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where he found Don Silvio very busy removing a hone upon which he had been whetting a sharp double-edged stiletto. The Sicilian walked up to him, offering his hand with apparent cordiality; but Jack, with a look of defiance, said, "Don Silvio, we know you; my object now is to demand, on the part of my friend, the satisfaction which you do not deserve, but which our indignation at your second attempt upon Don Rebiera induces us to offer; for if you escape from him you will have to do with me. On the whole, Don Silvio, you may think yourself fortunate, for it is better to die by the hands of a gentleman than by the gibbet."

Don Silvio turned deadly pale—his hand sought his stiletto in his bosom, but it was remaining on the table; at last he replied, "Be it so—I will meet you when and where you please, in an hour from this."

Jack mentioned the place of meeting, and then walked out of the room. He and Gascoigne then hastened to the quarters of an officer they were intimate with, and having provided themselves with the necessary firearms, were at the spot before the time. They waited for him till the exact time, yet no Don Silvio made his appearance.

"He's off," observed Gascoigne; "the villain has escaped us."

Half-an-hour over the time had passed, and still there was no sign of Gascoigne's antagonist, but one of the governor's aides-de-camp was seen walking up to them.

"Here's Atkins," observed Jack; "that's unlucky, but he won't interfere."

"Gentlemen," said Atkins, taking off his hat with much solemnity, "the governor particularly wishes to speak to you both."

"We can't come just now—we'll be there in half-an-hour."

"You must be there in three minutes, both of you. Excuse me, my orders are positive—and to see them duly executed I have a corporal and a file of men behind that wall—of course if you walk with me quietly there will be no occasion to send for their assistance."

"This is confounded tyranny," cried Jack. "Well may they call him 'King Tom.'"

"Yes," replied Atkins, "and he governs here *in rey absoluto*—so come along."

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Jack and Gascoigne, having no choice, walked up to the government house, where they found Sir Thomas in the verandah, which commanded a view of the harbour and offing.

"Come here, young gentlemen," said the governor, in a severe tone; "do you see that vessel about two miles clear of the port? Don Silvio is in it, going back to Sicily under a guard. And now remember what I say as a maxim through life. Fight with gentlemen, if you must fight, but not with villains and murderers. By 'consenting' to fight with a 'blackguard,' you as much disparage your cloth and compromise your own character, as by refusing to give satisfaction to a 'gentleman.' There, go away, for I'm angry with you, and don't let me see you till dinner-time."

CHAPTER XXIX

In which our hero sees a little more service, and is better employed than in fighting Don Silvio.

BUT before they met the governor at his table, a sloop of war arrived from the fleet with despatches from the commander-in-chief. Those to Captain Wilson required him to make all possible haste in fitting, and then to proceed and cruise off Corsica, to fall in with a Russian frigate which was on that coast; if not there, to obtain intelligence, and to follow her wherever she might be.

All was now bustle and activity on board of the *Aurora*. Captain Wilson, with our hero and Gascoigne, quitted the governor's house and repaired on board, where they remained day and night. On the third day the *Aurora* was complete and ready for sea, and about noon sailed out of Valette Harbour.

In a week the *Aurora* had gained the coast of Corsica, and there was no need of sending look-out men to the mast-head, for one of the officers or midshipmen was there from daylight to dark. She ran up the coast to the northward without seeing the object of her pursuit, or obtaining any intelligence.

Calms and light airs detained them for a few days, when a northerly breeze enabled them to run down the eastern side

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of the island. It was on the eighteenth day after they had quitted Malta, that a large vessel was seen ahead about eighteen miles off. The men were then at breakfast.

"A frigate, Captain Wilson, I'm sure of it," said Mr. Hawkins, the chaplain, whose anxiety induced him to go to the mast-head.

"How is she steering?"

"The same way as we are."

The *Aurora* was under all possible sail, and when the hands were piped to dinner, it was thought that they had neared the chase about two miles.

"This will be a long chase; a stern chase always is," observed Martin to Gascoigne.

"Yes, I'm afraid so—but I'm more afraid of her escaping."

"That's not unlikely either," replied the mate.

"You are one of Job's comforters, Martin," replied Gascoigne.

"Then I'm not so often disappointed," replied the mate.

"There are two points to be ascertained; the first is, whether we shall come up with the vessel or lose her—the next is, if we do come up with her, whether she is the vessel we are looking for."

"You seem very indifferent about it."

"Indeed I am not; I am the oldest passed midshipman in the ship, and the taking of the frigate will, if I live, give me my promotion, and if I'm killed, I shan't want it. But I've been so often disappointed that I now make sure of nothing until I have it."

"Well, for your sake, Martin, I will still hope that the vessel is the one we seek, that we shall not be killed, and that you will gain your promotion."

"I thank you, Easy—I wish I was one that dared hope as you do."

Poor Martin! he had long felt how bitter it was to meet disappointment upon disappointment. How true it is that hope deferred maketh the heart sick! and his anticipations of early days, the buoyant calculations of youth, had been one by one crushed; and now, having served his time nearly three times over, the reaction had become too painful, and, as he truly said, he dared not hope; still his temper was not soured, but chastened.

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"She has hauled her wind, sir," hailed the second lieutenant from the topmast cross-trees.

"What think you of that, Martin?" observed Jack.

"Either that she is an English frigate, or that she is a vessel commanded by a very brave fellow, and well manned."

It was sunset before the *Aurora* had arrived within two miles of the vessel; the private signal had been thrown out, but had not been answered, either because it was too dark to make out the colours of the flags, or that these were unknown to an enemy. The stranger had hoisted the English colours, but that was no satisfactory proof of her being a friend; and just before dark she had put her head towards the *Aurora*, who had now come stem down to her. The ship's company of the *Aurora* were all at their quarters, as a few minutes would now decide whether they had to deal with a friend or foe.

There is no situation perhaps more difficult, and demanding so much caution, as the occasional meeting with a doubtful ship. On the one hand, it being necessary to be fully prepared, and not allow the enemy the advantage which may be derived from your inaction; and on the other, the necessity of prudence, that you may not assault your friends and countrymen. Captain Wilson had hoisted the private night signal, but here again it was difficult, from his sails intervening, for the other ship to make it out. Before the two frigates were within three cables' length of each other, Captain Wilson, determined that there should be no mistake from any want of precaution on his part, hauled up his courses and brailed up his driver that the night signal might be clearly seen.

Lights were seen abaft on the quarter-deck of the other vessel as if they were about to answer; but she continued to keep the *Aurora* to leeward at about half a cable's length, and as the foremost guns of each vessel were abreast of each other, hailed in English—

"Ship ahoy! what ship's that?"

"His Majesty's ship *Aurora*," replied Captain Wilson, who stood on the hammocks. "What ship's that?"

By this time the other frigate had passed half her length clear of the beam of the *Aurora*, and at the same time that a pretended reply of "His Majesty's ship—" was heard, a broadside from her guns, which had been trained aft on purpose, was poured into the *Aurora*, and at so short a dis-

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tance doing considerable execution. The crew of the *Aurora*, hearing the hailing in English, and the vessel passing them apparently without firing, had imagined that she had been one of their own cruisers. The captains of the guns had dropped their lanyards in disappointment, and the silence which had been maintained as the two vessels met was just breaking up in various ways of lamentation at their bad luck, when the broadside was poured in, thundering in their ears, and the ripping and tearing of the beams and planks astonished their senses. Many were carried down below; but it was difficult to say whether indignation at the enemy's ruse, or satisfaction at discovering that they were not called to quarters in vain, most predominated. At all events, it was answered by three voluntary cheers, which drowned the cries of those who were being assisted to the cockpit.

"Man the larboard guns and about ship!" cried Captain Wilson, leaping off the hammocks. "Look out, my lads, and rake her in stays! We'll pay him off for that foul play before we've done with him. Look out, my lads, and take good aim as she pays round."

The *Aurora* was put about, and her broadside poured into the stern of the Russian frigate—for such she was. It was almost dark, but the enemy, who appeared as anxious as the *Aurora* to come to action, hauled up her courses to await her coming up. In five minutes the two vessels were alongside, exchanging murderous broadsides at little more than pistol-shot—running slowly in for the land, then not more than five miles distant. The skin-clad mountaineers of Corsica were aroused by the furious cannonading, watching the incessant flashes of the guns, and listening to their reverberating roar.

After half-an-hour's fierce combat, during which the fire of both vessels was kept up with undiminished vigour, Captain Wilson went down on the main-deck, and himself separately pointed each gun after it was loaded; those amidships being direct for the main-channels of the enemy's ship, while those abaft the beam were gradually trained more and more forward, and those before the beam more and more aft, so as to throw all their shot nearly into one focus, giving directions that they were all to be fired at once, at the word of command. The enemy, not aware of the cause of the delay, imagined that

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the fire of the *Aurora* had slackened, and loudly cheered. At the word given, the broadside was poured in, and dark as it was, the effects from it were evident. Two of the midship ports of the antagonist were blown into one, and her mainmast was seen to totter, and then to fall over the side. The *Aurora* then set her courses, which had been hauled up, and shooting ahead, took up a raking position, while the Russian was still hampered with her wreck, and poured in grape and canister from her upper deck carronades to impede their labours on deck, while she continued her destructive fire upon the hull of the enemy from the main-deck battery.

The moon now burst out from a low bank of clouds, and enabled them to accomplish their work with more precision. In a quarter of an hour the Russian was totally dismasted, and Captain Wilson ordered half of his remaining ship's company to repair the damages, which had been most severe, whilst the larboard men at quarters continued the fire from the main-deck. The enemy continued to return the fire from four guns, two on each of her decks, which she could still make bear upon the *Aurora*; but after some time even these ceased, either from the men having deserted them, or from their being dismounted. Observing that the fire from her antagonist had ceased, the *Aurora* also discontinued, and the jolly-boat astern being still uninjured, the second lieutenant was deputed to pull alongside of the frigate to ascertain if she had struck.

The beams of the bright moon silvered the rippling water as the boat shoved off; and Captain Wilson, and his officers who were still unhurt, leant over the shattered sides of the *Aurora*, waiting for a reply; suddenly the silence of the night was broken upon by a loud splash from the bows of the Russian frigate, then about three cables' length distant.

"What could that be?" cried Captain Wilson. "Her anchor's down. Mr. Jones, a lead over the side, and see what water we have."

Mr. Jones had long been carried down below, severed in two with a round shot; but a man leaped into the chains, and lowering down the lead, sounded in seven fathoms.

"Then I suspect he will give us more trouble yet," observed Captain Wilson; and so indeed it proved, for the Russian captain, in reply to the second lieutenant, had told him in English, "that he would answer that question with his broad-

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side ;" and before the boat was dropped astern, he had warped round with the springs on his cable, and had recommenced his fire upon the *Aurora*.

Captain Wilson made sail upon his ship, and sailed round and round the anchored vessel, so as to give her two broadsides to her one, and from the slowness with which she worked at her springs upon her cables, it was evident that she must be now very weak-handed. Still the pertinacity and decided courage of the Russian captain convinced Captain Wilson that, in all probability, he would sink at his anchor before he would haul down his colours ; and not only would he lose more of the *Aurora's* men, but also the Russian vessel, without he took a more decided step. Captain Wilson, therefore, resolved to try her by the board. Having poured in a raking fire, he stood off for a few moments, during which he called the officers and men on deck, and stated his intention. He then went about, and himself conning the *Aurora*, ran her on board the Russian, pouring in his reserved broadside as the vessels came into collision, and heading his men as they leaped on the enemy's decks.

Although, as Captain Wilson had imagined, the Russian frigate had not many men to oppose to the *Aurora's*, the deck was obstinately defended ; the voice and the arm of the Russian captain were to be heard and seen everywhere, and his men, encouraged by him, were cut down by numbers where they stood.

Our hero, who had the good fortune to be still unhurt, was for a little while close to Captain Wilson when he boarded, and was about to oppose his unequal force against that of the Russian captain, when he was pulled back by the collar by Mr. Hawkins, the chaplain, who rushed in advance with a sabre in his hand. The opponents were well matched, and it may be said that, with little interruption, a hand-to-hand conflict ensued, for the moon lighted up the scene of carnage, and they were well able to distinguish each other's faces. At last the chaplain's sword broke ; he rushed in, drove the hilt into his antagonist's face, closed with him, and they both fell down the hatchway together. After this the deck was gained, or rather cleared, by the crew of the *Aurora*, for few could be said to have resisted, and in a minute or two the frigate was in their possession. The chaplain and the Russian captain were hoisted up, still clinging to each other, both

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senseless from the fall, but neither of them dead, although bleeding from several wounds.

As soon as the main-deck had been cleared, Captain Wilson ordered the hatches to be put on, and left a party on board while he hastened to attend to the condition of his own ship and ship's company.

It was daylight before anything like order had been restored to the decks of the *Aurora* ; the water was still smooth, and instead of letting go her own anchor, she had hung on with a hawser to the prize ; but her sails had been furled, her decks cleared, guns secured, and the buckets were dashing away the blood from her planks and the carriages of the guns, when the sun rose and shone upon them. The numerous wounded had by this time been put into their hammocks, although there were still one or two cases of amputation to be performed.

The carpenter had repaired all shot-holes under or too near to the water-line, and then had proceeded to sound the well of the prize ; but although her upper works had been dreadfully shattered, there was no reason to suppose that she had received any serious injury below, and therefore the hatches still remained on, although a few hands were put to the pumps to try if she made any water. It was not until the *Aurora* presented a more cheerful appearance that Captain Wilson went over to the other ship, whose deck, now that the light of heaven enabled them to witness all the horrors even to minuteness, presented a shocking spectacle of blood and carnage. Body after body was thrown over ; the wounded were supplied with water and such assistance as could be rendered until the surgeons could attend them ; the hatches were then taken off, and the remainder of her crew ordered on deck. About two hundred obeyed the summons, but the lower deck was as crowded with killed and wounded as was the upper. For the present the prisoners were handed over down into the fore-hold of the *Aurora*, which had been prepared for their reception, and the work of separation of the dead from the living then underwent. After this, such repairs as were immediately necessary were made, and a portion of the *Aurora's* crew, under the orders of the second lieutenant, were sent on board to take charge of her. It was not till the evening of the day after this night conflict that the *Aurora* was in a situation to make sail. All hands were then sent on board of the *Trident*, for such was

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the name of the Russian frigate, to fit her out as soon as possible. Before morning—for there was no relaxation from their fatigue, nor was there any wish for it—all was completed, and the two frigates, although in a shattered condition, were prepared to meet any common conflict with the elements. The *Aurora* made sail with the *Trident* in tow; the hammocks were allowed to be taken down, and the watch below permitted to repose.

In this murderous conflict the *Trident* had more than two hundred men killed and wounded. The *Aurora's* loss had not been so great, but still it was severe, having lost sixty-five men and officers. Among the fallen there were Mr. Jones, the master, the third lieutenant, Mr. Arkwright, and two midshipmen killed. Mr. Pottyfar, the first lieutenant, severely wounded at the commencement of the action. Martin, the master's mate, and Gascoigne, the first mortally, and the second badly, wounded. Our hero had also received a slight cutlass wound, which obliged him to wear his arm for a short time in a sling.

Among the ship's company who were wounded was Mesty; he had been hurt with a splinter before the *Trident* was taken by the board, but had remained on deck, and had followed our hero, watching over him and protecting him as a father. He had done even more, for he had with Jack thrown himself before Captain Wilson, at a time that he had received such a blow with the flat of a sword as to stun him, and bring him down on his knee. And Jack had taken good care that Captain Wilson should not be ignorant, as he really would have been, of this timely service on the part of Mesty, who certainly, although with a great deal of *sang-froid* in his composition when in repose, was a fiend incarnate when his blood was up.

"But you must have been with Mesty," observed Captain Wilson, "when he did me the service."

"I was with him, sir," replied Jack, with great modesty; "but was of very little service."

"How is your friend Gascoigne this evening?"

"Oh, not very bad, sir—he wants a glass of grog."

"And Mr. Martin?"

Jack shook his head.

"Why, the surgeon thinks he will do well."

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"Yes, sir, and so I told Martin; but he said that it was very well to give him hope—but that he thought otherwise."

"You must manage him, Mr. Easy; tell him that he is sure of his promotion."

"I have, sir, but he won't believe it. He never will believe it till he has his commission signed. I really think that an acting order would do more than the doctor can."

"Well, Mr. Easy, he shall have one to-morrow morning. Have you seen Mr. Pottyfar? He, I am afraid, is very bad."

"Very bad, sir; and they say is worse every day, and yet his wound is healthy, and ought to be doing well."

Such was the conversation between Jack and his captain, as they sat at breakfast on the third morning after the action.

The next day Easy took down an acting order for Martin, and put it into his hands. The mate read it over as he lay bandaged in his hammock.

"It's only an acting order, Jack," said he; "it may not be confirmed."

Jack swore, by all the articles of war, that it would be; but Martin replied that he was sure it never would.

"No, no," said the mate, "I knew very well that I never should be made. If it is not confirmed, I may live; but if it is, I am sure to die."

Every one that went to Martin's hammock wished him joy of his promotion; but six days after the action, poor Martin's remains were consigned to the deep.

The next person who followed him was Mr. Pottyfar, the first lieutenant, who had contrived, wounded as he was, to reach a packet of the universal medicine, and had taken so many bottles before he was found out, that he was one morning found dead in his bed, with more than two dozen empty phials under his pillow, and by the side of his mattress. He was not buried with his hands in his pockets, but when sewed up in his hammock, they were, at all events, laid in the right position.