THE UNION JACK

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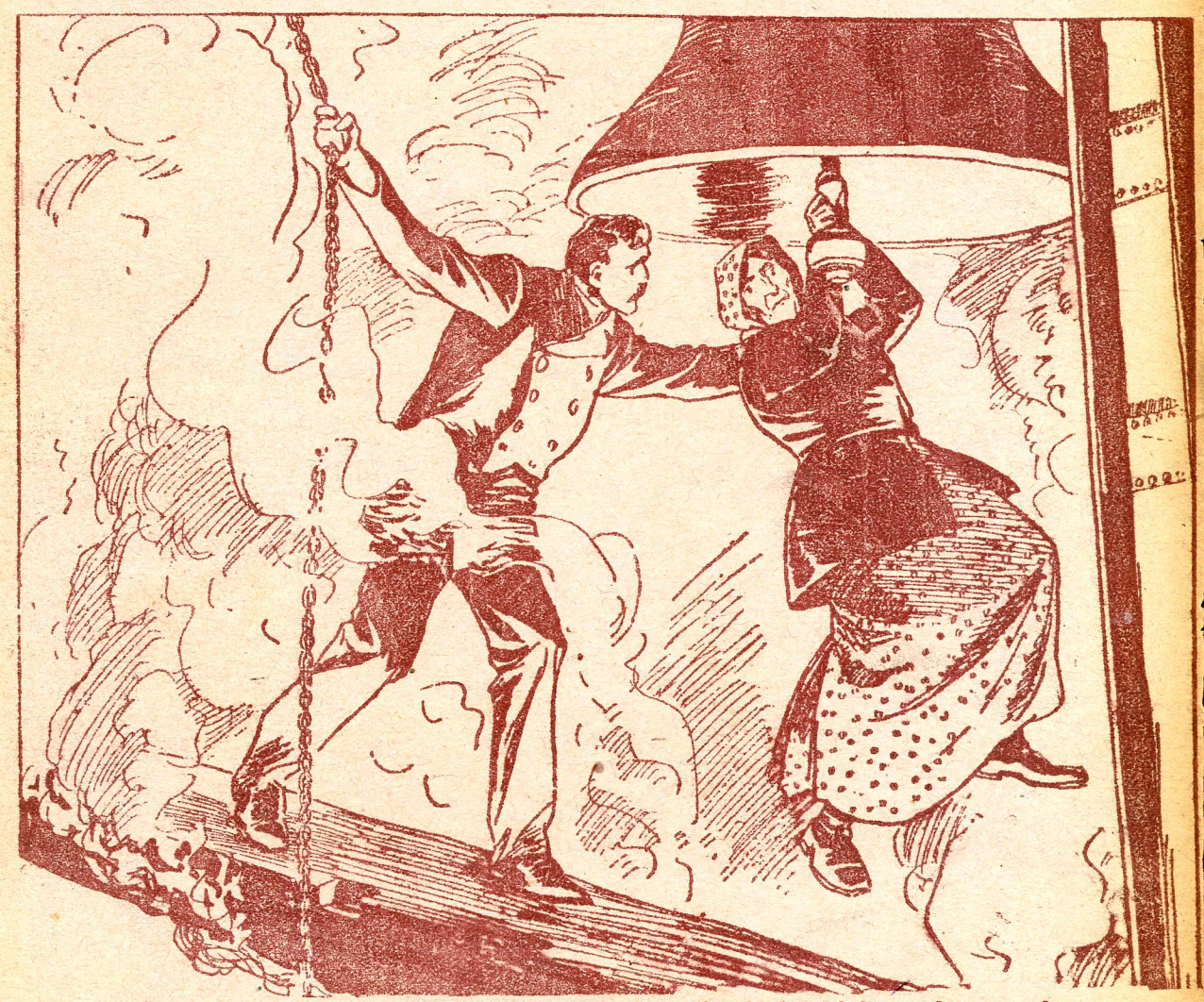
THE SEALED PACKET.



The old woman clutched the clapper of the bell; Harold darted forward to save her. It was a moment of great peril.

PUBLISHED EVERY FRIDAY.

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THE SEALED PACKET.

By MELTON WHYTE.

CHAPTER I.

THE ATTACK IN THE QUADRANGLE — DISCOVERED — ALMOST MURDER — A GREAT MISTAKE—AN INTERVIEW BETWEEN UNCLE AND NEPHEW—FRIEND OR FOE, WHICH?

Good health, good looks, an honourable profession, a fortune amounting to £40,000, and every promise of a brilliant future were the advantages possessed by Captain Harold Dane of the Queen's Royal Hussars.

His friends called him a lucky dog. They knew nothing of the one small "rift within the lute." He had an uncomfortable fancy that the sealed packet reposing in his inner pocket would, when opened on the morrow, alter the tenor of his life. His father, a widower, who had lived in Australia, and died there eight months since, had left behind particular instructions that the seal was not to be broken until seven clear days before Christmas.

"Confound it!" muttered the captain, "the thing is becoming a positive burden! Queer now, isn't it, how a matter like this preys on one's mind?"

He addressed the question to no one in particular, although the few passers-by hearing it regarded him momentarily with some curiosity. But Londoners are not prone to trouble with a stranger's affairs; so Captain Dane, forgetting that he had conveyed his thoughts audibly, passed briskly on towards the great barracks where he was quartered.

To reach his own rooms he was obliged to cross a silent quadrangle overshadowed by a high building on the one side and an extensive wall on the other. The few gas-jets fixed at odd intervals to the walls only served to increase the darkness in the intermediate stages between them. The night was exceptionally mild for the time of the year, and a little misty. The captain had barely entered the quadrangle, when he heard a stealthy sound behind. Wheeling round, he came face to face with a dark figure, and before he could make a sound he was struck heavily over the head.

He staggered sideways a few yards, half stunned, and scarcely equal to grapple with the two unknown miscreants who made a simultaneous rush at him.

Both were heavily coated, and armed with a life-preserver apiece, which one of them at least had hitherto concealed in his capacious pocket.

As they struck out again, Dane managed to pull himself together and call out.

An oath slipped from one of the men, who, apparently alarmed at the sound of the captain's crys, brought his weapon with a crash down on the victim's skull.

The captain reeled, and received a third blow from the second ruffian.

"That's finished him! Quick! the packet!" whispered the first man.

His companion knelt over the still form, and, plucking open the coat, plunged his hand deliberately into the left-hand pocket, and drew therefrom a small, square, sealed blue packet. This he thrust into the first speaker's eager hands, and, rising to his feet, crept on tiptoe to his side.

"There's someone moving yonder," he whispered, indicating the direction by a sidelong jerk of his head.

Both listened with bated breath. Footsteps were plainly audible. They might be either advancing or retreating. Sometimes they stopped altogether, as if the person were struggling against the conviction that something unwonted had occurred. Just then a groan broke from the captain, and the two men saw the figure of a soldier advance through the half-lights ahead.

"Whatever happens we must not be seen!" whispered the

The man knelt over him, and plunged his hand deliberately into his breast pocket.

NEXT WEEK. "HEIR TO A MILLION."

first speaker accosely, gripping his companion by the arm and dragging him by main force further into the black shadow of the wall, where both waited, shivering with fear, as the new-comer finally stopped beside the inert body of the captain.

"Hivins! what is this?" he ejaculated, recoiling from the body with a shudder.

He stood within a couple of yards' distance of the two men crouching back in the shadow of the wall. A stray ray of light gleamed momentarily on the long, tapering blade of a dagger. One of the men saw it, and, with an inward groan, arrested his companion's arm. Not daring to whisper, his action spoke more plainly than his tongue could have done. The other arm dropped, and the weapon fell back into its leather sheath in its owner's pocket.

Thus Trooper Carew's life was saved.

The orderly, unconscious of this, took a quick step forward, hesitated, then bent over and ran his fingers along the still form. He gave a suppressed cry, which made the two men in the rear start with apprehension, lest the alarm should be raised and themselves discovered. One of them again handled his deadly weapon. Should he strike? There was a pause, intensified by suspense; then Trooper Carew lighted a match, and by its faint glimmer perceived the officer's pale face.

"Sure an' it's yeself, master dear, that's been calling!" he said in astonishment.

"Help me up!" groaned Dane.

"Begorra it's too well ye've supped this blessed night!" the orderly muttered in an undertone. "Sure an' I'll help ye, sir!" he added aloud, suiting the action to the word.

Having assisted the bewildered officer to rise and supported him across the quadrangle, he passed along a dimly lighted passage, where he encountered a sentry, who stood upright at attention as Captain Dane reeled by.

Something in the man's attitude arrested the captain's attention. He stopped.

"Have you heard anyone outside, Robinson?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"No one?"

"Not a soul, sir."

"I must have been mistaken, and yet——"

The captain pressed his hand to his head, trying to recall what had happened. But he was still dazed, and in the act staggered against the wall like a drunken man.

The sentry exchanged a meaning glance with Carew, who, slipping his master's arm within his own, helped him up to his rooms. But they were overtaken by a tall, spare, grey-haired man, who addressed the captain by name.

"By St. Patrick, it's Sir James Dane!" muttered Carew in a scared undertone.

"Leave your master to me, you rascal!" said the new-comer sharply. "What's the matter, Harold?" he asked. "You don't seem particularly fit this evening. Where have you been?"

The captain made a violent effort to pull himself together.

"Uncle, what brings you here?" he stammered. "No bad news, I hope? Grace——"

"Is as well as well can be," replied the baronet, who, turning a pair of hawklike eyes on Carew, said: "Can you explain? Your master appears to be in a disgusting state of intoxication. How did it happen?"

"I don't know, sir. I found his honour a while ago lying across the quadrangle. Sure, it wasn't loikely he wanted the boys to see him, so I helped him along here."

A grim smile played around Sir James's mouth.

"You did well," he said, "and you'll do better still to keep your mouth shut! I don't want my nephew's peccadilloes bandied about as common property. If you're a wise fellow, you'll observe what I say."

"Thank ye, sor. His honour's been a good friend to me," observed Carew, his eyes opening at sight of the sovereign which Sir James slipped into his hand.

The door of his master's rooms closed with a snap. There was something almost vicious about it, which made the honest fellow start unpleasantly. He turned on his heels and rejoined the sentry.

"How them smart chaps drink!" said the latter. "Strike my davey! but I didn't think the captain was ever took so bad. 'E was that dead drunk 'e'd hardly stand."

"Wisha, Joe Robinson, howld yer dirty tongue, will ye?" responded Carew, producing the sovereign. "'Tis a decent pill, me bhoy; an' sure if we halve it 'tis the best way to drown our tongues. Ye understand?"

"Mum's the tip!" said the sentry, his eyes sparkling greedily. "Get her changed, lad; I'm your man. We don't know nothing, you and me."

Meanwhile the captain in his room had partly recovered his dazed faculties, and was able to give his visitor a fairly lucid account of what had transpired in the quadrangle. A nasty gash at the back of his left ear sufficiently testified to the truth of his story.

"Well, this is the most extraordinary outrage I have ever heard of!" exclaimed Sir James at the finish. "Maybe the miscreants selected you by mistake, or perhaps they had a grudge against you. I can think of no other reason."

The captain gave a violent start, and stared at him for some moments in silence.

"I can!" he cried suddenly, feeling in his pocket. "The packet has gone!"

"Stolen!" cried Sir James, his face going deadly white as he spoke.

"Stolen," repeated Dane. "Who can these men be?"

"That we must discover; and quickly, too!" said Sir James. "The seal was to be broken to-morrow, eh?"

"Yes."

"Why, for pity's sake, did you carry the document about with you?" asked the baronet abruptly.

"Because my father strictly enjoined me to," said Dane.

"H'm! he always acted in this manner," muttered the other. "Look here, my lad!" he added more kindly; "I'll see my way to the bottom of this affair. If, as I conjecture, the contents of the missing packet refer to the unhappy disagreement which existed between your father and myself, it is clear to me we have a secret enemy, who for some reason of his own wishes your father's explanation to remain unknown to you and I."

The captain flushed angrily and replied:

"You speak in riddles, sir. The last time I saw my father he admitted the disagreement which you speak of, but led me to infer that the explanation should rightly be made by yourself. I have a right to know, and I will put it in this way. You will be doing me a kindness to explain."

"Indeed," remarked the visitor, with a sneer, "you are quite mistaken. Still, I am willing—nay, determined—to help discover the miscreants who have stolen this packet," he added, rising, and walking towards the door. "I have one of the smartest agents in London, before whom I intend to place the facts. He will, if any man can, ferret out these rascals. Now let us be friends. I came here, at Grace's wish, to ask you to accept our Christmas hospitality. This mysterious affair need in no way prevent you doing so; for the present we must leave the matter in my agent's hands. When shall we see you?"

"To-morrow, or the next day," answered Dane, watching him depart.

CHAPTER II.

A CHANCE MEETING AT THE MANOR—A DIRECT CHARGE—SIR JAMES DANE BETRAYS HIMSELF—THE SECRET OF THE ROGUE'S IDENTITY—PROOF POSITIVE—FACE TO FACE WITH TRENT RASPER.

Captain Harold was as good as his word, for on the second evening after the interview with his uncle he arrived at Dane Manor, accompanied by his orderly Carew.

He was somewhat mystified by his reception; Sir James greeted him effusively, while Grace seemed anxious to avoid him. At dinner, too, he received an unpleasant shock, when amongst the guests he recognised a man suspected of a diamond theft and card-sharping. Later on his uncle introduced to him this person by the name of Rasper.

"A very old and valued friend of mine," he added aside to Harold. "I particularly wish you two to get on together. He is a very useful fellow."

"No doubt," answered the captain dryly. "But I fancy we have met before. In South Africa," he remarked aloud, "when Mr. Rasper travelled incognito as Julian Rosht."

The person in question may or may not have heard. He had moved away, and made no sign whatever. Sir James gave his nephew a keen, swift look.

"That is strange," he whispered; "you are not the first one to mistake my friend for this Julian Rosht. Their resemblance must evidently be very remarkable."

"I never saw two persons more alike," said the captain. "Do you know Mr. Rasper intimately?"

"Better than I know you, my boy!" laughed the baronet, with a faint suggestion of malice.

"In that case," answered the captain quietly, "I need not describe Rosht; you would hardly consider the resemblance flattering."

"Nay, I have reasons for wishing to know, Harold. You mistake me," went on his uncle. "Tell me who this Rosht was, and if you can the points of resemblance between the two."

They had crossed the low but wide oak-panelled hall, and were alone in the main corridor extending through the west wing of the building. Sir James stopped beneath one of the lamps suspended from the ceiling, and placed a hand firmly on his nephew's shoulder.

"Tell me!" he insisted.

"Well, in the first place Julian Rosht is suspected of a big diamond theft in South Africa. It is whispered, indeed, that he might be arraigned on a graver charge than that. It is well-known that Rosht is a cardsharper; and to sum him up he is one of the craftiest rogues unhung. Your friend outwardly resembles this man exactly. Of course, since you are able to vouch for him it can be resemblance only, and you must pardon my mistake. At the same time there is an infallible means of ascertaining the diamond thief's identity which I am not able to disclose."

"Why not?"

"Because the authorities do not wish to make the rascal as wise as themselves."

"You still persist in thinking Rasper and Rosht are one and the same?" said Sir James, who had grown very white, and appeared terribly ill at ease.

"Since you ask me directly, sir, I do."

The baronet's cheeks assumed a ghastly pallor; he trembled violently, and though he tried hard, yet failed to master his agitation.

"Hark! Someone is approaching!" he whispered hoarsely. "It may be he. I do not wish to be seen in—in this state. Tell me quickly, I beseech you, my boy, for the sake of—of the honour of the family the means to ascertain the naked truth?"

His wild pleading, no less than his distracted looks, impressed the kindhearted captain. Still he hesitated, for he knew the information coming to the ears of the real rogue might possibly afford him the means to defeat the ends of justice. By way of replying he shook his head.

The baronet seized his arm distractedly.

"You must tell me!" he cried, "for Grace's sake!"

"You mean——"

"She is—— No, no; tell me! Tell me, and I will explain!" cried Sir James.

It was the captain's turn to grow agitated. Apprehending the truth, he recalled his cousin's studied avoidance of him. The thought flashed across his brain. Had his uncle betrothed her to this villain? His heart almost stopped beating.

A rustle sounded at the end of the corridor, and in spite of themselves both men started violently. Two heavy plush curtains dropping from the ceiling intercepted their view, and hid the new-comer from sight.

"You will tell me, Harold, now?" whispered his uncle.

"Yes. If this man is the rogue I take him to be, look at his left hand."

"Yes, yes."

"At the third finger, where he wears a broad band of gold——"

"Quicker! We shall be overheard!" exclaimed the baronet, whose agitation was painful to witness.

The curtains were being moved aside, and the captain replied in a whisper:

"Get him on some pretext to remove the ring, and if you find the flesh beneath withered to the bone, know that he is Julian Rosht the murderer!"

"Merciful powers! I—— Grace, come here!" cried the baronet, quickly recovering his presence of mind, and with it his calm exterior.

A very beautiful girl passed between the hangings and approached them.

"You haven't got a word to say to your cousin Harold," continued her father, "he has actually been forced back upon the society of an old fogey like me. Take him in hand. You will be thankful for small mercies, eh, Harold?" he added, turning with a forced laugh to his nephew.

But the latter had not succeeded in mastering his emotion, and made no reply.

"Hadn't we better join the rest?" suggested Grace after a pause. Her father had already gone.

"Not yet; unless you insist?" said the captain quickly. "I want to know if it's true, Grace, my dear little Grace, why do you avoid me?"

"Don't, Harold!" she faltered.

"But I must, sweetheart. I accepted your father's invitation. I came here for one object expressly. Need I mention it; can't you guess it? Grace, why do you remain silent?"

"Because you must not speak to me like this, Harold. I—I am engaged to be married to Mr. Rasper."

The news, although he had guessed it, fell upon him like a thunderbolt. He leant back against the wall, and pressed his hands to his face. The action brought tears into the girl's eyes; she felt that she must break down if she remained longer; and so, giving him a swift, yearning look, which he did not perceive, she hurried softly away.

The captain remained oblivious to every sound for a long time; it was not until a tall, sinister looking man would have passed by that he looked up, and with a start stood face to face with Trent Rasper.

CHAPTER III.

THE MEETING IN THE CORRIDOR—AN UNPROVOKED ATTACK—A CHALLENGE AND ACCEPTANCE—WHAT PASSED BETWEEN CAPTAIN HAROLD DANE AND RASPER IN THE ARMOURY—MISHAP OR TREACHERY?—A FALSE ALARM—THE PEACEMAKER.

"You infernal scoundrel!" cried Dane, springing out and seizing the other roughly by the collar.

Rasper struck him a savage blow across the face.

"Take that!" he hissed, "and learn manners, you dog!"

The assault, in itself unexpected, caused the captain to release his grip and reel back towards the wall. Rasper followed up this advantage by putting in a second blow, which carried the captain off his feet, and sent him heavily across the corridor. His opponent laughed mockingly at his discomfiture.

Rising quickly, Dane made an attempt to close with Rasper. But the latter dodged and slipped behind the hangings.

Dane gave chase, and caught up with him outside the armoury. Here, quivering with passion, both faced each other.

"Julian Rosht, otherwise Trent Rasper, I demand an explanation—a reason for your presence in this house. By Heaven, I'll have some answer! Do you hear?" Dane cried.

"Which I flatly refuse to give!" returned the other coolly.

The captain ran his eyes up and down his rival, then suddenly, with a cry, he started forward, and before Rasper quite knew what had happened, he found his left hand forcibly detained in an iron grip, and the ring upon his third finger snatched off. An amused smile played round the corners of his mouth when Dane recoiled, giving a cry of dismay and surprise.

In place of the withered finger he had described to his uncle and expected to find, he perceived one unmarked and whole.

"I beg your pardon!" he stammered, abruptly dropping the other's hand. "I appear to have made a great mistake, and if you will listen——"

"My friend, I do not intend to listen!" replied Jasper, showing his gleaming teeth in the light. "You have subjected me to indignities which blood alone can wipe out. If you are a man, and not the cur I take you to be, you will accept my challenge on the spot. We want no seconds; we have a convenient rendezvous here." He opened the door, and Dane perceived the room was flooded by moonlight sweeping down through the large south window opposite. It shimmered across the suits of armour and fancy shields composed of weapons fastened to the walls.

Rasper had calculated to a nicety the force of his words, and felt confident that his challenge would be accepted. He bowed smilingly as the captain, without vouchsafing a reply, walked in. Then he closed and locked the door.

"To keep out intruders!" he remarked with a hollow laugh. "Choose your weapons; we shall fight by the light of the moon."

The captain selected a pair of keen rapiers, tested them, and handed one to his adversary, who accepted it with mock politeness.

Some seconds later the first clash of steel rang sharply out. After that the struggle continued hotly. Both were good swordsmen, and fairly well matched. Rasper had a trifle longer reach, but Dane was perhaps most agile. The latter drew first blood by wounding Rasper slightly on the arm.

He gave a snarl like a wounded tiger, and made a frantic pass for Dane's heart. But the captain parried it successfully. His skill seemed to affect Rasper's temper. He lost his wonted coolness, and became feverishly eager to inflict some bodily hurt on his adversary.

Again Dane's weapon drew blood.

Rasper started back with an oath, foolishly lost his guard, and exposed himself to the full fury of the captain's onslaught. The latter might, if he had chosen, have inflicted a mortal wound on his enemy; but instead he lowered the point of his rapier, supposing the other to be overcome with faintness.

In a moment Rasper's weapon flashed up in the moonlight, and taking a swift curve, passed close to the fleshy part of the captain's arm.

"You coward!" cried Dane. "Look to yourself. I'll punish you for that scurvy trick!"

But although the duel continued with unabated vigour, neither the one nor the other succeeded in drawing fresh blood for some time. They had little by little passed out beyond the flood of light, and were pressing back into the deepening gloom of the room.

In the heat of combat this passed unnoticed, till Rasper, the first to become aware of it, decried with his ferrety eyes something else ahead, which made his fingers itch to press his opponent more closely.

It was about this time, and owing to the darkness, that the captain found himself becoming worsted in the struggle. To his intense chagrin, his opponent's impetuous onset forced him further back. It was difficult to meet Rasper's attack, for he

had skilfully contrived to take up such a position that the little light which reached them fell full upon the captain, and only partly upon himself. At the same time he was slowly but surely pressing Dane further and further back into the darkest portion of the armoury.

A short, sharp cry of pain broke from Dane presently. In manipulating his rapier he had twisted one of the leaders of his arm. The weapon almost fell from his hand.

Rasper lunged out and tried to disarm him. But Dane was too quick Rapidly stepping back a pace or two, he changed over his weapon to his left hand, and struck upwards at his opponent. The latter parried, and pressed forward once more. The struggle had now really resolved itself into a matter of time, for left-handed the captain was no match for his wary antagonist.

Rasper pressed his charge hotly, and beat back his intended victim step by step. Still the captain maintained the struggle bravely, and even managed to inflict two or three more skin wounds on his opponent, who, despite his cruel eagerness, was beginning to feel faint from loss of blood.

At last Dane contrived to shift his weapon back to his right hand, and thus renew the contest in deadly earnest. For a while the two struggled for mastery in the darkness, their hard breathing and the clash of their weapons producing a weird confusion of sounds.

Suddenly Rasper gave a short, hard cry of triumph.

The captain started, more surprised than alarmed, for now he had obtained the best of the struggle, since Rasper had been forced back on one knee.

"Disarm!" he cried. "I have you covered!"

"Mercy!" pleaded Rasper.

"Disarm!" repeated Dane, pressing the point of his rapier down close to the other's neck.

He was prepared for treachery, and yet next moment he was staggering helplessly back, while Rasper, leaping to his feet, stood by unarmed. But suddenly from the opposite end of the room a dazzling light had flashed full into the captain's eyes. Blinded and amazed, he fell back.

With a loud cry, Rasper renewed the attack.

But it was impossible for the captain to hold his own. With the light blazing on his face, he could barely manage to parry the other's strokes. He was completely at the mercy of his foe, who, notwithstanding, seemed intent on bringing about the end in a manner altogether unexpected by his victim.

The dazzling stream of light made a broad, yellow track across the polished oak floor, disclosing in the rear, about three or four yards behind Captain Dane, an open square trapdoor. He was backing at every step towards it.

Rasper continued to press his retreat, till at last his victim stood on the very edge of the trap.

He gave a strange, exulting cry, possibly a signal, for the light vanished as suddenly as it had appeared. This swift transition to darkness for the time made both men indistinguishable.

Rasper struck out haphazard, and caught his weapon with a crash against the captain's. It broke in half, and a baffled oath escaped him.

Captain Dane, attempting to change his position, suddenly tripped back and fell through the trap with a startled cry.

He was conscious as he fell of a loud commotion above. He recognised the sound of his uncle's voice; then with a splash he plunged into a well of icy water.

After shooting down to what seemed an interminable depth, he began to ascend again to the surface. As he reappeared he received a heavy blow on the head. He made a desperate inward effort to retain consciousness; but, failing, he floated off inanimate, and to all appearance dead.

When, after a short interval, his senses returned, slowly, and in a state of semi-consciousness, he became aware that an arm was supporting him above the water. By the unsteady motion he concluded that his rescuer had his feet planted on the rungs of a rope ladder. It was some moments before he could distinguish the hum of voices, and then only after considerable effort was he able to distinguish the nature of their conversation.

"Get him up quickly," suggested one.

"I can't! Curse you! lower the rope, that I may tie it about him. Then you may haul."

The voice was close to his ear, and belonged to his uncle.

He tried to speak, but failed; and as he felt the rope passed under his arms and tightened a shudder rippled down his limbs. Next he was conscious of being drawn upward, guided apparently by the arm beside him, for more than once the motion was reversed, as though the task of dragging him to the floor above was not an easy one. Still in a state of semi-consciousness, he was forced through the trap and laid along the floor.

"Did you manage it?" he heard his uncle ask.

The other voice made some unintelligible reply, and a minute after the captain felt they were divesting him of his upper clothes.

Still unable to speak, he could only remain motionless, wondering in a dazed manner what these movements portended. He was roused finally by hearing a cry of rage and dismay from his uncle, which the latter smothered the instant Harold opened his eyes.

"My dear boy, what on earth has brought you to this pass?" he asked, apparently full of keen anxiety.

A carriage-lamp was standing on the floor, and its light fell full upon the baronet's face, who was kneeling beside his nephew. It was a very white, drawn face, and there was a look upon it which came as a revelation to the captain.

The latter shuddered and turned away his eyes. They chanced to fall upon Rasper, and the sight of his late antagonist with a start cleared away the confused mists from his brain.

"Ask that man," he said faintly.

"What does he mean, Rasper?" said Sir James.

"He means that his insolence provoked a duel between us, and in the midst of it he slipped through the open trap in the floor, that is all."

"It's a lie!" said Dane, sitting up. But, checking himself, he cried in an altered voice: "The amulet, where is it?"

"Gone, you fool!"

The baronet would have bitten his tongue out if by so doing he could have recalled those involuntary words.

As it happened, their purport was mistaken by the one most intimately concerned.

"No; it is safe, thank Heaven!" said Dane.

"Where?" asked his uncle eagerly.

"My orderly has it. The chain broke this morning."

Something like a sigh of relief came from the baronet, who proceeded to help his nephew to his feet and replace his vest and coat, Rasper meanwhile remaining an amused spectator.

Sir James turned to him suddenly, saying:

"Give the boy your hand, Rasper. Now," he added, addressing Harold, "let bygones be bygones. It strikes me you are both mistaken. I wish you to be friends, not foes."

CHAPTER IV.

A STARTLING STORY—CAPTAIN HAROLD RESOLVES TO STRIKE—THE MAN IN THE WOOD—TRACKED—THE GIPSY CAMP—"THE LUCK OF THE DANES"—A SURPRISE—STRUGGLING AGAINST HOPELESS ODDS—FLIGHT—AN ACCIDENT—IN THE DENE-HOLE.

The following day passed uneventfully, until Carew, while his master was dressing for dinner, came softly into the room and closed the door.

"Well?" asked the captain interrogatively.

He was surprised by the look of anxiety on his orderly's face.

"Sure, sor, I've lost yer little charm!" he blurted out. "Begorra, 'twas an ould gipsy woman who undone me. She snatched it out of me hand, an' she did! It's stolen, sor!"

"Is that the truth?" asked Dane, in a voice that trembled with anger and apprehension.

"The whole truth, sor! May the spalpeen die widout comfort, says I. Sure an' I was carrying the charm in a little packet, an' she comes up behind, along wid a hulking big rascal, and when she snatches it out of me hand, the rogue he closes in wid me. I bate half the life out of him, and then I sets off to find the ould woman. But, confound her, she'd gone!"

Dane hardly listened to this rambling statement. A conviction was dawning on his that yesterday's events and his present loss were in some way connected. He was not superstitious; he had worn the amulet for the sake of his mother. It had hung from his neck for three-and-twenty years, and, apart from its intrinsic worth, it had become endeared to him by association, and he felt the loss of it keenly. He recalled his father's words when, for the last time, they had parted. "As you value my honour and your mother's memory, never part with the amulet!" he had said. "One day it will serve you in a manner you little expect."

He made up his mind to make an effort to regain it.

Carew was standing abashed near the door when the captain looked up.

"You have been very careless, sir," said the latter; "but since it's useless to cry over spilt milk, you and I have got to find the charm. Now listen. To-night, after dinner, I have arranged to join the party skating on the broad lake by torchlight. There is a wood skirting the left bank. Meet me there by ten o'clock, and bring a couple of heavy sticks with you. You had better carry a pocket-pistol, in case of emergency. We have some dangerous work before us. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sor," answered Carew; "and, begging yer honour's pardon, but is it the gipsy's camp ye're going to attack?"

"Yes. Now you can go. But, mind, not a word to a soul!"

"Sure an' I'll be as dumb as a mute!" returned the soldier in an altered voice.

Dane watched him from the room.

"That man is faithful," he muttered. "I could trust him anywhere. He is not usually careless. There must have been something more in this than I can gather now."

He went down to dinner, and joined the skating-party afterwards, taking care not to betray the anxiety he felt over the loss of the amulet. It wanted exactly five minutes to ten when he glided unseen through the edge of the wood. Carew was there.

"Sure, yer honour, it's meself that thinks our plan's been discovered," whispered the orderly.

"What do you mean?" asked Dane sharply.

"I've been followed, sor."

"Are you sure?"

"Look yonder, sor; look!" whispered Carew. "That's the bla'guard! Begorra, I'd like to pot him, I would!"

The captain perceived in the moonlight, between the trees ahead, the half-crouching figure of a gipsy. The man appeared to be listening.

"Follow me!" the captain said in a low undertone. "We had better take to the ice, pass along to the opposite side of the wood, and there strike forward for the gipsy camp. We are not likely to be discovered, even by that fellow's keen eyes, amongst the numbers on the ice already."

He was right. The gipsy who had been watching followed them at a distance until he reached the edge of the bank, where he lingered for a while, trying vainly to distinguish Carew and his master.

Meanwhile the latter had crossed the wood, and at a point about a quarter of a mile from the bank had reached the heath. This was a wild, undulating stretch of country, inhabited wholly by the gipsies, of whom—for in the interval the moon had become obscured—no sign could be seen.

Master and man listened very intently. They could make out the faint buzz of excitement rising from the skaters on the frozen lake, but, save for the soft moaning of the wind across the waste ahead, no other sounds were audible.

The captain had ascertained that the gipsies were encamped two miles in a south-westerly direction from the manor, near the Red Stone, one of the landmarks of the neighbourhood. He concluded they were in the vicinity, and whispered to Carew to observe the utmost caution.

Proceeding lightly forward, the two presently reached an impassable bramble barrier, which ran a zigzag course along a rising mound. Failing to penetrate it, they struck round to the right, where the ground dipped, and exposed a straggling wood beyond. The country was very uneven here—all ridges and clefts and hummocks. A little watercourse, frozen hard, passed in and out of the maze till it disappeared beneath a hollow of the brambles. At this point Carew stopped.

"Whist!" he cried softly; "did yer honour hear that?"

"Yes. It sounded like the croaking of an owl."

"It's gipsies, sor—a signal!"

The sound was repeated again. This time it was quite near, upon the other side of the hedge. Instinctively Dane and Carew pressed down into the shelter of a small hollow and waited.

They had not long to wait before a movement by the frozen stream arrested their attention. Gradually a head and then the figure of a man wriggled into the half-gloom.

The orderly clutched his master's arm.

"Don't speak; don't move, sor!" he whispered. "He's getting up."

The figure rose to its full height and came cautiously towards them. Dane tried to ascertain by watching the stranger's movements whether, having discovered their whereabouts, he was approaching thus carelessly as a blind. Sometimes he fancied they must have been seen; that, in fact, the gipsy was bent on attracting their attention in order to permit his companions to approach them from the rear unseen. As the man came to a halt on the very edge of the hollow where Dane and Carew were hiding, the sound of footsteps behind suddenly became audible to all.

All at once a hand was clapped over Dane's mouth, his wrists were secured, and, being unable to cry or move, he was forced to remain half kneeling, half crouching, back in the shadow of the bramble-bush. He saw the gipsy come down the hollow towards them; then he espied another figure glide forward and meet him.

"Well, have you seen them?" whispered the first.

"Yes."

You followed, and found all well?"

"I followed, and found all well," repeated the second speaker in a whisper.

"Come with me. Mistress Rebecca has something of importance to place this night before her children."

"I know. 'Tis a diamond pendant—the Danes' amulet."

"Hist! not a word. Foxes lurk in the holes, and birds carry tales," whispered the first speaker mysteriously.

They moved up the slope, and presently could be heard wriggling over the frozen stream beneath the brambles.

Dane felt himself released, and gave a gasp of relief.

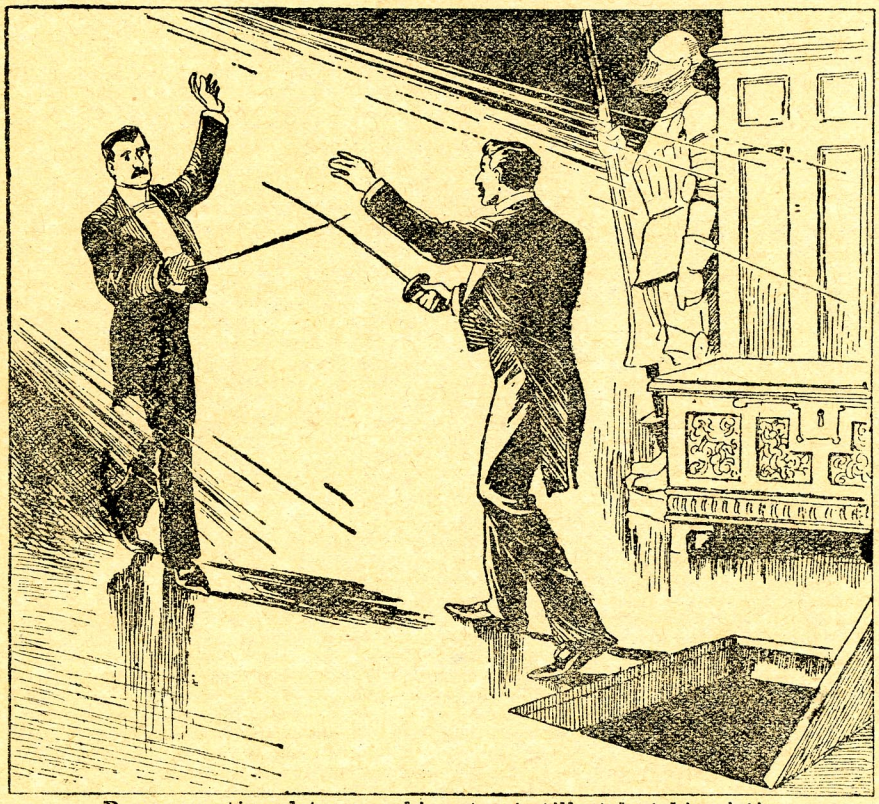
"Sure, sor, 'tis begging ye pardon I'd be afther!" whispered Carew, who had been the one to hold him so long in his confined position. "But I was afraid of ye, I was. A sound would have alarmed thim spalpeens, and thin we'd 'a' had the whole tribe of thim to tackle, and maybe they'd have worsted us."

"Never mind that; you did quite right," said Dane, beginning to crawl up the slope and approach the frozen watercourse.

To pass beyond after the two gipsies was really easier than it seemed, for they had by their movements left the way open and smooth.

Dane and his orderly had scarcely gained the other side when they perceived the two men had been joined by a third. The latter stopped to exchange a few words with his companions; then, leaving them, came swiftly towards the opening by the watercourse, and there seated himself and began to smoke.

"Begorra, the rogue has been placed there to keep watch!" whispered Carew, who, like his master, had crawled forward for shelter beneath a growth of furze.



Rasper continued to press his retreat, till at last his victim stood upon the very edge of the trap.

"In that case," returned Dane, "this is probably the only means of approaching the camp. By jove, I thought so!"

He stifled the exclamation in time to avoid betraying their presence to the keen-eared gipsy.

The moon had come out, and disclosed a wonderful scene. The zigzag line of brambles they had skirted outside grew on the very edge of an overhanging chalk cliff, and formed an even denser barrier where it dropped down, a quarter of a mile or so ahead, and wound away round to the lower, uneven ground by the right. Here it was broken for a short distance by a small rocky defile. This was really the only opening in what was otherwise an impassable barrier, enclosing probably about a square mile of abruptly rugged country. Three or four gipsies moved restlessly about the rocky opening on the right, and now and again threw curious glances towards a thick knot of stunted hawthorns. By the appearance of these trees it was evident the ground fell away there, and found a sheltered dell. Both Dane and his orderly felt certain they would find the gipsy camp there.

By crawling along on hands and knees they were able to gain the clump of hawthorns without attracting attention. Eyes and ears keenly alert, they soon descried through the trees ahead a motley company of men, women, and children, squatting in a broad semi-circle round a small flickering camp-fire. Alone, and facing this group, stood an old crone, probably younger than she looked, of peculiarly malignant aspect. She was in the act of chanting a weird song when the officer and his companion crept up to the inner edge of the sheltering trees.

Carew made a false movement, and the sound instantly attracted the old crone's attention. Turning swiftly about, her keen eyes seemed to pierce the very depths of the trees, and but for Dane's manœuvre in lying flat and compelling his companion to do so also, it is doubtful if either of them would have escaped observation.

For several minutes they remained pressed to the earth, their hearts beating wildly, lest at a word from the woman they should be discovered and seized. But after a long pause she continued her wild chant, and the strange group listened, keeping motion with the tune by a queer swaying of their bodies. At last the song ended, and a deep silence fell upon the gipsies. This was broken by a gruff voice, which at first Dane supposed proceeded from a ragged giant sitting almost opposite to the spot where he lay concealed. But he was mistaken. It was the gipsy queen who spoke.

"My children," she cried, "the gipsy curse is not dead! Many years have we waited for its fulfilment. Behold! to-night a great evil shall overtake the Manor, for, look, 'tis the Luck of the Danes I hold!"

A smothered exclamation broke from the captain, who beheld the old hag expose before the firelight his own amulet, the diamond pendant.

A murmur of wonder swelled up from the gipsies, and, accepting the omen, they one and all leaped up and began to dance madly, with hoarse shouts, round the fire. The old woman, still holding at arm's length the amulet, led the wild rabble. Twice they circled round the fire before Dane and his orderly sufficiently recovered from their surprise to be able to form a rapid plan of action.

"When that old hag approaches next, we must make a rush. You must seize her, while I recover the amulet. Then we must bolt for the rocky opening yonder. Should one of us fall and the other escape, the latter must alarm the people at the Manor and return with help. In that case this ruffianly crew are scarcely likely to proceed to extremities. You understand?"

"Yes, sor," replied Carew. "It's about time we prepared, yer honour; the old crone's coming close!"

Dane had kept his eye fixed on her, and, with a secret feeling of exultation, noted what he took to be signs of fatigue on the part of the old gipsy queen. Screaming hoarsely, and waving the amulet now to the left and right, but always above her head, in the flash of the firelight, she came swinging and leaping towards the spot where he stood, with every nerve at tension, concealed, but ready to spring upon her at the critical moment.

Carew held his breath.

He saw his officer step swiftly out from the trees; then at a bound he followed.

A fierce oath broke from the woman. She struggled savagely—to no purpose, for Carew, almost before she was aware of it, had pinioned her arms behind in his powerful grasp, while Dane had snatched the amulet from her clawlike fingers.

For a moment the gipsy band fell back in sheer amazement and terror; then their queen's plight, and the fierce war-cry which broke from her lips, and reached their startled ears, brought them on at a rush against the two bold intruders.

"Quick! follow me!" shouted Dane, leaping over the camp-fire and felling a couple of gipsies who attempted to stay his progress.

He heard a smothered cry proceed from his orderly, and glanced round. Carew was struggling hopelessly with a sack that had been drawn over his head and shoulders. Meanwhile half the gipsy band made a dash and completely surrounded Dane. Clearly they wished to disable him as they had disabled the trooper, for several coarse sacks were flung at his head. Failing to secure him in this manner, the lawless wretches drew their knives and threw themselves simultaneously upon him.

The captain ducked, and the infuriated horde tripped over him, inflicting with their knives some ugly wounds upon themselves.

Struggling desperately, Dane pushed a passage through the edge of the crowd, and, neatly dodging four would-be pursuers, dashed breathlessly through the small rocky defile and out into the undulating heath beyond.

He heard his pursuers drawing near behind. Presently he distinguished a pair of steps far fleeter than his own coming closer and closer up. He gripped the amulet tightly in his right hand and made another blind spurt forward, leaping up to clear a furze-bush in front of him. His lips parted in a startled cry. He was falling—falling through a black void into the earth. His heart sank, for he guessed the truth—he was falling into a deep pit. He struck his head against the bottom and lost consciousness, as a harsh, bitter laugh sounded from his gipsy pursuers.

CHAPTER V.

A MIDNIGHT INTRUDER—IN THE HAUNTED CHAMBER—A LIFE AT STAKE—THE MYSTERY OF THE AMULET—BAFFLED BY THE SECRET CUPBOARD — FIRE! — THE ALARM — AN ASTOUNDING ACCUSATION—GRACE MAKES A BRAVE BID.

To awaken in the dead of night in a great four-postered, canopied bed in the oak-panelled, haunted chamber of an old house, with a dim, uncertain light proceeding from the bluish flame of a spirit-lamp on a small marble slab, not far from the side of the bed, is an experience happily not given to everyone. It is, to say the least, a little trying to the nerves; and, after the incidents recorded in the foregoing chapter, it is scarcely to be wondered at that Captain Harold Dane should awake from his long stupor with an uncomfortable shiver.

This room—the Haunted Chamber—had been placed at his disposal during his visit to the Manor. It had never locked, he thought, so gloomy and forbidding as it did this night.

A small draught was wafting the partly transparent, bluish flame from the spirit-lamp in a weird dance up and down, hither and thither, sometimes drawing it out into the form of a long, narrow strip of ribbon, sometimes shooting it up like a needle-pointed stiletto.

Its movements fascinated the awakened sleeper. Little by little, as he watched, his mind recalled the surprises and dangers through which he had lately passed. He awoke to full consciousness, and, with a thrill of real terror, glanced rapidly round the room. The weird glimmer of the light seemed to accentuate the darkness which it had no power to dispel.

How had he come there? The thought turned him cold. He distinctly remembered falling into that dank, unwholesome pit, and hearing that mocking burst of laughter, which haunted him still.

Hark! That was assuredly a movement. Yes—no. He partly raised himself on the pillow and glanced sharply round. Yes; something was coming stealthily towards the bed.

Dane was not actually frightened, but he was conscious of feeling decidedly uncomfortable. His heart for a moment seemed to stop, then it began to flutter unevenly. Something—he knew not what—within him suggested that he would do well to lie back on the pillow and feign sleep. He did so—half reluctantly, nevertheless. Presently between the light and the bed a figure glided dimly into view. Between his half-closed eyelids he watched it, curious to fathom who it was, and for what purpose it approached him noiselessly in the night.

It stopped about a foot from the edge of the bed, shifted its position slightly, and by this means enabled Harold to make two astounding and horrifying discoveries. The steady glitter of a long, sharp dagger was the first, and made him nerve his body to be ready to spring up and wrest this weapon from his nocturnal visitor. The second discovery coming immediately after had an effect the reverse of the first—it unnerved him. His muscles relaxed, and he lay helpless in a cold fear, assailed by a nightmare of terror. He recognised in the figure by the bedside his uncle, Sir James Dane.

From any other person, or at any other time, the captain would have demanded an explanation; but now his mind recurred to what had gone before, and he could only lie back motionless, trying to fathom the mystery of it all.

He could hear his uncle catching at his breath as though under the influence of some powerful emotion. He drew stealthily closer, and placed a hand on the topmost edge of the

coverlet. Then something at the further end of the room seemed to attract his attention, and he stole away on tiptoe in the direction of the door.

A strange idea occurred to Harold, who felt cautiously for the amulet. He hardly expected to find it in its old position round his neck. But to his surprise it was there. As he made this discovery, his ears caught the sound of his uncle's steps again approaching. Quickly withdrawing his hand, and all but closing his eyelids, he, while waiting, feigned a sound sleep.

He was quick to note that this time Sir James wore a mask. With his right hand he rolled down a portion of the clothes, and bared his nephew's chest. A low, soft, exulting cry broke from his trembling lips when he beheld the amulet, which he seized on feverishly, and unfastened.

For a moment or two he appeared to hesitate, and fingered the dagger significantly. Indeed, for one brief second Dane felt the edge of the cold steel touch his flesh over the region of his heart. It was a terrible moment. His heart was beating wildly, and a cold sweat oozed from his skin. He feared these signs of agitation would not escape the lynx-eyed marauder.

At last, with a smothered exclamation, Sir James turned the bedclothes up, and stole softly away, stopping before the spirit-lamp.

Harold watched him narrowly.

The baronet first placed the weapon in a little leather sheath, and slipped this back into his pocket. Next, he remained some time closely examining the amulet. Finally, to Harold's amazement, he pressed a portion of the star-shaped pendant, and the whole came in half, exposing within something which caused him to give a suppressed cry of excitement. He closed the pendant with a faint snap, and, seizing up the lamp, half ran—so great was his eagerness—to the extreme end of the room.

Harold saw him hurriedly finger one of the panels. Then another and another in succession. A muttered oath, followed almost immediately by an exclamation of triumph, and this in turn succeeded by a cry of baffled rage, were the sounds which Harold heard in quick succession.

The captain felt it would be absurd to feign sleep longer. Leaping out of bed, he, by a few rapid strides, reached the marble slab, and snatching off the amulet, made a dart across the room for his uncle.

The latter was in the act of peering into a small secret cupboard, which he had exposed by the removal of one of the panels in the wall.

Harold's quick movements reached him, and, with a startled oath, he leaped back, slammed the panel into its place, and made a run for the fireplace. The captain attempted to intercept him, and would have succeeded; but the marauder, overcome by a host of conflicting emotions, wherein amazement and terror predominated, and thinking only of escape, flung the spirit-lamp at him. Harold dodged it safely; but next moment the lamp, falling with a crash, spilled its contents upon the floor, and these catching light sent a streaky flame upwards towards the ceiling.

In that momentary gleam, before the flame died down, Harold caught a glimpse of his uncle vanishing through a secret passage, which he closed instantly behind him.

The captain stood for an instant rooted to the spot, with despair and horror plainly written on his face.

Part of the panelling of the room had caught fire, several articles of furniture were smouldering, while that portion of the bare oak floor where the lamp had fallen was already ablaze. Suffocating smoke began to fill the apartment.

Harold made a bold but ineffectual attempt to cope with the flames. Perceiving how hopeless was the task, he pulled his clothes on, and, flinging open the door, called loudly for help.

By this time the fire had sprung up one whole side of the panelled wall, flames were spurting across the dry ceiling, and the room presented a terrible spectacle, lit up by all the varying ruddy shades of light.

A few scared servants were the first to appear, and they, perceiving the extent of the fire, ran shrieking down the corridor. They were met by a hurrying crowd of guests, and some of the menservants.

Harold, in a state of distraction, called loudly for volunteers. He heard Carew's well-known voice, and a moment later saw the orderly break through the frightened crowd and dash up to him.

"Sure it's meself, sor, though for the loife of me I can't till how I got inside the house this blessed night! 'Twas yer cries that woke me, sor!" explained the Irishman hurriedly.

"Have you seen Sir James?" asked the captain.

"Yis, sor; sure an' here's his honour himself!"

In spite of his alarm, and the danger of the fire, Harold could not help recoiling from the baronet with a cry half incredulous and eloquent of mistrust.

Sir James caught him by the arm savagely. "How did this happen—explain?" he demanded.

The captain was dumbfounded. He saw all eyes were fixed upon him, when a voice, which he recognised as Rasper's, replied: "He cannot, sir; but I can. I saw him kindle the fire himself."

Bold and clumsy as the lie was, it found credence amongst the bystanders, who, in the moment of their terror, were willing and able to believe anything.

"The hound!—that is why he cannot speak!" said Sir James, releasing his nephew with a jerk, which sent him reeling back into the blazing room.

Carew made a dash for his master, and dragged him out just as Grace hurried up.

"Father," she whispered, "this is not true!—it cannot be true! Some accident has happened, and it would be better for all of us if we, instead of accusing Harold, who is innocent, followed his example, and did something to master the flames."

Her words evoked a nervous cheer from the guests, and the men, inspired by her presence, rushed forward with a hose in the hope of playing successfully on the all-devouring fire.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PROGRESS OF THE FIRE—AN AWFUL DISCOVERY—THE GIPSY QUEEN IN PERIL—HOW CAPTAIN HAROLD SCALED THE TOTTERING WALL—TERRIBLE MOMENTS—THE PEAL FROM THE ALARM-BELL—BURIED IN THE FLAMES!

From the first, however, their efforts proved futile. They were beaten back slowly but surely, and, greatly alarmed, they all began to realise that the south wing, and possibly the remainder of the house, was doomed. Sir James, his guests, and the household worked strenuously to oppose the flames. Outside, in spite of the heavy snowstorm that had come on, a number of pumps and hoses had been set to work. Within efforts were made to save the main building by destroying the intersecting panelling, and leaving only the bare stone walls from roof to cellar. Fortunately there were a number of willing hands to assist, otherwise the task would have been impossible owing to its extent.

By four o'clock the whole of the south wing was ablaze, and the guests, shivering in their ulsters, were crowded on the lawn at the mercy of the snowstorm, which had, if anything, increased in fury.

It was bitterly cold. The water playing feebly upon the fire formed a ragged sheet of icicles round the uppermost buttresses on the east side, from which direction the wind was blowing. The whirling snowflakes fell hissing into the fire, and occasionally, when a floor or a portion of the roof collapsed, volumes of sparks shot up, geyser-like, and mingled for a second or two with the scurrying snow.

The scene was grand in the extreme. In the direct background stood the main body of the fine old manor, its grey, weather-stained walls, and quaint windows reflecting the deep red glow of the fire upon the guests huddled together, with blanched cheeks and trembling limbs on the lawn beneath. Beyond them had gathered the villagers. Not a few of the latter were working bravely in the main portion of the house, directed in their efforts by Grace, her father, and cousin, for like the rank coward he was, Rasper preferred to be out of harm's reach, and made a show of superintending the workers without.

About five o'clock the glad news went round that so far as the bulk of the manor was concerned the fire had been stayed. Renewed efforts were now made to battle with it in the south wing.

Sir James, to do him justice, had worked feverishly, while Harold, forgetting the cruel accusation levelled against him, had been chiefly responsible for staying the progress of the fire within. Grace had gone out, and was the one to spread the glad news amongst the frightened guests. She was about to return when all at once the remainder of the roof fell through, and with it a portion of the wall.

A murmur of horror simultaneously burst from all throats.

The girl paused, and cast a swift look upwards. Through the gap in the wall she could see the bell-turret. Half of it had fallen away, and there, exposed to the heat and savage rivalry of the flames, a human being was crouching against a tottering parapet.

It was a woman!

A billow of fire surged upwards, higher, higher, with its grey crest of smoke; then, almost on a level with the turret, the wind caught and broke it, sending it in streaking ribbons up and round the old alarm-bell. The ashen, wrinkled features of the woman were plain to all in the succeeding interval before the flames rolled silently back, and again rose at a point some distance away.

The woman clutched the parapet mute with terror, and the watchers, after the first murmur of horror, stood shivering and silent, overcome with awful suspense.

"It is Rebecca the gipsy queen!" cried Grace. "Mr. Rasper, run, please; fetch my father. He will know how best to save her."

"Yonder he is. Ah, he has seen us!" Rasper exclaimed.

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And a strange look passed between them as the baronet came up.

"Save the woman! Impossible!" the latter said sharply in reply to his daughter's urgent appeal. "No one could reach the turret; and, if anyone could, his weight would send it over. The woman is doomed! How came she there?—that's the question."

"Perhaps Captain Dane might be able to explain that!" suggested Rasper, stealing a covert glance at Grace.

She turned white almost to the lips; but, quickly recovering herself, she left them hurriedly without a word.

Sir James was alarmed. He would have followed, but Rasper detained him.

"Let her go," he said, "she will come by no harm; besides——"

"Curse you!" interrupted the baronet fiercely, breaking away. "Keep your advice till it's called for!"

"That is just what I intend to do!" sneered the other, arresting his host with a dark look which Sir James understood too well. "It strikes me our lady has gone to her knight-errant, and he, blind fool! will risk the forlorn hope."

"Well, what of that?" asked the baronet.

Rasper smiled.

"You and I have got to pray," he said, "that yonder turret will stand until the hero reaches it; then the sooner it plunges into the flames the better for us both."

The baronet's reply remained unspoken, for others joined them, and the object of their discussion himself appeared with Grace.

Meanwhile, the flames again enveloped the parapet where the gipsy queen was crouching. Rasper had expressed the chance of saving her correctly—it was indeed a forlorn hope.

Harold, begrimed with smoke and dirt, had with Carew's and another's assistance, managed to plant two long ladders, lashed together, against the wall of the burning building. These, however, reached but three-quarters of the distance up. Nothing daunted, he despatched Carew for a third one, and employed the interval by drawing on a thick pilot-jacket, which though to some extent cumbersome, was likely to afford the best protection against the flames.

By this time the fire had demolished the whole roof, except the overlapping portion of the bell-turret, which was fixed inside to the wall by iron supports. The parapet, being really a continuation of the outer wall, had collapsed entirely, displaying the framework of iron and smouldering wood. The gable surmounting the turret had not caught fire owing to the melted snow, which in places had turned to ice. The woman had crawled to the middle of the smouldering crossbeam underneath the alarm-bell.

As Harold received the third ladder he noted these particulars, and formed a rapid plan. He was about to mount, when Grace, who had remained in the background at her father's bidding,, rushed impetuously forward.

"It is too late!" she cried quickly. "Harold—Harold, don't go; you cannot save her!"

"Why, has she fallen?" he asked, for, with his foot on the lower rung of the ladder, he could not see.

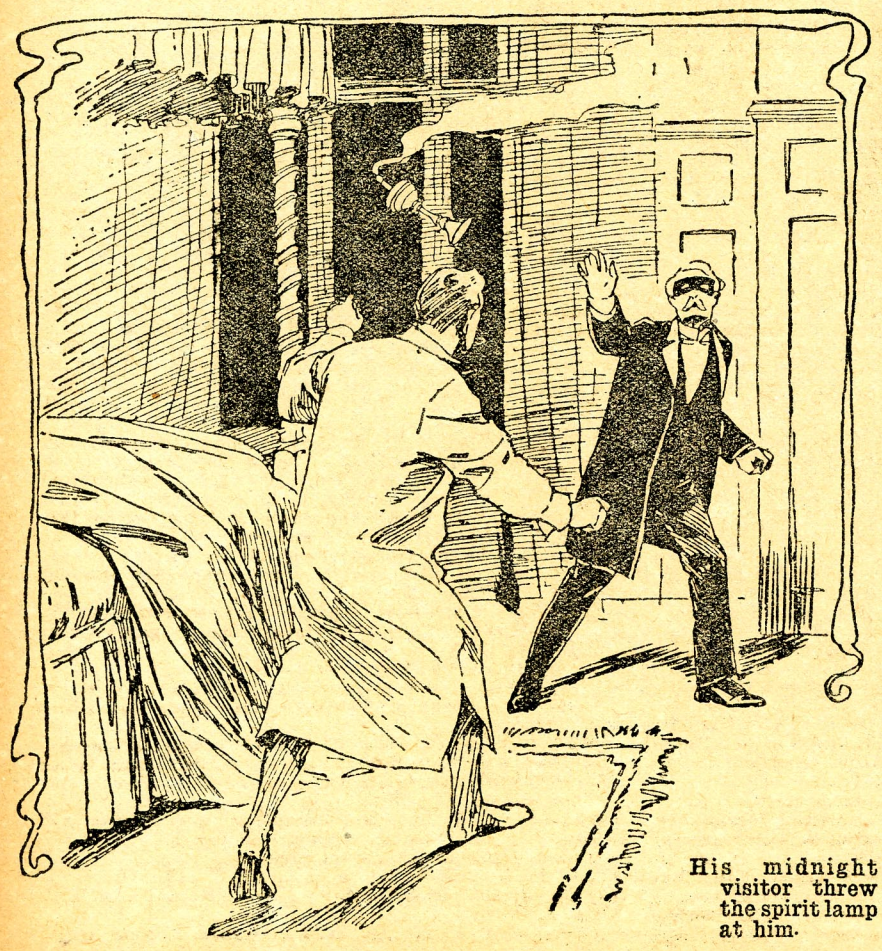
"No; but the beam is falling. Harold, I beseech——"

But he was out of earshot, and out of sight, too, since a rush of flame and smoke poured outwards from one of the lower windows, as he raced hand over hand up the ladder, hidden by the dense cloud.

A faint cheer presently broke from the watchers, who fancied they beheld him gain the attachment of the second ladder. A few seconds more suspense, then they beheld him for a moment clearly at the topmost rung, hauling for dear life at the rope fastened to the third ladder. Up and up he drew it, till another cheer reached his ears, telling him that the watchers had seen his hands close round it. Minutes of fearful suspense followed. At last a tremendous cheer rose from below. He had succeeded in planting it several feet above the top of the building, and had lashed it firmly to the second ladder.

After this the people on the lawn could distinguish only here and now there a grey, shapeless figure crawling, as it seemed to them, up the face of the wall, hidden mostly by the whirling snowstorm, and reappearing only where the heat of the flames had melted the falling flakes.

At last the figure stood out boldly on the crest of the wall, and, like the wretched woman crouching beyond, became visible to all in the fierce glow from the yellow heart of the fire.



His midnight visitor threw the spirit lamp at him.

Another mighty cheer swelled forth. They could see the captain crawl along the beam, over a billowy sea of flames, and gain the terrified gipsy's side.

The whole structure swayed and creaked, and a wave of fire rolled over the wall where the ladder rested.

A shiver passed through the crowd.

They saw Harold partly raise the woman and begin to drag her towards the ladder; but terror made her hesitate and struggle to return to her old place. She forced him away. He staggered, and lost his balance, falling across the beam, which the shock loosened.

The gipsy clutched frantically at the clapper of the bell; but her strength was unequal to her resolution, and she dropped just as Harold leapt forward and managed with one arm to save her, while with the other he clutched a steel chain hanging from the gable above.

The beam plunged into the fire, throwing up a bright cloud of sparks, and almost simultaneously another portion of the wall swayed, cracked, and toppled over inwards.

Then a thing happened that did more to strike terror into the heart of Sir James Dane than any risks which his nephew had run. A sullen peal burst from the alarm-bell.

"That means," whispered the awed and superstitious villagers, "that the Luck of the Danes has gone!"

"Ay, and it means death, too!" interposed an old crone, whom the

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The captain raised his handcuffed wrists, and brought them down on Rasper's head

inclemency of the weather had not been able to keep indoors. "Look, he's falling!"

But all whose eyes followed the direction of her wizened arm, though they agreed with her, shuddering violently, were, so far as the facts were concerned, mistaken.

Harold's hold had slipped off the chain on to a long, uncoiled hempen rope, which had dropped down from the end of the chain when the crossbeam underneath gave way. Already it was smouldering.

The gipsy whispered something which caused him, still bearing her on his left arm, to go sliding down into the midst of the fire.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FALL THROUGH THE FLAMES—A SECRET PASSAGE—GUIDED BY THE GIPSY QUEEN—HAROLD LEARNS A SECRET—MYSTERIOUS WORDS—THE DISCOVERY OF THE SLUICE—A NEW AND TERRIBLE DANGER—ALONE IN THE DENE-HOLE.

If the rope had not been saturated with the melted snow, it must have been consumed at once. Fortunately it stood the strain placed upon it by the rapid descent of Harold and the gipsy. The latter, with wonderful precision, had timed the attempt at the very moment it was possible to accomplish. Her rescuer shot safely past the sea of fire and dropped on to a solid stone platform fixed against one of the dividing walls. Setting his burden down at her own request, he saw her make a dart forward, and beheld through the mist of smoke a secret passage in the wall.

The captain was not slow to follow, and he had barely entered, when the woman clutched his arm and pointed back, hissing out something which he could not understand, but which sounded like a savage snarl. He paid, however, little attention to this, for as the gipsy spoke the turret and most of the outer wall came crashing into the fire. For a brief second a strange stillness prevailed. Harold fancied he could hear the quick murmur of horror which broke from the group without. No doubt, he thought, they had given him up as lost. Then he felt the grip on his arm released, and, not loth, followed his gipsy guide down a flight of stone steps luridly illuminated by many tongues of flame licking the cracks in the masonry. The smoke was suffocating.

Harold followed close behind the gipsy queen, and found himself marvelling at her agility and apparent familiarity with the intricate turns to the passage. They had come to the end of the steps and were pressing on through a smoke-laden underground passage. It twisted hither and thither, sometimes so abruptly and in such a contrary direction that at first he almost fancied they were retracing their steps, and at last grew so bewildered that he was unable to make out whether they were advancing or retreating.

It was pitchy-black until they turned another corner abruptly, where, some distance ahead, a dark lantern was burning suspended by a hook from the wall.

The gipsy glided forward and seized it, while the captain, coming up with her, expressed some surprise at finding a lantern burning there at all.

The old crone gave him a shrewd, narrow scrutiny, and her eyes gleamed maliciously.

"It's not for the likes of you Army gentlemen to wonder at much," she snapped. "Suppose I left the light here, or suppose one of my lads did, would it surprise you?"

"Yes; and yet, on second thoughts, no. Very likely you found your way into the house by this passage."

"Right!" croaked the old woman hoarsely. "So did you and that precious servant of yours."

The captain gave a start. The retort hardly surprised him; but he was eager to follow it up—almost too eager, for his next question was received in chilling silence.

"Why did you bring us here?" he asked. "And how did you find our rooms?"

Finding the woman would make no reply, he continued:

"Perhaps, when my uncle learns this, he will take steps to have the passage walled up."

"Who will tell him?" she asked fiercely.

"I will."

"You? Ha, ha, ha! You will tell him. Ha, ha, ha! that's good, now!"

It was horrible to hear that deep, mocking burst of laughter, which came echoing back from the ends of the passage when the hideous old creature left off.

"You will tell him," she went on in an undertone, as if speaking to herself; "you, Captain Harold Dane, of the Royal Hussars. Father lived and died in Australia. Left you a fortune of £40,000, and a sealed packet, which has been stolen. Yes; I know it all. I have it all as pat as you, and a good deal more besides. Don't start. You will tell him, I say—you? Well—— Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

She doubled her misshapen figure completely up by laughing.

She laughed till the tears streamed down her hideous cheeks, and she was forced by sheer exhaustion to lean for support against the mildewed wall. But all the while her keen, merciless little eyes were fixed narrowly on her companion.

He recoiled, loathing, from her side; but he could not avoid her basilisk gaze, and there was something about her short, ghoulish figure and the bitter mockery in her voice which, if it did not actually fascinate him, certainly compelled him to watch her closely in turn.

With a suddenness that surprised him, she dropped the mockery, and, making a short, swift dart up to his side, peered up into his face, hissing:

"You will say nothing, Captain Dane; you will hold your tongue! Do you understand? It will serve you ill to defy me. I know too much!"

"Enough of this folly, woman!" Harold cried angrily. "If you cannot answer a direct question, neither can I listen to this claptrap. Come! we have wasted time enough. Please take the light and show the way."

The gipsy appeared somewhat cowed by his stern voice.

"I do not refuse to answer a direct question," she muttered.

"Very well, then; explain how you, or your people, conveyed me back to the Manor last night?" Harold asked, confronting her.

"By this passage, sir," answered the hag humbly. "It begins in the dene-hole and ends in the house. I ordered two of my trusty men to carry you and your servant into the house, and place you both safely in your rooms."

"Then there was a means of communicating secretly with both apartments?"

"Yes."

"You left me the diamond amulet you first appeared so anxious to obtain," said Harold. "Why did you do that?"

The woman hesitated.

"I had my reasons," she said.

"Which I want to know!" continued the captain sharply.

"I wished to baffle your uncle!" snapped the gipsy, inwardly raging to find herself compelled to admit the truth.

"Ah! that accounts for his extraordinary visit to my bedside and its consequence," mused Harold half aloud.

The gipsy queen pricked up her ears instantly. With native shrewdness she put a question before Dane realised its purport, or his own mistake in replying to it.

"What did he do?" she asked in a voice quivering with suppressed excitement.

"He opened the pendant, and—— But of what concern is it to you?" said the captain, checking himself.

"A great deal more than you think!" laughed the hag, moving away with the light and beginning to hurry along the passage.

Harold followed her at some little distance; then he saw her suddenly stop and swing the lamp above her head. He hastened forward, startled by the sound of water dripping from the roof, which he perceived, when he had gained the gipsy's side, was trickling through a kind of sluice set above.

"That," volunteered the woman, with disagreeable emphasis, "can be opened in the Manor by anyone who knows the secret. There are only three persons who do—myself, Sir James Dane, and Mr. Trent Rasper. If they liked, they could at this moment drown us like rats! They would," she added, with sudden fierceness, "if they knew we were here. They hate me, I think, as much as they hate you!"

The captain was taken aback as much by the savageness of her tone as the meaning of her words. Before he could recover himself, she had slipped away ahead, and he saw her suddenly vanish down an abrupt slope. Running forward, he overtook her in the middle of a strangely shaped chalk-pit. He glanced wildly round. The sickly light revealed on all sides black, yawning cavities. Already he had lost count of the passage they had traversed; the place was like a maze. All at once the gipsy extinguished the lantern. He heard the scurry of her retreating footsteps, then an ominous sliding sound, and he knew instinctively that she had deserted him—he was alone.

Nevertheless, he called loudly, and continued his cries for some minutes, till his voice became reduced to a hoarse whisper.

He was amazed at the gipsy's astounding treachery; and at last, worn out by fatigue, hungry and thirsty, he dropped back on the cold, moist, chalky bottom of the dene-hole.

How should he escape? Well might he ask himself that question. How, indeed?

CHAPTER VIII.

FRESH ARRIVALS—A HERO'S BOAST—RASPER ENCOUNTERS AN UNWELCOME ACQUAINTANCE—THE GIPSY'S REWARD—WHAT GRACE HEARD OUTSIDE THE LIBRARY — A DEEPENING MYSTERY—THE CAPTAIN'S PAPERS—ALMOST DISCOVERED!—A BRAVE RESOLVE.

While Captain Dane remained all day a prisoner in the dene-hole the fire in the Manor burnt itself out. By midday only the skeleton of the south wing was standing. Sir James had sent to the nearest market-town for builders and carpenters, and in obedience to his instructions they closed up the gaps between the south wing and the main building.

A little after midday another party of guests arrived, and amongst them Colonel Havison, Captain Harold's commanding officer.

The baronet tried to make light of his loss, and offered the new-comers a hearty welcome, and accommodation in the east or the unused part of the house, which, save for one or two exceptions, the guests gladly accepted. Sir James treated the affair more in the light of an exciting episode than a gloomy tragedy. And his high spirits were contagious. However, later on an uncomfortable feeling began to gain ground that behind his bold front the master of Dane Manor was trying to hide the disgrace attendant on his nephew's connection with the cause of the fire. The news spread that the captain had not fallen a victim to the flames, that his rescue of the gipsy queen had been dictated by motives of prudence, since he had cleverly made his escape by letting it be thought he had fallen a victim to the fire.

The gossips recalled Trent Rasper's indictment of the captain at the time of the outbreak, and Rasper, perhaps, to his own surprise, found himself the hero of the day. Like all persons of his kidney, he made the most of the occasion, and posed before the new-comers as the lion of the party. As such he was introduced to Colonel Havison.

At the sound of this name, Rasper suddenly turned very pale, and the colonel ignored his proffered hand, and passed by with a cold bow.

Sir James, who had witnessed the incident, became strangely uncomfortable, and presently he followed Rasper, who had quietly left the room.

Grace was in the hall when the baronet passed through. He saw that she was speaking to the gipsy queen; but he did not see Colonel Havison, who was examining some of the family portraits, and was unconsciously hidden behind a cumbersome suit of armour.

"Mistress Rebecca, when my daughter has finished with you, I wish to see you in the library," Sir James said, hurriedly crossing the hall, and disappearing through a door on the opposite side.

The woman curtseyed, but there was a significant leer in her half-shaded eyes, which Grace saw by accident, and betrayed with a shudder.

The gipsy fixed her with a cunning look.

"Dear lady, it's kindness itself ye've been to me and my people!" she whined, "and the gipsy queen is humbly thankful. Ask anything but this, dear lady; it is the truth."

"I cannot believe it, Rebecca; you are mistaken. You must be, like my father and these people. I will not believe Harold set the house afire!" Grace said spiritedly.

"But you forget, my lady; he had a strong motive."

Grace turned a shade paler.

"Yes, I know," she answered; "but even that could not make Captain Harold commit a wicked crime!"

"It would make most people reckless," suggested the gipsy.

"It might," assented the girl; "but the captain had no cause to be so. My father never referred to the matter, either directly or indirectly, and I know he would not permit anyone to his knowledge to do so. Rebecca," she added quickly, "you do not like Captain Dane. If you did, and you were as grateful as you say you are to me, you would not help his enemies heap this disgrace upon him."

"His enemies, my lady!" exclaimed the hag, affecting surprise.

"Yes; at least one enemy. You know whom I mean?"

"Indeed, no, my dear lady, I do not!"

"I mean Mr. Rasper."

"Is he the captain's enemy?" asked the woman, unable to suppress the malicious glitter which sprang to her eyes.

But Grace, for the very first time in her life, had become thoroughly angry with the gipsy, and, with a gesture of annoyance, turned abruptly away.

The gipsy, half mockingly curtseyed, and disappeared in the direction of the baronet's study.

Colonel Havison stepped forward.

"Pardon me, my dear Miss Dane," he said, "if unwittingly I have played the part of an eavesdropper. But really that old woman appeared so frightfully venomous that I was afraid to leave you two alone. Of course, I overheard your discussion; but as the substance of it is common property I pray you will readily forgive me."

Grace seemed to draw comfort from his kindly manner, and smilingly met the colonel's honest brave eyes. A hope sprang up within her, and she said half wistfully:

"You don't believe them, colonel, do you? You don't believe this cruel rumour about Harold—I mean Captain Dane?"

"Well, I can hardly credit it," he answered guardedly.

"I knew you wouldn't. They say Harold has fled. But I do not believe it. He is a soldier, and would not fly from trouble."

"He has shown himself a brave and capable officer," remarked the colonel; "depend upon it he will turn up and put these rumours to shame. And now, if I were you, I should go to my father and have it out with that scurrilous old gipsy."

Grace was quick to adopt this advice, and though she reached the door of the library, which she found ajar, she did not enter the room, for she was arrested in a moment of terror by the astounding revelations which she heard.

Trent Rasper was speaking.

"You say Captain Dane is imprisoned in the dene-hole. How are we to believe that, woman?"

"Very simply, sir," answered the gipsy. "Open the sluice. Ha, ha, ha! It's been done before. You won't be troubled by him afterwards!"

"She means he will drown," remarked Rasper, addressing his host.

There was a long pause, broken at last by the gipsy saying:

"I have done my part, gentlemen. I have given you all the information I possess. You may believe me or not, but the captain brought me into the house, and made me reveal the secret cupboard in the haunted chamber to him. He threatened to kill me if I refused," she went on, "and he meant it. I am sorry, sir. I have served you faithfully all these years ever since your sweet mother died.

"Enough!" interrupted the baronet quickly; "you want, I suppose, the reward we agreed upon?"

"Five hundred guineas!" said the woman.

Grace heard the "clink" of gold, and knew that the woman had received her price.

"Now," said the baronet sternly, "you swear Captain Dane took those papers from the secret cupboard? You had no hand in it? I tell you, woman, if you are playing me false in this I shall discover, and then your days are numbered!"

"If I had taken them I might have made better use of them!" she answered sharply.

"You lying jade!" hissed Rasper; "the secret of the cupboard was not known to you. It was locked up in the amulet, which you opened, for the fool who owned it would not have had the cunning to do so!"

The gipsy muttered a suppressed oath, and made a dart for the door, which she reached, pursued by the baronet and Rasper, just as Grace managed to slip behind the hangings in the passage.

Sir James and his companion dashed after the gipsy, who sped down the corridor with remarkable agility.

Grace, trembling with suppressed horror, slipped into the room, and stopped short midway. She was on the verge of fainting, and it was only by a supreme effort that she recovered herself.

At the foot of her father's desk she perceived a small roll of papers. They were endorsed in her cousin's name, and she picked them up. Just then her ears, sharpened with terror, heard the sound of someone hurrying along the passage. The girl felt unequal to encounter anyone, much less her father or Rasper, whom she rightly concluded might be returning after a fruitless chase for the gipsy.

There was no hiding place near save the hollow beneath the desk. She slipped beneath as her father rushed breathlessly into the room.

"The papers! Gone!" he exclaimed aghast. And the loss for the moment appeared to overwhelm him. "No, no!" he continued in a low, suppressed voice, as though trying to persuade his fears they were safe. "No, the woman cannot have taken them. I must see Rasper. Curse the fellow, he has them!"

He dashed heedlessly out of the room as he had entered it.

Grace crept from her hiding-place with blanched cheeks. She had learnt enough to know that Harold was the object of her father and Rasper's merciless persecution; nay, that they had, in cold blood, planned his death. What terrible mystery lay behind all this she neither thought nor cared. It was sufficient to know that Harold was in danger, and him she must save.

She quitted the room with the precious papers in the bosom of her dress, and reached the hall in a state of numbed terror.

Carew, who had just been under examination by the colonel, was crossing a wide apartment towards the servants' quarters, when Grace reeled rather than walked in. Her appearance so alarmed him that he ran to her aid. No one else was by to render assistance, so the warmhearted Irishman supported her to a seat.

"Begorra, it's a dead faint, miss, 'd be afther coming!" he said, standing by, at a loss to know what next to do.

Grace looked up at him quickly. In him she recognised Harold's servant, and her mind was suddenly made up.

"You must help me," she said faintly. "Your master is in great danger. We must save him!"

"Yes, miss; whin—whin?" cried Carew.

"To-night—now!"

"Sure an' it's a blessing on ye, miss, for thinking of the dear master!" faltered the Irishman. Then, as a bright idea seemed to strike him, he added: "By St. Patrick, I'd be afther fetching yer bonnet and cloak, missie! We'll save Master Harold now!"

"No, no; we must be cautious. The police are looking for your master. After dinner I will meet you on the south terrace. Bring a strong rope with you. We shall need it. And, now, you must not say a word about this—no, not to a single soul!"

"May Hivin bless ye, miss!" murmured Carew, gazing after the girl, as he quietly left the hall.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW THE DENE-HOLE WAS DISCOVERED—THE PRISONER LIBERATED—AN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS—GRACE WINS A POWERFUL FRIEND—THE ESCAPE FROM THE MOOR—TRAPPED—SIX TO TWO—A STRUGGLE, AND ITS RESULT.

Grace passed three hours of terrible anxiety before she met Carew, who had managed to secure a stout rope. They had no lantern; but though the night was obscured, the snow on the ground afforded them a dim light, sufficient for their purpose.

The dene-hole lay on the edge of the moor, about a quarter of a mile from the house. Its mouth, or, rather, its circular top, was hidden by a circle of furze, and as bushes of this covered the whole moor, it made the exact spot difficult to find.

In the half-gloom Carew and his fair companion found their search impeded at every turn.

"Whist!" cried the orderly; "there's someone moving yonder, miss. Just drop down under cover here."

Grace, her heart beating wildly, did so. She could distinguish not one, but several figures upon the edge of the moor.

Carew suddenly gave an excited whisper.

"Begorra, miss, we've found the hole!" he said. "Look! there's no snow there."

And he pointed through a gap in the furze, where below a small dark cavity appeared in the ground.

He pushed heedlessly through the bushes, and Grace as quickly followed him. Both stood over the aperture, speechless with horror, for their ears caught the sound of the gurgle of water below. Above this presently rose a man's groan.

Carew called his master softly by name.

"Help me, for Heaven's sake!" implored the captain faintly. "The place is filling with water!"

"Ah, the spalpeens!" cried the trooper excitedly; "they'd murdher ye, would they? Catch, master dear; 'tis a blessed rope I'm throwing!"

A splash followed, as the end of the rope struck the water, and next moment Carew felt it tighten. He had secured it to the bottom of one of the bushes.

"Is it climbing up ye'll be able to, sor?" he asked.

The captain made no reply; but, judging by the movements of the rope and the sounds which rose from below, he was in the act of mounting when the orderly spoke. The latter and Grace kept their eyes fixed on the aperture, and were presently rewarded by distinguishing the captain, as he neared the neck of the pit. Carew assisted him up, and Grace, with a glad cry, knelt over him.

"Grace! you here!" Harold exclaimed in wonder.

"Yes, Harold. I heard that you were in danger, and this faithful man has been the means of saving you! The gipsy you rescued has spread the news that you have fled the neighbourhood. It's terrible!" she went on, breaking completely down. "All sorts of cruel things are spoken of you, Harold! The police are trying to find you!"

"The police?" gasped the captain in surprise.

"Yes. The story goes you set the south wing afire."

"It is false, Grace! You know that," the captain responded, giving her a brief but explicit outline of the events that had happened since his arrival in the house.

Grace listened in astonishment, and shuddered when the captain hurried over the description of her father's part in the affair. When he had finished, Carew ventured to arrest his attention.

"Whist now, master dear!" he said. "Sure the bla'guards are stealing after us! We'll have a fight for it; but it's no place for the young lady. Begorra, wouldn't it be best to send her back to the house, sor, with a missige for the colonel?"

"I am sure it would be," returned Harold in a whisper.

And, taking Grace aside, he urged her to find Colonel Havison, and explain that he wished to see him.

Grace lost no time in undertaking the errand; but she had some difficulty in finding the colonel. Her absence had been noted, and when she appeared her troubled looks brought upon her a host of inquiries. At last she contrived to meet the colonel in the crowded ballroom.

"Can I speak with you, Colonel Havison, alone for a minute

or so?" she said. "Captain Dane has given me a message for you."

"Has he? Well, then, you have seen him?"

"Yes. But he is in great danger. Will you help him, Colonel Havison?" she continued. "He is innocent; and these papers may explain a great deal." She drew the unsealed packet from her dress and thrust it into her companion's hands. "Don't examine them here, you may be seen; and my father—he is not, I am ashamed to tell you, friendly disposed towards Harold. That is Mr. Rasper's work!"

The colonel started.

"So," he muttered, "Julian Rosht is up to his old tricks again! I suspected as much. Yes," he added aloud, "I will help your cousin. Where is he?"

"Outside the house, beyond the south terrace," Grace whispered. "Look—look! we are being watched!"

She shrank back from the recess of the window, whither she had drawn the colonel, and pointed outside.

He saw a figure flit between the light, and recognised the gipsy Rebecca.

"I will go at once; but you must remain in the house with your guests," he said quickly, but kindly.

And before she could reply he had quitted her side, and she watched him make his exit from the room.

Meanwhile Captain Dane and his orderly, being rid of Grace, turned their attention to circumventing the officers of the law. It was clear they had been seen.

"Sure, sor, the bla'guards are creeping up on the right!" whispered Carew.

The captain strained his eyes in that direction, but could distinguish nothing beyond the whitish-black ridge of snow-covered furze. Still, he remained motionless till his drenched clothes began to stiffen with the cold, and he found it imperative to be moving. Very cautiously he groped his way beside Carew for a distance of fifty yards or so. Then both of them started back with a muttered exclamation. A great snowdrift barred their way, while suddenly from behind a lesser ridge on the left-hand side three dark figures sprang up into the dim view.

Dane and Carew started back.

"We are trapped, sor!" whispered the latter. "There are a couple more of the bla'guards behind!"

"And another creeping after us in the direction we have come!" added Dane bitterly.

"Begging yer pardon, sor, but it's not right ye should fall into their hands just now," said the trooper in a whisper. "Sure, they can arrist me, and ye'll get back to the house and mate the colonel. Maybe he'll show the bla'guards their mistake!"

The advice was good; but to Dane there appeared no possibility of carrying it out, for as the orderly finished there was a rush of feet, and the police were upon them.

"Run, sor—run!" urged Carew.

Dane hesitated. There might have been time before, there was none now. In a twinkling the officers surrounded them.

"Captain Harold Dane, I hold a warrant for your arrest!" said the sergeant, stepping forward.

"Don't answer, sor," whispered Carew.

He shrewdly suspected the men hailed from the neighbouring market town, and would be at a loss to distinguish between himself and his master. The darkness rendered the distinction all the more difficult.

"Will you please step forward, sir?" continued the sergeant, really more puzzled to distinguish between the two than Carew had supposed.

Dane was about to move, but the orderly forestalled him.

"Are you Captain Dane?" questioned the police-officer.

Carew inclined his head. He was afraid to speak, lest the brogue should betray him. The sergeant, receiving no reply, turned quickly to one of his constables.

"Arrest them both!" he said. "We shall be sure then to get the right one."

"Will ye, ye spalpeens? Take that, and that!" roared the Irishman, flooring the sergeant and the constable he had addressed by a couple of quick, powerful blows.

The rest were for the moment taken completely aback.

"Now, master dear, quick!" cried Carew, leaping at the four startled constables.

His spirit was infectious, and Dane followed him at a rush. Two of the officers went down, but the remaining two, who had recovered from their surprise, were not so easily disposed of. One of them tackled Carew, while the other wrestled with the captain. In the meantime the sergeant and the first constable got up and joined in the struggle. But even then their would-be captives were equal to them.

The struggle continued hotly for some minutes, and at last Carew broke away. Darting up to the captain's side, he fought tooth and nail to release the latter.

A baffled cry broke from his lips when swiftly a pair of handcuffs were pressed over his wrists and locked in their place. A moment later Captain Dane was served alike.

"We'll take the scoundrels to Sir James, he's a justice of the peace," remarked the sergeant decisively.

CHAPTER X.

THE UNEXPECTED MEETING—A CRUEL TRUTH—COLONEL HAVISON MAKES A STRANGE DISCLOSURE—CONFRONTED BY THE VICTIM—RIGHT TRIUMPHS IN THE END.

That a crisis was impending Grace knew. Some time had elapsed since Colonel Havison quitted the ballroom, and Sir James, who had noted his absence, was puzzled to account for it. Rasper, who had suddenly become terribly nervous and uneasy, made a fruitless effort to appear unconcerned. An awkward feeling of suspense troubled the whole party.

Suddenly the curtains by the door were swept apart, and the sergeant of police entered the room. He walked straight up to Sir James Dane, who had turned an ashen pallor.

"The warrant has been executed, sir," he said in an undertone. "The prisoner is outside. I thought maybe you would like to see him."

Sir James was for the moment too staggered to make any reply. He concluded at once that this was the direct outcome of the gipsy's treachery.

"No; take him away!" he managed to say in a hoarse, strained voice.

"Very well, sir. We had a difficulty in taking him," the sergeant remarked, still lingering.

Whatever reply Sir James would have made was interrupted by the sound of a scuffle outside. The sergeant, forgetting his surroundings, gave an oath, and started at a run for the door, while the guests huddled back in alarm. But before the officer had taken many steps, a bedraggled, handcuffed figure dashed through the opening, eluded his grasp, and halted before the baronet.

"Harold!"

"Yes. I understand it is your object to make me suffer this indignity, sir?" said the captain.

His uncle was speechless. He recoiled a step or two, everything seemed to move before him; the room and its occupants appeared misty, the constables who had followed their prisoner were blurred, so was the sergeant. Only one figure stood out incisively, and that was his nephew—handcuffed, a common prisoner. His eyes, his very presence at this pass was a cutting reproach to the baronet, and an object of mortal terror to Trent Rasper, who glided noiselessly up to his host's side.

"An explanation is necessary!" he whispered. "It had best come now."

Sir James understood him. Pulling himself together, he faltered rather than said:

"You have yourself to thank, sir, for this humiliating position. You are an incendiary. More I do not wish to say. The law must take its course."

"If the law takes a just course, you will be in my position!" retorted Harold angrily.

The thrust went home, and the baronet blurted out: "How dare you, sir, you—you——"

"Son of a forger!" interposed Rasper.

The captain, who was standing handcuffed between the two police-officers, suddenly wrenched himself free, and before Rasper could realise the sort of danger that menaced him, the captain raised his handcuffed wrists, and brought them down heavily, just missing the wretch's head. As it was, the steel struck his left side, and glanced off down his left arm. Rasper gave a sharp cry of pain, and thrust his left hand into his trouser-pocket.

As Harold was hustled roughly back by the constables, Grace, white and breathless, came up to him.

"Harold, go away!" she implored; "your innocence will be established soon. You can afford to be generous. Do go!"

"The coward! let his shame be told to the world!" said Rasper fiercely; "he has been living on his uncle's charity for years. His father was a common thief, who forged Sir James's name to deeds worth £60,000, and fled the country to avoid arrest. Only our host's good nature and his regard for the family name, made him overlook this wrong. This is how he is repaid by the forger's son!"

A low murmur followed the scoundrel's indictment. Harold was scarcely conscious of Grace imploring him to quit the room. The words he had been forced to listen to had burnt into his brain; but instead of rousing him to fury, they caused a terrible fear to possess his heart. He recalled, with a horrible dread, certain facts connected with his father, his uncle's previous refusal to discuss the subject.

"Is it true?" he asked hoarsely, turning his blanched face towards Grace, and reading the answer in her shrinking eyes.

"Yes," she whispered.

"Heaven help me!" he cried brokenly.

"Better come away, sir!" urged one of the constables, whose heart was touched by his misery.

"No; let him remain!" said a voice close behind. And Colonel Havison strode into the group.

He turned directly to the sergeant.

"Let me see the warrant for Captain Dane's arrest," he said; and as the man handed it over, he continued: "Ah, I thought so! Your prisoner is charged with incendiarism. Now, I have a couple of witnesses here to prove that he did not cause the fire. As a man cannot be arrested for a crime he has not committed, you will be good enough to release Captain Dane."

"But that is impossible, sir. If a blunder has been made——"

"Enough, I take all responsibility in this matter upon myself. Please to unfasten Captain Dane's handcuffs."

But the sergeant remained obdurate.

"Do not trouble about me, sir, I implore you. I am far too wretched to trouble about myself," said Dane.

"Do you recognise that man, Captain Dane," asked the colonel loudly, indicating Trent Rasper, who had edged a little towards the startled bystanders.

"At first I thought he was Julian Rosht," answered Harold.

"So he is!"

"I beg your pardon, colonel!" interposed Sir James Dane coldly, "I must beg you to remember that Mr. Rasper, whom you suppose to be quite another person, is my guest."

"I believe your nephew is, or was your guest also?" remarked the colonel pointedly.

His host, who had been growing more and more uncomfortable, was silenced.

"I am sure in addressing you, Mr. Rasper," went on the colonel, "that I voice the sentiments of everyone here, especially my fellow-guests. You must know that such a serious accusation as you have levelled against my fellow-officer's father needs substantial proofs to authenticate it. Can you produce these? Do you speak with authority, or on behalf of Sir James Dane?"

Rasper, who meanwhile had been alternating between rage and fear, seemed suddenly to recover himself, and retorted quickly:

"I shall be happy to oblige you, colonel. I speak authoritatively, for at the time of the fraud I was this family's solicitor. Mr. James Dane, the prisoner's father, imposed his signature upon me."

"I presume that had something to do with your early retirement from legal practice?" remarked the colonel.

"That is a point, sir, we are not called upon to discuss."

"Perhaps not; you are a rogue!"

"Sir!"

"And you, James Dane," the colonel added, turning to his host, "are one of the biggest scoundrels outside of Portland!"

"For shame!" exclaimed one or two of the guests.

But the colonel stoutly maintained his ground.

"Not only is your nephew innocent of this present charge, but his father's honour is untarnished. You appear by these papers to have received an important communication from your late brother. He urged you to disclose the truth to his son before a certain date, failing which his son was instructed to open a certain sealed packet. That packet was recently stolen, and turns up in your possession."

"That is false."

"It is true; the packet was found by your daughter. I have it here, as well as other papers of your own. It deals with the whole history of this alleged fraud, and establishes beyond the shadow of a doubt your villainy. Listen. Your father had two sons, each of whom he oddly christened 'James.' In after years both happened to woo the same lady. The younger won her, falsely, representing himself to be the heir to the title and estates. On the same day, after the marriage, the old baronet died suddenly. His heir was traveling abroad at the time, so the younger seized the occasion, and with the assistance of the family solicitor, a Mr. Rasper, assumed the title,, and instead of being penniless—for the old baronet left the whole of his property to his eldest son—the younger, by his treachery, obtained the lot."

A suppressed murmur disturbed the colonel, who, nevertheless, continued in a clear voice:

"The brothers subsequently met in London. I need not describe that meeting, for it is fully described here in this document. It is sufficient to state that for the sake of his brother's wife, the elder generously waived his rights, and, resolving never to return, quitted England with a sum of £60,000. Now mark. The wronged man no sooner had his back turned than he was further wronged by the infamous charge of forgery, a charge that has been sustained up to this very hour."

"Have mercy!" groaned the false baronet.

"Mercy!" exclaimed the colonel. "What mercy have you shown? No; the story shall be told to the end. These papers also referred to an amulet, which Captain Dane has worn since childhood, giving explicit instructions for opening the same. It contained a scrap of parchment torn from the copy of the real baronet's certificate of birth. The gipsy Rebecca discovered this; here it is, and the certificate also, which was hidden in a secret cupboard, also notified inside the amulet. The gipsy Rebecca, in the presence of her husband, searched the cupboard and found the certificate. These two persons were hidden in the haunted chamber, when you, James Dane, entered it, and either by accident or design set fire to the house."

Every eye was fixed on the disgraced man.

"It is true—too true!" he gasped; "the lad is innocent! Release him!"

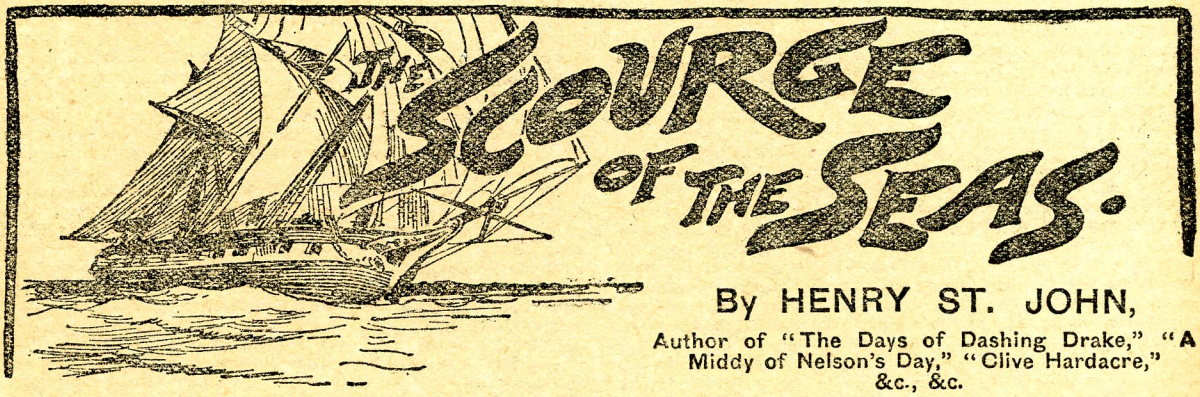
"Fool!" hissed Rasper. "Ha, ha! you won't have me! Too late!"

By a sudden swift movement he snatched the ring from off the third finger of his left hand, drawing off a neatly executed padding at the same time, showing that the skin beneath the ring was withered to the bone. The ring he pressed to his mouth. They could see him swallow the poison it contained. In half an hour he died.

* * * * * * *

Yuletide comes and Yuletide goes with many a sad and happy memory. Folks speak of a certain Christmas at Dane Manor with bated breath. They will tell you the story how one of the Danes died from the shock of disgrace; but if they are truthful they will add how his daughter married her cousin, and how no longer the Luck of the Danes is hidden in an amulet, but is voiced aloud in boisterous laughter by a pack of merry youngsters.

THE END.



By HENRY ST. JOHN,

Author of "The Days of Dashing Drake," "A Middy of Nelson's Day," "Clive Hardacre," &c., &c.

THE CHASE OF THE INDIAMAN—A NARROW SHAVE—AT CLOSE QUARTERS—AN UNEXPECTED RECOGNITION.

Life on the "Rose" was very tame and humdrum compared with the former lively times on board the old "Resolute."

Frank, Cuttlestone, and Lord Eustace had given their parole of honour, and were at liberty to go and do where and what they pleased; but they had no duties to perform, no work to do, and when this is the case time always hangs heavily.

M. Durand was kind and friendly as of yore, and he kept repeating his promises to intercede on behalf of his English friends when they came to France.

St. Simon, the boy who had been taken from the "Resolute," did more. He told Frank privately that the moment he had

quitted the deck of the "Rose," and was absolved from his parole, he would himself help both Frank and his countrymen to escape.

These promises, of course, cheered the prisoners a great deal, and rendered their captivity somewhat less irksome.

A week had passed since the triumph of the "Rose" and the "Haidèe" over the "Resolute." Captain Thibault had transferred the more valuable part of the cargoes from the Indiaman to the hold of the "Resolute," and had sunk the merchant vessels, after transhipping their captains and crews also to the "Resolute."

A prize crew had then been put aboard the frigate, and, under the French colours, she sailed in company with the "Rose" and the "Haidèe."

The three vessels, very fairly matched as far as their sailing qualities went, kept well together for a day or so; but one night, during a storm, the "Haidèe" dropped astern, and when morning broke she was nowhere visible.

This fact, however, did not greatly trouble Captain Thibault. Had it been the prize, it would have been a different matter; but the "Haidèe" was well able to take care of herself.

The morning of the "Haidèe's" disappearance the look-out man at the masthead of the "Rose" signalled a strange sail bearing northward.

For some time the leaden greyness of the atmosphere prevented them from deciphering with certainty the nature of the sail, but when the sun broke through the clouds she was discovered to be a full-rigged Indiaman.

This was a prize exactly suited to Captain Thibault's taste, and he had no notion of allowing it to slip through his fingers.

So, cracking on every inch of canvas that he dared to carry, away he went in chase of the flying trader.

A stern chase is usually a long chase; but in this particular instance the "Rose," being an infinitely better sailer than the heavy, clumsy Company's ship, it was not long before the heavy, black hull of the chase was visible from the quarter-deck of the "Rose."

Frank and Cuttlestone watched the chase with keen interest.

"The lubbers!" said Cuttlestone disgustedly. "Why don't they wait and show their metal? They usually carry plenty of guns."

"Well, they are only traders, after all," said Frank; "and if they like to run for it they are in the right. But running is not going to serve their turn this time. Just see how we are overhauling her. Ah! she is going to show fight, after all."

The Indiaman, probably realising the utter futility of flight, had tacked, and, with the wind on her starboard side, was standing right across the "Rose's" bows.

Cuttlestone clapped his hands with excitement.

"Now we're going to see some fun!" he said.

A minute or two later the fun began, when the Indiaman opened fire on the "Rose."

The first few shots were ineffectual, owing to the distance that separated the two vessels; but in a little while the fun began in grim earnest.

A round-shot from the Indiaman, flying high over the "Rose's" bows, passed over the forecastle, and, just missing the fore and main masts, continued its course over the quarter-deck and crashed into the mizzen-mast, sending the splinters flying in all directions.

In its flight over the quarter-deck the shot had passed so near to Cuttlestone's head that the displaced air had lifted his hat from his head, and brought it to the deck.

As Cuttlestone stooped to recover his headgear, Lord Eustace came limping on to the quarter-deck to see the fun.

"You nearly lost your head in earnest that time, my lad!" he remarked, with a smile.

Cuttlestone jammed his hat tightly down on to his head.

"Yes, sir," he replied coolly; "it was a close shave! Fancy those beggars making me salute them like that!"

The "Rose" now discharged her bow gun, the only gun she could as yet bring to bear; but before the smoke had cleared away a shot from the Indiaman came crashing into the stem of the "Rose," unshipping the gun and killing the gunner.

It was clear that the traders meant to make a desperate resistance, for they kept up an incessant fire on the Frenchman, until the frigate's square sails were hanging in ribbons from the yards. But still Captain Thibault pressed on in the teeth of the fire.

Suddenly the "Rose" tacked and let fly her starboard broadside; then, quickly resuming her course, she ran straight for the Indiaman, who was firing now with desperate energy.

Again the "Rose" tacked, just as the hull of the Indiaman was under the stem, and the two vessels crashed together with such force that scarcely a man upon either but was jerked from his feet.

The Frenchmen were up in a moment, and, throwing their grappling-irons on to the Indiaman, locked the two vessels fast together.

"Why," ejaculated Cuttlestone, as he sprang to his feet, "what does this mean? Who are those chaps on the trader's deck?"

Frank sprang into the shrouds and looked down on the Indiaman's deck.

As he did so his face paled, and his breath came fast with excitement, for almost the first person on whom his eyes rested was Garcia, Ourzon's rascally lieutenant.

He sprang back on to the deck before Garcia could see and recognise him, and as he did so he heard his name being shouted in Bill Woshem's lusty tones.

Bill was in the waist. He, too, had been allowed his freedom, upon the assurance of the English officers that he would be of good behaviour.

Frank caught sight of the old sailor gesticulating madly, and in an instant he had gained his side.

"Have ye seen 'em, Master Frank—them rascally wermin, the pi-rates? I jest clapped eyes on that there Garcia's ugly mug, and that little himp Acna! Depend upon it, the Indiaman's fallen into the clutches of the 'Vulture,' and Garcia's on board in charge of a prize crew. Don't 'e think Cap'en Thiboo ought to know the fac's of the case?"

"I do indeed," replied Frank.

At that instant he caught sight of young St. Simon, and he darted across the deck and took the boy by the arm.

St. Simon had heard something of Frank's wanderings, for Frank had told his French friend short extracts of his history. The boy opened his eyes widely when he heard that those pirates whose deeds, as narrated by Frank, had made his blood boil with indignation were actually at that moment in possession of the trader.

He immediately hastened aft to Captain Thibault, who was directing his men to the attack.

"Pirates, did you say, St. Simon? Peste! I thought they did not look like Englishmen!"

There was no great sagacity needed to discover that fact, for by far the greater part of Garcia's crew were mulattoes or woolly-headed negroes.

Knowing the true state of affairs, Captain Thibault was more than ever set on capturing the Indiaman.

But Garcia and his ruffians offered a desperate resistance, and again and again they beat back the Frenchmen who sought to carry them by boarding.

"St. Simon," cried Frank, "will you ask the captain if he will allow me to join in the attack? Those ruffians are the enemies of the English as well as the French!"

St. Simon nodded, and instantly preferred Frank's request, which Captain Thibault granted unhesitatingly.

Cuttlestone and Frank instantly armed themselves with cutlasses for which their unfortunate owners had no further use, and Bill Woshem, considering that the permission to fight the pirates might be extended to himself, did likewise.

"Let me get near that there grinning heathen of a Garcia," cried Bill bloodthirstily, "and I'll write my name on his ugly face!"

The Frenchmen looked with astonishment when they saw the three Englishmen armed with cutlasses.

"Down with the traitors!" cried one, who believed that the Englishmen had taken advantage of the opportunity to endeavour to gain their friends on the deck of the Indiaman.

He aimed a blow at Frank's head with his cutlass as he spoke; but fortunately Bill sprang forward just in time to ward off the blow.

St. Simon, seeing the error into which the Frenchman had fallen, rushed forward.

"The English fight for us to-day!" he cried. "Do not molest them. Down with the pirates!"

The fellow who had nearly succeeded in taking Frank's life grinned, and apologised for what he called in broken English his "leetle mistake."

"If that's what the idiot calls a little mistake," growled Cuttlestone, "what the deuce does he consider a big one?"

Although the pirates were in far less numbers than their antagonists, the stubborn resistance they offered successfully held the Frenchmen at bay, and when one did succeed in gaining the Indiaman's deck, it was only to fall a lifeless and bloodstained corpse beneath the murderous steel of the desperadoes.

"The 'Vulture' ain't far off, depend on it!" gasped Bill Woshem; "and that there Garcia's tryin' to hold us off until she comes up."

Bill had succeeded in edging his way right through the thickest of the throng, with Frank and Cuttlestone closely following at his heels.

Making for a spot which he considered the most vulnerable for an attack, Bill sprang from the hammocks, and in another moment was standing on the deck of the Indiaman. His example was quickly followed by the two boys, and in a moment or two a dozen Frenchmen had also effected a footing.

Uttering a shout to warn his men of the encroachment, Garcia, sword in hand, rushed forward to drive the besiegers back.

The next moment he and Frank were face to face.

OLD ENEMIES MEET—A BOLD STAND—THE SEARCH ON THE MERCHANTMAN—THE LOCKED DOOR.

Garcia stopped dead, his face transformed with passion and astonishment, and Frank, swift to seize the opportunity, made a lunge forward with his sword.

Garcia recovered his guard in time to avoid the blow, and the next moment he stood defending himself from the attack of the two boys and Bill.

It would probably have gone hard for the pirate lieutenant had not he been opportunely reinforced by several of his men.

A fierce hand-to-hand conflict then took place, the Frenchmen nobly backing up their erstwhile enemies, the English.

The men who had come to Garcia's aid had left an unguarded opening, of which the French sailors still on the deck of the "Rose" took instant advantage.

The pirates, only a score all told, were thus hemmed in on every side; but they were desperate men, fighting in a desperate cause, and each man of them knew that to fall alive into the hands of the enemy would be but to court a certain and ignoble death, so they fought with savage despair and ferocity, yielding the deck inch by inch to the besiegers.

"Throw down your arms!" cried the French lieutenant, who led the boarders.

"Never!" replied Garcia, between his clenched teeth.

There was scarcely a dozen of them now, and they, to a man, were bleeding from cuts and gashes innumerable.

"Tiens!" cried a French sailor, "these are not men—they are fiends! That yellow demon has nine lives. I myself have passed my sword into his body in more than one place."

But against such desperate odds it was only a question of time.

The pirates, with their backs to the mainmast, fought until they dropped one by one, till at last only three were left, Garcia and two others, who, fainting with exhaustion and loss of blood, still resolutely refused the quarter which was repeatedly offered to them. At last Garcia alone remained, the other two had dropped to the deck from sheer inability to stand, and he, too, was so weak that, had it not been for the support the mast offered, he would have fallen also.

He was a frightful sight to behold: his clothes were rent and gashed until they hung in ribbons from his body, and the naked flesh exposed was bleeding and gaping with wounds.

His face, always hideous, was now too frightful to look upon without shuddering; the yellow eyeballs, shot with blood, were distorted and glaring horribly, the mouth was agape, and flecked with blood and foam.

Some of the Frenchmen drew back and crossed themselves; but one, the same who had attributed to Garcia the possession of nine lives, hurled his discharged pistol at the pirate. The weapon struck Garcia full upon the forehead, and, without a groan the wretch fell insensible to the deck.

"Bind that man's hands!" commanded the French officer. "He is only stunned, and when he recovers he will be dangerous."

The same office was performed to the other two pirates, who still lay insensible.

Then the officer, followed by many of the crew, and by Bill and the two English boys, started on a tour of inspection of the ship.

Descending into the waist, the first object that met their gaze was the body of a man lying with his throat cut from ear to ear, a gruesome and revolting spectacle, from which Frank averted his eyes in horror. A little further lay another body horribly mutilated.

Both these bodies were clothed in the dress of a common seaman.

A few steps further, and a horrible sight burst upon their view. Dozens and dozens of corpses were flung in a blood-stained heap, from which a thick, black ooze slowly trickled across the deck.

"The—the scoundrels!—the cutthroat villains!" gasped Cuttlestone, turning green, and catching hold of Bill's arm to steady himself. "For mercy's sake, Bill, help me out of this! I shall make a fool of myself before all these Frenchies, if you don't."

The whole party hastened by the terrible remains of the merchant's crew with averted faces.

The officer led the way to the cabins, Bill and the boys still following.

The saloon was fitted up in the gorgeous style common in vessels of this class.

The walls were panelled with polished cedar, edged with gold mounting, the floor was covered by a rich carpet, the upholstery of the luxurious couches was in silk, and rich hangings of damask surrounded the stern windows.

The centre of the saloon was occupied by a large, polished cedar-wood table.

On this lay the body of a man, face downwards, his arms and legs extended, and secured to large iron staples, which had been driven into the polished wood.

He was clad only in his trousers, and his naked back presented a fearful spectacle, having been lashed until scarcely an inch of solid flesh remained.

The poor victim of this fiendish cruelty was quickly released, but when rolled over he was found to be quite dead.

Some idea of the torture which he had suffered was made apparent by the fact that he had bitten his under lip completely through in his agony.

Covering the poor remains with a curtain, which he tore down from a window, the lieutenant proceeded through the saloon, and out by a door at the further end, which opened into a passage, on either side of which the sleeping berths were ranged.

On the threshold of the saloon he stumbled, and, stooping to discover what was the object on which he had trodden, he saw that it was the body of a little pet dog. A stout cord was tied tightly around the throat of the poor little creature, which must have perished by slow strangulation.

An expression of horror came from the Frenchman's lips.

"Ciel!" he cried, "nothing alive seems to have escaped the ferocity of these brutes!"

The first berth proved to be empty, so also was the second; but the centre of the floor was disfigured by a large splash of blood.

They looked into each berth along the passageway, but not a living soul was to be seen.

At length, however, they reached a door which refused to open, and while they were forcing it, hurried footsteps, and low, agitated whispers could be heard from within.

"There is someone within," remarked the officer. Then, raising his voice, he told the occupants of the berth that they had nothing to fear.

He was evidently not understood, for he was answered by a female voice, which trembled with agitation and fear.

"Pray—pray go and leave us! We have done you no harm! Why should you persecute——" The sentence ended inaudibly, stifled by sobs.

"Don't take on, marm!" shouted Bill, with his mouth to the keyhole. "There ain't nothing to be afraid of. Open the door, there's a dear!"

"Oh, do go, please! Please leave us!"

Bill, too, had been misunderstood.

"You have nothing whatever to fear, madam!" cried Frank, taking his turn at persuasion. "There has been a desperate fight, and the pirates are all dead. This ship is now in the possession of a French man-of-war, and the French officers will treat you with all courtesy and respect!"

The lieutenant nodded. He understood just enough English to be able to grasp what Frank said.

"It is not true—it cannot be true!" cried the voice. Yet, in spite of the disbelief expressed, there was a tremulous hope in the tones.

"It is perfectly true, I assure you. I am an Englishman, a prisoner of war, and on my honour I assure you that all danger is over."

"Can I believe you? Dare I trust you?"

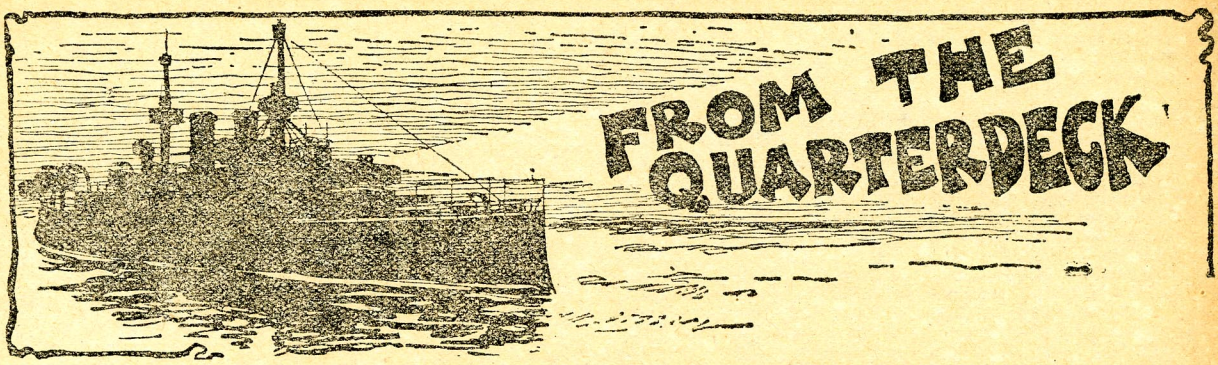
"You may—on my honour you may!" interposed Cuttlestone. "My name is Cuttlestone—Herbert Cuttlestone, midshipman, late of his Majesty's frigate the 'Resolute,' now, worse luck, a prisoner on the French frigate the 'Rose.'"

"I will trust you; your voices sound true and honest. Are all those terrible men gone?"

"All dead but three, and they ain't in the best of health," replied Cuttlestone.

Then came the sound of laboured breathings, as though someone was dragging a heavy weight across the floor, and the next moment the door swung open.

(*To be continued in next Friday's* UNION JACK.)



Bravo, Burton! F. E. Hope, U.J.L., of that town, has the honour of being the first lieutenant in the UNION JACK League. Bravo, F. E. Hope!

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Have you any favourite authors, and, if so, who are they? Fill in this form, and send it to me before January 1st.

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To the reader whose list is nearest the result of the poll I will present a beautiful stop-watch, just the thing for timing races with. To the next six I will give real silver pencil-cases.

The first commission for pressing seamen to man the warships of the navy was issued in 1355, "Tar." A statute of Richard II. (1378) speaks of it as a practice well-known, and provides a remedy against the desertion of those pressed. Pressing, either for land or sea service, was declared by the Parliament of 1641 to be illegal, but it was extensively practised long after that date.

The last wooden men-of-war added to the navy of this country were the "Diamond" and the "Sapphire," "Arthur." They were built in 1874.

Special laws have been the means of largely decreasing the smuggling and illicit buying of diamonds, but still a large number of the gem of gems which the Kimberley and other South African mines produce every year find their way into the market through dishonest channels.

Not many years ago the proportion of stones smuggled to those found bore the alarming figure of some 50 per cent. Indeed, smuggling was the despair of the various companies, and very stringent and rigidly enforced laws and regulations were found necessary to keep the evil within bounds. But, notwithstanding all the efforts of the special staff of police and detectives employed to put illicit diamond-dealing and smuggling down, at least one in twenty of the gems found finds its way into the market in the old way. The loss from this cause to the various companies cannot still fall far short of £200,000 per annum.

The gross tonnage of a vessel is the tonnage calculated by the Act passed in 1854, "Tonnage." The basis for tonnage adopted therein is a roomage or space ton of 100 cubic feet, and the tonnage is the roomage or internal cubic capacity of the ship below her uppermost deck, and of permanent closed-in space on her uppermost deck, available for cargo, stores, passengers, or crew, ascertained by the formula known as "Sterling's Rule." The aggregate cubic space in the ship thus ascertained (designated in units of 100 cubic feet) constitute her gross tonnage. Her registered or nett tonnage is the remaining tonnage after deducting from the gross tonnage the tonnage of spaces exclusively appropriated to the accommodation and use of the crew. For a steam vessel (in addition to crew-space deducted) the gross tonnage is further reduced by an allowance for space occupied by and necessary for propelling power.

I am ever your friend,
The Editor

All letters for the Editor should be addressed to 123, Temple Chambers, London, E.C.

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