pete Bidderby could see Sexton Blake, in his mind's-eye, dancing on nothing at the end of a noosed rope. Or should he—should he use his knowledge for his own ends, and perhaps extract some profit from the fortunate chance that had brought him to Black Bill's cottage that day?

It was a terrible strain to think the thing out in all its bearings when one's head was fuddled with the bad whisky of the Red Dog Hotel; but Pete Bidderby at last hit upon his plan of action.

He ran, crouching low under cover of the bushes, to another of the log shanties—his own—and two minutes later, just as Sexton Blake reached the copse where his horse was hobbled, the lanky Pete came out again, slightly changed in his outward appearance.

A fur cap had taken the place of his flapping sombrero; in his belt gleamed a bowie-knife, keeping his Derringer company, and his feet, generally encased in long riding-boots, were now thrust into a pair of silent running-shoes of rubber.

"Now to see if I've forgotten how to run!" he muttered, with an oath. "Maybe there was some truth in Bill Dagson's idea that these durned tenderfeet had struck it rich over there in the hills, and ef so be, then Pete Bidderby's goin' to take a hand in the game!"

Never dreaming of pursuit, Sexton Blake remounted, and set off towards the headquarters of the Narrow Squeak Gold-mining Syndicate. Once clear of Red Dog Valley, he let his horse lapse into an easy trot.

Then his thoughts reverted to Black Bill's box of documents. Why not examine his find now?

The detective looked around him. He was riding along an open plain, and ahead of him, stretching in a line from east to west, were the hills where Jeff Hart and Red Rob Witchev were digging for gold.

He glanced from side to side, and could see no sign of a living thing; but had he only darted a quick look behind him, without giving any warning of his intention, Sexton Blake would have seen the long, crouching form of Pete Bidderby hastening after him with all the stealth and celerity of a "black tracker" from Queensland.

Wrenching away one of the short ends of the box containing the papers, Blake found he could easily extract and read the documents one by one while holding their receptacle under his arm.

And so he jogged along, carefully examining each scrap of paper taken from the box before transferring it to his side-pocket.

Satisfaction gave place to doubt, and doubt to disappointment, as he waded through fully a half of the papers without discovering anything of interest or value.

"Have I had this trip for nothing, after all?" he grumbled. "Have I drawn blank—"

But then a cry of delight broke from him, and in a moment everything was changed.

On a rough sheet of "sugar-paper," which had likely enough been used to wrap a parcel of goods from a prairie store, three newspaper-cuttings had been pasted.

The first of these was an advertisement from the Personal column of a New York newspaper:

"Lost or kidnapped! Information is wanted as to the whereabouts of Charles Mayhew Willowton, aged four, missing from his home since July 17. A handsome reward will be paid to anyone—" &c.

An address was given of a large attorney's office in No. 7 York, and underneath the cutting was written in ink:

"New York Herald," July 30."

The second cutting was an article in another newspaper, describing the grief of the father of the missing child, Charles Washington Willowton, a New York merchant; while the third extract—and this one completed Sexton Blake's satisfaction—was a paragraph from a Leavenworth paper, describing the efforts of the police to arrest one George W. Adson, a "tough," suspected of many crimes, and wanted for murder and highway-robbery.

Other papers gave a kind of diary of George Adson's movements for nearly two years, and it was clear that the man referred to was no other than Black Bill.

"George Adson—G. Adson—Dagson!" mused Sexton Blake, with a chuckle. "Seems as though our late lamented friend Black William made himself a new name by an anagram on the old one. Well, anyhow, here's the whole story told as clearly as printer's ink can make it. Black Bill, you poor dead scoundrel, you were a methodical man in your way, and a vain one, too! If you'd lived in London, you'd be the sort of fellow that would collect all the nice things your friends wrote about you in the papers, and stick them in a splendid gilt-edged news-cutting album."

"Hart—Hart!" shouted the detective; for he had now reached the ranch in the hills.

"Hallo!" cried Hart, as he appeared at the door.

Then he struck an attitude, imitating Single-Eye's voice and manner, and cried:

"Lo! the great white tracker has returned to the poor wigwam of the men who dig for gold. What news brings Funnyhaha, the Terror of the Evildoer?"

"Great news, old chum!" laughed Blake, as he ran his horse into the shed that served the three adventurers as a stable.

"Waal, it must be somethin' tol'able steep to jedge from y'r manner, pard. Great snakes! yew're jest all of a quiver!

Say, have yew onairthed another gold-mine, or is the Yewnited States Treasury busted?"

"Neither one nor the other, old man; but I've found out who Black Bill was, and who Charlie is."

And into Jefferson Hart's astonished ears Blake poured the full story of his discovery, and showed the New Yorker the documents that proved it.

That evening, and again on the following day, serious councils were held within the Narrow Squeak ranch.

Blake was returning to New York immediately, and looked upon the discovery of Charlie's parentage as an additional reason for departure.

"Besides, Hart," he argued, "we're not doing the square thing here. This gold-mine doesn't belong to us."

"True enough, ole hoss, it don't; but what are we to do? Yew must reck'lect that since we started op'rations hyur thar's bin a new pardner in the firm—"

"That'll do, Hart!" roared the man from Cedar Rapids, in his elephantine voice. "I know what you're a-goin' to say—yew mean me, o' course. But I aren't goin' to let you or the chief hyur do the crooked thing just to obligate Rob Witchev—not by a jugful. Ef I c'lar out of this claim to-morrow without a cent to the good, I guess I shall have bin well repaid for the time I've spent, an' that's straight!"

"Well repaid?" echoed Hart. "Waal, you remind me of the man as wrote somewhere that words wuz given us to disguise our meanin'. Yew haven't touched a durned cent yet—"

"No," interrupted Rob, "I 'aven't—not a single cent. That aren't the kind of payment I meant, ye see. But I guess I've had the honour of workin' alongside and shoulder to shoulder with two of the uprightest and cleanest and straightforwardest gentlemen as was ever dumped down on this airth to set a good example to 'toughs' an' black-guards, an' if that aren't quite enough reward for me—"

Red Rob could get no farther in his unusually long speech, for there was a huskiness in his throat that moved him to bury his nose and mouth in a great can of ale—perhaps so that his companions should not see how deeply moved he was.

Instantly he found his free hand clasped simultaneously by Blake and Hart—it was quite a big enough hand to be clasped by two people at the same time—and Jeff Hart went on:

"O.K., pard, and the same to you every time; but you're not going to be a loser over the deal, I'll swear! You're one of the best we've struck, and without your help it's precious little gold-dust we'd have found in the Narrow Squeak claim. What d'you say, Blake?"

"Ditto to every word of yours, Hart. And so it's settled that we go back to New York, restore Charlie to his sorrowing parents, and interview Millionaire Clifford Hanks, the rightful owner of the Narrow Squeak claim; and then, for my part, good-bye to America!"

"No, no! not good-bye, I hope?"

"No; only au revoir, Hart, I promise you. Hallo! what was that?"

Simultaneously the three leapt to their feet, as the sharp crack of a rifle-shot was heard. Little Charlie, studying a picture-book in a far corner of the room, looked up in alarm, as Blake, followed by the others, darted to the door.

From the southward faintly came the sounds of horses' hoofs.

Blake promptly leapt to the summit of the hillock that surrounded the ranch.

"Looks like some of the miners from Red Dog!" he cried, as he made out three horsemen riding rapidly towards the ranch.

"Thar's another over thar!" cried Jefferson Hart, pointing to another oncoming figure, a little to the westward. "Two of 'em!" he added, as he took a closer look.

"And two more comin' this way!" shouted Red Rob Witchev, who had clambered up on the opposite side of the shanty.

"S-s-sh! Whisper, Rob—whisper, for Heaven's sake!" urged Jeff Hart. "Your or'nery voice 'll be jest the finest guide they could possibly have to show 'em jest where we are."

"It's a durned plot to surround us!" cried Red Rob, unheeding the warning. "I guess the shot we heard was fired by mistake, pards, and a durned lucky mistake for us!"

The giant from Cedar Rapids had clapped to his eyes the field-glasses Jeff Hart had brought with him from the east, and he gave an angry yell, as he recognised the foremost man.

"Thar's Pete Bidderby leading 'em, and Job Danks is there, and Red Hank Manuell, and 'Greaser' Garcia. I reckon there's the hull durned army of the bad men of Red Dog come out hyur to visit us!"

Sexton Blake took the lead, with his usual energy and resource.

"We must do what we can against them, friends!" he cried. "We're well armed, and have a good position to fight from."

"Ay, we'll stand 'em off, pard! You give the word, and we'll take your orders," said Hart quickly. "We must have a leader, or we'll get muddled."

"First of all lock little Charlie in the ranch. Now, you go over there, Rob, and you there, Hart"—pointing to various points of the ridge surrounding the ranch, which really made the place a kind of natural fortress.

"Now, let's give them a volley with both hands, boys! And remember this, every man downed is one notch on the road to victory. Are you ready? Fire!"

At the word the Derringers of the goldseekers spoke.

"Hurrah! That's Pete Bidderby chewing the grass!" roared Red Rob.

"And one man down this side, Rob!"

"And two of 'em hyur!" shouted Jefferson Hart, with a ring of warlike triumph in his voice.

Thus unexpectedly repulsed, the attackers drew off for a time, but soon came on again, and this time at a gallop, evidently intending to take the fortress at a rush.

"It's five to one agen us," shouted Jeff Hart, whose eyes blazed with all the fierce thrill of battle; "but if 'twas a hundred we'd see it through—by Jimmy, we'd see it through!"

With grim faces and teeth hard set, the three defenders waited—waited for the moment to fire.

"Now, lads, pepper 'em!" Blake shouted. "Fire!"

But even as the word was given there came a shrill chorus of savage yells nigh drowning the sharp crack, crack of the Derringers.

And down upon the "toughs" from Red Dog like an avenging host swept a horde of copper-skinned warriors, whose awe-inspiring war-cry was scarcely less fearsome a thing than were the tomahawks and poisoned arrows of the prairie braves.

"Redskins, by thunder!" cried Red Rob. "This yur is jest the finishing touch."

"Hully gee! it's Single-Eye!" came in an exultant roar from the New Yorker. "The one-eyed chieftain's payin' a debt, Blake, that's left unsettled ninety-nine times out of a hundred—a debt of gratitude. Durn me ef I ever say a word agen a redskin again!"

Silent, but with vigilant eyes and every nerve on the stretch, Sexton Blake was keenly watching the unexpected conflict between the Sioux warriors and the loafers of Red Dog; and if the detective said nothing, he was none the less alive to the narrow escape he and his companions had had.

"Narrow Squeak!" he muttered. "I'm thinking we named our gold-mine well, after all!"

The arrival of the Indians at once turned the tide of the conflict.

Against a well-armed, well-mounted Sioux band, what chance had a mere handful of gold-miners? Bidderby, Danks, and other wounded men were with difficulty carried off by their friends, and then the rascally attackers fled helter-skelter, scattering like chaff before the Sioux braves.

A shout from Sexton Blake was rightly interpreted by Single-Eye to mean that mercy must be shown.

The chase, therefore, was abandoned, and the marauders from Red Dog Valley allowed to find their way home as best they could.

After such a lesson it was not at all likely that any further attack would be made that night; but Single-Eye insisted on remaining until the morning with all his braves, encamped on the plain at the hillfoot, to keep watch and ward over the goldseekers of the Narrow Squeak claim.

"Hart," said Blake to his American comrade in the morning, "there's one thing I'd like to do before we clear out and steer for New York."

"Give it a name, pard!"

"I'd like just one day's gold-digging. Here am I, a duly qualified member of the Narrow Squeak Syndicate, and I haven't so much as touched a pick or a shovel."

"Hurrah! You shall make up for lost time to-day, pard; and I'll see you through it, old hoss, so I will!"

So off they started for the gold-claim, Hart jubilant at the prospect of an early return to New York; and Sexton Blake no less excited to think that within a few weeks, all being well, he would be well on his way to England and to London.

Red Rob Witchew they left to guard the ranch and to look after little Charlie.

Not a doubt had they, not a care oppressed them, as they swung along the hillsides towards the secret waterfall. Black Bill and his rascally comrades, they felt sure, would not dare to deliver a second attack on the ranch in broad daylight; and what other danger could threaten them?"

What indeed? All seemed secure; but could Sexton Blake have foreseen the events of the next few hours, could either he or the New Yorker have dreamt how a threatening figure from the past was suddenly to swoop down upon them and turn all their plans awry, it is quite certain that the great detective's whim would have been left ungratified.

To be continued next Wednesday, when Book I. of this fascinating story will conclude. Then look out for Book II. of Sexton Blake's Adventures, entitled "THE KING OF DETECTIVES."

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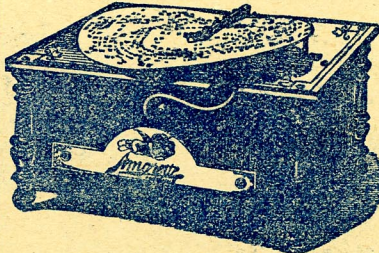
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