

"You appear to have been exerting yourself," said I.

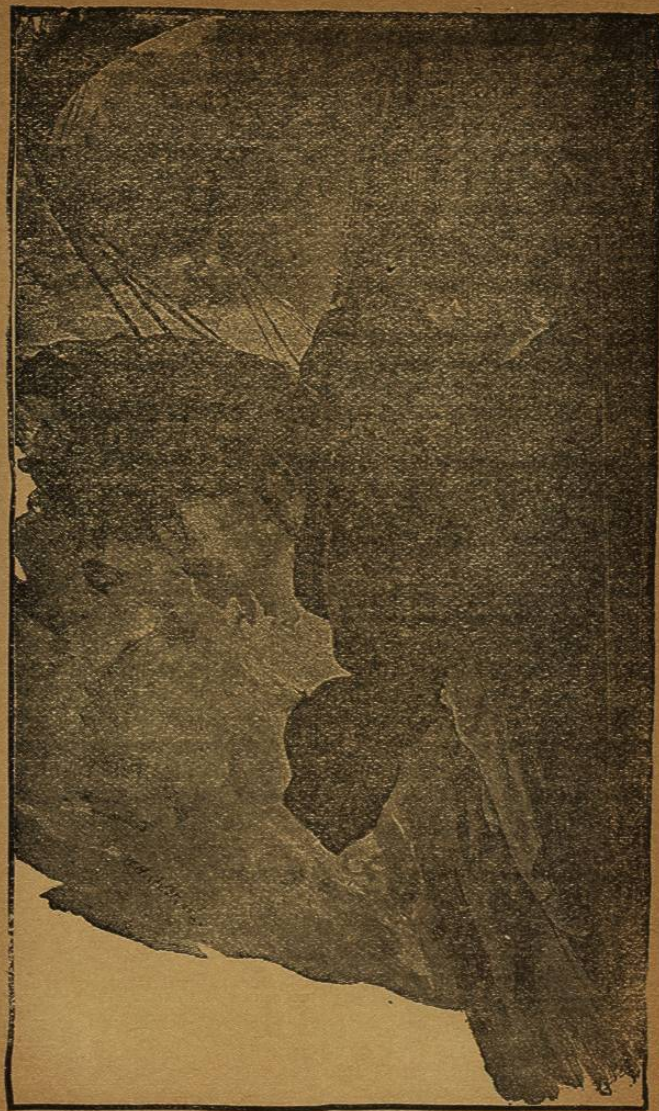
"And so I have," he answered; "I have been risking my life indeed."

He produced a bottle of champagne from a chest of drawers, and after offering me a draught of it, swallowed a tumblerful of the wine.

"I was within an ace of going overboard," said he, applying his handkerchief to his moustache, and sinking into his Madeira chair. "I must not again attempt such a feat in that infernal cloak."

"What have you been doing?"

"I received no letter to-day, and wished to know the reason of Miss Primrose's silence, so I got into what I think you call the main-chains, where the rigging comes together thickly, and where the shadow is so deep that I defy any one who is not keeping a bright lookout on the poop to observe a figure cautiously creeping over the side. I wished to make my way to that platform," said he, pointing with his thumb in the direction of the mizzen-channel, "and I succeeded in doing so,



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though I can't conceive now how I managed it, for the beading along the side—do you call it beading? but no matter—did not certainly project an inch, and I could find no other support for my toes. Fortunately, my height enabled me to keep a good hold of the rail, but that confounded cloak was as though I were carrying several men on my back.”

“You might very easily have gone overboard,” said I.

“I very nearly *did* go overboard,” he replied; “I believe I shall not make a second attempt of the same sort,” said he, laughing softly, and toying with his cigar-case as though debating whether he should light a cheroot or not.

“Then it must have been you that I heard just now?” said I.

“Quite likely,” he answered coolly.

“I suppose you now know,” said I, “that Miss Primrose's maid shares her berth with her?”

“Yes, I now know that. Still my adventure was perfectly successful. Miss Primrose, you see, sleeps as you do on the top shelf, and her maid lies in the under bunk. A whispered

conversation blends harmoniously with the hiss of the foam. And then we had reason to suppose that the maid was asleep.”

He now lighted a cheroot and sat gazing at me thoughtfully.

“Have you heard,” said I, “that the General questioned me somewhat passionately about you this morning?”

“No. Who is to give me the news but you? My time outside just now was all too brief to obtain information of that sort.”

“He questioned me very angrily; as good as ordered the commander of the ship to send a number of sailors here to hoist you on deck. He knows who you are. He called you Cunningham. His putting the maid to sleep with her mistress proves his detection of the truth.”

“I hope he was not very rude to you?” he exclaimed, unemotionally, with a demeanour of coolness indeed that astonished me, as I had reasonably imagined that the news would surprise or irritate or alarm him.

“His temper rendered his speech objectionable,” said I. “Now that he knows you are

on board, I presume you will show yourself on deck?"

"I believe not," he replied. "I am very comfortable here—as snug and lonely as a maggot in its nut. The General would not suffer Miss Primrose and me to be together. I must therefore keep away from the poop, or endure the misery of fearing that her health suffered from confinement to her cabin—for her father would certainly insist upon her remaining below. Besides, if I now went amongst you, nothing would follow but the discomfort of being stared at. After to-day all the passengers will be as busy with talk as a rookery."

"Though the General," said I, "humanely suggested that you should be dragged on to the deck, I am bound to say on behalf of Captain Stagg, whom we both dislike, that he spoke up very spunkily, told Sir Charles—" and here I gave him the substance of what the skipper had said.

"I am not to be dragged out of this cabin," said he, smiling. "For any sort of violence done me in that way Captain Stagg would have to pay handsomely in a court of justice, and

he knows it. I take it," said he, stroking down his moustache and admiring the ash of his cigar, "that the law of the land is extended to the ocean. I have paid for this cabin, or for a share of it. My portion is as much mine to hold and enjoy as if it were a lodging hired by the week or month ashore. There is no imaginable excuse that Captain Stagg could invent for having me dragged out of it. In fact, I should like to reason the matter with him; and if to-morrow you will ask him to step down and look in upon me, I shall feel obliged."

Our conversation continued in this strain for some time. I could gather no hint from him as to his intentions. He certainly did not appear in the least degree disconcerted by the General's discovery of his being in the ship—for as you have seen, Sir Charles's suspicion practically amounted to discovery; and yet it seemed to me that the one effect of this detection must be to render his prospects as a lover entirely hopeless: for now the General's existence would be one of impassioned vigilance. Whilst the three of them kept the sea, there

would indeed be the safety of the illimitable horizon; there were no post-chaises, no railway stations over the side; and the General would be sensible of the security provided to his wishes by a full-rigged sailing-ship in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. But when the three of them reached India! Then it would be that Sir Charles, knowing Mr. Cunningham to be at Miss Primrose's heels, would go to work to wither and extinguish my cabin-fellow's hopes. What he *would* do who could conjecture? What he *could* do is not hard to suppose. He was a man of passions which were to be easily inflamed into the exercise of a tyranny that should be nothing short of brutal; and hence I could not but think that now Mr. Cunningham was known to be on board, the sooner he relinquished his pursuit of Miss Primrose, the more promptly he should request Captain Stagg to transfer him to the first homeward-bound ship the *Light of Asia* might fall in with, the saner he would prove himself.

A few days passed. I will not detain you with an account of the small talk of those

hours, nor with a description of what I took notice of in the behaviour, severally, of the General, of his daughter, and of Mr. Cunningham, who was suffered to remain unmolested below. But this much I may set down: that though we were all of us aware that Miss Primrose was under no restraint, and that though in the daytime her father kept his eye upon her, whilst at night she was watched only by her maid,—if indeed the mere sleeping of the woman in Miss Primrose's berth could be interpreted into any sort of sentinelling,—we did not fail to notice that the girl was slowly withdrawing herself from the society of the saloon and the deck. Most of her meals were taken to her cabin, where she was waited upon by her maid. This we knew to be of her own ordering, because again and again Sir Charles, finding her absent from her place when he took his seat, would go to her berth and return with a face dark with mortification and annoyance. Also she seldom visited the deck. Me she now scarcely noticed. Interpreted by what followed, I later recognized what was almost incivility in her as a maiden's strategy, but at the time

her cold and withholding demeanour vexed me as an expression of ingratitude, and perhaps in



"ME SHE NOW SCARCELY NOTICED."

a small degree it removed my sympathy from her.

VII

"IN THE MIDDLE WATCH"

By the date at which this story has now arrived we had been a day less than a month out from the Thames ; but the equator was still under our bow. Indeed I have some recollection of our latitude at noon on this day being 40' or 45' north. Throughout the morning and throughout the afternoon the burnished heave of the sea was faintly tarnished by catspaws only, delicate breathings of air that rapidly expired in their sportive flights, leaving our lofty canvas sulkily and breathlessly swaying as the tall fabric lightly rolled on the light wide blue undulations.

Yet the heat was not so excessive as we had found it further north. The pitch no longer lay soft as putty in the seams of the deck, and