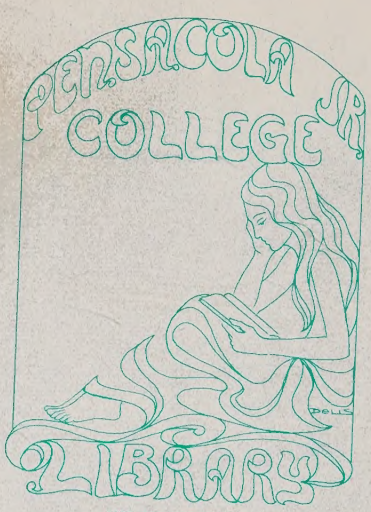
SHORT STORIES OF

Wilkie Collins

Wood Engravings by

FRITZ EICHENBERG



SHORT STORIES OF

Wilkie Collins

WITH WOOD ENGRAVINGS
BY FRITZ EICHENBERG

A PERPETUA BOOK

A. S. BARNES AND COMPANY, INC.
NEW YORK

PERPETUA EDITION 1960

Contents

A TERRIBLY STRANGE BED

SHORTLY after my education at college was finished, I happened to be staying at Paris with an English friend. We were both young men then, and lived, I am afraid, rather a wild life in the delightful city of our sojourn. One night we were idling about the neighborhood of the Palais Royal, doubtful to what amusement we should next betake ourselves. My friend proposed a visit to Frascati's; but his suggestion was not to my taste. I knew Frascati's, as the French saying is, by heart; had lost and won plenty of five-franc pieces there, merely for amusement's sake, until it was amusement no longer, and was thoroughly tired, in fact, of all the ghastly respectabilities of such a social anomaly as a respectable gambling-house. "For heaven's sake," said I to my friend, "let us go somewhere where we can see a little genuine, blackguard, poverty-stricken gaming, with no false gingerbread glitter thrown over it at all. Let us get away from fashionable Frascati's to a house where they don't mind letting in a man with a ragged coat, or a man with no coat, ragged or otherwise." "Very well," said my

friend; "we needn't go out of the Palais Royal to find the sort of company you want. Here's the place just before us; as blackguard a place, by all report, as you could possibly wish to see." In another minute we arrived at the door, and entered the house.

When we got upstairs, and had left our hats and sticks with the doorkeeper, we were admitted into the chief gambling-room. We did not find many people assembled there. But, few as the men were who looked up at us on our entrance, they were all types — lamentably true types — of their respective classes.

We had come to see blackguards; but these men were something worse. There is a comic side, more or less appreciable, in all blackguardism; here there was nothing but tragedy, mute, weird tragedy. The quiet in the room was horrible. The thin, haggard, long-haired young man, whose sunken eyes fiercely watched the turning up of the cards, never spoke; the flabby, fat-faced, pimply player, who pricked his piece of pasteboard perseveringly to register how often black won and how often red, never spoke; the dirty, wrinkled old man, with the vulture eyes and the darned greatcoat, who had lost his last sou and still looked on desperately after he could play no longer, never spoke. Even the voice of the croupier sounded as if it were strangely dulled and thickened in the atmosphere of the room. I had entered the place to laugh, but the spectacle before me was something to weep over. I soon found it necessary to take refuge in excitement from the depression of spirits which was fast

stealing on me. Unfortunately I sought the nearest excitement by going to the table and beginning to play. Still more unfortunately, as the event will show, I won — won prodigiously; won incredibly; won at such a rate that the regular players at the table crowded round me, and, staring at my stakes with hungry, superstitious eyes, whispered to one another that the English stranger was going to break the bank.

The game was rouge-et-noir. I had played at it in every city in Europe, without, however, the care or the wish to study the theory of chances — that philosopher's stone of all gamblers! And a gambler, in the strict sense of the word, I had never been. I was heart-whole from the corroding passion for play. My gaming was a mere idle amusement. I never resorted to it by necessity, because I never knew what it was to want money. I never practiced it so incessantly as to lose more than I could afford, or to gain more than I could coolly pocket without being thrown off my balance by my good luck. In short, I had hitherto frequented gambling-tables — just as I frequented ballrooms and opera-houses — because they amused me, and because I had nothing better to do with my leisure hours.

But on this occasion it was very different; now, for the first time in my life, I felt what the passion for play really was. My success first bewildered, and then, in the most literal meaning of the word, intoxicated me. Incredible as it may appear, it is nevertheless true that I only lost when I attempted to estimate chances and played according to previous calculation. If I left everything to luck, and staked

without any care or consideration, I was sure to win — to win in the face of every recognized probability in favor of the bank. At first some of the men present ventured their money safely enough on my color; but I speedily increased my stakes to sums which they dared not risk. One after another they left off playing, and breathlessly looked on at my game.

Still, time after time, I staked higher and higher, and still won. The excitement in the room rose to fever-pitch. The silence was interrupted by a deep-muttered chorus of oaths and exclamations in different languages every time the gold was shovelled across to my side of the table; even the imperturbable croupier dashed his rake on the floor in a (French) fury of astonishment at my success. But one man present preserved his self-possession, and that man was my friend. He came to my side, and, whispering in English, begged me to leave the place, satisfied with what I had already gained. I must do him the justice to say that he repeated his warnings and entreaties several times, and only left me and went away after I had rejected his advice (I was to all intents and purposes gambling drunk) in terms which rendered it impossible for him to address me again that night.

Shortly after he had gone, a hoarse voice behind me cried, "Permit me, my dear sir — permit me to restore to their proper place two napoleons which you have dropped. Wonderful luck, sir! I pledge you my word of honor as an old soldier, in the course of my long experience in this sort of thing, I never saw such luck as yours — never! Go on, sir — *sacré mille bombes!* Go on boldly, and break the bank!"

I turned round and saw, nodding and smiling at me with inveterate civility, a tall man, dressed in a frogged and braided surtout.

If I had been in my senses I should have considered him, personally, as being rather a suspicious specimen of an old soldier. He had goggling blood-shot eyes, mangy mustaches, and a broken nose. His voice betrayed a barrack-room intonation of the worst order, and he had the dirtiest pair of hands I ever saw — even in France. These little personal peculiarities exercised, however, no repelling influence on me. In the mad excitement, the reckless triumph of that moment, I was ready to "fraternize" with anybody who encouraged me in my game. I accepted the old soldier's offered pinch of snuff, clapped him on the back, and swore he was the honestest fellow in the world — the most glorious relic of the Grand Army that I had ever met with. "Go on!" cried my military friend, snapping his fingers in ecstasy — "go on, and win! Break the bank — *mille tonnerres!* my gallant English comrade, break the bank!"

And I *did* go on — went on at such a rate that in another quarter of an hour the croupier called out, "Gentlemen, the bank has discontinued for tonight." All the notes and all the gold in that "bank" now lay in a heap under my hands; the whole floating capital of the gambling-house was waiting to pour into my pockets!

"Tie up the money in your pocket-handkerchief, my worthy sir," said the old soldier, as I wildly plunged my hands into my heap of gold. "Tie it up, as we used to tie up

a bit of dinner in the Grand Army; your winnings are too heavy for any breeches-pockets that ever were sewed. There! that's it — shovel them in, notes and all! *Credié!* what luck! Stop! another napoleon on the floor! *Ah! sacré petit polisson de Napoléon!* have I found thee at last? Now then, sir — two tight double knots each way with your honorable permission, and the money's safe. Feel it! feel it, fortunate sir! hard and round as a cannon-ball. *Ah, bah!* if they had only fired such cannon-balls at us at Austerlitz — *nom d'une pipe!* if they only had! And now, as an ancient grenadier, as an ex-brave of the French army, what remains for me to do? I ask what? Simply this, to entreat my valued English friend to drink a bottle of champagne with me, and toast the goddess Fortune in foaming goblets before we part!"

"Excellent ex-brave! Convivial ancient grenadier! Champagne by all means! An English cheer for an old soldier! Hurrah! hurrah! Another English cheer for the goddess Fortune! Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

"Bravo! the Englishman, the amiable, gracious Englishman, in whose veins circulates the vivacious blood of France! Another glass? *Ah, bah!* the bottle is empty! Never mind! *Vive le vin!* I, the old soldier, order another bottle, and half a pound of bonbons with it!"

"No, no, ex-brave; never, ancient grenadier! *Your* bottle last time; *my* bottle this! Behold it! Toast away! The French army! the great Napoleon! the present company! the croupier! the honest croupier's wife and daughters — if he has any! the ladies generally! everybody in the world!"

By the time the second bottle of champagne was emptied, I felt as if I had been drinking liquid fire; my brain seemed all aflame. No excess in wine had ever had this effect on me before in my life. Was it the result of a stimulant acting upon my system when I was in a highly excited state? Was my stomach in a particularly disordered condition? Or was the champagne amazingly strong?

"Ex-brave of the French army!" cried I, in a mad state of exhilaration, "*I* am on fire! how are *you?* You have set me on fire! Do you hear, my hero of Austerlitz? Let us have a third bottle of champagne to put the flame out!"

The old soldier wagged his head, rolled his goggle-eyes until I expected to see them slip out of their sockets, placed his dirty forefinger by the side of his broken nose, solemnly ejaculated "Coffee!" and immediately ran off into an inner room.

The word pronounced by the eccentric veteran seemed to have a magical effect on the rest of the company present. With one accord they all rose to depart. Probably they had expected to profit by my intoxication, but, finding that my new friend was benevolently bent on preventing me from getting dead drunk, had now abandoned all hope of thriving pleasantly on my winnings. Whatever their motive might be, at any rate they went away in a body. When the old soldier returned, and sat down again opposite to me at the table, we had the room to ourselves. I could see the croupier, in a sort of vestibule which opened out of it, eating his supper in solitude. The silence was now deeper than ever.

A sudden change, too, had come over the "ex-brave." He assumed a portentously solemn look; and when he spoke to me again, his speech was ornamented by no oaths, enforced by no finger-snapping, enlivened by no apostrophes or exclamations.

"Listen, my dear sir," said he, in mysteriously confidential tones — "listen to an old soldier's advice. I have been to the mistress of the house (a very charming woman, with a genius for cookery!) to impress on her the necessity of making us some particularly strong and good coffee. You must drink this coffee in order to get rid of your little amiable exaltation of spirits before you think of going home — you *must,* my good and gracious friend! With all that money to take home tonight, it is a sacred duty to yourself to have your wits about you. You are known to be a winner to an enormous extent by several gentlemen present tonight, who, in a certain point of view, are very worthy and excellent fellows; but they are mortal men, my dear sir, and they have their amiable weaknesses! Need I say more? Ah, no, no! you understand me! Now, this is what you must do: send for a cabriolet when you feel quite well again, draw up all the windows when you get into it, and tell the driver to take you home only through the large and well-lighted thoroughfares. Do this, and you and your money will be safe. Do this, and tomorrow you will thank an old soldier for giving you a word of honest advice."

Just as the ex-brave ended his oration in very lachrymose tones, the coffee came in, ready poured out in two cups.

My attentive friend handed me one of the cups with a bow. I was parched with thirst, and drank it off at a draught. Almost instantly afterward I was seized with a fit of giddiness, and felt more completely intoxicated than ever. The room whirled round and round furiously; the old soldier seemed to be regularly bobbing up and down before me like the piston of a steam-engine. I was half deafened by a violent singing in my ears; a feeling of utter bewilderment, helplessness, idiocy, overcame me. I rose from my chair, holding on by the table to keep my balance, and stammered out that I felt dreadfully unwell — so unwell that I did not know how I was to get home.

"My dear friend," answered the old soldier — and even his voice seemed to be bobbing up and down as he spoke — "my dear friend, it would be madness to go home in *your* state; you would be sure to lose your money; you might be robbed and murdered with the greatest ease. *I* am going to sleep here; do *you* sleep here too. They make up capital beds in this house — take one; sleep off the effects of the wine, and go home safely with your winnings tomorrow — tomorrow, in broad daylight."

I had but two ideas left: one, that I must never let go hold of my handkerchief full of money; the other, that I must lie down somewhere immediately, and fall off into a comfortable sleep. So I agreed to the proposal about the bed, and took the offered arm of the old soldier, carrying my money with my disengaged hand. Preceded by the croupier, we passed along some passages and up a flight of stairs into

the bedroom which I was to occupy. The ex-brave shook me warmly by the hand, proposed that we should breakfast together, and then, followed by the croupier, left me for the night.

I ran to the wash-hand stand; drank some of the water in my jug; poured the rest out, and plunged my face into it; then sat down in a chair and tried to compose myself. I soon felt better. The change for my lungs from the fetid atmosphere of the gambling-room to the cool air of the apartment I now occupied, the almost equally refreshing change for my eyes from the glaring gas-lights of the "salon" to the dim, quiet flicker of one bedroom candle, aided wonderfully the restorative effects of cold water. The giddiness left me, and I began to feel a little like a reasonable being again. My first thought was of the risk of sleeping all night in a gambling-house; my second, of the still greater risk of trying to get out after the house was closed, and of going home alone at night through the streets of Paris with a large sum of money about me. I had slept in worse places than this on my travels; so I determined to lock, bolt, and barricade my door, and take my chance till the next morning.

Accordingly, I secured myself against all intrusion; looked under the bed and into the cupboard; tried the fastening of the window; and then, satisfied that I had taken every proper precaution, pulled off my upper clothing, put my light, which was a dim one, on the hearth among a feathery litter of wood-ashes, and got into bed, with the handkerchief full of money under my pillow.

I soon felt not only that I could not go to sleep, but that I could not even close my eyes. I was wide awake and in a high fever. Every nerve in my body trembled; every one of my senses seemed to be preternaturally sharpened. I tossed and rolled, and tried every kind of position, and perseveringly sought out the cold corners of the bed, and all to no purpose. Now I thrust my arms over the clothes; now I poked them under the clothes; now I violently shot my legs straight out down to the bottom of the bed; now I convulsively coiled them up as near my chin as they would go; now I shook out my crumpled pillow, changed it to the cool side, patted it flat, and lay down quietly on my back; now I fiercely doubled it in two, set it up on end, thrust it against the board of the bed, and tried a sitting posture. Every effort was in vain; I groaned with vexation as I felt that I was in for a sleepless night.

What could I do? I had no book to read. And yet, unless I found out some method of diverting my mind, I felt certain that I was in the condition to imagine all sorts of horrors; to rack my brain with forebodings of every possible and impossible danger; in short, to pass the night in suffering all conceivable varieties of nervous terror.

I raised myself on my elbow, and looked about the room — which was brightened by a lovely moonlight pouring straight through the window — to see if it contained any pictures or ornaments that I could at all clearly distinguish. While my eyes wandered from wall to wall, a remembrance of Le Maistre's delightful little book, "Voyage autour de ma

Chambre," occurred to me. I resolved to imitate the French author, and find occupation and amusement enough to relieve the tedium of my wakefulness, by making a mental inventory of every article of furniture I could see, and by following up to their sources the multitude of associations which even a chair, a table, or a wash-hand stand may be made to call forth.

In the nervous, unsettled state of my mind at that moment, I found it much easier to make my inventory than to make my reflections, and thereupon soon gave up all hope of thinking in Le Maistre's fanciful track — or, indeed, of thinking at all. I looked about the room at the different articles of furniture, and did nothing more.

There was, first, the bed I was lying in; a four-post bed, of all things in the world to meet with in Paris — yes, a thorough clumsy British four-poster, with a regular top lined with chintz, the regular fringed valance all round, the regular stifling, unwholesome curtains, which I remembered having mechanically drawn back against the posts, without particularly noticing the bed, when I first got into the room. Then there was the marble-topped wash-hand stand, from which the water I had spilled, in my hurry to pour it out, was still dripping, slowly and more slowly, on to the brick floor. Then two small chairs, with my coat, waistcoat, and trousers flung on them. Then a large elbow-chair covered with dirty white dimity, with my cravat and shirt-collar thrown over the back. Then a chest of drawers with two of the brass handles off, and a tawdry, broken china inkstand

placed on it by way of ornament for the top. Then the dressing-table, adorned by a very small looking-glass and a very large pincushion. Then the window — an unusually large window. Then a dark old picture, which the feeble candle dimly showed me. It was the picture of a fellow in a high Spanish hat, crowned with a plume of towering feathers; a swarthy, sinister ruffian, looking upward, shading his eyes with his hand, and looking intently upward — it might be at some tall gallows at which he was going to be hanged. At any rate, he had the appearance of thoroughly deserving it.

This picture put a kind of constraint upon me to look upward too — at the top of the bed. It was a gloomy and not an interesting object, and I looked back at the picture. I counted the feathers in the man's hat — they stood out in relief — three white, two green. I observed the crown of his hat, which was of a conical shape, according to the fashion supposed to have been favored by Guido Fawkes. I wondered what he was looking up at. It couldn't be at the stars; such a desperado was neither astrologer nor astronomer. It must be at the high gallows, and he was going to be hanged presently. Would the executioner come into possession of his conical crowned hat and plume of feathers? I counted the feathers again — three white, two green.

While I still lingered over this very improving and intellectual employment, my thoughts insensibly began to wander. The moonlight shining into the room reminded me of a certain moonlight night in England — the night after a picnic party in a Welsh valley. Every incident of the drive

homeward, through lovely scenery, which the moonlight made lovelier than ever, came back to my remembrance, though I had never given the picnic a thought for years; though, if I had *tried* to recollect it, I could certainly have recalled little or nothing of that scene long past. Of all the wonderful faculties that help to tell us we are immortal, which speaks the sublime truth more eloquently than memory? Here was I, in a strange house of the most suspicious character, in a situation of uncertainty, and even of peril, which might seem to make the cool exercise of my recollection almost out of the question; nevertheless remembering, quite involuntarily, places, people, conversations, minute circumstances of every kind, which I had thought forgotten for ever; which I could not possibly have recalled at will, even under the most favorable auspices. And what cause had produced in a moment the whole of this strange, complicated, mysterious effect? Nothing but some rays of moonlight shining in at my bedroom window.

I was still thinking of the picnic, of our merriment on the drive home, of the sentimental young lady who *would* quote "Childe Harold" because it was moonlight. I was absorbed by these past scenes and past amusements, when, in an instant, the thread on which my memories hung snapped asunder; my attention immediately came back to present things more vividly than ever, and I found myself, I neither knew why nor wherefore, looking hard at the picture again.

Looking for what?

Good God! the man had pulled his hat down on his

brows! No! the hat itself was gone! Where was the conical crown? Where the feathers — three white, two green? Not there! In place of the hat and feathers, what dusky object was it that now hid his forehead, his eyes, his shading hand?

Was the bed moving?

I turned on my back and looked up. Was I mad? drunk? dreaming? giddy again? or was the top of the bed really moving down — sinking slowly, regularly, silently, horribly, right down throughout the whole of its length and breadth — right down upon me, as I lay underneath?

My blood seemed to stand still. A deadly, paralyzing coldness stole all over me as I turned my head round on the pillow and determined to test whether the bedtop was really moving or not, by keeping my eye on the man in the picture.

The next look in that direction was enough. The dull, black, frousy outline of the valance above me was within an inch of being parallel with his waist. I still looked breathlessly. And steadily and slowly — very slowly — I saw the figure, and the line of frame below the figure, vanish, as the valance moved down before it.

I am, constitutionally, anything but timid. I have been on more than one occasion in peril of my life, and have not lost my self-possession for an instant; but when the conviction first settled on my mind that the bedtop was really moving, was steadily and continuously sinking down upon me, I looked up shuddering, helpless, panic-stricken, beneath the hideous machinery for murder, which was advancing closer and closer to suffocate me where I lay.

I looked up, motionless, speechless, breathless. The candle, fully spent, went out; but the moonlight still brightened the room. Down and down, without pausing and without sounding, came the bedtop, and still my panic terror seemed to bind me faster and faster to the mattress on which I lay; down and down it sank, till the dusty odor from the lining of the canopy came stealing into my nostrils.

At that final moment the instinct of self-preservation startled me out of my trance, and I moved at last. There was just room for me to roll myself sideways off the bed. As I dropped noiselessly to the floor, the edge of the murderous canopy touched me on the shoulder.

Without stopping to draw my breath, without wiping the cold sweat from my face, I rose instantly on my knees to watch the bedtop. I was literally spellbound by it. If I had heard footsteps behind me, I could not have turned round; if a means of escape had been miraculously provided for me, I could not have moved to take advantage of it. The whole life in me was, at that moment, concentrated in my eyes.

It descended: the whole canopy, with the fringe round it, came down, down, close down; so close that there was not room now to squeeze my finger between the bedtop and the bed. I felt at the sides, and discovered that what had appeared to me from beneath to be the ordinary light canopy of a four-post bed was in reality a thick, broad mattress, the substance of which was concealed by the valance and its fringe. I looked up and saw the four posts rising hideously bare. In the middle of the bedtop was a huge wooden screw

that had evidently worked it down through a hole in the ceiling, just as ordinary presses are worked down on the substance selected for compression. The frightful apparatus moved without making the faintest noise. There had been no creaking as it came down; there was now not the faintest sound from the room above. Amid a dead and awful silence I beheld before me — in the nineteenth century, and in the civilized capital of France — such a machine for secret murder by suffocation as might have existed in the worst days of the Inquisition, in the lonely inns among the Harz Mountains, in the mysterious tribunals of Westphalia! Still, as I looked on it, I could not move, I could hardly breathe; but I began to recover the power of thinking, and in a moment I discovered the murderous conspiracy framed against me in all its horror.

My cup of coffee had been drugged, and drugged too strongly. I had been saved from being smothered by having taken an overdose of some narcotic. How I had chafed and fretted at the fever-fit which had preserved my life by keeping me awake! How recklessly I had confided myself to the two wretches who had led me into this room, determined, for the sake of my winnings, to kill me in my sleep by the surest and most horrible contrivance for secretly accomplishing my destruction! How many men, winners like me, had slept, as I had proposed to sleep, in that bed, and had never been seen or heard of more! I shuddered at the bare idea of it.

But ere long all thought was again suspended by the

sight of the murderous canopy moving once more. After it had remained on the bed — as nearly as I could guess — about ten minutes, it began to move up again. The villains who worked it from above evidently believed that their purpose was now accomplished. Slowly and silently, as it had descended, that horrible bedtop rose toward its former place. When it reached the upper extremities of the four posts, it reached the ceiling too. Neither hole nor screw could be seen; the bed became in appearance an ordinary bed again, the canopy an ordinary canopy, even to the most suspicious eyes.

Now, for the first time, I was able to move, to rise from my knees, to dress myself in my upper clothing, and to consider of how I should escape. If I betrayed by the smallest noise that the attempt to suffocate me had failed, I was certain to be murdered. Had I made any noise already? I listened intently, looking toward the door.

No! no footsteps in the passage outside; no sound of a tread, light or heavy, in the room above — absolute silence everywhere. Besides locking and bolting my door, I had moved an old wooden chest against it, which I had found under the bed. To remove this chest (my blood ran cold as I thought of what its contents *might* be!) without making some disturbance was impossible; and, moreover, to think of escaping through the house, now barred up for the night, was sheer insanity. Only one chance was left me — the window. I stole to it on tiptoe.

My bedroom was on the first floor, above an entresol,

and looked into the back street. I raised my hand to open the window, knowing that on that action hung, by the merest hairbreadth, my chance of safety. They keep vigilant watch in a house of murder. If any part of the frame cracked, if the hinge creaked, I was a lost man! It must have occupied me at least five minutes, reckoning by time — five *hours*, reckoning by suspense — to open that window. I succeeded in doing it silently — in doing it with all the dexterity of a house-breaker — and then looked down into the street. To leap the distance beneath me would be almost certain destruction! Next, I looked round at the sides of the house. Down the left side ran a thick water-pipe; it passed close by the outer edge of the window. The moment I saw the pipe, I knew I was saved. My breath came and went freely for the first time since I had seen the canopy of the bed moving down upon me!

To some men the means of escape which I had discovered might have seemed difficult and dangerous enough; to *me* the prospect of slipping down the pipe into the street did not suggest even a thought of peril. I had always been accustomed, by the practice of gymnastics, to keep up my school-boy powers as a daring and expert climber, and knew that my head, hands, and feet would serve me faithfully in any hazards of ascent or descent. I had already got one leg over the window-sill, when I remembered the handkerchief filled with money under my pillow. I could well have afforded to leave it behind me, but I was revengefully determined that the miscreants of the gambling-house should miss their

plunder as well as their victim. So I went back to the bed and tied the heavy handkerchief at my back by my cravat.

Just as I had made it tight and fixed it in a comfortable place, I thought I heard a sound of breathing outside the door. The chill feeling of horror ran through me again as I listened. No! dead silence still in the passage; I had only heard the night air blowing softly into the room. The next moment I was on the window-sill, and the next I had a firm grip on the water-pipe with my hands and knees.

I slid down into the street easily and quietly, as I thought I should, and immediately set off at the top of my speed to a branch "prefecture" of police, which I knew was situated in the immediate neighborhood. A "subprefect," and several picked men among his subordinates, happened to be up, maturing, I believe, some scheme for discovering the perpetrator of a mysterious murder which all Paris was talking of just then. When I began my story, in a breathless hurry and in very bad French, I could see that the subprefect suspected me of being a drunken Englishman who had robbed somebody; but he soon altered his opinion as I went on, and before I had anything like concluded, he shoved all the papers before him into a drawer, put on his hat, supplied me with another (for I was bareheaded), ordered a file of soldiers, desired his expert followers to get ready all sorts of tools for breaking open doors and ripping up brick flooring, and took my arm, in the most friendly and familiar manner possible, to lead me with him out of the house. I will venture to say that when the subprefect was a little boy, and was

taken for the first time to the play, he was not half as much pleased as he was now at the job in prospect for him at the gambling-house!

Away we went through the streets, the subprefect cross-examining and congratulating me in the same breath as we marched at the head of our formidable posse comitatus. Sentinels were placed at the back and front of the house the moment we got to it; a tremendous battery of knocks was directed against the door; a light appeared at a window; I was told to conceal myself behind the police; then came more knocks, and a cry of "Open in the name of the law!" At that terrible summons bolts and locks gave way before an invisible hand, and the moment after the subprefect was in the passage, confronting a waiter half dressed and ghastly pale. This was the short dialogue which immediately took place:

"We want to see the Englishman who is sleeping in this house."

"He went away hours ago."

"He did no such thing. His friend went away; *he* remained. Show us to his bedroom!"

"I swear to you, Monsieur le Sous-préfet, he is not here! he —"

"I swear to you, Monsieur le Garçon, he is. He slept here; he didn't find your bed comfortable; he came to us to complain of it; here he is among my men; and here am I ready to look for a flea or two in his bedstead. Renaudin!" (calling to one of the subordinates, and pointing to the

waiter), "collar that man, and tie his hands behind him. Now then, gentlemen, let us walk upstairs!"

Every man and woman in the house was secured — the "old soldier" the first. Then I identified the bed in which I had slept, and then we went into the room above.

No object that was at all extraordinary appeared in any part of it. The subprefect looked round the place, commanded everybody to be silent, stamped twice on the floor, called for a candle, looked attentively at the spot he had stamped on, and ordered the flooring there to be carefully taken up. This was done in no time. Lights were produced, and we saw a deep raftered cavity between the floor of this room and the ceiling of the room beneath. Through this cavity there ran perpendicularly a sort of case of iron, thickly greased; and inside the case appeared the screw, which communicated with the bedtop below. Extra lengths of screw, freshly oiled; levers covered with felt; all the complete upper works of a heavy press — constructed with infernal ingenuity so as to join the fixtures below, and when taken to pieces again to go into the smallest possible compass — were next discovered and pulled out on the floor. After some little difficulty the subprefect succeeded in putting the machinery together, and, leaving his men to work it, descended with me to the bedroom. The smothering canopy was then lowered, but not so noiselessly as I had seen it lowered. When I mentioned this to the subprefect, his answer, simple as it was, had a terrible significance. "My men," said he, "are working down the bedtop for the first time; the men whose money you won were in better practice."

We left the house in the sole possession of two police agents, every one of the inmates being removed to prison on the spot. The subprefect, after taking down my *procès verbal* in his office, returned with me to my hotel to get my passport. "Do you think," I asked, as I gave it to him, "that any men have really been smothered in that bed, as they tried to smother *me?*"

"I have seen dozens of drowned men laid out at the morgue," answered the subprefect, "in whose pocket-books were found letters stating that they had committed suicide in the Seine, because they had lost everything at the gaming-table. Do I know how many of those men entered the same gambling-house that *you* entered? won as *you* won? took that bed as *you* took it? slept in it? were smothered in it? and were privately thrown into the river, with a letter of explanation written by the murderers and placed in their pocket-books? No man can say how many or how few have suffered the fate from which you have escaped. The people of the gambling-house kept their bedstead machinery a secret from *us* — even from the police! The dead kept the rest of the secret for them. Good night, or rather good morning, Monsieur Faulkner! Be at my office again at nine o'clock; in the meantime, *au revoir!*"

The rest of my story is soon told. I was examined and reëxamined; the gambling-house was strictly searched all through from top to bottom; the prisoners were separately interrogated, and two of the less guilty among them made a confession. I discovered that the old soldier was master of the gambling-house — *justice* discovered that he had been

drummed out of the army as a vagabond years ago; that he had been guilty of all sorts of villainies since; that he was in possession of stolen property, which the owners identified; and that he, the croupier, another accomplice, and the woman who had made my cup of coffee were all in the secret of the bedstead. There appeared some reason to doubt whether the inferior persons attached to the house knew anything of the suffocating machinery; and they received the benefit of that doubt, by being treated simply as thieves and vagabonds. As for the old soldier and his two head myrmidons, they went to the galleys; the woman who had drugged my coffee was imprisoned for I forget how many years; the regular attendants at the gambling-house were considered "suspicious," and placed under "surveillance"; and I became, for one whole week (which is a long time), the head "lion" in Parisian society. My adventure was dramatized by three illustrious play-makers, but never saw theatrical daylight; for the censorship forbade the introduction on the stage of a correct copy of the gambling-house bedstead.

One good result was produced by my adventure, which any censorship must have approved: it cured me of ever again trying rouge-et-noir as an amusement. The sight of a green cloth, with packs of cards and heaps of money on it, will henceforth be for ever associated in my mind with the sight of a bed canopy descending to suffocate me in the silence and darkness of the night.

THE CALDRON OF OIL

ABOUT one French league distant from the city of Toulouse there is a village called Croix-Daurade. In the military history of England, this place is associated with a famous charge of the Eighteenth Hussars, which united two separated columns of the British army on the day before the Duke of Wellington fought the battle of Toulouse. In the criminal history of France, the village is memorable as the scene of a daring crime, which was discovered and punished under circumstances sufficiently remarkable to merit preservation in the form of a plain narrative.

I. THE PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

In the year seventeen hundred, the resident priest of the village of Croix-Daurade was Monsieur Pierre-Célestin Chaubard. He was a man of no extraordinary energy or capacity, simple in his habits, and sociable in his disposition. His character was irreproachable; he was strictly con-

scientious in the performance of his duties; and he was universally respected and beloved by all his parishioners.

Among the members of his flock there was a family named Siadoux. The head of the household, Saturnin Siadoux, had been long established in business at Croix-Daurade as an oil manufacturer. At the period of the events now to be narrated, he had attained the age of sixty, and was a widower. His family consisted of five children — three young men, who helped him in the business, and two daughters. His nearest living relative was his sister, the widow Mirailhe.

The widow resided principally at Toulouse. Her time in that city was mainly occupied in winding up the business affairs of her deceased husband, which had remained unsettled for a considerable period after his death, through delays in realizing certain sums of money owing to his representative. The widow had been left very well provided for — she was still a comely, attractive woman — and more than one substantial citizen of Toulouse had shown himself anxious to persuade her into marrying for the second time. But the widow Mirailhe lived on terms of great intimacy and affection with her brother Siadoux and his family; she was sincerely attached to them, and sincerely unwilling, at her age, to deprive her nephews and nieces, by a second marriage, of the inheritance, or even of a portion of the inheritance, which would otherwise fall to them on her death. Animated by these motives, she closed her doors resolutely on all suit-

ors who attempted to pay their court to her, with the one exception of a master-butcher of Toulouse, whose name was Cantegrel.

This man was a neighbor of the widow's and had made himself useful by assisting her in the business complications which still hung about the realization of her late husband's estate. The preference which she showed for the master-butcher was thus far of the purely negative kind. She gave him no absolute encouragement; she would not for a moment admit that there was the slightest prospect of her ever marrying him; but, at the same time, she continued to receive his visits, and she showed no disposition to restrict the neighborly intercourse between them, for the future, within purely formal bounds. Under these circumstances, Saturnin Siadoux began to be alarmed, and to think it time to bestir himself. He had no personal acquaintance with Cantegrel, who never visited the village; and Monsieur Chaubard (to whom he might otherwise have applied for advice) was not in a position to give an opinion; the priest and the master-butcher did not even know each other by sight. In this difficulty, Siadoux bethought himself of inquiring privately at Toulouse, in the hope of discovering some scandalous passages in Cantegrel's early life which might fatally degrade him in the estimation of the widow Mirailhe. The investigation, as usual in such cases, produced rumors and reports in plenty, the greater part of which dated back to a period of the butcher's life when he had resided in the ancient

town of Narbonne. One of these rumors, especially, was of so serious a nature that Siadoux determined to test the truth or falsehood of it personally by traveling to Narbonne. He kept his intention a secret not only from his sister and his daughters, but also from his sons; they were young men, not overpatient in their tempers, and he doubted their discretion. Thus, nobody knew his real purpose but himself when he left home.

His safe arrival at Narbonne was notified in a letter to his family. The letter entered into no particulars relating to his secret errand: it merely informed his children of the day when they might expect him back, and of certain social arrangements which he wished to be made to welcome him on his return. He proposed, on his way home, to stay two days at Castelnaudry, for the purpose of paying a visit to an old friend who was settled there. According to this plan, his return to Croix-Daurade would be deferred until Tuesday, the twenty-sixth of April, when his family might expect to see him about sunset, in good time for supper. He further desired that a little party of friends might be invited to the meal, to celebrate the twenty-sixth of April (which was a feast-day in the village), as well as to celebrate his return. The guests whom he wished to be invited were, first, his sister; secondly, Monsieur Chaubard, whose pleasant disposition made him a welcome guest at all the village festivals; thirdly and fourthly, two neighbors, business men like himself, with whom he lived on terms of the friendliest intimacy. That was the party; and the family of Siadoux took especial

pains, as the time approached, to provide a supper worthy of the guests, who had all shown the heartiest readiness in accepting their invitations.

This was the domestic position, these were the family prospects, on the morning of the twenty-sixth of April — a memorable day, for years afterward, in the village of Croix-Daurade.

II. THE EVENTS OF THE DAY

Besides the curacy of the village church, good Monsieur Chaubard held some ecclesiastical preferment in the cathedral church of St. Stephen at Toulouse. Early in the forenoon of the twenty-sixth, certain matters connected with this preferment took him from his village curacy to the city — a distance which has been already described as not greater than one French league, or between two and three English miles.

After transacting his business, Monsieur Chaubard parted with his clerical brethren, who left him by himself in the sacristy (or vestry) of the church. Before he had quitted the room, in his turn, the beadle entered it, and inquired for the Abbé de Mariotte, one of the officiating priests attached to the cathedral.

"The Abbé has just gone out," replied Monsieur Chaubard. "Who wants him?"

"A respectable-looking man," said the beadle. "I

thought he seemed to be in some distress of mind when he spoke to me."

"Did he mention his business with the Abbé?"

"Yes, sir; he expressed himself as anxious to make his confession immediately."

"In that case," said Monsieur Chaubard, "I may be of use to him in the Abbé's absence, for I have authority to act here as confessor. Let us go into the church and see if this person feels disposed to accept my services."

When they went into the church, they found the man walking backward and forward in a restless, disordered manner. His looks were so strikingly suggestive of some serious mental perturbation, that Monsieur Chaubard found it no easy matter to preserve his composure when he first addressed himself to the stranger.

"I am sorry," he began, "that the Abbé de Mariotte is not here to offer you his services —"

"I want to make my confession," said the man, looking about him vacantly, as if the priest's words had not attracted his attention.

"You can do so at once, if you please," said Monsieur Chaubard. "I am attached to this church, and I possess the necessary authority to receive confessions in it. Perhaps, however, you are personally acquainted with the Abbé de Mariotte? Perhaps you would prefer waiting —"

"No!" said the man, roughly. "I would as soon, or sooner, confess to a stranger."

"In that case," replied Monsieur Chaubard, "be so good as to follow me."


IHS

He led the way to the confessional. The beadle, whose curiosity was excited, waited a little, and looked after them. In a few minutes he saw the curtains, which were sometimes used to conceal the face of the officiating priest, suddenly drawn. The penitent knelt with his back turned to the church. There was literally nothing to see; but the beadle waited, nevertheless, in expectation of the end.

After a long lapse of time the curtain was withdrawn, and priest and penitent left the confessional.

The change which the interval had worked in Monsieur Chaubard was so extraordinary, that the beadle's attention was altogether withdrawn, in the interest of observing it, from the man who had made the confession. He did not remark by which door the stranger left the church — his eyes were fixed on Monsieur Chaubard. The priest's naturally ruddy face was as white as if he had just risen from a long sickness; he looked straight before him, with a stare of terror, and he left the church as hurriedly as if he had been a man escaping from prison; left it without a parting word, or a farewell look, although he was noted for his courtesy to his inferiors on all ordinary occasions.

"Good Monsieur Chaubard has heard more than he bargained for," said the beadle, wandering back to the empty confessional with an interest which he had never felt in it till that moment.

The day wore on as quietly as usual in the village of Croix-Daurade. At the appointed time the supper-table was laid for the guests in the house of Saturnin Siadoux. The

widow Mirailhe and the two neighbors arrived a little before sunset. Monsieur Chaubard, who was usually punctual, did not make his appearance with them; and when the daughters of Saturnin Siadoux looked out from the upper windows, they saw no signs on the high-road of their father's return.

Sunset came, and still neither Siadoux nor the priest appeared. The little party sat waiting round the table, and waited in vain. Before long a message was sent up from the kitchen, representing that the supper must be eaten forthwith, or be spoiled; and the company began to debate the two alternatives — of waiting, or not waiting, any longer.

"It is my belief," said the widow Mirailhe, "that my brother is not coming home tonight. When Monsieur Chaubard joins us, we had better sit down to supper."

"Can any accident have happened to my father?" asked one of the two daughters, anxiously.

"God forbid!" said the widow.

"God forbid!" repeated the two neighbors, looking expectantly at the empty supper-table.

"It has been a wretched day for traveling," said Louis, the eldest son.

"It rained in torrents all yesterday," added Thomas, the second son.

"And your father's rheumatism makes him averse to traveling in wet weather," suggested the widow, thoughtfully.

"Very true!" said the first of the two neighbors, shaking his head piteously at his passive knife and fork.

Another message came up from the kitchen, and peremptorily forbade the company to wait any longer.

"But where is Monsieur Chaubard?" said the widow. "Has he been taking a journey too? Why is he absent? Has anybody seen him today?"

"I have seen him today," said the youngest son, who had not spoken yet. This young man's name was Jean; he was little given to talking, but he had proved himself, on various domestic occasions, to be the quickest and most observant member of the family.

"Where did you see him?" asked the widow.

"I met him this morning, on his way into Toulouse."

"He has not fallen ill, I hope? Did he look out of sorts when you met him?"

"He was in excellent health and spirits," said Jean. "I never saw him look better —"

"And I never saw him look worse," said the second of the neighbors, striking into the conversation with the aggressive fretfulness of a hungry man.

"What! this morning?" cried Jean, in astonishment.

"No; this afternoon," said the neighbor. "I saw him going into our church here. He was as white as our plates will be — when they come up. And what is almost as extraordinary, he passed without taking the slightest notice of me."

Jean relapsed into his customary silence. It was getting dark; the clouds had gathered while the company had been talking; and, at the first pause in the conversation, the rain,

falling again in torrents, made itself drearily audible.

"Dear, dear me!" said the widow. "If it was not raining so hard, we might send somebody to inquire after good Monsieur Chaubard."

"I'll go and inquire," said Thomas Siadoux. "It's not five minutes' walk. Have up the supper; I'll take a cloak with me; and if our excellent Monsieur Chaubard is out of his bed, I'll bring him back, to answer for himself."

With those words he left the room. The supper was put on the table forthwith. The hungry neighbor disputed with nobody from that moment, and the melancholy neighbor recovered his spirits.

On reaching the priest's house, Thomas Siadoux found him sitting alone in his study. He started to his feet, with every appearance of the most violent alarm, when the young man entered the room.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Thomas; "I am afraid I have startled you."

"What do you want?" asked Monsieur Chaubard, in a singularly abrupt, bewildered manner.

"Have you forgotten, sir, that this is the night of our supper?" remonstrated Thomas. "My father has not come back, and we can only suppose —"

At those words the priest dropped into his chair again, and trembled from head to foot. Amazed to the last degree by this extraordinary reception of his remonstrance, Thomas Siadoux remembered, at the same time, that he had engaged to bring Monsieur Chaubard back with him; and he deter-

mined to finish his civil speech as if nothing had happened.

"We are all of opinion," he resumed, "that the weather has kept my father on the road. But that is no reason, sir, why the supper should be wasted, or why you should not make one of us, as you promised. Here is a good warm cloak —"

"I can't come," said the priest. "I'm ill; I'm in bad spirits; I'm not fit to go out." He sighed bitterly, and hid his face in his hands.

"Don't say that, sir," persisted Thomas. "If you are out of spirits, let us try to cheer you. And you, in your turn, will enliven us. They are all waiting for you at home. Don't refuse, sir," pleaded the young man, "or we shall think we have offended you in some way. You have always been a good friend to our family —"

Monsieur Chaubard again rose from his chair, with a second change of manner, as extraordinary and as perplexing as the first. His eyes moistened as if the tears were rising in them; he took the hand of Thomas Siadoux, and pressed it long and warmly in his own. There was a curious mixed expression of pity and fear in the look which he now fixed on the young man.

"Of all the days in the year," he said, very earnestly, "don't doubt my friendship today. Ill as I am, I will make one of the supper party, for your sake —"

"And for my father's sake?" added Thomas, persuasively.

"Let us go to the supper," said the priest.

Thomas Siadoux wrapped the cloak round him, and they left the house.

Every one at the table noticed the change in Monsieur Chaubard. He accounted for it by declaring, confusedly, that he was suffering from nervous illness; and then added that he would do his best, notwithstanding, to promote the social enjoyment of the evening. His talk was fragmentary, and his cheerfulness was sadly forced; but he contrived, with these drawbacks, to take his part in the conversation — except in the case when it happened to turn on the absent master of the house. Whenever the name of Saturnin Siadoux was mentioned — either by the neighbors, who politely regretted that he was not present, or by the family, who naturally talked about the resting-place which he might have chosen for the night — Monsieur Chaubard either relapsed into blank silence, or abruptly changed the topic. Under these circumstances, the company, by whom he was respected and beloved, made the necessary allowances for his state of health; the only person among them who showed no desire to cheer the priest's spirits, and to humor him in his temporary fretfulness, being the silent younger son of Saturnin Siadoux.

Both Louis and Thomas noticed that, from the moment when Monsieur Chaubard's manner first betrayed his singular unwillingness to touch on the subject of their father's absence, Jean fixed his eyes on the priest with an expression of suspicious attention, and never looked away from him for the rest of the evening. The young man's absolute silence

at table did not surprise his brothers, for they were accustomed to his taciturn habits. But the sullen distrust betrayed in his close observation of the honored guest and friend of the family surprised and angered them. The priest himself seemed once or twice to be aware of the scrutiny to which he was subjected, and to feel uneasy and offended, as he naturally might. He abstained, however, from openly noticing Jean's strange behavior; and Louis and Thomas were bound, therefore, in common politeness, to abstain from noticing it also.

The inhabitants of Croix-Daurade kept early hours. Toward eleven o'clock, the company rose and separated for the night. Except the two neighbors, nobody had enjoyed the supper, and even the two neighbors, having eaten their fill, were as glad to get home as the rest. In the little confusion of parting, Monsieur Chaubard completed the astonishment of the guests at the extraordinary change in him, by slipping away alone, without waiting to bid anybody goodnight.

The widow Mirailhe and her nieces withdrew to their bedrooms, and left the three brothers by themselves in the parlor.

"Jean," said Thomas Siadoux, "I have a word to say to you. You stared at our good Monsieur Chaubard in a very offensive manner all through the evening. What did you mean by it?"

"Wait till tomorrow," said Jean, "and perhaps I may tell you."

He lit his candle, and left them. Both the brothers ob-

served that his hand trembled, and that his manner — never very winning — was on that night more serious and more unsociable than usual.

III. THE YOUNGER BROTHER

When post-time came on the morning of the twenty-seventh, no letter arrived from Saturnin Siadoux. On consideration, the family interpreted this circumstance in a favorable light. If the master of the house had not written to them, it followed, surely, that he meant to make writing unnecessary by returning on that day.

As the hours passed, the widow and her nieces looked out, from time to time, for the absent man. Toward noon they observed a little assembly of people approaching the village. Ere long, on a nearer view, they recognized at the head of the assembly, the chief magistrate of Toulouse, in his official dress. He was accompanied by his assessor (also in official dress), by an escort of archers, and by certain subordinates attached to the town-hall. These last appeared to be carrying some burden, which was hidden from view by the escort of archers. The procession stopped at the house of Saturnin Siadoux; and the two daughters, hastening to the door to discover what had happened, met the burden which the men were carrying, and saw, stretched on a litter, the dead body of their father.

The corpse had been found that morning on the banks

of the river Lers. It was stabbed in eleven places with knife or dagger wounds. None of the valuables about the dead man's person had been touched; his watch and his money were still in his pockets. Whoever had murdered him, had murdered him for vengeance, not for gain.

Some time elapsed before even the male members of the family were sufficiently composed to hear what the officers of justice had to say to them. When this result had been at length achieved, and when the necessary inquiries had been made, no information of any kind was obtained which pointed to the murderer, in the eye of the law. After expressing his sympathy, and promising that every available means should be tried to effect the discovery of the criminal, the chief magistrate gave his orders to his escort, and withdrew.

When night came, the sister and the daughters of the murdered man retired to the upper part of the house, exhausted by the violence of their grief. The three brothers were left once more alone in the parlor, to speak together of the awful calamity which had befallen them. They were of hot Southern blood, and they looked on one another with a Southern thirst for vengeance in their tearless eyes.

The silent younger son was now the first to open his lips.

"You charged me yesterday," he said to his brother Thomas, "with looking strangely at Monsieur Chaubard all the evening; and I answered, that I might tell you why I looked at him when tomorrow came. Tomorrow has come, and I am ready to tell you."

He waited a little, and lowered his voice to a whisper when he spoke again.

"When Monsieur Chaubard was at our supper-table last night," he said, "I had it in my mind that something had happened to our father, and that the priest knew it."

The two elder brothers looked at him in speechless astonishment.

"Our father has been brought back to us a murdered man!" Jean went on, still in a whisper. "I tell you, Louis — and you, Thomas — that the priest knows who murdered him."

Louis and Thomas shrank from their younger brother as if he had spoken blasphemy.

"Listen," said Jean. "No clue has been found to the secret of the murder. The magistrate has promised us to do his best; but I saw in his face that he had little hope. We must make the discovery ourselves, or our father's blood will have cried to us for vengeance, and cried in vain. Remember that, and mark my next words. You heard me say yesterday evening that I had met Monsieur Chaubard on his way to Toulouse, in excellent health and spirits. You heard our old friend and neighbor contradict me at the supper-table, and declare that he had seen the priest, some hours later, go into our church here with the face of a panic-stricken man. You saw, Thomas, how he behaved when you went to fetch him to our house. You saw, Louis, what his looks were like when he came in. The change was noticed by everybody — what was the cause of it? I saw the cause in the priest's own face

when our father's name turned up in the talk round the supper-table. Did Monsieur Chaubard join in that talk? He was the only person present who never joined in it once. Did he change it on a sudden whenever it came his way? It came his way four times; and four times he changed it — trembling, stammering, turning whiter and whiter, but still, as true as the heaven above us, shifting the talk off himself every time! Are you men? Have you brains in your heads? Don't you see, as I see, what this leads to? On my salvation I swear it — the priest knows the hand that killed our father!"

The faces of the two elder brothers darkened vindictively, as the conviction of the truth fastened itself on their minds.

"How could he know it?" they inquired, eagerly.

"He must tell us himself," said Jean.

"And if he hesitates — if he refuses to open his lips?"

"We must open them by main force."

They drew their chairs together after that last answer, and consulted for some time in whispers.

When the consultation was over, the brothers rose and went into the room where the dead body of their father was laid out. The three kissed him, in turn, on the forehead — then took hands together, and looked meaningly in each other's faces — then separated. Louis and Thomas put on their hats, and went at once to the priest's residence; while Jean withdrew by himself to the great room at the back of the house, which was used for the purposes of the oil factory.

Only one of the workmen was left in the place. He was watching an immense caldron of boiling linseed-oil.

"You can go home," said Jean, patting the man kindly on the shoulder. "There is no hope of a night's rest for me, after the affliction that has befallen us; I will take your place at the caldron. Go home, my good fellow—go home."

The man thanked him, and withdrew. Jean followed, and satisfied himself that the workman had really left the house. He then returned, and sat down by the boiling caldron.

Meanwhile Louis and Thomas presented themselves at the priest's house. He had not yet retired to bed, and he received them kindly, but with the same extraordinary agitation in his face and manner which had surprised all who saw him on the previous day. The brothers were prepared beforehand with an answer when he inquired what they wanted of him. They replied immediately that the shock of their father's horrible death had so seriously affected their aunt and their eldest sister, that it was feared the minds of both might give way, unless spiritual consolation and assistance were afforded to them that night. The unhappy priest — always faithful and self-sacrificing where the duties of his ministry were in question — at once rose to accompany the young men back to the house. He even put on his surplice, and took the crucifix with him, to impress his words of comfort all the more solemnly on the afflicted women whom he was called on to succor.

Thus innocent of all suspicion of the conspiracy to which he had fallen a victim, he was taken into the room

where Jean sat waiting by the caldron of oil, and the door was locked behind him.

Before he could speak, Thomas Siadoux openly avowed the truth.

"It is we three who want you," he said; "not our aunt, and not our sister. If you answer our questions truly, you have nothing to fear. If you refuse—" He stopped, and looked toward Jean and the boiling caldron.

Never, at the best of times, a resolute man; deprived, since the day before, of such resources of energy as he possessed, by the mental suffering which he had undergone in secret, the unfortunate priest trembled from head to foot as the three brothers closed round him. Louis took the crucifix from him, and held it; Thomas forced him to place his right hand on it; Jean stood in front of him and put the questions.

"Our father has been brought home a murdered man," he said. "Do you know who killed him?"

The priest hesitated, and the two elder brothers moved him nearer to the caldron.

"Answer us, on peril of your life," said Jean. "Say, with your hand on the blessed crucifix, do you know the man who killed our father?"

"I do know him."

"When did you make the discovery?"

"Yesterday."

"Where?"

"At Toulouse."

"Name the murderer."

At those words the priest closed his hand fast on the crucifix, and rallied his sinking courage.

"Never!" he said, firmly. "The knowledge I possess was obtained in the confessional. The secrets of the confessional are sacred. If I betray them, I commit sacrilege. I will die first!"

"Think!" said Jean. "If you keep silence, you screen the murderer. If you keep silence, you are the murderer's accomplice. We have sworn over our father's dead body to avenge him; if you refuse to speak, we will avenge him on you. I charge you again, name the man who killed him."

"I will die first," the priest reiterated, as firmly as before.

"Die, then!" said Jean. "Die in that caldron of boiling oil."

"Give him time," cried Louis and Thomas, earnestly pleading together.

"We will give him time," said the younger brother.

"There is the clock yonder, against the wall. We will count five minutes by it. In those five minutes, let him make his peace with God, or make up his mind to speak."

They waited, watching the clock. In that dreadful interval, the priest dropped on his knees and hid his face. The time passed in dead silence.

"Speak! for your own sake, for our sakes, speak!" said Thomas Siadoux, as the minute-hand reached the point at which the five minutes expired.

The priest looked up; his voice died away on his lips;

the mortal agony broke out on his face in great drops of sweat; his head sank forward on his breast.

"Lift him!" cried Jean, seizing the priest on one side. "Lift him, and throw him in!"

The two elder brothers advanced a step, and hesitated.

"Lift him, on your oath over our father's body!"

The two brothers seized him on the other side. As they lifted him to a level with the caldron, the horror of the death that threatened him burst from the lips of the miserable man in a scream of terror. The brothers held him firm at the caldron's edge. "Name the man!" they said for the last time.

The priest's teeth chattered — he was speechless. But he made a sign with his head — a sign in the affirmative. They placed him in a chair, and waited patiently until he was able to speak.

His first words were words of entreaty. He begged Thomas Siadoux to give him back the crucifix. When it was placed in his possession, he kissed it, and said, faintly, "I ask pardon of God for the sin that I am about to commit." He paused, and then looked up at the younger brother, who still stood in front of him. "I am ready," he said. "Question me, and I will answer."

Jean repeated the questions which he had put when the priest was first brought into the room.

"You know the murderer of our father?"

"I know him."

"Since when?"

"Since he made his confession to me yesterday in the Cathedral of Toulouse."

"Name him."

"His name is Cantegrel."

"The man who wanted to marry our aunt?"

"The same."

"What brought him to the confessional?"

"His own remorse."

"What were the motives for his crime?"

"There were reports against his character, and he discovered that your father had gone privately to Narbonne to make sure they were true."

"Did our father make sure of their truth?"

"He did."

"Would those discoveries have separated our aunt from Cantegrel if our father had lived to tell her of them?"

"They would. If your father had lived, he would have told your aunt that Cantegrel was married already; that he had deserted his wife at Narbonne; that she was living there with another man, under another name; and that she had herself confessed it in your father's presence."

"Where was the murder committed?"

"Between Villefranche and this village. Cantegrel had followed your father to Narbonne, and had followed him back again to Villefranche. As far as that place, he traveled in company with others, both going and returning. Beyond Villefranche, he was left alone at the ford over the river.

There Cantegrel drew the knife to kill him before he reached home and told his news to your aunt."

"How was the murder committed?"

"It was committed while your father was watering his pony by the bank of the stream. Cantegrel stole on him from behind, and struck him as he was stooping over the saddle-bow."

"This is the truth, on your oath?"

"On my oath, it is the truth."

"You may leave us."

The priest rose from his chair without assistance. From the time when the terror of death had forced him to reveal the murderer's name a great change had passed over him. He had given his answers with the immovable calmness of a man on whose mind all human interests had lost their hold. He now left the room, strangely absorbed in himself; moving with the mechanical regularity of a sleep-walker; lost to all perception of things and persons about him. At the door he stopped — woke, as it seemed, from the trance that possessed him — and looked at the three brothers with a steady, changeless sorrow, which they had never seen in him before, which they never afterward forgot.

"I forgive you," he said, quietly and solemnly. "Pray for me when my time comes."

With those last words, he left them.

The night was far advanced; but the three brothers determined to set forth instantly for Toulouse, and to place their information in the magistrate's hands before the morning dawned.

Thus far no suspicion had occurred to them of the terrible consequences which were to follow their night-interview with the priest. They were absolutely ignorant of the punishment to which a man in holy orders exposed himself, if he revealed the secrets of the confessional. No infliction of that punishment had been known in their neighborhood; for at that time, as at this, the rarest of all priestly offenses was a violation of the sacred trust confided to the confessor by the Roman Church. Conscious that they had forced the priest into the commission of a clerical offense, the brothers sincerely believed that the loss of his curacy would be the heaviest penalty which the law could exact from him. They entered Toulouse that night, discussing the atonement which they might offer to Monsieur Chaubard, and the means which they might best employ to make his future easy to him.

The first disclosure of the consequences which would certainly follow the outrage they had committed, was revealed to them when they made their deposition before the officer of justice. The magistrate listened to their narrative with horror vividly expressed in his face and manner.

"Better you had never been born," he said, "than have

avenged your father's death as you three have avenged it. Your own act has doomed the guilty and the innocent to suffer alike."

Those words proved prophetic of the truth. The end came quickly, as the priest had foreseen it, when he spoke his parting words.

The arrest of Cantegrel was accomplished without difficulty the next morning. In the absence of any other evidence on which to justify this proceeding, the private disclosure to the authorities of the secret which the priest had violated became inevitable. The Parliament of Languedoc was, under these circumstances, the tribunal appealed to; and the decision of that assembly immediately ordered the priest and the three brothers to be placed in confinement, as well as the murderer Cantegrel. Evidence was then immediately sought for, which might convict this last criminal without any reference to the revelation that had been forced from the priest — and evidence enough was found to satisfy judges whose minds already possessed the foregone certainty of the prisoner's guilt. He was put on his trial, was convicted of the murder, and was condemned to be broken on the wheel. The sentence was rigidly executed, with as little delay as the law would permit.

The cases of Monsieur Chaubard, and of the three sons of Siadoux, next occupied the judges. The three brothers were found guilty of having forced the secret of a confession from a man in holy orders, and were sentenced to death by hanging. A far more terrible expiation of his offense awaited

the unfortunate priest. He was condemned to have his limbs broken on the wheel, and to be afterward, while still living, bound to the stake and destroyed by fire.

Barbarous as the punishments of that period were, accustomed as the population was to hear of their infliction, and even to witness it, the sentences pronounced in these two cases dismayed the public mind; and the authorities were surprised by receiving petitions for mercy from Toulouse, and from all the surrounding neighborhood. But the priest's doom had been sealed. All that could be obtained, by the intercession of persons of the highest distinction, was, that the executioner should grant him the mercy of death before his body was committed to the flames. With this one modification, the sentence was executed, as the sentence had been pronounced, on the curate of Croix-Daurade.

The punishment of the three sons of Siadoux remained to be inflicted. But the people, roused by the death of the ill-fated priest, rose against this third execution with a resolution before which the local government gave away. The cause of the young men was taken up by the hot-blooded populace, as the cause of all fathers and all sons; their filial piety was exalted to the skies; their youth was pleaded in their behalf; their ignorance of the terrible responsibility which they had confronted in forcing the secret from the priest was loudly alleged in their favor. More than this, the authorities were actually warned that the appearance of the prisoners on the scaffold would be the signal for an organized revolt and rescue. Under this serious pressure, the exe-

cution was deferred, and the prisoners were kept in confinement until the popular ferment had subsided.

The delay not only saved their lives, it gave them back their liberty as well. The infection of the popular sympathy had penetrated through the prison doors. All three brothers were handsome, well-grown young men. The gentlest of the three in disposition — Thomas Siadoux — aroused the interest and won the affection of the head-jailer's daughter. Her father was prevailed on at her intercession to relax a little in his customary vigilance; and the rest was accomplished by the girl herself. One morning, the population of Toulouse heard, with every testimony of the most extravagant rejoicing, that the three brothers had escaped, accompanied by the jailer's daughter. As a necessary legal formality, they were pursued, but no extraordinary efforts were used to overtake them; and they succeeded, accordingly, in crossing the nearest frontier.

Twenty days later, orders were received from the capital to execute their sentence in effigy. They were then permitted to return to France, on condition that they never again appeared in their native place, or in any other part of the province of Languedoc. With this reservation they were left free to live where they pleased, and to repent the fatal act which had avenged them on the murderer of their father at the cost of the priest's life.

Beyond this point the official documents do not enable us to follow their career. All that is now known has been now told of the village tragedy at Croix-Daurade.

THE FATAL CRADLE

OTHERWISE

THE HEART-RENDING STORY OF MR. HEAVYSIDES

THERE has never yet been discovered a man with a grievance who objected to mention it. I am no exception to this general human rule. I have got a grievance, and I don't object to mention it. Compose your spirits to hear a pathetic story, and kindly picture me in your own mind as a baby five minutes old.

Do I understand you to say that I am too big and too heavy to be pictured in anybody's mind as a baby? Perhaps I may be — but don't mention my weight again, if you please. My weight has been the grand misfortune of my life. It spoiled all my prospects (as you will presently hear) before I was two days old.

My story begins thirty-one years ago, at eleven o'clock in the forenoon, and starts with the great mistake of my first appearance in this world, at sea, on board the merchant ship *Adventure,* Captain Gillop, five hundred tons burden, coppered, and carrying an experienced surgeon. In presenting myself to you (which I am now about to do) at that eventful period of my life when I was from five to

ten minutes old, and in withdrawing myself again from your notice (so as not to trouble you with more than a short story) before the time when I cut my first tooth, I need not hesitate to admit that I speak on hearsay knowledge only. It is knowledge, however, that may be relied on, for all that. My information comes from Captain Gillop, commander of the *Adventure* (who sent it to me in the form of a letter); from Mr. Jolly, experienced surgeon of the *Adventure* (who wrote it for me — most unfeelingly, as I think — in the shape of a humorous narrative); and from Mrs. Drabble, stewardess of the *Adventure* (who told it me by word of mouth). Those three persons were, in various degrees, spectators — I may say astonished spectators — of the events which I have now to relate.

The *Adventure*, at the time I speak of, was bound out from London to Australia. I suppose you know without my telling you that thirty years ago was long before the time of the gold-finding and the famous clipper ships. Building in the new colony and sheep-farming far up inland were the two main employments of those days, and the passengers on board our vessel were consequently builders or sheep-farmers, almost to a man.

A ship of five hundred tons, well loaded with cargo, doesn't offer first-rate accommodation to a large number of passengers. Not that the gentlefolk in the cabin had any great reason to complain. There the passage money, which was a good round sum, kept them what you call select. One or two berths in this part of the ship were even empty and

going a-begging, in consequence of there being only four cabin passengers. These are their names and descriptions:

Mr. Sims, a middle-aged man, going out on a building speculation; Mr. Purling, a weakly young gentleman, sent on a long sea-voyage, for the benefit of his health; and Mr. and Mrs. Smallchild, a young married couple, with a little independence, which Mr. Smallchild proposed to make a large one by sheep-farming.

This gentleman was reported to the captain as being very good company when on shore. But the sea altered him to a certain extent. When Mr. Smallchild was not sick, he was eating and drinking; and when he was not eating and drinking, he was fast asleep. He was perfectly patient and good-humored, and wonderfully nimble at running into his cabin when the qualms took him on a sudden; but, as for his being good company, nobody heard him say ten words together all through the voyage. And no wonder. A man can't talk in the qualms; a man can't talk while he is eating and drinking; and a man can't talk when he is asleep. And that was Mr. Smallchild's life. As for Mrs. Smallchild, she kept her cabin from first to last. But you will hear more of her presently.

These four cabin passengers, as I have already remarked, were well enough off for their accommodation. But the miserable people in the steerage — a poor place at the best of times on board the *Adventure* — were all huddled together, men and women and children, higgledy-piggledy, like sheep in a pen, except that they hadn't got the same quantity of

fine fresh air to blow over them. They were artisans and farm-laborers, who couldn't make it out in the Old Country. I have no information either of their exact numbers or of their names. It doesn't matter; there was only one family among them which need be mentioned particularly—namely, the family of the Heavysides. To wit, Simon Heavysides, intelligent and well-educated, a carpenter by trade; Susan Heavysides, his wife; and seven little Heavysides, their unfortunate offspring. My father and mother and brothers and sisters, did I understand you to say? Don't be in a hurry! I recommend you to wait a little before you make quite sure of that circumstance.

Though I myself had not, perhaps, strictly speaking, come on board when the vessel left London, my ill luck, as I firmly believe, had shipped in the *Adventure* to wait for me — and decided the nature of the voyage accordingly.

Never was such a miserable time known. Stormy weather came down on us from all points of the compass, with intervals of light, baffling winds or dead calms. By the time the *Adventure* had been three months out, Captain Gillop's naturally sweet temper began to get soured. I leave you to say whether it was likely to be much improved by a piece of news which reached him from the region of the cabin on the morning of the ninety-first day. It had fallen to a dead calm again; and the ship was rolling about helpless, with her head all round the compass, when Mr. Jolly (from whose facetious narrative I repeat all conversations exactly as they passed)

came on deck to the captain, and addressed him in these words:

"I have got some news that will rather surprise you," said Mr. Jolly, smiling and rubbing his hands. (Although the experienced surgeon has not shown much sympathy for my troubles, I won't deny that his disposition was as good as his name. To this day no amount of bad weather or hard work can upset Mr. Jolly's temper.)

"If it's news of a fair wind coming," grumbled the captain, "that would surprise me on board this ship, I can promise you!"

"It's not exactly a wind coming," said Mr. Jolly. "It's another cabin passenger."

The captain looked round at the empty sea, with the land thousands of miles away, and with not a ship in sight — turned sharply on the experienced surgeon — eyed him hard — changed color suddenly — and asked what he meant.

"I mean there's a fifth cabin passenger coming on board," persisted Mr. Jolly, grinning from ear to ear — "introduced by Mrs. Smallchild — likely to join us, I should say, toward evening — size, nothing to speak of — sex, not known at present — manners and customs, probably squally."

"Do you really mean it?" asked the captain, backing away, and turning paler and paler.

"Yes, I do," answered Mr. Jolly, nodding hard at him.

"Then I'll tell you what," cried Captain Gillop, sud-

denly flying into a violent passion, "I won't have it! the infernal weather has worried me out of my life and soul already — and I won't have it! Put if off, Jolly — tell her there isn't room enough for that sort of thing on board my vessel. What does she mean by taking us all in this way? Shameful! Shameful!"

"No! no!" remonstrated Mr. Jolly. "Don't look at it in that light. It's her first child, poor thing. How should *she* know? Give her a little more experience, and I dare say —"

"Where's her husband?" broke in the captain, with a threatening look. "I'll speak my mind to her husband, at any rate."

Mr. Jolly consulted his watch before he answered.

"Half-past eleven," he said. "Let me consider a little. It's Mr. Smallchild's regular time just now for squaring accounts with the sea. He'll have done in a quarter of an hour. In five minutes more he'll be fast asleep. At one o'clock he'll eat a hearty lunch, and go to sleep again. At half-past two he'll square accounts as before — and so on till night. You'll make nothing out of Mr. Smallchild, captain. Extraordinary man — wastes tissue, and repairs it again perpetually, in the most astonishing manner. If we are another month at sea, I believe we shall bring him into port totally comatose. — Halloo! What do *you* want?"

The steward's mate had approached the quarter-deck while the doctor was speaking. Was it a curious coincidence? This man also was grinning from ear to ear, exactly like Mr. Jolly.

"You're wanted in the steerage, sir," said the steward's mate to the doctor. "A woman taken bad, name of Heavysides."

"Nonsense!" cried Mr. Jolly. "Ha, ha, ha! You don't mean — eh?"

"That's it, sir, sure enough," said the steward's mate, in the most positive manner.

Captain Gillop looked all around him in silent desperation; lost his sea-legs for the first time these twenty years; staggered back till he was brought all standing by the side of his own vessel; dashed his fist on the bulwark, and found language to express himself in, at the same moment.

"This ship is bewitched," said the captain, wildly. "Stop!" he called out, recovering himself a little as the doctor bustled away to the steerage. "Stop! If it's true, Jolly, send her husband here aft to me. Damme, I'll have it out with one of the husbands!" said the captain, shaking his fist viciously at the empty air.

Ten minutes passed; and then there came staggering toward the captain, tottering this way and that with the rolling of the becalmed vessel, a long, lean, melancholy, light-haired man, with a Roman nose, a watery blue eye, and a complexion profusely spotted with large brown freckles. This was Simon Heavysides, the intelligent carpenter, with the wife and the family of seven small children on board.

"Oh! you're the man, are you?" said the captain.

The ship lurched heavily; and Simon Heavysides staggered away with a run to the opposite side of the deck, as if

he preferred going straight overboard into the sea to answering the captain's question.

"You're the man — are you?" repeated the captain, following him, seizing him by the collar, and pinning him up fiercely against the bulwark. "It's your wife — is it? You infernal rascal! what do you mean by turning my ship into a lying-in hospital? You have committed an act of mutiny; or, if it isn't mutiny, it's next door to it. I've put a man in irons for less! I've more than half a mind to put *you* in irons! Hold up, you slippery lubber! What do you mean by bringing passengers I don't bargain for on board my vessel? What have you to got to say for yourself, before I clap the irons on you?"

"Nothing, sir," answered Simon Heavysides, accepting the captain's strong language without a word of protest. "As for the punishment you mentioned just now, sir," continued Simon, "I wish to say — having seven children more than I know how to provide for, and an eighth coming to make things worse — I respectfully wish to say, sir, that my mind is in irons already; and I don't know as it will make much difference if you put my body in irons along with it."

The captain mechanically let go of the carpenter's collar; the mild despair of the man melted him in spite of himself.

"Why did you come to sea? Why didn't you wait ashore till it was all over?" asked the captain, as sternly as he could.

"It's no use waiting, sir," remarked Simon. "In our line of life, as soon as it's over it begins again. There's no

end to it that I can see," said the miserable carpenter, after a moment's meek consideration — "except the grave."

"Who's talking about the grave?" cried Mr. Jolly, coming up at that moment. "It's births we've got to do with on board this vessel — not burials. Captain Gillop, this woman, Mrs. Heavysides, can't be left in your crowded steerage in her present condition. She must be moved off into one of the empty berths — and the sooner the better, I can tell you!"

The captain began to look savage again. A steerage passenger in one of his "state-rooms" was a nautical anomaly subversive of all discipline. He eyed the carpenter once more, as if he was mentally measuring him for a set of irons.

"I'm very sorry, sir," Simon remarked politely—"very sorry that any inadvertence of mine or Mrs. Heavysides —"

"Take your long carcass and your long tongue forward!" thundered the captain. "When talking will mend matters, I'll send for you again. Give your own orders, Jolly," he went on, resignedly, as Simon staggered off. "Turn the ship into a nursery as soon as you like!"

Five minutes later — so expeditious was Mr. Jolly — Mrs. Heavysides appeared horizontally on deck, shrouded in blankets and supported by three men. When this interesting procession passed the captain, he shrank aside from it with as vivid an appearance of horror as if a wild bull was being carried by him instead of a British matron.

The sleeping-berths below opened on either side out of the main cabin. On the left-hand side (looking toward the

ship's bowsprit) was Mrs. Smallchild. On the right-hand side, opposite to her, the doctor established Mrs. Heavysides. A partition of canvas was next run up, entirely across the main cabin. The smaller of the two temporary rooms thus made lay nearest the stairs leading on deck, and was left free to the public. The larger was kept sacred to the doctor and his mysteries. When an old clothes-basket, emptied, cleaned, and comfortably lined with blankets (to serve for a makeshift cradle), had been in due course of time carried into the inner cabin, and had been placed midway between the two sleeping-berths, so as to be easily producible when wanted, the outward and visible preparations of Mr. Jolly were complete; the male passengers had all taken refuge on deck; and the doctor and the stewardess were left in undisturbed possession of the lower regions.

While it was still early in the afternoon the weather changed for the better. For once in a way, the wind came from a fair quarter, and the *Adventure* bowled along pleasantly before it almost on an even keel. Captain Gillop mixed with the little group of male passengers on the quarter-deck, restored to his sweetest temper; and set them his customary example, after dinner, of smoking a cigar.

"If this fine weather lasts, gentlemen," he said, "we shall make out very well with our meals up here, and we shall have our two small extra cabin passengers christened on dry land in a week's time, if their mothers approve of it. How do you feel in your mind, sir, about your good lady?"

Mr. Smallchild (to whom the inquiry was addressed)

had his points of external personal resemblance to Simon Heavysides. He was neither so tall nor so lean, certainly — but he, too, had a Roman nose, and light hair, and watery blue eyes. With careful reference to his peculiar habits at sea, he had been placed conveniently close to the bulwark, and had been raised on a heap of old sails and cushions, so that he could easily get his head over the ship's side when occasion required. The food and drink which assisted in "restoring his tissue," when he was not asleep and not "squaring accounts with the sea," lay close to his hand. It was then a little after three o'clock; and the snore with which Mr. Smallchild answered the captain's inquiry showed that he had got round again, with the regularity of clockwork, to the period of the day when he recruited himself with sleep.

"What an insensible blockhead that man is!" said Mr. Sims, the middle-aged passenger, looking across the deck contemptuously at Mr. Smallchild.

"If the sea had the same effect on you that it has on him," retorted the invalid passenger, Mr. Purling, "you would just be as insensible yourself."

Mr. Purling (who was a man of sentiment) disagreed with Mr. Sims (who was a man of business) on every conceivable subject, all through the voyage. Before, however, they could continue the dispute about Mr. Smallchild, the doctor surprised them by appearing from the cabin.

"Any news from below, Jolly?" asked the captain, anxiously.

"None whatever," answered the doctor. "I've come to idle the afternoon away up here, along with the rest of you."

As events turned out, Mr. Jolly idled away an hour and a half exactly. At the end of that time Mrs. Drabble, the stewardess, appeared with a face of mystery, and whispered, nervously, to the doctor.

"Please to step below directly, sir."

"Which of them is it?" asked Mr. Jolly.

"*Both* of them," answered Mrs. Drabble, emphatically.

The doctor looked grave; the stewardess looked frightened. The two immediately disappeared together.

"I suppose, gentlemen," said Captain Gillop, addressing Mr. Purling, Mr. Sims, and the first mate, who had just joined the party — "I suppose it's only fit and proper, in the turn things have taken, to shake up Mr. Smallchild? And I don't doubt but what we ought to have the other husband handy, as a sort of polite attention under the circumstances. Pass the word forward there, for Simon Heavysides. Mr. Smallchild, sir! rouse up! Here's your good lady — Hang me, gentlemen, if I know exactly how to put it to him."

"Yes. Thank you," said Mr. Smallchild, opening his eyes drowsily. "Biscuit and cold bacon, as usual — when I'm ready. I'm not ready yet. Thank you. Good-afternoon." Mr. Smallchild closed his eyes again, and became, in the doctor's phrase, "totally comatose."

Before Captain Gillop could hit on any new plan for

rousing this imperturbable passenger, Simon Heavysides once more approached the quarter-deck.

"I spoke a little sharp to you, just now, my man," said the captain, "being worried in my mind by what's going on on board this vessel. But I'll make it up to you, never fear. Here's your wife in what they call an interesting situation. It's only right you should be within easy hail of her. I look upon you, Heavysides, as a steerage passenger in difficulties; and I freely give you leave to stop here along with us till it's all over."

"You are very good, sir," said Simon; "and I am indeed thankful to you and to these gentlemen. But please to remember, I have seven children already in the steerage — and there's nobody left to mind 'em but me. My wife has got over it uncommonly well, sir, on seven previous occasions — and I don't doubt but what she'll conduct herself in a similar manner on the eighth. It will be a satisfaction to her mind, Captain Gillop and gentlemen, if she knows I'm out of the way, and minding the children. For which reason, I respectfully take my leave." With those words Simon made his bow, and returned to his family.

"Well, gentlemen, these two husbands take it easy enough, at any rate!" said the captain. "One of them is used to it, to be sure; and the other is —"

Here a banging of cabin doors below, and a hurrying of footsteps, startled the speaker and his audience into momentary silence and attention.

"Ease her with the helm, Williamson!" said Captain Gillop, addressing the man who was steering the vessel. "In my opinion, gentlemen, the less the ship pitches the better, in the turn things are taking now."

The afternoon wore on into evening, and evening into night.

Mr. Smallchild performed the daily ceremonies of his nautical existence as punctually as usual. He was aroused to a sense of Mrs. Smallchild's situation when he took his biscuit and bacon; lost the sense again when the time came round for "squaring his accounts;" recovered it in the interval which ensued before he went to sleep; lost it again, as a matter of course, when his eyes closed once more — and so on through the evening and early night. Simon Heavysides received messages occasionally (through the captain's care), telling him to keep his mind easy; returned messages mentioning that his mind was easy, and that the children were pretty quiet, but never approached the deck in his own person. Mr. Jolly now and then showed himself; said "All right — no news;" took a little light refreshment, and disappeared again as cheerful as ever. The fair breeze still held; the captain's temper remained unruffled; the man at the helm eased the vessel, from time to time, with the most anxious consideration. Ten o'clock came; the moon rose and shone superbly; the nightly grog made its appearance on the quarter-deck; the captain gave the passengers the benefit of his company; and still nothing happened. Twenty minutes more of suspense slowly succeeded each other —

and then, at last, Mr. Jolly was seen suddenly to ascend the cabin stairs.

To the amazement of the little group on the quarter-deck, the doctor held Mrs. Drabble, the stewardess, fast by the arm, and, without taking the slightest notice of the captain or the passengers, placed her on the nearest seat he could find. As he did this his face became visible in the moonlight, and displayed to the startled spectators an expression of blank consternation.

"Compose yourself, Mrs. Drabble," said the doctor, in tones of unmistakable alarm. "Keep quiet, and let the air blow over you. Collect yourself, ma'am — for Heaven's sake, collect yourself!"

Mrs. Drabble made no answer. She beat her hands vacantly on her knees, and stared straight before her, like a woman panic-stricken.

"What's wrong?" asked the captain, setting down his glass of grog in dismay. "Anything amiss with those two unfortunate women?"

"Nothing," said the doctor. "Both doing admirably well."

"Anything queer with their babies?" continued the captain. "Are there more than you bargained for, Jolly? Twins, for instance?"

"No! no!" replied Mr. Jolly, impatiently. "A baby apiece — both boys — both in first-rate condition. Judge for yourselves," added the doctor, as the two new cabin passengers tried their lungs below for the first time, and

found that they answered their purpose in the most satisfactory manner.

"What the devil's amiss, then, with you and Mrs. Drabble?" persisted the captain, beginning to lose his temper again.

"Mrs. Drabble and I are two innocent people, and we have got into the most dreadful scrape that ever you heard of!" was Mr. Jolly's startling answer.

The captain, followed by Mr. Purling and Mr. Sims, approached the doctor with looks of horror. Even the man at the wheel stretched himself over it as far as he could to hear what was coming next. The only uninterested person present was Mr. Smallchild. His time had come round for going to sleep again, and he was snoring peacefully, with his biscuit and bacon close beside him.

"Let's hear the worst of it at once, Jolly," said the captain, a little impatiently.

The doctor paid no heed to his request. His whole attention was absorbed by Mrs. Drabble. "Are you better now, ma'am?" he asked, anxiously.

"No better in my mind," answered Mrs. Drabble, beginning to beat her knees again. "Worse, if anything."

"Listen to me," said Mr. Jolly, coaxingly. "I'll put the whole case over again to you, in a few plain questions. You'll find it all come back to your memory, if you only follow me attentively, and if you take time to think and collect yourself before you attempt to answer."

Mrs. Drabble bowed her head in speechless submission — and listened. Everybody else on the quarter-deck listened, except the impenetrable Mr. Smallchild.

"Now, ma'am!" said the doctor. "Our troubles began in Mrs. Heavyside's cabin, which is situated on the starboard side of the ship?"

"They did, sir," replied Mrs. Drabble.

"Good! We went backward and forward, an infinite number of times, between Mrs. Heavysides (starboard) and Mrs. Smallchild (larboard) — but we found that Mrs. Heavysides, having got the start, kept it — and when I called out, 'Mrs. Drabble! here's a chopping boy for you; come and take him!' — I called out starboard, didn't I?"

"Starboard, sir — I'll take my oath of it," said Mrs. Drabble.

"Good again! 'Here's a chopping boy,' I said. 'Take him, ma'am, and make him comfortable in the cradle.' And you took him and made him comfortable in the cradle, accordingly? Now where was the cradle?"

"In the main cabin, sir," replied Mrs. Drabble.

"Just so! In the main cabin, because we hadn't got room for it in either of the sleeping-cabins. You put the starboard baby (otherwise Heavysides) in the clothes-basket cradle in the main cabin. Good once more. How was the cradle placed?"

"Crosswise to the ship, sir," said Mrs. Drabble.

"Crosswise to the ship? That is to say, with one side

longwise toward the stern of the vessel, and one side longwise toward the bows. Bear that in mind — and now follow me a little further. No! no! don't say you can't, and your head's in a whirl. My next question will steady it. Carry your mind on half an hour, Mrs. Drabble. At the end of half an hour you heard my voice again; and my voice called out, 'Mrs. Drabble! here's another chopping boy for you; come and take him!' — and you came and took him larboard, didn't you?"

"Larboard, sir, I don't deny it," answered Mrs. Drabble.

"Better and better! 'Here is another chopping boy,' I said. 'Take him, ma'am, and make him comfortable in the cradle, along with number one.' And you took the larboard baby (otherwise Smallchild), and made him comfortable in the cradle along with the starboard baby (otherwise Heavysides), accordingly? Now what happened after that?"

"Don't ask me, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Drabble, losing her self-control, and wringing her hands desperately.

"Steady, ma'am! I'll put it to you as plain as print. Steady! and listen to me. Just as you had made the larboard baby comfortable I had occasion to send you into the starboard (or Heavysides) cabin to fetch something which I wanted in the larboard (or Smallchild) cabin; I kept you there a little while along with me; I left you and went into the Heavysides cabin, and called to you to bring me something I wanted out of the Smallchild cabin, but before you got half-way across the main cabin I said, 'No; stop where

you are, and I'll come to you;' immediately after which Mrs. Smallchild alarmed you, and you came across to me of your own accord; and thereupon I stopped you in the main cabin, and said, 'Mrs. Drabble, your mind's getting confused; sit down and collect your scattered intellects;' and you sat down and tried to collect them —"

("And couldn't, sir," interposed Mrs. Drabble, parenthetically. "Oh, my head! my head!")

— "And tried to collect your scattered intellects, and couldn't?" continued the doctor. "And the consequence was, when I came out from the Smallchild cabin to see how you were getting on, I found you with the clothes-basket cradle hoisted up on the cabin table, staring down at the babies inside, with your mouth dropped open, and both your hands twisted in your hair? And when I said, 'Anything wrong with either of those two fine boys, Mrs. Drabble?' you caught me by the coat collar, and whispered in my right ear these words, 'Lord save us and help us, Mr. Jolly, I've confused the two babies in my mind, and I don't know which is which!' "

"And I don't know now!" cried Mrs. Drabble, hysterically. "Oh, my head! my head! I don't know now!"

"Captain Gillop and gentlemen," said Mr. Jolly, wheeling round and addressing his audience with the composure of sheer despair, "that is the Scrape — and, if you ever heard of a worse one, I'll trouble you to compose this miserable woman by mentioning it immediately."

Captain Gillop looked at Mr. Purling and Mr. Sims. Mr. Purling and Mr. Sims looked at Captain Gillop. They were all three thunderstruck — and no wonder.

"Can't *you* throw any light on it, Jolly?" inquired the captain, who was the first to recover himself.

"If you knew what I have had to do below, you wouldn't ask me such a question as that," replied the doctor. "Remember that I have had the lives of two women and two children to answer for — remember that I have been cramped up in two small sleeping-cabins, with hardly room to turn round in, and just light enough from two miserable little lamps to see my hand before me; remember the professional difficulties of the situation, the ship rolling about under me all the while, and the stewardess to compose into the bargain; bear all that in mind, will you, and then tell me how much spare time I had on my hands for comparing two boys together inch by inch — two boys born at night, within half an hour of each other, on board a ship at sea. Ha, ha! I only wonder the mothers and the boys and the doctor are all five of them alive to tell the story!"

"No marks on one or other of them that happened to catch your eye?" asked Mr. Sims.

"They must have been strongish marks to catch my eye in the light I had to work by, and in the professional difficulties I had to grapple with," said the doctor. "I saw they were both straight well-formed children — and that's all I saw."

"Are their infant features sufficiently developed to indi-

cate a family likeness?" inquired Mr. Purling. "Should you say they took after their fathers or their mothers?"

"Both of them have light eyes, and light hair — such as it is," replied Mr. Jolly, doggedly. "Judge for yourself."

"Mr. Smallchild has light eyes and light hair," remarked Mr. Sims.

"And Simon Heavysides has light eyes and light hair," rejoined Mr. Purling.

"I should recommend waking Mr. Smallchild, and sending for Heavysides, and letting the two fathers toss up for it," suggested Mr. Sims.

"The parental feeling is not to be trifled with in that heartless manner," retorted Mr. Purling. "I should recommend trying the Voice of Nature."

"What may that be, sir?" inquired Captain Gillop, with great curiosity.

"The maternal instinct," replied Mr. Purling. "The mother's intuitive knowledge of her own child."

"Ay, ay!" said the captain. "Well thought of. What do you say, Jolly, to the Voice of Nature?"

The doctor held up his hand impatiently. He was engaged in resuming the effort to rouse Mrs. Drabble's memory by a system of amateur cross-examination, with the unsatisfactory result of confusing her more helplessly than ever.

Could she put the cradle back, in her own mind, into its original position? No. Could she remember whether she laid the starboard baby (otherwise Heavysides) on the side of the cradle nearest the stern of the ship, or nearest the

bows? No. Could she remember any better about the larboard baby (otherwise Smallchild)? No. Why did she move the cradle on to the cabin table, and so bewilder herself additionally, when she was puzzled already? Because it came over her, on a sudden, that she had forgotten, in the dreadful confusion of the time, which was which; and of course she wanted to look closer at them, and see; and she couldn't see; and to her dying day she should never forgive herself; and let them throw her overboard, for a miserable wretch, if they liked — and so on, till the persevering doctor was wearied out at last, and gave up Mrs. Drabble, and gave up, with her, the whole case.

"I see nothing for it but the Voice of Nature," said the captain, holding fast to Mr. Purling's idea. "Try it, Jolly — you can but try it."

"Something must be done," said the doctor. "I can't leave the women alone any longer, and the moment I get below they will both ask for their babies. Wait here till you're fit to be seen, Mrs. Drabble, and then follow me. Voice of Nature!" added Mr. Jolly, contemptuously, as he descended the cabin stairs. "Oh yes, I'll try it — much good the Voice of Nature will do us, gentlemen. You shall judge for yourselves."

Favored by the night, Mr. Jolly cunningly turned down the dim lamps in the sleeping-cabins to a mere glimmer, on the pretext that the light was bad for his patients' eyes. He then took up the first of the two unlucky babies that came to hand, marked the clothes in which it was wrapped with a blot of ink, and carried it in to Mrs. Smallchild, choosing

her cabin merely because he happened to be nearest to it. The second baby (distinguished by having no mark) was taken by Mrs. Drabble to Mrs. Heavysides. For a certain time the two mothers and the two babies were left together. They were then separated again by medical order; and were afterward re-united, with the difference that the marked baby went on this occasion to Mrs. Heavysides, and the unmarked baby to Mrs. Smallchild — the result, in the obscurity of the sleeping-cabins, proving to be that one baby did just as well as the other, and that the Voice of Nature was (as Mr. Jolly had predicted) totally incompetent to settle the existing difficulty.

"While night serves us, Captain Gillop, we shall do very well," said the doctor, after he had duly reported the failure of Mr. Purling's suggested experiment. "But when morning comes, and daylight shows the difference between the children, we must be prepared with a course of some kind. If the two mothers below get the slightest suspicion of the case as it stands, the nervous shock of the discovery may do dreadful mischief. They must be kept deceived, in the interests of their own health. We must choose a baby for each of them when tomorrow comes, and then hold to the choice, till the mothers are well and up again. The question is, who's to take the responsibility? I don't usually stick at trifles — but I candidly admit that *I*'m afraid of it."

"I decline meddling in the matter on the ground that I am a perfect stranger," said Mr. Sims.

"And I object to interfere, from precisely similar motives," added Mr. Purling, agreeing for the first time with

a proposition that emanated from his natural enemy all through the voyage.

"Wait a minute, gentlemen," said Captain Gillop. "I've got this difficult matter, as I think, in its right bearings. We must make a clean breast of it to the husbands, and let *them* take the responsibility."

"I believe they won't accept it," observed Mr. Sims.

"And I believe they will," asserted Mr. Purling, relapsing into his old habits.

"If they won't," said the captain, firmly, "I'm master on board this ship — and, as sure as my name is Thomas Gillop, *I'll* take the responsibility!"

This courageous declaration settled all difficulties for the time being; and a council was held to decide on future proceedings. It was resolved to remain passive until the next morning, on the last faint chance that a few hours' sleep might compose Mrs. Drabble's bewildered memory. The babies were to be moved into the main cabin before the daylight grew bright — or, in other words, before Mrs. Smallchild or Mrs. Heavysides could identify the infant who had passed the night with her. The doctor and the captain were to be assisted by Mr. Purling, Mr. Sims, and the first mate, in the capacity of witnesses; and the assembly so constituted was to meet, in consideration of the emergency of the case, at six o'clock in the morning, punctually. At six o'clock, accordingly, with the weather fine, and the wind still fair, the proceedings began. For the last time Mr. Jolly cross-examined Mrs. Drabble, assisted by the captain, and super-

vised by the witnesses. Nothing whatever was elicited from the unfortunate stewardess. The doctor pronounced her confusion to be chronic, and the captain and the witnesses unanimously agreed with him.

The next experiment tried was the revelation of the true state of the case to the husbands.

Mr. Smallchild happened, on this occasion, to be "squaring his accounts" for the morning; and the first articulate words which escaped him in reply to the disclosure were, "Deviled biscuit and anchovy paste." Further perseverance merely elicited an impatient request that they would "pitch him overboard at once, and the two babies along with him." Serious remonstrance was tried next, with no better effect. "Settle it how you like," said Mr. Smallchild, faintly. "Do you leave it to me, sir, as commander of this vessel?" asked Captain Gillop. (No answer.) "Nod your head, sir, if you can't speak." Mr. Smallchild nodded his head roundwise on his pillow — and fell asleep. "Does that count for leave to me to act?" asked Captain Gillop of the witnesses. And the witnesses answered, decidedly, Yes.

The ceremony was then repeated with Simon Heavysides, who responded, as became so intelligent a man, with a proposal of his own for solving the difficulty.

"Captain Gillop and gentlemen," said the carpenter, with fluent and melancholy politeness, "I should wish to consider Mr. Smallchild before myself in this matter. I am quite willing to part with my baby (whichever he is); and I respectfully propose that Mr. Smallchild should take *both*

the children, and so make quite sure that he has really got possession of his own son."

The only immediate objection to this ingenious proposition was started by the doctor, who sarcastically inquired of Simon, "what he thought Mrs. Heavysides would say to it?" The carpenter confessed that this consideration had escaped him, and that Mrs. Heavysides was only too likely to be an irremovable obstacle in the way of the proposed arrangement. The witnesses all thought so too; and Heavysides and his idea were dismissed together, after Simon had first gratefully expressed his entire readiness to leave it all to the captain.

"Very well, gentlemen," said Captain Gillop. "As commander on board, I reckon next after the husbands in the matter of responsibility. I have considered this difficulty in all its bearings, and I'm prepared to deal with it. The Voice of Nature (which you proposed, Mr. Purling) has been found to fail. The tossing up for it (which you proposed, Mr. Sims) doesn't square altogether with my notions of what's right in a very serious business. No, sir! I've got my own plan; and I'm now about to try it. Follow me below, gentlemen, to the steward's pantry."

The witnesses looked round on one another in the profoundest astonishment — and followed.

"Pickerel," said the captain, addressing the steward, "bring out the scales."

The scales were of the ordinary kitchen sort, with a tin tray on one side to hold the commodity to be weighed, and

a stout iron slab on the other to support the weights. Pickerel placed these scales upon a neat little pantry table, fitted on the ball-and-socket principle, so as to save the breaking of crockery by swinging with the motion of the ship.

"Put a clean duster in the tray," said the captain. "Doctor," he continued, when this had been done, "shut the doors of the sleeping-berths (for fear of the women hearing anything), and oblige me by bringing those two babies in here."

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Drabble, who had been peeping guiltily into the pantry — "oh, don't hurt the little dears! If anybody suffers, let it be me!"

"Hold your tongue, if you please, ma'am," said the captain. "And keep the secret of these proceedings, if you wish to keep your place. If the ladies ask for their children, say they will have them in ten minutes' time."

The doctor came in, and set down the clothes-basket cradle on the pantry floor. Captain Gillop immediately put on his spectacles, and closely examined the two unconscious innocents who lay beneath him.

"Six of one and half a dozen of the other," said the captain. "I don't see any difference between them. Wait a bit, though! Yes, I do. One's a bald baby. Very good. We'll begin with that one. Doctor, strip the bald baby, and put him in the scales."

The bald baby protested — in his own language — but in vain. In two minutes he was flat on his back in the tin tray, with the clean duster under him to take the chill off.

"Weigh him accurately, Pickerel," continued the captain. "Weigh him, if necessary, to an eighth of an ounce. Gentlemen! watch this proceeding closely; it's a very important one."

While the steward was weighing and the witnesses were watching, Captain Gillop asked his first mate for the log-book of the ship, and for pen and ink.

"How much, Pickerel?" asked the captain, opening the book.

"Seven pounds one ounce and a quarter," answered the steward.

"Right, gentlemen?" pursued the captain.

"Quite right," said the witnesses.

"Bald child — distinguished as Number One — weight, seven pounds one ounce and a quarter (avoirdupois)," repeated the captain, writing down the entry in the log-book. "Very good. We'll put the bald baby back now, doctor, and try the hairy one next."

The hairy one protested — also in his own language — and also in vain.

"How much, Pickerel?" asked the captain.

"Six pounds fourteen ounces and three-quarters," replied the steward.

"Right, gentlemen?" inquired the captain.

"Quite right," answered the witnesses.

"Hairy child — distinguished as Number Two — weight, six pounds fourteen ounces and three-quarters (avoirdupois)," repeated and wrote the captain. "Much obliged to you, Jolly — that will do. When you have got the

other baby back in the cradle, tell Mrs. Drabble neither of them must be taken out of it till further orders; and then be so good as to join me and these gentlemen on deck. If anything of a discussion rises up among us, we won't run the risk of being heard in the sleeping-berths." With these words Captain Gillop led the way on deck, and the first mate followed with the log-book and the pen and ink.

"Now, gentlemen," began the captain, when the doctor had joined the assembly, "my first mate will open these proceedings by reading from the log a statement which I have written myself, respecting this business, from beginning to end. If you find it all equally correct with the statement of what the two children weigh, I'll trouble you to sign it, in your quality of witnesses, on the spot."

The first mate read the narrative, and the witnesses signed it, as perfectly correct. Captain Gillop then cleared his throat, and addressed his expectant audience in these words:

"You'll all agree with me, gentlemen, that justice is justice, and that like must to like. Here's my ship of five hundred tons, fitted with her spars accordingly. Say she's a schooner of a hundred and fifty tons, the veriest landsman among you, in that case, wouldn't put such masts as these into her. Say, on the other hand, she's an Indiaman of a thousand tons, would our spars (excellent good sticks as they are, gentlemen) be suitable for a vessel of that capacity? Certainly not. A schooner's spars to a schooner, and a ship's spars to a ship, in fit and fair proportion."

Here the captain paused, to let the opening of his speech sink well into the minds of the audience. The audience encouraged him with the parliamentary cry of "Hear! hear!" The captain went on:

"In the serious difficulty which now besets us, gentlemen, I take my stand on the principle which I have just stated to you. My decision is as follows: Let us give the heaviest of the two babies to the heaviest of the two women; and let the lightest then fall, as a matter of course, to the other. In a week's time, if this weather holds, we shall all (please God) be in port; and if there's a better way out of this mess than *my* way, the parsons and lawyers ashore may find it, and welcome."

With those words the captain closed his oration; and the assembled council immediately sanctioned the proposal submitted to them, with all the unanimity of men who had no idea of their own to set up in opposition.

Mr. Jolly was next requested (as the only available authority) to settle the question of weight between Mrs. Smallchild and Mrs. Heavysides, and decided it, without a moment's hesitation, in favor of the carpenter's wife, on the indisputable ground that she was the tallest and stoutest woman of the two. Thereupon the bald baby, "distinguished as Number One," was taken into Mrs. Heavysides' cabin; and the hairy baby, "distinguished as Number Two," was accorded to Mrs. Smallchild; the Voice of Nature, neither in the one case nor in the other, raising the slightest objection to the captain's principle of distribution. Before seven

o'clock Mr. Jolly reported that the mothers and sons, larboard and starboard, were as happy and comfortable as any four people on board ship could possibly wish to be; and the captain thereupon dismissed the council with these parting remarks:

"We'll get the studding-sails on the ship now, gentlemen, and make the best of our way to port. Breakfast, Pickerel, in half an hour, and plenty of it! I doubt if that unfortunate Mrs. Drabble has heard the last of this business yet. We must all lend a hand, gentlemen, and pull her through if we can. In other respects the job's over, so far as we are concerned; and the parsons and lawyers must settle it ashore."

The parsons and the lawyers did nothing of the sort, for the plain reason that nothing was to be done. In ten days the ship was in port, and the news was broken to the two mothers. Each one of the two adored her baby, after ten day's experience of it — and each one of the two was in Mrs. Drabble's condition of not knowing which was which.

Every test was tried. First, the test by the doctor, who only repeated what he had told the captain. Secondly, the test by personal resemblance; which failed in consequence of the light hair, blue eyes, and Roman noses shared in common by the fathers, and the light hair, blue eyes, and no noses worth mentioning shared in common by the children. Thirdly, the test of Mrs. Drabble, which began and ended in fierce talking on one side and floods of tears on the other. Fourthly, the test by legal decision, which broke down

through the total absence of any instructions for the law to act on. Fifthly, and lastly, the test by appeal to the husbands, which fell to the ground in consequence of the husbands knowing nothing about the matter in hand. The captain's barbarous test by weight remained the test still — and here am I, a man of the lower order, without a penny to bless myself with, in consequence.

Yes! I was the bald baby of that memorable period. My excess in weight settled my destiny in life. The fathers and mothers on either side kept the babies according to the captain's principle of distribution, in despair of knowing what else to do. Mr. Smallchild, who was sharp enough when not seasick, made his fortune. Simon Heavysides persisted in increasing his family, and died in the work-house.

Judge for yourself (as Mr. Jolly might say) how the two boys born at sea fared in after-life. I, the bald baby, have seen nothing of the hairy baby for years past. He may be short, like Mr. Smallchild — but I happen to know that he is wonderfully like Heavysides, deceased, in the face. I may be tall, like the carpenter — but I have the Smallchild eyes, hair, and expression, notwithstanding. Make what you can of that! You will find it come, in the end, to the same thing. Smallchild, junior, prospers in the world, because he weighed six pounds, fourteen ounces and three-quarters. Heavysides, junior, fails in the world, because he weighed seven pounds one ounce and a quarter. Such is destiny, and such is life. I'll never forgive *my* destiny as long as I live. There is my grievance. I wish you good morning.

MR. CAPTAIN
AND THE NYMPH

"THE Captain is still in the prime of life," the widow remarked. "He has given up his ship; he possesses a sufficient income, and he has nobody to live with him. I should like to know why he doesn't marry."

"The Captain was excessively rude to me," the widow's younger sister added, on her side. "When we took leave of him in London, I asked if there was any chance of his joining us at Brighton this season. He turned his back on me as if I had mortally offended him; and he made me this extraordinary answer: 'Miss! I hate the sight of the sea.' The man has been a sailor all his life. What does he mean by saying that he hates the sight of the sea?"

These questions were addressed to a third person present — and the person was a man. He was entirely at the mercy of the widow and the widow's sister. The other ladies of the family — who might have taken him under their protection — had gone to an evening concert. He was known to be the Captain's friend, and to be well acquainted with events in the Captain's life. As it happened,

he had reasons for hesitating to revive associations connected with those events. But what polite alternative was left to him? He must either inflict disappointment, and, worse still, aggravate curiosity — or he must resign himself to circumstances, and tell the ladies why the Captain would never marry, and why (sailor as he was) he hated the sight of the sea. They were both young women and handsome women — and the person to whom they had appealed (being a man), followed the example of submission to the sex, first set in the garden of Eden. He enlightened the ladies, in the terms that follow:

II

The British merchantman, *Fortuna*, sailed from the port of Liverpool (at a date which it is not necessary to specify) with the morning tide. She was bound for certain islands in the Pacific Ocean, in search of a cargo of sandal-wood — a commodity which, in those days, found a ready and profitable market in the Chinese Empire.

A large discretion was reposed in the Captain by the owners, who knew him to be not only trustworthy, but a man of rare ability, carefully cultivated during the leisure hours of a seafaring life. Devoted heart and soul to his professional duties, he was a hard reader and an excellent linguist as well. Having had considerable experience among the inhabitants of the Pacific Islands, he had attentively studied their char-

acters, and had mastered their language in more than one of its many dialects. Thanks to the valuable information thus obtained, the Captain was never at a loss to conciliate the islanders. He had more than once succeeded in finding a cargo under circumstances in which other captains had failed.

Possessing these merits, he had also his fair share of human defects. For instance, he was a little too conscious of his own good looks — of his bright chestnut hair and whiskers, of his beautiful blue eyes, of his fair white skin, which many a woman had looked at with the admiration that is akin to envy. His shapely hands were protected by gloves; a broad-brimmed hat sheltered his complexion in fine weather from the sun. He was nice in the choice of his perfumes; he never drank spirits, and the smell of tobacco was abhorrent to him. New men among his officers and his crew, seeing him in his cabin, perfectly dressed, washed, and brushed until he was an object speckless to look upon — a merchant-captain soft of voice, careful in his choice of words, devoted to study in his leisure hours — were apt to conclude that they had trusted themselves at sea under a commander who was an anomalous mixture of a schoolmaster and a dandy. But if the slightest infraction of discipline took place, or if the storm rose and the vessel proved to be in peril, it was soon discovered that the gloved hands held a rod of iron; that the soft voice could make itself heard through wind and sea from one end of the deck to the other; and that it issued orders which the greatest fool on board dis-

covered to be orders that had saved the ship. Throughout his professional life, the general impression that this variously gifted man produced on the little world about him was always the same. Some few liked him; everybody respected him; nobody understood him. The Captain accepted these results. He persisted in reading his books and protecting his complexion, with this result: his owners shook hands with him, and put up with his gloves.

The *Fortuna* touched at Rio for water, and for supplies of food which might prove useful in case of scurvy. In due time the ship rounded Cape Horn, favored by the finest weather ever known in those latitudes by the oldest hand on board. The mate — one Mr. Duncalf — a boozing, wheezing, self-confident old sea-dog, with a flaming face and a vast vocabulary of oaths, swore that he didn't like it. "The foul weather's coming, my lads," said Mr. Duncalf. "Mark my words, there'll be wind enough to take the curl out of the Captain's whiskers before we are many days older!"

For one uneventful week, the ship cruised in search of the islands to which the owners had directed her. At the end of that time the wind took the predicted liberties with the Captain's whiskers; and Mr. Duncalf stood revealed to an admiring crew in the character of a true prophet.

For three days and three nights the *Fortuna* ran before the storm, at the mercy of wind and sea. On the fourth morning the gale blew itself out, the sun appeared again toward noon, and the Captain was able to take an observation. The result informed him that he was in a part of the Pacific

Ocean with which he was entirely unacquainted. Thereupon, the officers were called to a council in the cabin.

Mr. Duncalf, as became his rank, was consulted first. His opinion possessed the merit of brevity. "My lads, this ship's bewitched. Take my word for it, we shall wish ourselves back in our own latitudes before we are many days older." Which, being interpreted, meant that Mr. Duncalf was lost, like his superior officer, in a part of the ocean of which he knew nothing.

The remaining members of the council having no suggestions to offer, left the Captain to take his own way. He decided (the weather being fine again) to stand on under an easy press of sail for four-and-twenty hours more, and to see if anything came of it.

Soon after nightfall, something did come of it. The lookout forward hailed the quarter-deck with the dread cry, "Breakers ahead!" In less than a minute more, everybody heard the crash of the broken water. The *Fortuna* was put about, and came round slowly in the light wind. Thanks to the timely alarm and the fine weather, the safety of the vessel was easily provided for. They kept her under a short sail; and they waited for the morning.

The dawn showed them in the distance a glorious green island, not marked in the ship's charts — an island girt about by a coral-reef, and having in its midst a high-peaked mountain which looked, through the telescope, like a mountain of volcanic origin. Mr. Duncalf, taking his morning draught of rum and water, shook his groggy old head and

said (and swore): "My lads, I don't like the look of that island." The Captain was of a different opinion. He had one of the ship's boats put into the water; he armed himself and four of his crew who accompanied him; and away he went in the morning sunlight to visit the island.

Skirting round the coral reef, they found a natural breach, which proved to be broad enough and deep enough not only for the passage of the boat, but of the ship herself if needful. Crossing the broad inner belt of smooth water, they approached the golden sands of the island, strewed with magnificent shells, and crowded by the dusky islanders — men, women, and children, all waiting in breathless astonishment to see the strangers land.

The Captain kept the boat off, and examined the islanders carefully. The innocent, simple people danced, and sang, and ran into the water, imploring their wonderful white visitors by gestures to come on shore. Not a creature among them carried arms of any sort; a hospitable curiosity animated the entire population. The men cried out, in their smooth musical language, "Come and eat!" and the plump black-eyed women, all laughing together, added their own invitation, "Come and be kissed!" Was it in mortals to resist such temptations as these? The Captain led the way on shore, and the women surrounded him in an instant, and screamed for joy at the glorious spectacle of his whiskers, his complexion, and his gloves. So the mariners from the far north were welcomed to the newly-discovered island.

III

The morning wore on. Mr. Duncalf, in charge of the ship, cursing the island over his rum and water, as a "beastly green strip of a place, not laid down in any Christian chart," was kept waiting four mortal hours before the Captain returned to his command, and reported himself to his officers as follows:

He had found his knowledge of the Polynesian dialects sufficient to make himself in some degree understood by the natives of the new island. Under the guidance of the chief he had made a first journey of exploration, and had seen for himself that the place was a marvel of natural beauty and fertility. The one barren spot in it was the peak of the volcanic mountain, composed of crumbling rock: originally no doubt lava and ashes, which had cooled and consolidated with the lapse of time. So far as he could see, the crater at the top was now an extinct crater. But, if he had understood rightly, the chief had spoken of earthquakes and eruptions at certain by-gone periods, some of which lay within his own earliest recollections of the place.

Adverting next to considerations of practical utility, the Captain announced that he had seen sandal-wood enough on the island to load a dozen ships, and that the natives were willing to part with it for a few toys and trinkets generally distributed among them. To the mate's disgust, the *Fortuna* was taken inside the reef that day, and was anchored

before sunset in a natural harbor. Twelve hours of recreation, beginning with the next morning, were granted to the men, under the wise restrictions in such cases established by the Captain. That interval over, the work of cutting the precious wood and loading the ship was to be unremittingly pursued.

Mr. Duncalf had the first watch after the *Fortuna* had been made snug. He took the boatswain aside (an ancient sea-dog like himself), and he said in a gruff whisper: "My lad, this here ain't the island laid down in our sailing orders. See if mischief don't come of disobeying orders before we are many days older."

Nothing in the shape of mischief happened that night. But at sunrise the next morning a suspicious circumstance occurred; and Mr. Duncalf whispered to the boatswain: "What did I tell you?" The Captain and the chief of the islanders held a private conference in the cabin; and the Captain, after first forbidding any communication with the shore until his return, suddenly left the ship, alone with the chief, in the chief's own canoe.

What did this strange disappearance mean? The Captain himself, when he took his seat in the canoe, would have been puzzled to answer that question. He asked, in the nearest approach that his knowledge could make to the language used in the island, whether he would be a long time or a short time absent from his ship.

The chief answered mysteriously (as the Captain understood him) in these words: "Long time or short

time, your life depends on it, and the lives of your men."

Paddling his light little boat in silence over the smooth water inside the reef, the chief took his visitor ashore at a part of the island which was quite new to the Captain. The two crossed a ravine, and ascended an eminence beyond. There the chief stopped, and silently pointed out to sea.

The Captain looked in the direction indicated to him, and discovered a second and a smaller island, lying away to the southwest. Taking out his telescope from the case by which it was slung at his back, he narrowly examined the place. Two of the native canoes were lying off the shore of the new island; and the men in them appeared to be all kneeling or crouching in curiously chosen attitudes. Shifting the range of his glass, he next beheld a white-robed figure, tall and solitary — the one inhabitant of the island whom he could discover. The man was standing on the highest point of a rocky cape. A fire was burning at his feet. Now he lifted his arms solemnly to the sky; now he dropped some invisible fuel into the fire, which made a blue smoke; and now he cast other invisible objects into the canoes floating beneath him, which the islanders reverently received with bodies that crouched in abject submission. Lowering his telescope, the Captain looked round at the chief for an explanation. The chief gave the explanation readily. His language was interpreted by the English stranger in these terms:

"Wonderful white man! the island you see yonder is a Holy Island. As such it is *Taboo* — an island sanctified and

set apart. The honorable person whom you notice on the rock is an all-powerful favorite of the gods. He is by vocation a Sorcerer, and by rank a Priest. You now see him casting charms and blessings into the canoes of our fishermen, who kneel to him for fine weather and great plenty of fish. If any profane person, native or stranger, presumes to set foot on that island, my otherwise peaceful subjects will (in the performance of a religious duty) put that person to death. Mention this to your men. They will be fed by my male people, and fondled by my female people, so long as they keep clear of the Holy Isle. As they value their lives, let them respect this prohibition. Is it understood between us? Wonderful white man! my canoe is waiting for you. Let us go back."

Understanding enough of the chief's language (illustrated by his gestures) to receive in the right spirit the communication thus addressed to him, the Captain repeated the warning to the ship's company in the plainest possible English. The officers and men then took their holiday on shore, with the exception of Mr. Duncalf, who positively refused to leave the ship. For twelve delightful hours they were fed by the male people, and fondled by the female people, and then they were mercilessly torn from the fleshpots and the arms of their new friends, and set to work on the sandal-wood in good earnest. Mr. Duncalf superintended the loading, and waited for the mischief that was to come of disobeying the owners' orders with a confidence worthy of a better cause.

IV

Strangely enough, chance once more declared itself in favor of the mate's point of view. The mischief did actually come; and the chosen instrument of it was a handsome young islander, who was one of the sons of the chief.

The Captain had taken a fancy to the sweet-tempered, intelligent lad. Pursuing his studies in the dialect of the island, at leisure hours, he had made the chief's son his tutor, and had instructed the youth in English by way of return. More than a month had passed in this intercourse, and the ship's lading was being rapidly completed — when, in an evil hour, the talk between the two turned on the subject of the Holy Island.

"Does nobody live on the island but the Priest?" the Captain asked.

The chief's son looked round him suspiciously. "Promise me you won't tell anybody!" he began very earnestly.

The Captain gave his promise.

"There is one other person on the island," the lad whispered; "a person to feast your eyes upon, if you could only see her! She is the Priest's daughter. Removed to the island in her infancy, she has never left it since. In that sacred solitude she has only looked on two human beings — her father and her mother. I once saw her from my canoe, taking care not to attract her notice, or to approach too near the holy soil. Oh, so young, dear master, and, oh, so beautiful!" The chief's son completed the description by kissing his own hands as an expression of rapture.

The Captain's fine blue eyes sparkled. He asked no more questions; but, later on that day, he took his telescope with him, and paid a secret visit to the eminence which overlooked the Holy Island. The next day, and the next, he privately returned to the same place. On the fourth day, fatal Destiny favored him. He discovered the nymph of the island.

Standing alone upon the cape on which he had already seen her father, she was feeding some tame birds which looked like turtle-doves. The glass showed the Captain her white robe, fluttering in the sea-breeze; her long black hair falling to her feet; her slim and supple young figure; her simple grace of attitude, as she turned this way and that, attending to the wants of her birds. Before her was the blue ocean; behind her rose the lustrous green of the island forest. He looked and looked until his eyes and arms ached. When she disappeared among the trees, followed by her favorite birds, the Captain shut up his telescope with a sigh, and said to himself: "I have seen an angel!"

From that hour he became an altered man; he was languid, silent, interested in nothing. General opinion, on board his ship, decided that he was going to be taken ill.

A week more elapsed, and the officers and crew began to talk of the voyage to their market in China. The Captain refused to fix a day for sailing. He even took offense at being asked to decide. Instead of sleeping in his cabin, he went ashore for the night.

Not many hours afterward (just before daybreak), Mr.

Duncalf, snoring in his cabin on deck, was aroused by a hand laid on his shoulder. The swinging lamp, still alight, showed him the dusky face of the chief's son, convulsed with terror. By wild signs, by disconnected words in the little English which he had learned, the lad tried to make the mate understand him. Dense Mr. Duncalf, understanding nothing, hailed the second officer, on the opposite side of the deck. The second officer was young and intelligent; he rightly interpreted the terrible news that had come to the ship.

The Captain had broken his own rules. Watching his opportunity, under cover of the night, he had taken a canoe, and had secretly crossed the channel to the Holy Island. No one had been near him at the time but the chief's son. The lad had vainly tried to induce him to abandon his desperate enterprise, and had vainly waited on the shore in the hope of hearing the sound of the paddle announcing his return. Beyond all reasonable doubt, the infatuated man had set foot on the shores of the tabooed island.

The one chance for his life was to conceal what he had done, until the ship could be got out of the harbor, and then (if no harm had come to him in the interval) to rescue him after nightfall. It was decided to spread the report that he had really been taken ill, and that he was confined to his cabin. The chief's son, whose heart the Captain's kindness had won, could be trusted to do this, and to keep the secret faithfully for his good friend's sake.

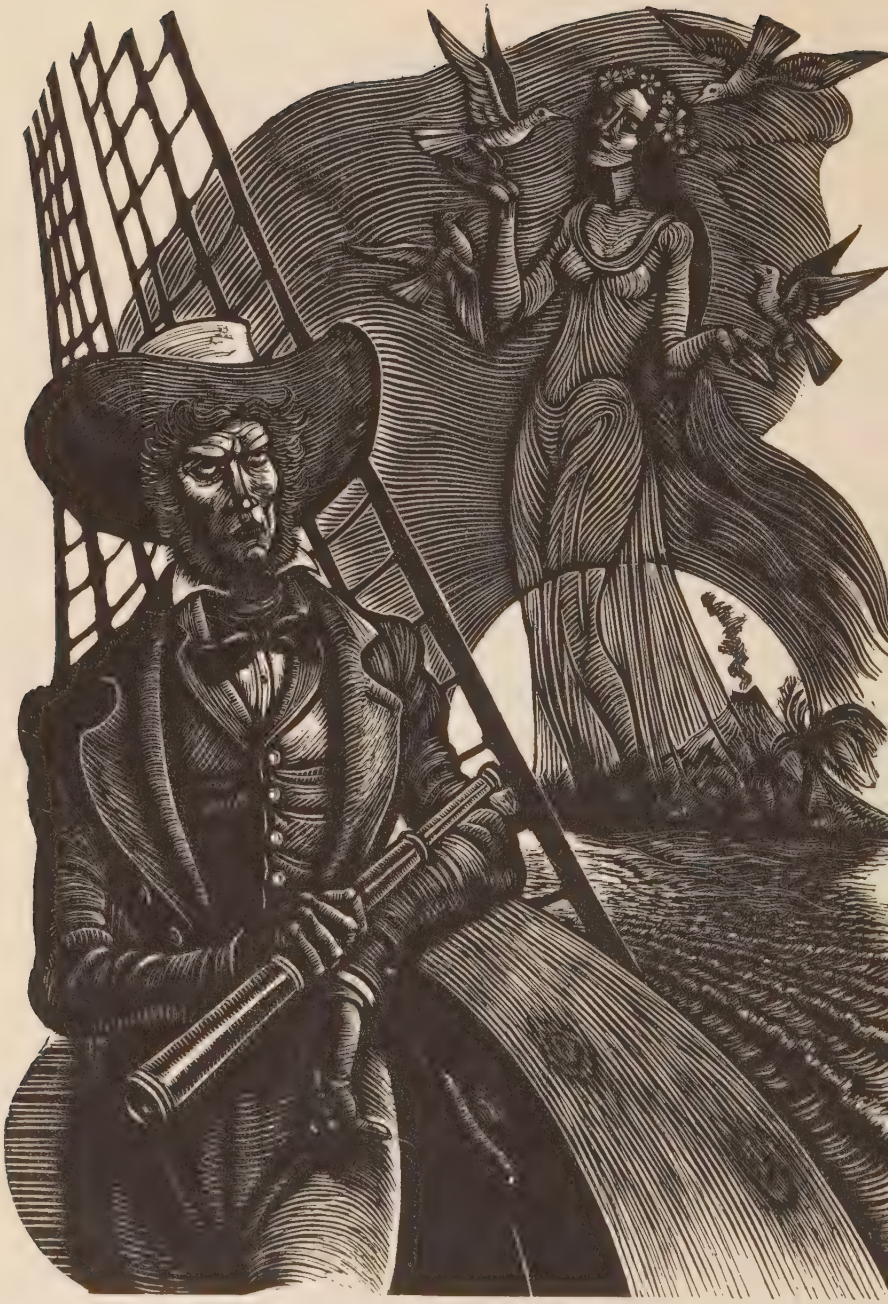
Toward noon, the next day, they attempted to take the ship to sea, and failed for want of wind. Hour by hour, the

heat grew more oppressive. As the day declined, there were ominous appearances in the western heaven. The natives, who had given some trouble during the day by their anxiety to see the Captain, and by their curiosity to know the cause of the sudden preparations for the ship's departure, all went ashore together, looking suspiciously at the sky, and reappeared no more. Just at midnight, the ship (still in her snug berth inside the reef) suddenly trembled from her keel to her uppermost masts. Mr. Duncalf, surrounded by the startled crew, shook his knotty fist at the island as if he could see it in the dark. "My lads, what did I tell you? That was a shock of earthquake."

With the morning the threatening aspect of the weather unexpectedly disappeared. A faint hot breeze from the land, just enough to give the ship steerage-way, offered Mr. Duncalf a chance of getting to sea. Slowly the *Fortuna,* with the mate himself at the wheel, half sailed, half drifted into the open ocean. At a distance of barely two miles from the island the breeze was felt no more, and the vessel lay becalmed for the rest of the day.

At night the men waited their orders, expecting to be sent after their Captain in one of the boats. The intense darkness, the airless heat, and a second shock of earthquake (faintly felt in the ship at her present distance from the land) warned the mate to be cautious. "I smell mischief in the air," said Mr. Duncalf. "The Captain must wait till I am surer of the weather."

Still no change came with the new day. The dead calm



continued, and the airless heat. As the day declined, another ominous appearance became visible. A thin line of smoke was discovered through the telescope, ascending from the topmost peak of the mountain on the main island. Was the volcano threatening an eruption? The mate, for one, entertained no doubt of it. "By the Lord, the place is going to burst up!" said Mr. Duncalf. "Come what may of it, we must find the Captain tonight!"

V

What was the Captain doing? and what chance had the crew of finding him that night?

He had committed himself to his desperate adventure, without forming any plan for the preservation of his own safety; without giving even a momentary consideration to the consequences which might follow the risk that he had run. The charming figure that he had seen haunted him night and day. The image of the innocent creature, secluded from humanity in her island solitude, was the one image that filled his mind. A man, passing a woman in the street, acts on the impulse to turn and follow her, and in that one thoughtless moment shapes the destiny of his future life. The Captain had acted on a similar impulse, when he took the first canoe he had found on the beach, and shaped his reckless course for the tabooed island.

Reaching the shore while it was still dark, he did one

sensible thing — he hid the canoe so that it might not betray him when the daylight came. That done, he waited for the morning on the outskirts of the forest.

The trembling light of dawn revealed the mysterious solitude around him. Following the outer limits of the trees, first in one direction, then in another, and finding no trace of any living creature, he decided on penetrating to the interior of the island. He entered the forest.

An hour of walking brought him to rising ground. Continuing the ascent, he got clear of the trees, and stood on the grassy top of a broad cliff which overlooked the sea. An open hut was on the cliff. He cautiously looked in, and discovered that it was empty. The few household utensils left about, and the simple bed of leaves in a corner, were covered with fine sandy dust. Night-birds flew blundering out of the inner cavities of the roof, and took refuge in the shadows of the forest below. It was plain that the hut had not been inhabited for some time past.

Standing at the open doorway and considering what he should do next, the Captain saw a bird flying toward him out of the forest. It was a turtle-dove, so tame that it fluttered close up to him. At the same moment the sound of sweet laughter became audible among the trees. His heart beat fast; he advanced a few steps and stopped. In a moment more the nymph of the island appeared, in her white robe, ascending the cliff in pursuit of her truant bird. She saw the strange man, and suddenly stood still; struck motionless by the amazing discovery that had burst upon her. The Captain approached, smiling and holding out his

hand. She never moved; she stood before him in helpless wonderment — her lovely black eyes fixed spellbound on his face; her dusky bosom palpitating above the fallen folds of her robe; her rich red lips parted in mute astonishment. Feasting his eyes on her beauty in silence, the Captain after a while ventured to speak to her in the language of the main island. The sound of his voice, addressing her in the words that she understood, roused the lovely creature to action. She started, stepped close up to him, and dropped on her knees at his feet.

"My father worships invisible deities," she said, softly. "Are you a visible deity? Has my mother sent you?" She pointed as she spoke to the deserted hut behind them. "You appear," she went on, "in the place where my mother died. Is it for her sake that you show yourself to her child? Beautiful deity, come to the Temple — come to my father!"

The Captain gently raised her from the ground. If her father saw him, he was a doomed man.

Infatuated as he was, he had sense enough left to announce himself plainly in his own character, as a mortal creature arriving from a distant land. The girl instantly drew back from him with a look of terror.

"He is not like my father," she said to herself; "he is not like me. Is he the lying demon of the prophecy? Is he the predestined destroyer of our island?"

The Captain's experience of the sex showed him the only sure way out of the awkward position in which he was now placed. He appealed to his personal appearance.

"Do I look like a demon?" he asked.

Her eyes met his eyes; a faint smile trembled on her lips. He ventured on asking what she meant by the predestined destruction of the island. She held up her hand solemnly, and repeated the prophecy.

The Holy Island was threatened with destruction by an evil being, who would one day appear on its shores. To avert the fatality the place had been sanctified and set apart, under the protection of the gods and their priest. Here was the reason for the taboo, and for the extraordinary rigor with which it was enforced. Listening to her with the deepest interest, the Captain took her hand and pressed it gently.

"Do I feel like a demon?" he whispered.

Her slim brown fingers closed frankly on his hand. "You feel soft and friendly," she said with the fearless candor of a child. "Squeeze me again. I like it!"

The next moment she snatched her hand away from him; the sense of his danger had suddenly forced itself on her mind. "If my father sees you," she said, "he will light the signal fire at the Temple, and the people from the other island will come here and put you to death. Where is your canoe? No! It is daylight. My father may see you on the water." She considered a little, and, approaching him, laid her hands on his shoulders. "Stay here till nightfall," she resumed. "My father never comes this way. The sight of the place where my mother died is horrible to him. You are safe here. Promise to stay where you are till night-time."

The Captain gave his promise.

Freed from anxiety so far the girl's mobile temperament

recovered its native cheerfulness, its sweet gayety and spirit. She admired the beautiful stranger as she might have admired a new bird that had flown to her to be fondled with the rest. She patted his fair white skin, and wished she had a skin like it. She lifted the great glossy folds of her long black hair, and compared it with the Captain's bright curly locks, and longed to change colors with him from the bottom of her heart. His dress was a wonder to her; his watch was a new revelation. She rested her head on his shoulder to listen delightedly to the ticking as he held the watch to her ear. Her fragrant breath played on his face, her warm, supple figure rested against him softly. The Captain's arm stole round her waist, and the Captain's lips gently touched her cheek. She lifted her head with a look of pleased surprise. "Thank you," said the child of Nature, simply. "Kiss me again; I like it. May I kiss you?" The tame turtle-dove perched on her shoulder as she gave the Captain her first kiss, and diverted her thoughts to the pets that she had left, in pursuit of the truant dove. "Come," she said, "and see my birds. I keep them on this side of the forest. There is no danger, so long as you don't show yourself on the other side. My name is Aimata. Aimata will take care of you. Oh, what a beautiful white neck you have!" She put her arm admiringly round his neck. The Captain's arm held her tenderly to him. Slowly the two descended the cliff, and were lost in the leafy solitudes of the forest. And the tame dove fluttered before them, a winged messenger of love, cooing to his mate.

VI

The night had come, and the Captain had not left the island.

Aimata's resolution to send him away in the darkness was a forgotten resolution already. She had let him persuade her that he was in no danger, so long as he remained in the hut on the cliff; and she had promised, at parting, to return to him while the Priest was still sleeping, at the dawn of day.

He was alone in the hut. The thought of the innocent creature whom he loved was sorrowfully as well as tenderly present to his mind. He almost regretted his rash visit to the island. "I will take her with me to England," he said to himself. "What does a sailor care for the opinion of the world? Aimata shall be my wife."

The intense heat oppressed him. He stepped out on the cliff, toward midnight, in search of a breath of air.

At that moment, the first shock of earthquake (felt in the ship while she was inside the reef) shook the ground he stood on. He instantly thought of the volcano on the main island. Had he been mistaken in supposing the crater to be extinct? Was the shock that he had just felt a warning from the volcano, communicated through a submarine connection between the two islands? He waited and watched through the hours of darkness, with a vague sense of apprehension, which was not to be reasoned away. With the first light of daybreak he descended into the forest, and saw the lovely being whose safety was already precious to him as his own, hurrying to meet him through the trees.

She waved her hand distractedly as she approached him. "Go!" she cried; "go away in your canoe before our island is destroyed!"

He did his best to quiet her alarm. Was it the shock of earthquake that had frightened her? No: it was more than the shock of earthquake — it was something terrible which had followed the shock. There was a lake near the Temple, the waters of which were supposed to be heated by subterranean fires. The lake had risen with the earthquake, had bubbled furiously, and had then melted away into the earth and been lost. Her father, viewing the portent with horror, had gone to the cape to watch the volcano on the main island, and to implore by prayers and sacrifices the protection of the gods. Hearing this, the Captain entreated Aimata to let him see the emptied lake, in the absence of the Priest. She hesitated; but his influence was all-powerful. He prevailed on her to turn back with him through the forest.

Reaching the furthest limit of the trees, they came out upon open rocky ground which sloped gently downward toward the center of the island. Having crossed this space, they arrived at a natural amphitheater of rock. On one side of it the Temple appeared, partly excavated, partly formed by a natural cavern. In one of the lateral branches of the cavern was the dwelling of the Priest and his daughter. The mouth of it looked out on the rocky basin of the lake. Stooping over the edge, the Captain discovered, far down in the empty depths, a light cloud of steam. Not a drop of water was visible, look where he might.

Aimata pointed to the abyss, and hid her face on his bosom. "My father says," she whispered, "that it is your doing."

The Captain started. "Does your father know that I am on the island?"

She looked up at him with a quick glance of reproach. "Do you think I would tell him, and put your life in peril?" she asked. "My father felt the destroyer of the island in the earthquake; my father saw the coming destruction in the disappearance of the lake." Her eyes rested on him with a loving languor. "Are you indeed the demon of the prophecy?" she said, winding his hair round her finger. "I am not afraid of you, if you are. I am a creature bewitched; I love the demon." She kissed him passionately. "I don't care if I die," she whispered between the kisses, "if I only die with you!"

The Captain made no attempt to reason with her. He took the wiser way — he appealed to her feelings.

"You will come and live with me happily in my own country," he said. "My ship is waiting for us. I will take you home with me, and you shall be my wife."

She clapped her hands for joy. Then she thought of her father, and drew back from him in tears.

The Captain understood her. "Let us leave this dreary place," he suggested. "We will talk about it in the cool glades of the forest, where you first said you loved me."

She gave him her hand. "Where I first said I loved you!" she repeated, smiling tenderly as she looked at him. They left the lake together.

The darkness had fallen again; and the ship was still becalmed at sea.

Mr. Duncalf came on deck after his supper. The thin line of smoke, seen rising from the peak of the mountain that evening, was now succeeded by ominous flashes of fire from the same quarter, intermittently visible. The faint hot breeze from the land was felt once more. "There's just an air of wind," Mr. Duncalf remarked. "I'll try for the Captain while I have the chance."

One of the boats was lowered into the water — under command of the second mate, who had already taken the bearings of the tabooed island by daylight. Four of the men were to go with him, and they were all to be well armed. Mr. Duncalf addressed his final instructions to the officer in the boat.

"You will keep a lookout, sir, with a lantern in the bows. If the natives annoy you, you know what to do. Always shoot natives. When you get anigh the island, you will fire a gun and sing out for the Captain."

"Quite needless," interposed a voice from the sea. "The Captain is here!"

Without taking the slightest notice of the astonishment that he had caused, the commander of the *Fortuna* paddled his canoe to the side of the ship. Instead of ascending to the deck, he stepped into the boat, waiting alongside. "Lend me your pistols," he said quietly to the second officer, "and oblige me by taking your men back to their duties on board."

He looked up at Mr. Duncalf and gave some further directions. "If there is any change in the weather, keep the ship standing off and on, at a safe distance from the land, and throw up a rocket from time to time to show your position. Expect me on board again by sunrise."

"What!" cried the mate. "Do you mean to say you are going back to the island — in that boat — all by yourself?"

"I am going back to the island," answered the Captain, as quietly as ever; "in this boat — all by myself." He pushed off from the ship, and hoisted the sail as he spoke.

"You're deserting your duty!" the old sea-dog shouted, with one of his loudest oaths.

"Attend to my directions," the Captain shouted back, as he drifted away into the darkness.

Mr. Duncalf — violently agitated for the first time in his life — took leave of his superior officer, with a singular mixture of solemnity and politeness, in these words:

"The Lord have mercy on your soul! I wish you good-evening."

VIII

Alone in the boat, the Captain looked with a misgiving mind at the flashing of the volcano on the main island.

If events had favored him, he would have removed Aimata to the shelter of the ship on the day when he saw the emptied basin on the lake. But the smoke of the Priest's sacri-

fice had been discovered by the chief; and he had dispatched two canoes with instructions to make inquiries. One of the canoes had returned; the other was kept in waiting off the cape, to place a means of communicating with the main island at the disposal of the Priest. The second shock of earthquake had naturally increased the alarm of the chief. He had sent messages to the Priest, entreating him to leave the island, and other messages to Aimata suggesting that she should exert her influence over her father, if he hesitated. The Priest refused to leave the Temple. He trusted in his gods and his sacrifices — he believed they might avert the fatality that threatened his sanctuary.

Yielding to the holy man, the chief sent re-enforcements of canoes to take their turn at keeping watch off the headland. Assisted by torches, the islanders were on the alert (in superstitious terror of the demon of the prophecy) by night as well as by day. The Captain had no alternative but to keep in hiding, and to watch his opportunity of approaching the place in which he had concealed his canoe. It was only after Aimata had left him as usual, to return to her father at the close of evening, that the chances declared themselves in his favor. The fire flashes from the mountain, visible when the night came, had struck terror into the hearts of the men on the watch. They thought of their wives, their children, and their possessions on the main island, and they one and all deserted their Priest. The Captain seized the opportunity of communicating with the ship, and of exchanging a frail canoe which he was ill able to man-

age, for a swift-sailing boat capable of keeping the sea in the event of stormy weather.

As he now neared the land, certain small sparks of red, moving on the distant water, informed him that the canoes of the sentinels had been ordered back to their duty.

Carefully avoiding the lights, he reached his own side of the island without accident, and guided by the boat's lantern, anchored under the cliff. He climbed the rocks, advanced to the door of the hut, and was met, to his delight and astonishment, by Aimata on the threshold.

"I dreamed that some dreadful misfortune had parted us forever," she said; "and I came here to see if my dream was true. You have taught me what it is to be miserable; I never felt my heart ache till I looked into the hut and found that you had gone. Now I have seen you, I am satisfied. No! you must not go back with me. My father may be out looking for me. It is you that are in danger, not I. I know the forest as well by dark as by daylight."

The Captain detained her when she tried to leave him.

"Now you *are* here," he said, "why should I not place you at once in safety? I have been to the ship; I have brought back one of the boats. The darkness will befriend us — let us embark while we can."

She shrank away as he took her hand. "You forget my father!" she said.

"Your father is in no danger, my love. The canoes are waiting for him at the cape, I saw the lights as I passed."

With that reply he drew her out of the hut and led her

toward the sea. Not a breath of the breeze was now to be felt. The dead calm had returned — and the boat was too large to be easily managed by one man alone at the oars.

"The breeze may come again," he said. "Wait here, my angel, for the chance."

As he spoke, the deep silence of the forest below them was broken by a sound. A harsh wailing voice was heard, calling:

"Aimata! Aimata!"

"My father!" she whispered; "he has missed me. If he comes here you are lost."

She kissed him with passionate fervor; she held him to her for a moment with all her strength.

"Expect me at daybreak," she said, and disappeared down the landward slope of the cliff.

He listened, anxious for her safety. The voices of the father and daughter just reached him from among the trees. The Priest spoke in no angry tones; she had apparently found an acceptable excuse for her absence. Little by little, the failing sound of their voices told him that they were on their way back together to the Temple. The silence fell again. Not a ripple broke on the beach. Not a leaf rustled in the forest. Nothing moved but the reflected flashes of the volcano on the main island over the black sky. It was an airless and an awful calm.

He went into the hut, and lay down on his bed of leaves — not to sleep, but to rest. All his energies might be required to meet the coming events of the morning. After the

voyage to and from the ship, and the long watching that had preceded it, strong as he was he stood in need of repose.

For some little time he kept awake, thinking. Insensibly the oppression of the intense heat, aided in its influence by his own fatigue, treacherously closed his eyes. In spite of himself, the weary man fell into a deep sleep.

He was awakened by a roar like the explosion of a park of artillery. The volcano on the main island had burst into a state of eruption. Smoky flame-light overspread the sky, and flashed through the open doorway of the hut. He sprang from his bed — and found himself up to his knees in water.

Had the sea overflowed the land?

He waded out of the hut, and the water rose to his middle. He looked round him by the lurid light of the eruption. The one visible object within the range of view was the sea, stained by reflections from the blood-red sky, swirling and rippling strangely in the dead calm. In a moment more, he became conscious that the earth on which he stood was sinking under his feet. The water rose to his neck; the last vestige of the roof of the hut disappeared.

He looked round again, and the truth burst on him. The island was sinking — slowly, slowly sinking into volcanic depths, below even the depth of the sea! The highest object was the hut, and that had dropped inch by inch under water before his own eyes. Thrown up to the surface by occult volcanic influences, the island had sunk back, under the same influences, to the obscurity from which it had emerged!

A black shadowy object, turning in a wide circle, came slowly near him as the all-destroying ocean washed its bitter waters into his mouth. The buoyant boat, rising as the sea rose, had dragged its anchor, and was floating round in the vortex made by the slowly-sinking island. With a last desperate hope that Aimata might have been saved as *he* had been saved, he swam to the boat, seized the heavy oars with the strength of a giant, and made for the place (so far as he could guess at it now) where the lake and the Temple had once been.

He looked round and round him; he strained his eyes in the vain attempt to penetrate below the surface of the seething dimpling sea. Had the panic-stricken watchers in the canoes saved themselves, without an effort to preserve the father and daughter? Or had they both been suffocated before they could make an attempt to escape? He called to her in his misery, as if she could hear him out of the fathomless depths: "Aimata! Aimata!" The roar of the distant eruption answered him. The mounting fires lit the solitary sea far and near over the sinking island. The boat turned slowly and more slowly in the lessening vortex. Never again would those gentle eyes look at him with unutterable love! Never again would those fresh lips touch his lips with their fervent kiss! Alone, amid the savage forces of Nature in conflict, the miserable mortal lifted his hands in frantic supplication — and the burning sky glared down on him in its pitiless grandeur, and struck him to his knees in the boat. His reason sank with his sinking limbs. In the merciful

frenzy that succeeded the shock, he saw afar off, in her white robe, an angel poised on the waters, beckoning him to follow her to the brighter and the better world. He loosened the sail, he seized the oars; and the faster he pursued it, the faster the mocking vision fled from him over the empty and endless sea.

IX

The boat was discovered, on the next morning, from the ship.

All that the devotion of the officers of the *Fortuna* could do for their unhappy commander was done on the homeward voyage. Restored to his own country, and to skilled medical help, the Captain's mind by slow degrees recovered its balance. He has taken his place in society again — he lives and moves and manages his affairs like the rest of us. But his heart is dead to all new emotions; nothing remains in it but the sacred remembrance of his lost love. He neither courts nor avoids the society of women. Their sympathy finds him grateful, but their attractions seem to be lost on him; they pass from his mind as they pass from his eyes — they stir nothing in him but the memory of Aimata.

"Now you know, ladies, why the Captain will never marry, and why (sailor as he is) he hates the sight of the sea."

"BLOW UP WITH THE BRIG!"

I HAVE got an alarming confession to make. I am haunted by a Ghost.

If you were to guess for a hundred years, you would never guess what my ghost is. I shall make you laugh to begin with — and afterward I shall make your flesh creep. My Ghost is the ghost of a Bedroom Candlestick.

Yes, a bedroom candlestick and candle, or a flat candlestick and candle — put it which way you like — that is what haunts me. I wish it was something pleasanter and more out of the common way; a beautiful lady, or a mine of gold and silver, or a cellar of wine and a coach and horses, and such like. But, being what it is, I must take it for what it is, and make the best of it; and I shall thank you kindly if you will help me out by doing the same.

I am not a scholar myself, but I make bold to believe that the haunting of any man with anything under the sun begins with the frightening of him. At any rate, the haunting of me with a bedroom candlestick and candle began with the frightening of me with a bedroom candlestick and

candle — the frightening of me half out of my life; and, for the time being, the frightening of me altogether out of my wits. That is not a very pleasant thing to confess before stating the particulars; but perhaps you will be the readier to believe that I am not a downright coward, because you find me bold enough to make a clean breast of it already, to my own great disadvantage so far.

Here are the particulars, as well as I can put them:

I was apprenticed to the sea when I was about as tall as my own walking-stick; and I made good enough use of my time to be fit for a mate's berth at the age of twenty-five years.

It was in the year eighteen hundred and eighteen, or nineteen, I am not quite certain which, that I reached the before-mentioned age of twenty-five. You will please to excuse my memory not being very good for dates, names, numbers, places, and such like. No fear, though, about the particulars I have undertaken to tell you of; I have got them all ship-shape in my recollection; I can see them, at this moment, as clear as noonday in my own mind. But there is a mist over what went before, and, for the matter of that, a mist likewise over much that came after — and it's not very likely to lift at my time of life, is it?

Well, in eighteen hundred and eighteen, or nineteen, when there was peace in our part of the world — and not before it was wanted, you will say — there was fighting, of a certain scampering, scrambling kind, going on in that old

battlefield which we seafaring men know by the name of the Spanish Main.

The possessions that belonged to the Spaniards in South America had broken into open mutiny and declared for themselves years before. There was plenty of bloodshed between the new Government and the old; but the new had got the best of it, for the most part, under one General Bolivar — a famous man in his time, though he seems to have dropped out of people's memories now. Englishmen and Irishmen with a turn for fighting, and nothing particular to do at home, joined the general as volunteers; and some of our merchants here found it a good venture to send supplies across the ocean to the popular side. There was risk enough, of course, in doing this; but where one speculation of the kind succeeded, it made up for two, at the least, that failed. And that's the true principle of trade, wherever I have met with it, all the world over.

Among the Englishmen who were concerned in this Spanish-American business, I, your humble servant, happened in a small way to be one.

I was then mate of a brig belonging to a certain firm in the City, which drove a sort of general trade, mostly in queer out-of-the-way places, as far from home as possible; and which freighted the brig, in the year I am speaking of, with a cargo of gunpowder for General Bolivar and his volunteers. Nobody knew anything about our instructions, when we sailed, except the captain; and he didn't half seem to like

them. I can't rightly say how many barrels of powder we had on board, or how much each barrel held — I only know we had no other cargo. The name of the brig was the *Good Intent* — a queer name enough, you will tell me, for a vessel laden with gunpowder, and sent to help a revolution. And as far as this particular voyage was concerned, so it was. I mean that for a joke, and I hope you will encourage me by laughing at it.

The *Good Intent* was the craziest old tub of a vessel I ever went to sea in, and the worst found in all respects. She was two hundred and thirty, or two hundred and eighty tons burden, I forget which; and she had a crew of eight, all told — nothing like as many as we ought by rights to have had to work the brig. However, we were well and honestly paid our wages; and we had to set that against the chance of foundering at sea, and, on this occasion, likewise the chance of being blown up into the bargain.

In consideration of the nature of our cargo, we were harassed with new regulations, which we didn't at all like, relative to smoking our pipes and lighting our lanterns; and, as usual in such cases, the captain, who made the regulations, preached what he didn't practice. Not a man of us was allowed to have a bit of lighted candle in his hand when he went below — except the skipper; and he used his light, when he turned in, or when he looked over his charts on the cabin table, just as usual.

This light was a common kitchen candle or "dip," and it stood in an old battered flat candlestick, with all the japan

worn and melted off, and all the tin showing through. It would have been more seamanlike and suitable in every respect if he had a lamp or a lantern; but he stuck to his old candlestick; and that same old candlestick has ever afterward stuck to *me.* That's another joke, if you please, and a better one than the first, in my opinion.

Well (I said "well" before, but it's a word that helps a man on, like), we sailed in the brig, and shaped our course, first, for the Virgin Islands, in the West Indies; and, after sighting them, we made for the Leeward Islands next, and then stood on due south, till the lookout at the mast-head hailed the deck and said he saw land. That land was the coast of South America. We had had a wonderful voyage so far. We had lost none of our spars or sails, and not a man of us had been harassed to death at the pumps. It wasn't often the *Good Intent* made such a voyage as that, I can tell you.

I was sent aloft to make sure about the land, and I did make sure of it.

When I reported the same to the skipper, he went below, and had a look at his letter of instructions and the chart. When he came on deck again, he altered our course a trifle to the eastward — I forget the point on the compass, but that don't matter. What I do remember is, that it was dark before we closed in with the land. We kept the lead going, and hove the brig to in from four to five fathoms water, or it might be six — I can't say for certain. I kept a sharp eye to the drift of the vessel, none of us knowing how the currents ran on that coast. We all wondered why the skipper didn't

anchor; but he said No, he must first show a light at the fore-topmasthead, and wait for an answering light on shore. We did wait, and nothing of the sort appeared. It was starlight and calm. What little wind there was came in puffs off the land. I suppose we waited, drifting a little to the westward, as I made it out, best part of an hour before anything happened — and then, instead of seeing the light on shore, we saw a boat coming toward us, rowed by two men only.

We hailed them, and they answered "Friends!" and hailed us by our name. They came on board. One of them was an Irishman, and the other was a coffee-colored native pilot, who jabbered a little English.

The Irishman handed a note to our skipper, who showed it to me. It informed us that the part of the coast we were off was not oversafe for discharging our cargo, seeing that spies of the enemy (that is to say, of the old Government) had been taken and shot in the neighborhood the day before. We might trust the brig to the native pilot; and he had his instructions to take us to another part of the coast. The note was signed by the proper parties; so we let the Irishman go back alone in the boat, and allowed the pilot to exercise his lawful authority over the brig. He kept us stretching off from the land till noon the next day — his instructions, seemingly, ordering him to keep us well out of sight of the shore. We only altered our course in the afternoon, so as to close in with the land again a little before midnight.

This same pilot was about as ill-looking a vagabond as ever I saw; a skinny, cowardly, quarrelsome mongrel, who

swore at the men in the vilest broken English, till they were everyone of them ready to pitch him overboard. The skipper kept them quiet, and I kept them quiet; for the pilot being given us by our instructions, we were bound to make the best of him. Near nightfall, however, with the best will in the world to avoid it, I was unlucky enough to quarrel with him.

He wanted to go below with his pipe, and I stopped him, of course, because it was contrary to orders. Upon that he tried to hustle by me, and I put him away with my hand. I never meant to push him down; but somehow I did. He picked himself up as quick as lightning, and pulled out his knife. I snatched it out of his hand, slapped his murderous face for him, and threw his weapon overboard. He gave me one ugly look, and walked aft. I didn't think much of the look then, but I remembered it a little too well afterward.

We were close in with the land again, just as the wind failed us, between eleven and twelve that night, and dropped our anchor by the pilot's directions.

It was pitch-dark, and a dead, airless calm. The skipper was on deck, with two of our best men for watch. The rest were below, except the pilot, who coiled himself up, more like a snake than a man, on the forecastle. It was not my watch till four in the morning. But I didn't like the look of the night, or the pilot, or the state of things generally, and I shook myself down on deck to get my nap there, and be ready for anything at a moment's notice. The last I remember was the skipper whispering to me that he didn't like the

look of things either, and that he would go below and consult his instructions again. That is the last I remember, before the slow, heavy, regular roll of the old brig on the ground-swell rocked me off to sleep.

I was awoke by a scuffle on the forecastle and a gag in my mouth. There was a man on my breast and a man on my legs, and I was bound hand and foot in half a minute.

The brig was in the hands of the Spaniards. They were swarming all over her. I heard six heavy splashes in the water, one after another. I saw the captain stabbed to the heart as he came running up the companion, and I heard a seventh splash in the water. Except myself, every soul of us on board had been murdered and thrown into the sea. Why I was left, I couldn't think, till I saw the pilot stoop over me with a lantern and look, to make sure of who I was. There was a devilish grin on his face, and he nodded his head at me, as much as to say, *You* were the man who hustled me down and slapped my face, and I mean to play the game of cat and mouse with you in return for it!

I could neither move nor speak, but I could see the Spaniards take off the main hatch and rig the purchases for getting up the cargo. A quarter of an hour afterward I heard the sweeps of a schooner, or other small vessel, in the water. The strange craft was laid alongside of us, and the Spaniards set to work to discharge our cargo into her. They all worked hard except the pilot; and he came from time to time, with his lantern, to have another look at me, and to grin and nod always in the same devilish way. I am old enough now not

to be ashamed of confessing the truth, and I don't mind acknowledging that the pilot frightened me.

The fright, and the bonds, and the gag, and the not being able to stir hand or foot, had pretty nigh worn me out by the time the Spaniards gave over work. This was just as the dawn broke. They had shifted a good part of our cargo on board their vessel, but nothing like all of it, and they were sharp enough to be off with what they had got before daylight.

I need hardly say that I had made up my mind by this time to the worst I could think of. The pilot, it was clear enough, was one of the spies of the enemy, who had wormed himself into the confidence of our consignees without being suspected. He, or more likely his employers, had got knowledge enough of us to suspect what our cargo was; we had been anchored for the night in the safest berth for them to surprise us in; and we had paid the penalty of having a small crew, and consequently an insufficient watch. All this was clear enough — but what did the pilot mean to do with *me?*

On the word of a man, it makes my flesh creep now, only to tell you what he did with me.

After all the rest of them were out of the brig, except the pilot and two Spanish seamen, these last took me up, bound and gagged as I was, lowered me into the hold of the vessel, and laid me along on the floor, lashing me to it with ropes' ends, so that I could just turn from one side to the other, but could not roll myself fairly over, so as to change

my place. They then left me. Both of them were the worse for liquor; but the devil of a pilot was sober — mind that! — as sober as I am at the present moment.

I lay in the dark for a little while, with my heart thumping as if it was going to jump out of me. I lay about five minutes or so when the pilot came down into the hold alone.

He had the captain's cursed flat candlestick and a carpenter's awl in one hand, and a long thin twist of cotton-yarn, well oiled, in the other. He put the candlestick, with a new "dip" candle lighted in it, down on the floor about two feet from my face, and close against the side of the vessel. The light was feeble enough; but it was sufficient to show a dozen barrels of gunpowder or more left all round me in the hold of the brig. I began to suspect what he was after the moment I noticed the barrels. The horrors laid hold of me from head to foot, and the sweat poured off my face like water.

I saw him go next to one of the barrels of powder standing against the side of the vessel in a line with the candle, and about three feet, or rather better, away from it. He bored a hole in the side of the barrel with his awl, and the horrid powder came trickling out, as black as hell, and dripped into the hollow of his hand, which he held to catch it. When he had got a good handful, he stopped up the hole by jamming one end of his oiled twist of cotton-yarn fast into it, and he then rubbed the powder into the whole length of the yarn till he had blackened every hair-breadth of it.

The next thing he did — as true as I sit here, as true

as the heaven above us all — the next thing he did was to carry the free end of his long, lean, black, frightful slow-match to the lighted candle alongside my face. He tied it (the bloody-minded villain!) in several folds round the tallow dip, about a third of the distance down, measuring from the flame of the wick to the lip of the candlestick. He did that; he looked to see that my lashings were all safe; and then he put his face close to mine, and whispered in my ear, "Blow up with the brig!"

He was on deck again the moment after, and he and the two others shoved the hatch on over me. At the furthest end from where I lay they had not fitted it down quite true, and I saw a blink of daylight glimmering in when I looked in that direction. I heard the sweeps of the schooner fall into the water — splash! splash! fainter and fainter, as they swept the vessel out in the dead calm, to be ready for the wind in the offing. Fainter and fainter, splash, splash! for a quarter of an hour more.

While those sounds were in my ears, my eyes were fixed on the candle.

It had been freshly lighted. If left to itself, it would burn for between six and seven hours. The slow-match was twisted round it about a third of the way down, and therefore the flame would be about two hours reaching it. There I lay, gagged, bound, lashed to the floor; seeing my own life burning down with the candle by my side — there I lay, alone on the sea, doomed to be blown to atoms, and to see that doom drawing on, nearer and nearer with every fresh

second of time, through nigh on two hours to come: powerless to help myself, and speechless to call for help to others. The wonder to me is that I didn't cheat the flame, the slow-match, and the powder, and die of the horror of my situation before my first half-hour was out in the hold of the brig.

I can't exactly say how long I kept the command of my senses after I had ceased to hear the splash of the schooner's sweeps in the water. I can trace back everything I did and everything I thought, up to a certain point; but, once past that, I get all abroad, and lose myself in my memory now, much as I lost myself in my own feelings at the time.

The moment the hatch was covered over me, I began, as every other man would have begun in my place, with a frantic effort to free my hands. In the mad panic I was in, I cut my flesh with the lashings as if they had been knife-blades, but I never stirred them. There was less chance still of freeing my legs, or of tearing myself from the fastenings that held me to the floor. I gave in when I was all but suffocated for want of breath. The gag, you will please to remember, was a terrible enemy to me; I could only breathe freely through my nose — and that is but a poor vent when a man is straining his strength as far as ever it will go.

I gave in and lay quiet, and got my breath again, my eyes glaring and straining at the candle all the time.

While I was staring at it, the notion struck me of trying to blow out the flame by pumping a long breath at it suddenly through my nostrils. It was too high above me, and too far away from me, to be reached in that fashion. I tried,

and tried, and tried; and then I gave in again, and lay quiet again, always with my eyes glaring at the candle, and the candle glaring at *me*. The splash of the schooner's sweeps was very faint by this time. I could only just hear them in the morning stillness. Splash! splash! — fainter and fainter — splash! splash!

Without exactly feeling my mind going, I began to feel it getting queer as early as this. The snuff of the candle was growing taller and taller, and the length of tallow between the flame and the slow-match, which was the length of my life, was getting shorter and shorter. I calculated that I had rather less than an hour and a half to live.

An hour and a half! Was there a chance in that time of a boat pulling off to the brig from shore? Whether the land near which the vessel was anchored was in possession of our side, or in possession of the enemy's side, I made out that they must, sooner or later, send to hail the brig merely because she was a stranger in those parts. The question for *me* was, how soon? The sun had not risen yet, as I could tell by looking through the chink in the hatch. There was no coast village near us, as we all knew, before the brig was seized, by seeing no lights on shore. There was no wind, as I could tell by listening, to bring any strange vessel near. If I had had six hours to live, there might have been a chance for me, reckoning from sunrise to noon. But with an hour and a half, which had dwindled to an hour and a quarter by this time — or, in other words, with the earliness of the morning, the uninhabited coast, and the death calm all

against me — there was not the ghost of a chance. As I felt that, I had another struggle — the last — with my bonds, and only cut myself the deeper for my pains. I gave in once more, and lay quiet, and listened for the splash of the sweeps.

Gone! Not a sound could I hear but the blowing of a fish now and then on the surface of the sea, and the creak of the brig's crazy old spars, as she rolled gently from side to side with the little swell there was on the quiet water.

An hour and a quarter. The wick grew terribly as the quarter slipped away, and the charred top of it began to thicken and spread out mushroom-shape. It would fall off soon. Would it fall off red-hot, and would the swing of the brig cant it over the side of the candle and let it down on the slow-match? If it would, I had about ten minutes to live instead of an hour.

This discovery set my mind for a minute on a new tack altogether. I began to ponder with myself what sort of a death blowing up might be. Painful! Well, it would be, surely, too sudden for that. Perhaps just one crash inside me, or outside me, or both; and nothing more! Perhaps not even a crash; that and death and the scattering of this living body of mine into millions of fiery sparks, might all happen in the same instant! I couldn't make it out; I couldn't settle how it would be. The minute of calmness in my mind left it before I had half done thinking; and I got all abroad again.

When I came back to my thoughts, or when they came back to me (I can't say which), the wick was awfully tall, the flame was burning with a smoke above it, the charred top

was broad and red, and heavily spreading out to its fall.

My despair and horror at seeing it took me in a new way, which was good and right, at any rate, for my poor soul. I tried to pray — in my own heart, you will understand, for the gag put all lip-praying out of my power. I tried, but the candle seemed to burn it up in me. I struggled hard to force my eyes from the slow, murdering flame, and to look up through the chink in the hatch at the blessed daylight. I tried once, tried twice; and gave it up. I next tried only to shut my eyes, and keep them shut — once — twice — and the second time I did it. "God bless old mother, and sister Lizzie; God keep them both, and forgive *me.*" That was all I had time to say, in my own heart, before my eyes opened again, in spite of me, and the flame of the candle flew into them, flew all over me, and burned up the rest of my thoughts in an instant.

I couldn't hear the fish blowing now; I couldn't hear the creak of the spars; I couldn't think; I couldn't feel the sweat of my own death agony on my face — I could only look at the heavy, charred top of the wick. It swelled, tottered, bent over to one side, dropped — red-hot at the moment of its fall — black and harmless, even before the swing of the brig had canted it over into the bottom of the candlestick.

I caught myself laughing.

Yes! laughing at the safe fall of the bit of wick. But for the gag, I should have screamed with laughing. As it was, I shook with it inside me — shook till the blood was in my

head, and I was all but suffocated for want of breath. I had just sense enough left to feel that my own horrid laughter at that awful moment was a sign of my brain going at last. I had just sense enough left to make another struggle before my mind broke loose like a frightened horse, and ran away with me.

One comforting look at the blink of daylight through the hatch was what I tried for once more. The fight to force my eyes from the candle and to get that one look at the daylight was the hardest I had had yet; and I lost the fight. The flame had hold of my eyes as fast as the lashings had hold of my hands. I couldn't look away from it. I couldn't even shut my eyes, when I tried that next, for the second time. There was the wick growing tall once more. There was the space of unburned candle between the light and the slow-match shortened to an inch or less.

How much life did that inch leave me? Three-quarters of an hour? Half an hour? Fifty minutes? Twenty minutes? Steady! an inch of tallow-candle would burn longer than twenty minutes. An inch of tallow! the notion of a man's body and soul being kept together by an inch of tallow! Wonderful! Why, the greatest king that sits on a throne can't keep a man's body and soul together; and here's an inch of tallow that can do what the king can't! There's something to tell mother when I get home which will surprise her more than all the rest of my voyages put together. I laughed inwardly again at the thought of that, and shook and swelled and suffocated myself, till the light of the candle leaped in

through my eyes, and licked up the laughter, and burned it out of me, and made me all empty and cold and quiet once more.

Mother and Lizzie. I don't know when they came back; but they did come back — not, as it seemed to me, into my mind this time, but right down bodily before me, in the hold of the brig.

Yes: sure enough, there was Lizzie, just as light-hearted as usual, laughing at me. Laughing? Well, why not? Who is to blame Lizzie for thinking I'm lying on my back, drunk in the cellar, with the beer-barrels all round me? Steady! she's crying now — spinning round and round in a fiery mist, wringing her hands, screeching out for help — fainter and fainter, like the splash of the schooner's sweeps. Gone — burned up in the fiery mist! Mist? fire? no; neither one nor the other. It's mother makes the light — mother knitting, with ten flaming points at the ends of her fingers and thumbs, and slow-matches hanging in bunches all round her face instead of her own gray hair. Mother in her old arm-chair, and the pilot's long skinny hands hanging over the back of the chair, dripping with gunpowder. No! no gunpowder, no chair, no mother — nothing but the pilot's face, shining red-hot, like a sun, in the fiery mist; turning upside down in the fiery mist; running backward and forward along the slow-match, in the fiery mist; spinning millions of miles in a minute, in the fiery mist — spinning itself smaller and smaller into one tiny point, and that point darting on a sudden straight into my head — and then, all fire and all

mist — no hearing, no seeing, no thinking, no feeling — the brig, the sea, my own self, the whole world, all gone together!

After what I've just told you, I know nothing and remember nothing, till I woke up (as it seemed to me) in a comfortable bed, with two rough-and-ready men like myself sitting on each side of my pillow, and a gentleman standing watching me at the foot of the bed. It was about seven in the morning. My sleep (or what seemed like my sleep to me) had lasted better than eight months — I was among my own countrymen in the island of Trinidad — the men at each side of my pillow were my keepers, turn and turn about — and the gentleman standing at the foot of the bed was the doctor. What I said and did in those eight months, I never have known, and never shall. I woke out of it as if it had been one long sleep — that's all I know.

It was another two months or more before the doctor thought it safe to answer the questions I asked him.

The brig had been anchored, just as I had supposed, off a part of the coast which was lonely enough to make the Spaniards pretty sure of no interruption, so long as they managed their murderous work quietly under cover of night.

My life had not been saved from the shore, but from the sea. An American vessel, becalmed in the offing, had made out the brig as the sun rose; and the captain having his time on his hands in consequence of the calm, and seeing a vessel anchored where no vessel had any reason to be, had manned one of his boats and sent his mate with it, to look a little

closer into the matter, and bring back a report of what he saw.

What he saw, when he and his men found the brig deserted and boarded her, was the gleam of candle-light through the chink in the hatchway. The flame was within about a thread's breadth of the slow-match when he lowered himself into the hold; and if he had not had the sense and coolness to cut the match in two with his knife before he touched the candle, he and his men might have been blown up along with the brig as well as me. The match caught, and turned into sputtering red fire, in the very act of putting the candle out; and if the communication with the powder-barrel had not been cut off, the Lord only knows what might have happened.

What became of the Spanish schooner and the pilot, I have never heard from that day to this.

As for the brig, the Yankees took her, as they took me, to Trinidad, and claimed their salvage, and got it, I hope, for their own sakes. I was landed just in the same state as when they rescued me from the brig — that is to say, clean out of my senses. But please to remember, it was a long time ago; and, take my word for it, I was discharged cured, as I have told you. Bless your hearts, I'm all right now, as you may see. I'm a little shaken by telling the story, as is only natural — a little shaken, my good friends, that's all.

The Short Stories of Wilkie Collins

A trail-blazer for a long line of writers, Wilkie Collins (1824-1889) was the creator of the mystery novel. The terrain he laid open was spacious enough to include stories drawn from the endless and absorbing casebooks of crime, detection, mystery, and supernatural fantasy—with their modern derivatives, psychological thrillers and science fiction—though in Collins' day all these were included under the general category of Tales of Mystery and Imagination. Poe is credited as being the creator of the first modern detective stories, but it was Collins who broadened the genre to the proportions of a novel. Both writers led to the creation of the imperishable Sherlock Holmes, and to what is currently our most popular type of reading and dramatic entertainment.

Collins' stories, products of a fantastic imagination, are still fresh and vital, and those included in this collection, especially the macabre tale "A Terribly Strange Bed," demonstrate the author's uncanny knack for arousing suspense and excitement. The other classic mystery stories included in this volume are, "The Caldron of Oil," "The Fatal Cradle," "Mr. Captain and the Nymph," and "'Blow up with the Brig!'"

A Perpetua Book

Published by
A. S. Barnes and Company, Inc.
New York 16

P-4015

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

$1.65