

Fenn George Manville

Dutch the Diver: or, A Man's Mistake



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Dutch the Diver; Or, A Man's Mistake

Story 1-Chapter I.

Story One – Dutch the Diver.

At the Diver's Office

“I say, Rasp. Confound the man! Rasp, will you leave that fire alone? Do you want to roast me?”

“What’s the good o’ you saying will I leave the fire alone, Mr Pug?” said the man addressed, stoking savagely at the grate; “you know as well as I do that if I leave it half hour you never touches it, but lets it go out.”

Half a scuttle of coals poured on.

“No, no. No more coals, Rasp.”

“They’re on now, Mr Pug,” said Rasp, with a grim grin. “You know how the governor grumbles if the fire’s out, and it’s me as ketches it.”

“The office is insufferably hot now.”

“Good job, too; for it’s cold enough outside, I can tell you; and there’s a draught where I sits just as if you’d got yer ear up again the escape-valve of the air-pump.”

“Get a screen, then,” said the first speaker, impatiently, as he scratched his thick, curly, crisp brown hair with the point of a pair of compasses, and gazed intently at a piece of drawing-paper pinned out upon the desk before him.

“Screen? Bah! What do I want wi’ screens? I can stand wind and cold, and a bit o’ fire, too, for the matter o’ that. I ain’t like some people.”

“Hang it all, Rasp, I wish you’d go,” said the first speaker. “You see how busy I am. What’s the matter with you this morning? Really, you’re about the most disagreeable old man I ever knew.”

“Disagreeable? Old?” cried Rasp, seizing the poker, and inserting it in the bars for another good stoke at the office fire, when the compasses were banged down on the desk, their owner leaped off the stool, twisted the poker out of the stoker’s hand, and laughingly threw it down on the fender.

“I’ll get Mr Parkley to find you a post somewhere as fireman at a furnace,” said the first speaker, laughing.

“I don’t want no fireman’s places,” growled Rasp. “How’d the work go on here wi’out me? Old, eh? Disagreeable, eh! Sixty ain’t so old, nayther; and just you wear diving soots for forty year, and get your head blown full o’ wind till you’re ’most ready to choke, and be always going down, and risking your blessed life, and see if you wouldn’t soon be disagreeable.”

“Well, Rasp, I’ve been down pretty frequently, and in as risky places as most men of my age, and it hasn’t made me such an old crab.”

“What, you? Bah! Nothing puts you out – nothing makes you cross ’cept too much fire, and you do get waxey over that. But you try it for forty year – forty year, you know, and just see what you’re like then, Mr Pug.”

“Confound it all, Rasp,” cried the younger man, “that’s the third time in the last ten minutes that you’ve called me Pug. My name is Pugh – PUGH – Pugh.”

“Taint,” said the old fellow, roughly, “I ain’t lived sixty year in the world, and don’t know how to spell. PEW spells *pew*, and PUGH spells *pug*, with the H at the end and wi’out it, so you needn’t tell me.”

“You obstinate old crab,” said the other, good-humouredly, as he stopped him from making another dash at the poker. “There, be off, I’m very busy.”

“You allus are busy,” growled the old fellow; “you’ll get your brains all in a muddle wi’ your figuring and drawing them new dodges and plans. No one thinks the better o’ you, no matter how hard you works. It’s my opinion, Mr Dutch – there, will that suit yer, as you don’t like to be called Mr Pug?”

“There, call me what you like, Rasp, you’re a good, old fellow, and I shall never forget what you have done for me.”

“Bah! Don’t talk stuff,” cried the old fellow, snappishly.

“Stuff, eh?” said the other, laughing, as he took up his compasses, and resumed his seat. “Leave – that – fire – alone!” he cried, seizing a heavy ruler, and shaking it menacingly as the old man made once more for the poker. “And now, hark here – Mrs Pugh says you are to come out to the cottage on Sunday week to dinner, and spend the day.”

“Did she say that? Did she say that, Mr Dutch?” cried the old man, with exultation.

“Yes, she wants to have a long chat with the man who saved her husband’s life.”

“Now, what’s the good o’ talking such stuff as that, Mr Pug?” cried the old man, angrily. “Save life, indeed! Why, I only come down and put a rope round you. Any fool could ha’ done it.”

“But no other fool would risk his life as you did yours to save mine, Rasp,” said the younger man, quietly. “But, there, we won’t talk about it. It gives me the horrors. Now, mind, you’re to come down on Sunday week.”

“I ain’t comin’ out there to be buttered,” growled the old fellow, sourly.

“Buttered, man?”

“Well, yes – to be talked to and fussed and made much of by your missus, Master Dutch.”

“Nonsense!”

“Taint nonsense. There, I tell you what, if she’ll make a contract not to say a word about the accident, and I may sit and smoke a pipe in that there harbour o’ yourn, I’ll come.”

“Arbour at this time of the year, Rasp?” laughed the younger man. “Why, it’s too cold.”

“What’s that to do wi’ it? Just as if I couldn’t stand cold. Deal better than you can heat.”

“Then I shall tell her you are coming, Rasp. What would you like for dinner?”

“Oh, anything’ll do for the likes o’ me. I ain’t particular.”

“No, but you may as well have what you like for dinner.”

“Oh, I ain’t particular. Have just what you like. But if there was a morsel o’ tripe on the way I might pick a bit.”

“Good!” said the other, smiling, “you shall have some tripe for dinner for one thing.”

“Don’t you get letting it be got o’ purpose for me. Anything’ll do for me – a bit o’ sooetty pudden, for instance.”

“All right, Rasp. Tripe and suet pudding on Sunday week.”

“If ever there was,” said Rasp, thoughtfully, as he made an offer to get at the poker, “a woman as was made to be a beautiful angel, and didn’t turn out to be one because they forgot her wings, that’s your missus, Master Dutch.”

“Thank you, Rasp, old fellow, thank you,” said the young man, smiling; and his eyes brightened as he listened to this homely praise of the woman he worshipped.

“But what’s a puzzle to me,” continued the old fellow, with a grim chuckle, “is how she as is so soft, and fair, and dark-haired, and gentle, could take up with such a strong, broad-shouldered chap as you, Mr Dutch.”

“Yes, it was strange,” said the young man.

“I should more like have expected to see you pair off wi’ Captain Studwick’s lass – Miss Bessy. Now, she’s a fine gal, if you like.”

“Yes, she’s a fine, handsome girl, Rasp; and her father’s very proud of her, too.”

“I should just think he ought to be,” said Rasp. “Why, it’s my belief, if any chap offended her, she’d give him such a clap aside o’ the head as would make his ears ring.”

“I don’t know about that, Rasp,” laughed the other; “but I do believe whoever wins her will have a true-hearted Englishwoman for his wife.”

“O’ course he will, else she wouldn’t be the skipper’s lass. Bless her! – she’s always got a nice, pleasant word to say to a man when she comes here with her father. He used to think you meant to make up to her, Master Dutch.”

“Nonsense, man, nonsense!”

“Oh, but he did; and then this other affair came off. I never could understand it, though.”

“Ah, it was a problem, eh?” laughed the younger man.

“For you ain’t good-looking, are you, sir?”

“Not at all, Rasp,” laughed the other. “We should neither of us get the prize for beauty, eh, Rasp?”

“I should think not,” said Rasp: “but I always was the ugliest man our way. I think she took to you because you were so straight, and stout, and strong.”

“Perhaps so, Rasp.”

“I’ve heerd say, as the more gentle, and soft, and tender a woman is, the more she likes a fellow as is all big bone and muscle, so as to take care of her, you know. That must ha’ been it, sir,” continued the old fellow, chuckling, “unless she took a fancy to your name. Ho! ho! ho!”

“No, I don’t think it was that, Rasp, my man,” said the other, quietly.

“More don’t I, sir; Dutch Pug. Ho! ho! ho!”

“Dutch Drayson Pugh, Master Rasp.”

“Pug’s bad enough,” said the old fellow; “but Dutch! What did they call you Dutch for?”

“It was a whim of my father,” said the other. “My grandfather married a lady in Holland, and in memory of the alliance my father said – so I’ve often been told – that as I was a fair, sturdy little fellow, like a Dutch burgomaster in miniature, I should be called Dutch; and that is my name, Mr Rasp, at your service.”

“Well, you can’t help it now, sir, any more than you can the Pug; but if it had been me I should have called myself Drayson.”

“And seemed ashamed of the name my dear old father gave me, Rasp! No, I’m not the man for that,” said Dutch, warmly.

“No, sir, you ain’t,” said Rasp, in a more respectful tone, as he looked at the colour flaming up in the younger man’s cheeks, and in his heart of hearts acknowledged that he was not such a bad-looking fellow after all; for, though far from handsome, he was bold, bluff, and Saxon of aspect, broad-shouldered, and evidently Herculean in strength, though, from his deep build and fine proportions, in no wise heavy.

Now, on the other hand, Rasp was a decidedly plain man, rough, rugged, grizzled, and with eyebrows and whiskers of the raggedest nature possible. Their peculiar bristly quality was partaken of also by his hair, which, though cut short, was abundant; and though you might have brushed it to your heart’s content, it was as obstinate as its owner, for it never lay in any direction but that it liked.

At this point Rasp, who was a favoured old servant of the firm in which Dutch Pugh held a confidential post, made another attempt to stoke the fire, was turned on his flank, and retreated, leaving the young man to busily resume the drawing of a plan for some piece of machinery.

It was a dark, gloomy-looking room, that in which he worked, for the one window opened upon the narrow street of the busy sea-port of Ramwich; and a heavy, yellow fog hung over the town, and made the office look gloomy and full of shadow.

The place was fitted up as a private office, and near the window was placed one of those great double-sloped desks, so arranged that four people could stand, or sit upon the high leather-covered stools, and write at it at the same time. A wide level divided the two slopes, and this was dominated by brass rails, beneath which stood a couple of those broad, flat, pewter inkstands common in commercial offices, and which in this case it was Rasp’s delight to keep clean.

There were other objects about the gloomy office, though, upon which Rasp bestowed his time; for in three places, fitted on stands, and strapped to the wall to prevent their falling forward, were what looked at first sight, as they peered from the gloom, like so many suits of grotesque armour; for what light there was gleamed from the huge polished helmets, with their great brass, latticed goggle glass eyes – whose crests were tubes, and ornamentation glistening rims and studs of copper. A nervous person coming upon them in the dark might easily have been startled, for, with a certain grim idea of humour, Rasp had by degrees so arranged them that they leaned forward in peculiarly life-like positions – the hand of one holding a copper lantern, another being in the act of striking with a massive hatchet, and the third poising a huge crowbar in a menacing mode.

Farther back in the gloom stood a strange-looking air-pump; while in various directions, coiled and trailed like snakes, great lengths of india-rubber tubing, apparently in disorder, but really carefully kept ready for instant use, this being Rasp's special task, of which he was proud to a degree.

"This is a teaser," said Dutch to himself, after making sundry lines on the paper before him, and then pausing, compasses in one hand, pen in the other. "Valve A to close tube B – escape-valve at A dash – small copper globe at B dash, as a reservoir, and – hum – ha – yes – to be sure, small stop-cock in the middle of the copper tube at H. That's it! I've got it at last."

"Of course you have – I knew you would," said a short quick voice.

Dutch started, and turned sharply round, to confront the little, square-built man who had entered the office quietly, and stood peering over his shoulder.

"Ah, Mr Parkley! I didn't hear you come in," said Dutch, smiling.

"Too busy over your work," said the new-comer, who seemed all hat and comforter, from between which peered a pair of keen, restless eyes. "I knew you'd work that out, Dutch, or else I shouldn't have given you the job. Dutch Pugh, I'd give something for your cleverness with pen and pencil. Look at me, sir, a man dragged up instead of brought up – a man who never signs his name because he can't write decently – a man who can hardly read a newspaper, unless the type's big. Ignorant, ignorant to a degree – a man –"

"Of sound judgment, sir," said Dutch, interrupting him, "who from the power of his brain and long experience has suggested more improvements in hydraulic machinery than any of our greatest scientists, and who has not only originated and made his great business, but whose opinion is sought from everywhere in all great diving cases."

"Stuff – stuff – stuff, Dutch! I'm ashamed of my ignorance."

"And who is one of the wealthiest men in Ramwich."

"Gammon and flattery, Dutch, my lad," said the other, taking off his great hat to place it jauntily on one of the diving-helmets, and then returning into the light, with his broad bald head shining, and his dark, restless eyes twinkling good-humouredly. "Here, catch hold of that," he continued, thrusting one hand into his chest, and dragging out the fringed end of his white woollen comforter.

Dutch Pugh laid down his compasses, smiling, and took hold of the end of the comforter, when its wearer began slowly to turn round before the fire, as if he was being roasted, unwinding about three yards of comforter from his neck, and then giving a sigh of relief as he again went into the back part of the office, and hung the woollen wrap round one of the diver's necks.

"I've managed to make bread and cheese, Pugh – bread and cheese," he said, chuckling, as he came back, climbed upon a stool by that of his assistant, and sat with his hands on his knees. "Yes, bread and cheese; beef and horse-radish. Pugh, how's the little wife?"

"Quite well, Mr Parkley," said Dutch, smiling.

"That's right, bless her! Tell her I'm coming down to spend a Sunday soon."

"We shall only be too glad, sir," said Dutch, smiling. "When shall it be?"

"Soon, man; but not yet. Too busy. I've got this big job on," he continued, rubbing his bald head, which looked as if he had worn a diver's helmet till all the hair had been frayed off. "Oh, here's a letter."

For just then Rasp came into the office, not quietly, like his master – who walked slowly and heavily, as if putting down boots with massive leaden soles, and seemed as if he were wading through deep water, and liable to get entangled amongst sunken rigging – but with a bang and a rush like a big wind, and even made the letter he held in his hand rustle as he held it out to Mr Parkley, saying, with a surly snarl —

“Letter. Answer. Waiting.”

Then, uttering a snort, he walked across to the diving suits, snatched off Mr Parkley’s hat, whisked off the comforter, and dabbed them both on a hat-peg close at hand; after which he took out a large blue-check cotton pocket-handkerchief drew forward a set of short steps, and, growling as he did so, began to breathe on the bright copper, gave it a good polishing, and then went off to his den.

“See that?” said Mr Parkley, nodding his head sideways at Rasp, as he went out – but not until he had seized the poker, rammed it between the bars with a scientific twist, and made the blaze go dancing up the chimney. “See that, Pugh! He’s the real master here. He’s a tyrant.”

“Well, really, sir, he has his own way pretty well.”

“Rare stuff though, Pugh, my dear boy – rare stuff. That man’s one you can always trust in any emergency. I’d leave my life in his hands at any time.”

“I know that, sir,” said Dutch, warmly. “He is as true as steel.”

“Right, Pugh, my dear boy – right. But look here,” he continued, thrusting a finger in the young man’s button-hole, “I wish you would drop that ‘sir’ to me. I don’t like it. I’m only a business fellow, and you’ve had the education of a gentleman, and I feel sometimes as if I ought to say ‘sir’ to you.”

“My dear sir – ”

“There you go again.”

“Well, my dear Mr Parkley, then, I have you to thank for so much kindness.”

“Stuff! stuff! stuff!” cried the elder, laying his hand playfully on his mouth. “You came to me to help me, and I was to pay you for that help. Well, look here, Pugh, you’ve been no end of value to me, and get more useful every day. What I pay you is nonsense to what you are worth. Now, look here; in three months the current business year with me will be up, and I’m going to ask you to join me as junior partner.”

“Mr Parkley!” cried the young man, astounded, as his employer leaped off his stool, and took down and replaced his hat.

“Say no more,” he cried; “I don’t act without thinking, do I?”

“Never, sir.”

“Then it’s all right. Catch hold of this,” he continued, handing the young man one end of the comforter, and then, tucking the other in under his waistcoat, he slowly wound himself up in it again, tapped the letter, and said, “Big job on here – I’m going to see them about it;” and then, lifting his feet in his peculiar way, he seemed to move out of the office as if he were under water, and the door closed behind him.

Story 1-Chapter II. Golden Promises

The last words of his employer had such an effect upon Dutch Pugh that he leaped from his stool, and began to pace the office excitedly, for this was beyond his wildest dreams. Partner in such a business, where he knew that many thousands were netted every year! He could hardly believe it. At one moment he was all exhilaration, thinking of the delight it would afford his young wife; at the next, he felt a strange sensation of depression, as of coming trouble. It was as if the sunshine of his life had been crossed by a black shadow; and minute by minute this increased upon him, till he shuddered, started, and turned round, to glance uneasily about the office, as if expecting to see trouble there.

And then it seemed to him as if the three goblinlike figures were laughing and blinking at him weirdly, menacing him with crowbar and hatchet; and, as if in a dream for the next few moments, he seemed to see himself engaged in some dangerous diving experiment, and at the mercy of an enemy who sought his life, while his young wife pleaded for him and in vain.

It was all misty and strange; his brain was confused, and he could the next minute no more have analysed this waking dream, or idealised the actors therein, than have flown; but there, for a few brief moments, was the impression upon him of coming trouble – trouble so horrible that it menaced his life and the honour of her he most dearly loved. That was the impression; but how, when, where, he could not comprehend.

“Am I going mad?” he exclaimed, dashing his hand to his forehead. “What an idiot I am!” he cried, with a forced laugh. “That old rascal has made the place like an oven, and the blood has flown to my head. There, only to think what trifles will upset a man, and, if he is weak-minded, make him superstitious and fanciful. Some men would have really believed that a terrible calamity was about to befall them, when it was only – ”

“Here’s a gentleman to see you,” said Rasp, barking out his words, and ushering in a stranger.

Dutch Pugh involuntarily started, for he seemed to be in the presence of a stranger, and yet somehow the face was familiar to him. It was that of an exceedingly handsome man of about thirty, who took off a soft sombrero hat, and loosened the folds of a heavy black cloak, one end of which was thrown over his shoulder. He was evidently a foreigner, for his complexion was of a rich creamy tinge, his crisp black hair curled closely round a broad, high forehead, his dark eyes glittered beneath straight black brows, his nose was slightly aquiline, and the lower part of his face was covered with a thick, silky, black beard.

As he loosened the cords of his heavy cloak with his carefully-gloved hand, Dutch Pugh saw that he was faultlessly dressed, and, as he smiled and showed his white teeth, he said in good English, but with a perceptible foreign accent —

“Mr Parkley, I learn, is out. I address Mr Pugh?”

“The same,” said Dutch, who seemed fascinated by his look. “Will you take a chair?”

A cold chill came over the speaker as the visitor smiled and seated himself, but only to be succeeded by a feeling of suffocation; and for an instant his brain swam, and the dreamy feeling seemed about to return, but it passed off instantly, as, rousing himself, Dutch said —

“You will find this room too hot, perhaps. Shall I open – ”

“Hot!” laughed the stranger, taking out a card and letter of introduction. “My dear sir, it is comfortable after your chilly streets. I am from Cuba, where we see the sun.”

As he spoke he handed a card, upon which was printed – “Señor Manuel Lauré.”

“You will open the letter?” he continued, passing the one he held in his hand. “No?”

“Mr Parkley will be here shortly,” said Dutch. “Would you prefer to see him?”

“Yes – no,” said the stranger. “I should like to see him, but I am content to talk to you. You Englishmen are so intelligent, and those who sent me here told me that their fellow-countrymen would be ready to help my designs.”

“May I ask what they are?” said Dutch, who began to feel suspicious of the stranger.

“Yes, for I shall betray nothing. First, am I right? Yes,” he said, glancing round, and pointing at the diving suits. “I see I am right. You work under water – dive?”

“That is our business, and the making of apparatus.”

“Apparatus? Oh, yes, I understand. Would you – would Mr Parkley like to make a great fortune?”

“Not a doubt about it,” said Mr Parkley, entering, all hat and comforter. “How do?” he continued, bluffly, as the visitor rose and bowed, and then scanned him searchingly, as hat and comforter were placed once more upon the diving suit.

“This is Mr Parkley, the head of this establishment.”

“I am delighted,” said the stranger, raising his eyebrows, and half-closing his eyes. “Will you, then, read?”

“Thinks I don’t look it, Pugh,” said Mr Parkley aside, as he took the letter handed him, opened it, glanced at the contents and superscription, and then handed it to Dutch.

“Sit down, sir,” he said, sharply, as he perched himself on a stool as jerkily as the stranger resumed his full of grace. “Read it aloud, Mr Pugh.”

Dutch still felt troubled; but he read, in a clear voice, the letter from a well-known English firm at Havana.

“Dear Sir, – The bearer of this, Señor Manuel Lauré, comes to you with our earnest recommendation. He has certain peculiar projects that he will explain. To some people they would seem wild and visionary; but to you, with your appliances, they will doubtless appear in a very different light. He is a gentleman of good position here, and worthy of your respect. If you do not see fit to carry out his wishes, kindly place him in communication with some other firm, and do what you can to prevent his being imposed upon. – Faithfully yours, —

“Roberts and Moore.

“To Mr Parkley, Ramwich.”

“Glad to see you, sir,” said Mr Parkley, upon whom the letter wrought a complete change. “Good people, Roberts and Moore. Supplied them with a complete diving apparatus. So you’ve come over on purpose to offer me a fortune?”

“Yes,” said the visitor, “a great fortune. You smile, but listen. Do I think you a child, sir? Oh, no. I do not tell you I want to make a great fortune for you only, but for myself as well.”

“Of course,” said Mr Parkley, smiling, and showing in his manner how thoroughly business-like he was. “I thought that had to come.”

“See here, sir – This Mr Pugh is in your confidence?”

“Quite. Go on.”

“See, then: I have travelled much, boating – yachting you would call it in England – all around the shores of the Great Gulf of Mexico. I know every island and piece of coast in the Carib Sea.”

“Yes,” said Mr Parkley, drumming on the desk.

“I have made discoveries there.”

“Mines?” said Mr Parkley. “Not in my way.”

“No, sir – better than mines; for the gold and silver are gathered and smelted – cast into ingots.”

“Buried treasure, eh? Not in my way, sir – not in my way.”

“Yes, buried treasure, Mr Parkley; but buried in the bright, clear sea, where the sun lights up the sand and rocks below.”

“Sea, eh? Well, that is more in our way. Eh, Pugh?”

“Read the old chronicles of the time, sir, two or three hundred years ago,” said the Cuban, rising, with his eyes flashing, and his handsome face lit up by his glowing excitement, “and you shall find that gold ships and plate-ships – ships laden with the treasures of Mexico and Peru, taken by the Spaniards, were sunk here and there upon those wondrous coasts.”

“Old women’s tales,” said Mr Parkley, abruptly. “Cock-and-bull stories.”

“I do not quite understand,” said the Cuban, haughtily, “except that you doubt me. Sir, these are truths. I doubted first; but for five years in a small vessel I have searched the Carib Sea, and I can take you to where three ships have been wrecked and sunk – ships whose existence is only known to me.”

“Very likely,” said Mr Parkley; “but that don’t prove that they were laden with gold.”

“Look,” said the Cuban, taking from a pocket in his cloak a packet, and, opening it out, he unwrapped two papers, in one of which was a small ingot of gold, in the other a bar of silver. They were cast in a very rough fashion, and the peculiarity that gave strength to the Cuban’s story was that each bar of about six inches long was for the most part encrusted with barnacle-like shells and other peculiar sea growths.

“Hum! Could this have been stuck on, Pugh?” said Mr Parkley, curiously examining each bar in turn.

“I think not, sir, decidedly,” said Pugh. “Those pieces of metal must have been under water for a great length of time.”

“You are right, Mr Pugh,” said the Cuban, whose face brightened. “You are a man of sound sense. They have been under water three hundred years.”

He smiled at the young Englishman as he spoke, but the other felt repelled by him, and his looks were cold.

“How did you get those bars and ingots?” said Mr Parkley, abruptly.

“From amongst the rotten timbers of an old galleon,” said the Cuban. “But where?”

“That is my secret. Thirty feet below the surface at low water.”

“Easy depth,” said Mr Parkley, thoughtfully. “But why did you not get more?”

“Sir, am I a fish? I practised diving till I could go down with a stone, and stay a minute; but what is that? How could I tear away shell, and coral, and hard wood, and sand, and stones. I find six such bars, and I am satisfied. I seek for years for the place, and I know three huge mines of wealth for the bold Englishmen who would fit out a ship with things like these” – pointing to the diving suits – “with brave men who will go down with bars, and stay an hour, and break a way to the treasure, and there load – load that ship with gold and silver, and perhaps rich jewels. Sir, I say to you,” he continued, his face gradually glowing in excitement, “are you the brave Englishman who will fit out a ship and go with me? I say, make a written bond of agreement to find all we shall want in what you call apparatus and brave men. I show you the exact place. I take your ship to the spot to anchor, and then, when we get the treasures, I take half for myself, and you take half for yourselves. Is it fair?”

“Yes, it sounds fair enough,” said Mr Parkley, rubbing his nose with a pair of compasses. “What do you say, Pugh?”

“I hardly know what to say, sir. The project is tempting, certainly; but – ”

“But it is a monstrous fortune,” said the Cuban. “It is an opportunity that cannot come twice to a man. Do you hear? Great ingots of gold and bars of silver. Treasures untold, of which I offer you half, and yet you English people are so cold and unmovable. Why, a Spaniard or a Frenchman would have gone mad with excitement.”

“Yes,” said Mr Parkley, “but we don’t do that sort of thing here.”

“No,” said the Cuban, “you are so cold.”

“It takes some time to warm us, sir,” said Dutch, sternly; “but when we are hot, we keep so till our work is done. Your Frenchman and Spaniard soon get hot, and are cold directly.”

“That’s right, Pugh, every word,” said Mr Parkley, nodding his head.

“Then you refuse my offer?” said the Cuban, with a bitter look of contempt stealing over his face.

“Do I?” replied Mr Parkley.

“Yes, you are silent – you do not respond.”

“Englishmen don’t risk ten thousand pounds without looking where it is to go, my fine fellow,” said Mr Parkley, drumming away at the desk. “I don’t say I shall not take it up, and I don’t say I shall.”

“You doubt me, then. Are not my papers good?”

“Unexceptionable.”

“Is not the half of the wondrous wealth enough for you? You who only take out your ship and divers to get what it has taken me years to find. I tell you there are cargoes of this rich metal lying there – hundreds of thousands of pounds – a princely fortune; and yet you hesitate.”

“Are there any volcanoes your way?” said Mr Parkley, drily.

“Yes – many. Why?”

“I thought so,” said the sturdy Englishman.

“It is enough,” cried the Cuban, haughtily. “You play with me, and insult me.”

And, as he spoke, with flashing eyes, he snatched at the two ingots, and began to wrap them up, but with a smile of contempt he threw them back on the desk.

“No, we do not,” said Mr Parkley quietly; “only you are so red hot. I must have time to think.”

“Time to think?”

“Yes. I like the idea, and I think I shall accept your offer.”

“You believe in my papers, then?”

“Oh, yes, they are beyond suspicion,” said Mr Parkley, holding out his hand. “Only there are so many tricks played that one has to go carefully. Well, how are you? Glad to see you, and hope we shall be good friends.”

“My great friend!” exclaimed the Cuban, throwing his arms round the sturdy little man, and nearly oversetting him, stool and all, in his fervid embrace. “They were right: you are the true enterprising man of energy after all.”

“I say, don’t do that again, please,” said Mr Parkley. “We shake hands here, and save those hugs for the other sex – at least the young fellows do.”

“But I am overjoyed,” exclaimed the Cuban, enthusiastically. “Here, I will be English,” he cried, holding out his hand and shaking that of Dutch most heartily. “We two shall be great friends, I see. You will come too. You are young and full of energy, and you shall be as rich as he. You shall both draw up gold in heaps and be princes. Thank you both – thank you. And now we will make our plans.”

“Gently, gently,” exclaimed Mr Parkley; “this all takes time. If that treasure has lain for three hundred years at the bottom of the sea, it will be safe for a few months longer.”

“Ah, yes, yes.”

“Then we must take our time, and, if we go, make plenty of preparation.”

“Yes, yes,” said the Cuban; “take plenty of diving suits and a diving bell.”

“Don’t you fidget about that, sir,” said Mr Parkley, proudly. “I think we can find such appliances as will do the trick. Eh, Pugh?”

Dutch nodded, and then looked uneasily at the Cuban, whose presence seemed to fill him with a vague trouble.

“I’ve got an important contract on too,” continued Parkley.

“A contract?” said the Cuban. “A new machine?”

“No, no; a bond such as we must have to do certain work.”

“Yes, yes. I see.”

“I’ve got to empty a ship off the coast here. She went down, laden with copper.”

“I must see that,” cried the Cuban, excitedly. “Where is it? Let us go. I must see the men go under water.”

“All in good time, sir – all in good time; for I must finish that job first. Well, Rasp,” he continued, as that worthy came in.

“It’s Mrs Pug, sir. Shall I show her in?”

“No, no,” exclaimed Dutch, eagerly.

But he was too late; for, as he spoke, a lady-like figure entered the room, and the bright, fair, girlish face, with its clustering curls of rich dark-brown hair, turned from one to the other in a timid, apologetic way.

“I am sorry,” she faltered. “You are engaged. My husband arranged – ”

“Come in, my dear – come in,” said Mr Parkley, hopping off his stool, taking her hands, and patting them affectionately, as he placed her in a chair. “We’ve about done for to-day; and if we had not, there’s nothing you might not hear. I’ll be bound to say, Pugh keeps nothing from you.”

“But she is beautiful!” muttered the Cuban, with sparkling eyes, as his lips parted, and a warm flush came into his creamy cheeks; while Dutch turned pale as he saw his admiration, and the vague feeling of dread came once more in combination with one of dislike.

Story 1-Chapter III. Under Water and Under Current

“But I am not polite, my dear,” said Mr Parkley. “This is Señor Manuel Lorry, a gentleman from Havana. Señor, Mrs Pugh, the wife of my future partner, and almost my daughter.”

The Cuban bowed low as the young Englishwoman rose and looked anxiously at him, her eyes falling directly, and she blushed vividly, as though her fair young cheeks were scorched beneath his ardent gaze.

A pang shot through the breast of Dutch Pugh; but the eyes were raised again to his with so naïve and innocent a look that the pain was assuaged, and he crossed to her side.

“Well, Señor,” said Mr Parkley, “I am to see that you are not imposed upon, so you are in my charge.”

“I know so much of the straightforward honesty of the English, sir, that I am glad to be in your hands.”

“That’s complimentary,” said Mr Parkley.

“It is true, sir,” said the Cuban, bowing.

“Very well, then,” said Mr Parkley, “we’ll begin by trusting one another fully. Well, Rasp, what is it now?”

“Here’s Sam Oakum just come from Barrport.”

“Well, have they got out all the copper?”

“Not a bit of it, for the men won’t go down.”

“Why?”

“Say the engine don’t supply enough air, and the receiver’s bust. Won’t go down, hany one on ’em.”

“Nonsense!”

“John Tolly’s dead or thereabouts.”

“Dead?”

“So Sam says.”

“Tut, tut, tut!” ejaculated Mr Parkley. “Always something wrong. Pugh, you’ll have to go down directly, and set an example, or I must. Tolly always comes up dead when he don’t like a job.”

“No, no, no!” exclaimed Mrs Pugh, leaping off to catch her husband by the arm. “He must never go down again. Promise me you will not go,” she cried, turning her ashy face up to his.

“But she is beautiful indeed!” muttered the Cuban.

“My darling,” whispered Dutch, “be a woman. There is no danger.”

“No danger!” she wailed. “Dutch, I’ve dreamed night after night of some terrible trouble, and it is this. You must not – must not go.”

“My darling,” he whispered. And, bending over her, he said a few words in her ear, which made her set her teeth firmly and try to smile, as she stood up clasping his hand.

“I will try,” she whispered – “try so hard.”

“I’m ready, Mr Parkley,” said the young man, hoarsely.

“That’s right, Pugh. Go and set matters square. I’ll see your wife safe back home.”

“I leave her to you,” said Dutch, in a low voice. “Good-bye, my darling, get back home. I’ll join you soon,” he whispered, and hurried out of the office.

But as he turned for a moment, it was to see the Cuban’s eyes fixed upon the trembling girl; while the goblinlike figures against the wall seemed to be nodding and gibbering at him, as if laughing at the troubles that assailed his breast.

“Off down to Barrport, Mr Pug?” said Rasp, as he stood in the outer office.

“Yes, instantly. Come, Oakum,” he said, to a rough-looking sailor, who stood hat in hand.

“Sharp’s the word, Mr Pug,” said Rasp; “but I say,” he continued, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder, “that foreign chap, I don’t like the looks o’ he.”

“I tell you what it is, sir,” said the rough-looking sailor, as he walked by Dutch Pugh’s side down to the station. “If I weer much along o’ that Rasp, it would soon come to a row.”

“Why, man?”

“Cause he’s such a overbearing sort of a chap. He’s one of them kind as always thinks he’s skipper, and every one else is afore the mast. If he’d come aboard the ship and hailed me, I should ha’ ast him to sit down on the deck and handed him the bacco; but when I comes in he sits and stares at one orty like, and goes on taking his bacco, in a savage sorter way, up his nose, and never so much as says, ‘Have a pinch, mate,’ or the like.”

“You don’t know him, my man,” said Dutch, quietly.

“And don’t want to,” growled the old sailor. “I should just like to have him aboard our vessel for a month. I’d show him how to count ten, I know.”

“Well, there are more unlikely things,” said Dutch. “Perhaps he may sail with you.”

“What, are we going off, sir?” said the sailor, facing round.

“I don’t know yet,” said Dutch, “but it is possible.”

“I’m glad on it,” said the sailor, giving his canvas trousers a slap. “I’m tired o’ hanging about the coast as we do. All this diving work’s very well, but I want to get out in the blue again.”

“Tell me all about the upset over the work,” said Dutch. “Is Tolly bad?”

“Not he, sir,” chuckled the sailor. “I’d ha’ cured him with a rope’s-end in about two twos. Didn’t want to go down, and when the skipper turned rusty, and said as how he must, his mates takes sides with him, and say as Mr Parkley wants to send ’em to their death, and then the real sore place comes out – they wants a rise in the pay. ‘Well, then,’ says the skipper, ‘I’ll send for Mr Parkley;’ and then Tolly says in his blustering way, ‘Ah,’ he says, ‘I ain’t afraid to go down, and if I loses my life it’s all the governor’s fault.’ So down he goes, and dreckly after he begins pulling his siggle rope, and they pulls him up, unscrews him, and lays him on the deck, and gives him cold grog.”

“But was he senseless?”

“He wasn’t so senseless that he couldn’t lap the grog, sir, no end; and if he warn’t playing at sham Abraham, my name ain’t Sam Oakum.”

Barrport was soon reached, and, boarding a small lugger, Dutch and his companion were put aboard a handsomely-rigged schooner, lying about four miles along the coast, at anchor, by the two masts of a vessel seen above the water. And here it was evident that arrangements had been made for diving, for a ladder was lashed to the side of the vessel, evidently leading down to the deck of the sunken ship, while four men in diving suits lounged against the bulwarks, their round helmets, so greatly out of proportion to their heads, standing on a kind of rack, while the heavy leaden breast and back pieces they wore lay on the planks.

“Ah, Pugh,” said a weather-beaten, middle-aged man, greeting Dutch as he reached the deck; “glad you’ve come. When I’ve a mutiny amongst my own men I know what to do; but with these fellows I’m about done, especially as they say the machinery is defective.”

“Of course, Captain Studwick,” said Dutch aloud, “men cannot be asked to risk their lives. Here, Tolly, what is it?”

The diver spoken to, a fat-faced, pig-eyed fellow, with an artful leer upon his countenance, sidled up.

“The pump don’t work as it should, Mr Pugh,” he said. “Near pretty nigh gone – warn’t I, mates?”

The others nodded.

“Is the work below very hard?” said Dutch, quietly.

“Well, no, sir, I don’t know as it’s much harder nor usual; but the copper’s heavy to move, and the way into the hold is littler nor usual; ain’t it, mates?”

“Take off your suit,” said Dutch, after glancing at the men at the air-pump, and seeing that they were those he could trust.

“It won’t fit you, sir,” said the man, surlily.

“I’m the best judge of that,” said Dutch; “take it off instantly.”

The man glanced at his companions, but seeing no help forthcoming from them, he began sulkily to take off the copper gorget and the india-rubber garments, with the heavy leaden-soled boots, which, with the help of the old sailor, Dutch slipped on with the ease of one accustomed to handle such articles; then fitting on the leaden weights – the chest and back piece – he took up the helmet, saw that the tube from the back was properly adjusted and connected with the air-pump, which he examined, and then turned to Captain Studwick —

“You’ll see that no one touches the tube, Mr Studwick,” he said, in a low tone. “One of those fellows might feel disposed to tamper with it.”

The captain nodded, and Dutch then lifted on the helmet, the rim of which fitted exactly to the gorget, had the screws tightened, and then, with the old sailor and the captain himself seeing that the tube and signalling cords were all right, the pump began to work, and Dutch walked heavily to the side, took hold of the rungs of the ladder, and began to descend.

In a few moments his head had disappeared, and his blurred figure could be made out going down into the darkness, while a constant stream of exhausted air which escaped from the helmet-valve kept rising in great bubbles. The pump clanked as its pistons worked up and down, and the sailors and divers – the former eagerly and the latter in a sulky fashion – approached the side and looked over.

Captain Studwick himself held the signal-line, and answered the calls made upon him for more or less air by communicating with the men at the pump; and so the minutes passed, during which time, by the necessity for lengthening out the tube and cord, it was evident that Dutch was going over the submerged vessel in different directions. All had gone so well that the captain had relaxed somewhat in his watchfulness, when he was brought back to attention by a violent jerking of the cord.

“More air!” he shouted – “quick!” just as there was a yell, a scuffle, and the man Tolly struggled into the middle of the deck, wrestling hard with a black sailor, who backed away from him, and then, running forward like a ram, struck his adversary in the chest and sent him rolling over into the scuppers.

By this time the signalling had ceased, and Dutch was evidently moving about at his ease.

“What was that?” said Captain Studwick, sternly, as the man Tolly got up and made savagely at the black, but was restrained by the strong arm of the old sailor, Oakum.

Tolly and the black both spoke excitedly together, and not a word was to be understood.

“Here you, Mr Tolly, what is it?” cried the captain. “Hold your tongue, ’Pollo.”

“I bash him head, sah. I – ”

“Hold your tongue, sir,” said the captain. “What was it?”

“I happened to look round, sir, and found this stupid nigger standing on the tube, and when I dragged him off he struck me.”

“Who you call nigger, you ugly, white, fat-head tief?” shouted the black, savagely. “I bash your ugly head.”

“Silence!” cried the captain.

“It great big lie, sah,” cried the black. “I turn roun’ and see dat ugly tief set him hoof on de tubum, and top all de wind out of Mass’ Dutch Pugh, and I scruff him.”

“You infamous – ”

“Silence!” roared the captain. “Stand back, both of you. Oakum, see that no one goes near the tube. Haul in gently there; he’s coming up.”

This was the case, for in another minute the great round top of the helmet was seen to emerge from the water; its wearer mounted the side, and was soon relieved of his casque, displaying the flushed face of Dutch, who looked sharply round.

“Some one must have stepped on the tube,” he said. “Who was it?”

“It lies between these two,” said Captain Studwick, pointing to the pair of adversaries.

“It was the nigger, sir,” said Tolly.

“No, sah, ’sure you, sah. I too much sense, sah, to put um foot on de tubum. It was dis fellow, sah,” said the black, with dignity.

“I presume it was an accident,” said Dutch, quietly. Then, turning to the divers – “I have been down, as you see, my men. The apparatus is in perfect working order, the water clear, the light good, and the copper easy to get at. Begin work directly. If anything goes wrong, it is the fault of your management.”

“But ain’t this black fellow to be punished?” began the man Tolly.

“Mr John Tolly, you are foreman of these divers,” said Dutch quietly, “and answerable to Mr Parkley for their conduct. If one of the sailors deserves punishment, that is Captain Studwick’s affair.”

For a moment there was dead silence, then ’Pollo spoke.

“I not a sailor, sah; I de ship cook. You mind I not put de cork in de tubum, Mass’ Tolly, next time you go down.”

“There! do you hear him?” cried Tolly. “Who’s going down to be threatened like that?”

“Yah, yah, yah!” laughed the black. “Him great coward, sah. He not worf notice.”

Then he turned and walked forward, while Tolly resumed his suit, vacated for him by Dutch, their helmets were put on by two of the men, and diving commenced, Dutch remaining on board till it was time to cease, and having the satisfaction of seeing a goodly portion of the copper hauled on the deck of the schooner, the divers fastening ropes round the ingots, which were drawn up by the sailors.

“That was a malicious trick, of course,” said Dutch to the captain while Tolly was below.

“I’m afraid it was,” said the captain, “to try and make out that the machinery was out of order.”

“Yes, I expected it,” said Dutch; “and that’s why I spoke to you. They did not mean to do me a mischief, of course – only to frighten me. I don’t suspect the black, though.”

“What, ’Pollo!” said the captain. “Good heavens, no! He’s as staunch as steel. A thoroughly trustworthy man.”

“I must wink at it, I suppose,” said Dutch, “for it is not easy to supply vacancies in our little staff, and the men know it. They are hard fellows to manage.”

“And yet you manage them well,” said the captain, smiling. “You ought to have been a skipper.”

“Think so?” said Dutch; “but look, who is this coming on board?”

“Poor John!” said the captain, with a sigh. “Poor boy, he’s in a sad way.”

“But he’s very young, Mr Studwick, and with the fine weather he may amend.”

“He’s beginning to be out of hope, Pugh, and so is poor Bessy. The doctor says he must have a sea voyage into some warmer climate – not that he promises health, but prolonged life.”

“Indeed!” said Dutch, starting, as he thought of the Cuban’s proposal, and the probability of Captain Studwick having charge of the vessel if the trip was made, but not feeling at liberty to say much; and, the boat from the shore touching the side, he held his peace.

A minute later a fine, handsome, but rather masculine girl – whose clear eyes sparkled as they lit on Dutch Pugh, and then were turned sharply away – stepped on deck, holding out her hand directly after to assist an invalid to pass the gangway, which he did, panting slightly, and then pausing to cough.

He was evidently enough the girl’s brother, for with his delicate looks and hectic flush he looked strangely effeminate, and in height and stature the pair were wonderfully alike.

“I don’t think it was wise of you to come out, John,” said the captain, kindly; “it’s a cold, thick day.”

“It’s so dull at home,” said the young man, “and I must have change. There, I’m well wrapped up, father; and Bessy takes no end of care of me.”

He gave the girl a tender and affectionate look as he spoke; and she smiled most pleasantly.

“Ah, Mr Pugh, I’m glad to see you. Have you been down?”

“Yes, just for a little while,” said Dutch, shaking hands with him, and then holding out his hand to the sister, who half shrank from him with an angry, flushed face; but his frank, pleasant look overcame her, and she held out her hand to him.

“You have not been to see us yet, Miss Studwick,” he said, frankly. “Hester quite expects you to call, and I hope you will be friends.”

“I will try to be, Mr Pugh,” said the girl, huskily. “I’ll call – soon.”

“That’s right,” he said, smiling. “Come, too, John. We shall be very glad to see you.”

The young man started, and looked at him searchingly with his unnaturally bright eyes.

“No,” he said, sadly. “I’m too much of an invalid now. That is, at present,” he said, catching his father’s eye, and speaking hastily. “I shall be better in a month or two. I’m stronger now – much stronger; am I not, Bessy? Give me your arm, dear. I want to see the divers.”

The couple walked forward to where the air-pump was standing, and the eyes of the captain and Dutch Pugh met, when the former shook his head sadly, and turned away.

There was something very pathetic in the aspect of the young man, in whom it was plain enough to see that one by one most fatal diseases had made such inroads as to preclude all hope of recovery; and saddened at heart, for more than one reason, above all feeling that his presence was not welcome, Dutch superintended his men till, feeling that it would be absolutely necessary that some one would have to be on deck every day till the copper was all recovered, he made up his mind that it would fall to his lot, except at such times as Mr Parkley would relieve guard.

Story 1-Chapter IV. The Diver at Home

The next morning Rasp was sent off to act as superintendent, for Mr Parkley decided that Dutch must stay and help him in his plans for carrying out the Cuban's wishes, if he took the affair up, and previously to discuss the matter.

Dutch announced to Rasp then that he would have to set off at once.

"It's always the way," grumbled the old fellow. "Board that schooner, too. Yah!"

"Never mind, Rasp; you like work. You'll be like the busy bee, improving each shining hour," said Dutch, smiling.

"Yes; and my helmets, and tubes, and pumps getting not fit to be seen, and made hat-pegs of. Busy bee, indeed! I'm tired of improving the shining hours. I've been all my life a-polishing of 'em up for some one else."

He set off growling, and vowing vengeance on the men if they did not work; and Dutch returned to find Mr Parkley with a map of the West Indies spread upon the desk.

"Look here," he said, "here's the place," and he pointed to the Caribbean Sea.

"Do you think seriously of this matter, then?" said Dutch.

"Very. Why not? I believe it is genuine. Don't you?"

"I can't say," replied Dutch. "It may be."

"I think it is," said the other, sharply; "and it seems to me a chance."

"If it proved as this Cuban says, of course it would be."

"And why should it not?" said Mr Parkley. "You see he has nothing to gain by getting me to fit out an expedition, unless we are successful."

"But it may be visionary."

"Those ingots were solid visions," said Mr Parkley. "No, my lad; the thing's genuine. I've thought it out all right, and decided to go in for it at once – that is, as soon as we can arrange matters."

"Indeed, sir!" said Dutch, startled at the suddenness of the decision.

"Yes, my lad, I have faith in it. We could go in the schooner. Take a couple of those divers, and some of our newest appliances. I look upon the whole affair as a godsend. Hum! Here he is. Don't seem too eager, but follow my lead."

A clerk announced the previous night's visitor; and Dutch recalled for the moment the previous day's meeting, and the annoyance he had felt on seeing the stranger's admiring gaze. But this was all forgotten in a few moments, the Cuban being certainly all that could be desired in gentlemanly courtesy, and his manners were winning in the extreme.

"And now that you have had a night for consideration, Señor Parkley, what do you think of my project?" he said, glancing at the map.

"I want to know more," said Mr Parkley.

"I have told you that vessels were sunk – ships laden with gold and silver, Señor Parkley, and I say join me. Find all that is wanted – a ship – divers – and make an agreement to give me half the treasure recovered, and I will take your ship to the spots. Where these are is my secret."

"You said I was slow and cold, Mr Lorry, yesterday," said Mr Parkley. "You shan't say so to-day. When I make up my mind I strike while the iron is hot. My mind is made up."

"Then you refuse," said the Cuban, frowning.

"No, sir, I agree. Here's my hand upon it."

He held out his hand, which the Cuban caught and pressed hastily.

"Viva!" he exclaimed, his face flushing with pleasure.

"You will both be rich as princes. Our friend here goes too?"

“Yes, I shall take him with us,” said Mr Parkley.

Dutch started in wonder at what seemed so rash a proceeding.

“And he must share, too,” said the Cuban, warmly.

“Yes; he will be my partner,” said Mr Parkley.

“And when do we start – to-morrow?”

“To-morrow!” laughed Mr Parkley. “No, sir; it will take us a month to fit out our expedition.”

“A month?”

“At least. We must go well prepared, and not fail for want of means.”

“Yes, yes, that is good.”

“And all this takes time. Trust me, sir, I shall not let the grass grow under my feet.”

“I do not understand the grass grow,” said the Cuban.

“I mean I shall hurry on the preparations,” said Mr Parkley.

The Cuban nodded his satisfaction; when the rest of the morning was spent in discussing the matter; and, though the visitor was extremely careful not to say a word that might give a hint as to the locality of the treasure, it became more and more evident that he was no empty enthusiast, but one who had spent years in the search, and had had his quest browned with success.

Several days passed in this way, during which great success attended the raising of the copper, and a proper deed of agreement had been drawn up and duly signed between the parties to the proposed expedition, at which, however, Dutch had said but little at his own home, lest he should cause his wife, who had been delicate since their marriage, any uneasiness.

The strange fancies that had troubled him had been almost forgotten, and in spite of himself he had become somewhat tinged by the Cuban's enthusiasm, and often found himself dwelling on the pleasure of being possessed of riches such as were described.

“It would make her a lady,” he argued; “and if anything happened to me she would be above want.”

He was musing in this way one morning, when Mr Parkley came to him, they having dined together with the Cuban on the previous evening at his hotel.

“Well, Pugh,” he said, “I'm getting more faith every day. Lorry's a gentleman.”

“Yes,” said Dutch, “he is most polished in his ways, and I must say I begin to feel a great deal of faith in him myself.”

“That's well,” said Mr Parkley, rubbing his hands. “You'll have to go with us.”

“I'm afraid, sir, you must – ”

“Excuse you? No, I don't think I can. Besides, Pugh, you would go with me as my partner, for I shall have all that settled.”

“You are very, very kind, sir,” said Dutch, flushing with pleasure.

“Nonsense, man,” cried Mr Parkley; “all selfishness. You and I can do so much together. See how useful you are to me, partner.”

“Not your partner yet, sir.”

“Yes, you are, Pugh,” said the other, slapping him on the shoulder; “and now we'll go in for calculations and arrangements for the expedition. I was thinking the schooner would do, but I find it would be too small, so I shall set Captain Studwick to look out for a good brig or a small barque, and take him into our confidence to some extent.”

“Not wholly?”

“No; and yet, perhaps, it would be as well. And now, Pugh, I've got a favour to ask of you.”

“Anything, sir, that I can do I will do with all my heart,” replied Pugh, enthusiastically.

“I knew you would,” replied Mr Parkley. “You see, this is a big thing, my lad, and will be the making of us both, and Lorry is a very decent fellow.”

“Decidedly,” said Pugh, wondering at what was coming.

“Well, I must be as civil to him as I can, and so will you, of course.”

“Of course.”

“He’s taken a great fancy to you, by-the-way, and praises you sky-high.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes; and look here, Pugh, he has got to be tired of this hotel where he is, and wants society. I can’t ask him to my shabby place, so I want you to oblige me by playing the host.”

Pugh started as if he had been stung.

“Nothing could be better,” continued Mr Parkley, who did not notice the other’s emotion. “Ask him to come and stay at your little place. Mrs Pugh has things about her in so nice and refined a way that you can make him quite at home. You will gain his confidence, too, and we shall work better for not being on mere hard business terms.”

Dutch felt his brain begin to swim.

“I’ll come as often as I can, and we shall be making him one of us. The time will pass more pleasantly for him, and there’ll be no fear of somebody else getting hold of him to make better terms.”

“Yes – exactly – I see,” faltered Pugh, whose mind was wandering towards home, and who recalled the Cuban’s openly expressed admiration for his wife.

“The dear little woman,” continued Mr Parkley, “could take him out for a drive while you are busy, and you can have music and chess in the evenings. You’ll have to live better, perhaps; but mind, my dear fellow, we are not going to let you suffer for that, and you must let me send you some wine, and a box or two of cigars. We must do the thing handsomely for him.”

“Yes, of course,” said Dutch vaguely.

“Quite a stranger here, you know, and by making him a friend, all will go on so much more smoothly afterwards.”

“Exactly,” said Dutch again.

“But how dreamy you are? What are you thinking about?”

Dutch started, for in spite of his love and trust he was thinking of the handsome Cuban being installed at his home, and always in company with his innocent young wife, while he was away busy over his daily avocations.

“I beg pardon; did I seem thinking?”

“That you did. But never mind; you’ll do this for me, Pugh?”

“Certainly, if you wish it,” said Dutch, making an effort; while the figure of the Cuban seemed to be coming like a dark shadow across his life.

“Well, yes, I do wish it, Pugh, and I am very much obliged. By-the-way, though, what will she say to your going out on the expedition?”

Dutch shook his head.

“By Jove, I never thought of that,” said Mr Parkley. “Poor little woman, it will be too bad. I tell you what, I was going to get old Norton to mind the business. I will not. You shall stay at home.”

“I should like to go,” said Pugh, quietly; “but situated as I am, I should be glad if I could stay.”

“So you shall, Pugh – so you shall,” said Mr Parkley. And nodding his head over and over again, he left Dutch to his thoughts.

He left for home that night with the cloud seeming to darken round him. He felt that under the circumstances he was bound to accede to his partner’s wishes, and yet he was about to take this man, a stranger, to his own sacred hearth, and he shuddered again and again at the ideas that forced themselves upon his brain.

“I’ve said I’ll receive him,” he said at last, half aloud; “but it is not yet too late. Hester shall decide, and if she says ‘No,’ why there’s an end of it all.”

A short run by the rail took him to his pleasant little home – a small house, almost a cottage, with its tolerably large grounds and well-kept lawn. The little dining and drawing-rooms were shaded by a broad green verandah, over which the bedroom of the young couple looked down, in summer, upon a perfect nest of trailing roses.

Dutch gave a sigh of satisfaction as he saw the bright, sunny look of pleasure that greeted him, and for the next hour he had forgotten the dark shadow as he related to his young wife the great advance in their future prospects.

“I do love that dear old Mr Parkley so,” she cried, enthusiastically. “And now, Dutch, dear, tell me all about why this foreign gentleman is taking up so much of your time. Why, darling, is anything the matter?”

Dutch sighed again, but it was with satisfaction, as with a mingling of tender love and anxiety the little woman rose, and, throwing one arm round his neck, laid her soft little cheek to his.

“Matter! No, dear. Why?” he said, trying to smile.

“You looked so dull and ill all at once, as if in some pain.”

“Did I? Oh, it was nothing, only I was a little bothered.”

“May I know what about?”

“Well, yes, dear,” he said, playing with her soft hair, as he drew her down upon his knee. “The fact is that Mr Parkley is anxious for some attention to be paid to this Cuban gentleman – this Mr Lauré.”

“And he wants us to ask him here,” said Hester, gravely; and for a moment a look of pain crossed her face.

“Yes. How did you know?” he cried, startled at her words.

“I can’t tell,” she replied, smiling again directly. “I seemed to know what you were going to say by instinct.”

“But we cannot have him here, can we?” said Dutch, eagerly. “It would inconvenience you so.”

She remained silent for a moment, and a warm flush appeared upon her face as he gazed at her searchingly; for it was evident that a struggle was going on within her breast, and she was debating as to what she should say. Then, to his great annoyance, she replied —

“I don’t think that we ought to refuse Mr Parkley this request, dear. I hardly liked the idea at first, and this Mr Lauré did not impress me favourably when we met.”

Dutch’s face brightened.

“But,” she continued, “I have no doubt I shall like him very much, and we will do all we can to make his stay a pleasant one.”

Dutch remained silent, and a frown gathered on his brow for a few moments; but the next moment he looked up, smiling on the sweet ingenuous countenance before him, feeling ashamed of the doubts and fancies that had intruded.

“You are right, dear,” he said, cheerfully. “It is a nuisance, for I don’t like any one coming between us and spoiling our evenings; but it will not be for long, and he has come about an enterprise that may bring us a considerable sum.”

“I’ll do all I can, dear,” she cried, cheerfully.

And then, going to the piano, the tones of her voice fell upon the ears of Dutch Pugh even as the melodies of David on the troubled spirit of Saul of old, for as the young husband lay back in his chair, and listened to his favourite songs – sung, it seemed to him, more sweetly than ever – the tears gathered in his eyes, and he closed them, feeling that the evil spirit that assailed his breast had been exorcised, and that the cruel doubts and fears were bitter sins against a pure, sweet woman, who loved him with all her soul; and he cursed his folly as he vowed that he never again would suffer such fancies to gain an entrance to his breast.

For quite an hour they sat thus, she singing in her soft, low voice ballad after ballad that she knew he loved; and he lying back there, dreamily drinking in the happiness that was his, and thanking Heaven for his lot. For the shadow was beaten back, and true joy once more reigned supreme.

He was roused from his delicious reverie by the touch of two soft, warm lips on his forehead.

“Asleep, darling?” whispered Hester.

“Asleep? No,” he cried, in a low, deep voice, as he drew her to his heart. “Awake, darling – wide awake to the fact that I am the happiest of men in owning all your tender, true, womanly love.”

As he spoke his lips sought hers, and with a sigh of content, and a sweet smile lighting up her gentle face, Hester’s arms clasped his neck, and she nestled closer to his breast.

Story 1-Chapter V. A Waking Dream

The next day, after a long and busy discussion, in which Lauré took eager interest, and during which plans were made as to stores, arms for protection against the Indians of the coast they were to visit, lifting and diving apparatus, and the like, the Cuban was installed at the cottage, and that first night Dutch saw again upon his face that intense admiration the dark, warm-blooded Southerner felt for the fair young English girl. For girl she still was, with a girl's ways, prettily mingled with her attempts to play the part of mistress of her own house. The young husband felt a pang of jealous misery await him as he sat back in the shade of his prettily-furnished drawing-room, seeing their visitor hover about the piano while Hester sang, paying endless attentions with the polish and courtesy of a foreigner, various little refined acts – such as would never have occurred to the bluff young Englishman.

“I'm a jealous fool – that's what I am,” said Dutch to himself; “and if I go on like this I shall be wretched all the time he is here. I won't have it – I won't believe it. She is beautiful – God bless her! and no man could see her without admiring her. I ought to be proud of his admiration instead of letting it annoy me; for, of course, it's his foreign way of showing it. An Englishman would be very different; but what right have I to fancy for a moment that this foreign gentleman, my guest, would harbour a thought that was not honourable to me? There, it's all gone.”

He brightened up directly; and as, with a pleasant smile, Lauré came to him soon afterwards and challenged him to a game of chess, the evening passed pleasantly away.

The days glided on rapidly enough, with Dutch Pugh always repeating to himself the stern reproof that he was unjust to his guest and to his young wife to allow a single thought of ill to enter his heart; and to keep these fancies away he worked harder than ever at the preparations for the voyage, being fain, though, to confess that one thing that urged him on was the desire to be rid of his guest.

“I don't think much of these furren fellows,” said Rasp, one day, when, after a shorter stay than usual at the offices, Lauré had effusively pressed Dutch's hand and gone back to the cottage. “How does Mrs Pug like him?”

Dutch started, but said, quietly —

“Suppose we get on with the packing of that air-pump, Rasp. You had better get in a couple of the men.”

“All right,” grumbled the old fellow; “I wasn't going to leave it undone; but if I was a married man with a 'ansum wife, 'ang me if I should care about having a smooth-tongued, dark-eyed, scented foreign monkey of a chap like that at my house.”

“You insolent old scoundrel!” cried Dutch, flashing into a rage; and he caught the old fellow by the throat, but loosened him again with an impatient “Pish!”

Rasp seized the poker and sent the red-hot cinders flying as he stoked away at the fire.

“I desire that you never speak to me again like that. How dare you!”

“Oh, all right, Mr Pug, I won't speak again,” said Rasp. “I didn't mean no offence. I only said what I thought, and that was as I didn't like to see that furren chap always a-hanging after going back to your house, when he ought to be here, helping to see to the things getting ready.”

“Rasp!” said Dutch angrily.

“Well, so he ought to, instead of being away. Nobody wants him to take off his yaller kid gloves and work, but he might look on. He's going to be a niste one, he is, when he gets out in the place where we're a-going. He'll have a hammock slung and a hawning over it when he gets out in the hot sunshine, that's about what he'll do, and lie on his back and smoke cigarettes while one works. Say, Mr Pug, I wish you was going with us!”

He went and had another stoke at the fire, and glanced at Dutch's back, for he was writing, and made no response. "Sulky, and won't speak," muttered Rasp; and, going out, banged the door after him.

"The fancies of a vulgar mind," said Dutch to himself, as soon as he was alone. "The coarse belief of one who cannot understand the purity of feeling and thought of a true woman; and I actually let such ideas have a place in my breast. Bah! It's disgraceful!"

He glanced round the office, and then angrily devoted himself once more to his work, for it seemed as if the great goggle-eyed diving-helmets were once more bending forward and laughing at him derisively.

"I will not have this office made so hot," he muttered impatiently; and he worked on for some time, but only to fall dreaming again, as he said, "A little more than a fortnight and we shall be ready. Good luck to the expedition. I wish it were gone."

Then, in spite of himself, he began thinking about the conduct of Lauré at his house, and wishing earnestly that he had never agreed to his reception as a guest.

"But, there, he is a perfect gentleman," he argued; "and his conduct to me is almost too effusive. Little Hester must find him all that could be desired, or she would complain. Hallo, who is this?"

"Company to see you," said Rasp, roughly; and, as Dutch left his stool, it was to meet Captain Studwick's invalid son and his sister, who came in, accompanied by a quiet, gentlemanly-looking young man, whom he introduced as Mr Meldon.

"The medical gentleman who attends me now," said John Studwick, smiling; "not that I want much, do I, Mr Meldon?"

"Well, no, we will not call you an invalid, Mr Studwick," said the stranger.

"Fact is," said John Studwick, "I've set up a medical man of my own. Mr Meldon is going with us on the voyage."

"What voyage?" said Dutch, eagerly.

"Oh, you don't know, of course," said John Studwick, laughing. "My father thinks a sea voyage will set me right, and I am going in the *Sea King*. Bessy's going too."

"Indeed," said Dutch, looking from one to the other, while Bessy coloured slightly, and turned away.

"Yes, it's just settled this morning. Mr Parkley is willing, so we shall have a sea voyage and adventure too. I say, Mr Pugh, you asked me to come to your house."

"Yes, and I shall be very glad," said Dutch, smiling.

"Well, can we fix a day when we may be introduced to this Spanish Cuban gentleman? I'm curious to know my fellow-passenger. Sick man's fancy."

"Thursday week, then," said Dutch, eagerly. "Mr Meldon, perhaps, will join us."

"I shall be very happy," replied that individual.

And he glanced at Bessy, who coloured again slightly; and then, after a few words about the voyage, in which John Studwick expressed his regret that Dutch was not going on the expedition, the little party went away.

"If I'm not mistaken," said Dutch to himself, as he climbed to his stool, "there's somebody there to heal the sore place in poor Bessy's heart. Poor girl! If I was not coxcombical to say so, I should think she really was fond of me. There, come forth, little loadstone," he said, with a look of intense love lighting up his countenance, and raising the lid of his desk he took from a drawer a photographic carte of his wife, and set it before him, to gaze at it fondly.

"I don't think I could have cared for Bessy Studwick, darling, even if there had been no Hester in the world."

As he gazed tenderly at the little miniature of his wife's features, there seemed to come a peculiar look in the eyes – the expression on the face became one of pain.

He knew it was fancy, but he gazed on at the picture till his imagination took a wider leap, and as if it were quite real, so real that in his disturbed state he could not have declared it untrue, he saw Hester seated in their own room, with every object around clearly defined, her head bent forward, and the Cuban kneeling at her feet, and pressing her hands to his lips.

So real was the scene that he started away from the desk with a loud cry, oversetting his stool, and letting the heavy desk lid fall with a crash.

In a moment Rasp ran into the office, armed with a heavy diver's axe, and then stood staring in amazement.

"Is any one gone mad?" he growled.

"It was nothing, Rasp," said Dutch, wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

"I never heard nothing make such a row as that afore," growled Rasp.

And then, putting the axe down, he made for the poker, had a good stoke at the fire, and went out muttering.

Dutch opened the desk on the instant, but the scene was gone, and hastily closing the lid again he began to pace the room.

For a moment his intention was to rush off home, but he restrained himself for the time, and tried to recall the past; but his brain was in a whirl. At last he grew more calm, and took out his watch.

"Only five o'clock," and he had said that he should get some dinner where he was, stop late at work, and not be home till after nine.

He was to stay there and work for another three or four hours – to make calculations that required all his thought, when he had seen or conjured up that dreadful sight. No: he could not bear it. His nerves tingled, his brain was throbbing, and incipient madness seemed to threaten his reason as he prepared to obey the influence that urged him to go home.

"The villain!" he groaned. "It must be a warning. Heaven help me, I will know the worst."

Story 1-Chapter VI. A Pleasant Evening

Dutch Pugh seized his hat and coat, and was about to dash into the street, when the remembrance of that evening before the coming of the Cuban came upon him, and he replaced them.

“Stop a moment,” he said hoarsely, as he began to walk up and down once more. “Let me think – let me take matters coolly, or I shall go mad. There, there, this will not do; I’m going up and down here like a wild beast in his cage.”

He made an effort, and forced himself to sit down. “Now,” he said, “let’s see. What does this mean? Here am I, a strong, full-blooded, sane man, and what have I been doing?”

He paused for a moment before answering his question.

“Letting my mind dwell on thoughts that are a disgrace to me, till I imagine – yes, imagine – so vividly that it seems real, all that nonsense. I picture the scene. I magnify a simple piece of cardboard, and make it fit my own vile imaginations till I see what could never have taken place; and on the strength of that, what am I going to do? Why rush off home as jealous and mad as an Othello, ready to distort everything I see, believe what does not exist, and generally play such a part as I should repent to my last day. Poor girl, has it come to this, that I cannot trust you, and am going to play the spy upon your actions?”

“No, hang me if I do. Now, look here, Dutch, this is not manly,” he continued, catechising himself. “You are foolishly jealous of that man, are you not?”

“Yes,” he said, answering his own question. “Now then, why are you jealous? Has your wife ever given you the slightest cause?”

“Never, so help me Heaven.”

“There, then, does not that satisfy you? Why, man, if everyone who has a handsome wife were to act like this, what a world we should have. So much, then, for your wife. Now, then, about this man – what of him? He is polished and refined, and pays your wife attentions. Well, so would any foreigner under the circumstances. Shame, man, shame; he is your guest, the guest, too, of a woman whose truth you know – whose whole life is beyond suspicion. You leave her every day to go here or there, and does she ask you where you have been – what you have done? Does she suspect you? Why, Dutch Pugh, you wretched maniac, if she saw you talking to a score of pretty women how would she act? I’ll tell you. She’d open those sweet, candid eyes of hers, and beam upon you, and no more doubt your truth than that of Heaven.”

“And I’ll not doubt yours, darling,” he muttered, going to the desk, taking out the photograph, kissing it before putting it back; and then, tightening his lips, he took his seat, fixed his attention upon his work, and grew so intent that the next time he looked at his watch it was close upon nine, when, in a calm, matter-of-fact way, he walked all the way home.

In spite of his determination, he could not help seeing that Hester looked pale and troubled when he entered the little drawing-room, and that her manner was strange and constrained. She met his gaze in a timid way, and without doubt her hand trembled.

He would not notice her, though, but began chatting to them, Lauré being in the highest of spirits and relating anecdotes of his travels till Dutch felt in the best of spirits, and it was near midnight when they all rose for bed, Hester looking very pallid though – so much so that Dutch noticed it.

“Are you quite well, dear?” he asked.

She raised her eyes, and was about to speak when she caught Lauré’s eyes fixed upon her in a strange manner, and she replied hastily —

“Oh, yes, dear, quite, quite well?”

“You don’t feel any of your old symptoms?”

“Oh, no,” she replied, smiling. “You are so anxious about me.”

“No wonder,” said Lauré, “with such a pearl of a wife. Well, I must to bed. Good-night, dear host and hostess.”

He advanced to Hester Pugh and kissed her hand, turning directly to Dutch and pressing his so affectionately that the young Englishman returned the grip with such interest that the Cuban winced, and then smiled as he saw in Dutch's eyes how honest and true was the intent.

“I was sorry to be detained to-night,” continued Dutch frankly; “it must be very dull here. Look here, Hester, I've asked John Studwick and his sister and Mr Meldon, a doctor, to dinner on Thursday. Send a letter to Miss Studwick yourself and ask Mr Parkley as well, so as to have a pleasant evening.”

Hester Pugh brightened up directly, and began to talk of the arrangements for the dinner, while the Cuban went off with a peculiar smile upon his face.

“But I don't know what to say about this, Dutch,” said Hester, playfully, as she made an effort to be gay and shake off the lassitude that seemed to oppress her. “Report says, sir, that Miss Bessy Studwick was very fond of a certain gentleman we know.”

“Poor Bessy!” said Dutch, thoughtfully.

“Poor Bessy, sir. Then it is all true?”

“What – about Bessy Studwick, darling? Well, I think it was. It sounds conceited of me to say so, but I believe it was the case. But,” he added, drawing her to him, “this certain gentleman only had one heart, and a certain lady took possession of it all. Hester, my darling, I never in my life had loving thought about more than one woman, and her I love more dearly every day.”

She closed her eyes, and the tears gathered beneath her lids as he pressed her to his heart and sighed gently.

Miss Studwick's name was mentioned no more that night.

The time passed quickly, away, and the Thursday came. Dutch had been so fully occupied, and so determined not to listen to the promptings of his fancy, as he called it, that he refused to take any notice of the way in which the Cuban had settled down in his house. From being all eager now to get the expedition fitted out, and ready to be pettish and impatient with Mr Parkley and Dutch for their careful, deliberate preparations, he seemed now quite careless, pleading indisposition, and spending the greater part of his time at the cottage.

The dinner passed off most pleasantly, and the table was made bright by the magnificent flowers the Cuban had purchased as his offering to the feast, and by the rich fruit Mr Parkley had added in his rough pleasant way, coming down to the cottage with a heavy basket on his arm, and smiling all round as he dabbed his lace and head, hot with the exertion.

To the great delight of Dutch, he saw that quite a liking had sprung up between his wife and Bessy Studwick, both evidently trying hard to let him see that they indulged in no thoughts of the past; while the Cuban ceased his attentions to Hester, and taking Bessy down to dinner, heaped his foreign, nameless little results of polish upon the tall, Juno-like maiden.

The only person in the party who looked grave was John Studwick, who watched all this with uneasy glances, though it must be said that he seemed just as much annoyed when Mr Meldon, the young doctor, was speaking to his sister. He lacked no attentions, though, himself, for, compassionating the state of the invalid's health, both Dutch and Hester tried hard to make the meeting pleasant to him.

“The little wife looks ill, Pugh,” said Mr Parkley, as they went in to dinner. “You ask Mr Meldon his opinion about her by-and-by. Our coming worries her.”

“I'll ask her if she's poorly or worried,” said Dutch smiling. “Hester!”

She came up to him looking pale and startled, but he did not notice it.

“Mr Parkley thinks you wish all the visitors anywhere,” said Dutch playfully.

“He does not,” said Hester, placing her hand on Mr Parkley's arm. “He knows he is always so very welcome here.”

She went in with him to dinner, and evidently exerted herself greatly to chase away the cloud that shadowed her, devoting herself to her guests, but in spite of her efforts her eyes were more than once directed partially to where Lauré was chatting volubly with Bessy Studwick, and, meeting his, remained for a few moments as if fascinated or fixed by his gaze.

Later on in the evening, when they were all in the drawing-room, Hester seemed quite excited, and full of forced gaiety, while Lauré was brimming with anecdote, chatting more volubly than ever. Before long he was asked to sing, and Hester sat down to the piano.

While he was singing in a low, passionate voice some Spanish love song, and those near were listening as if enthralled, Dutch felt his arm touched, and John Studwick motioned him to follow into the back drawing-room, and then, seeing it was impossible to speak there, Dutch led the way into the little dining-room, where, with the rich tones of the Cuban's voice penetrating to where they stood, the invalid, who seemed greatly excited, caught his host by the arm.

"Dutch Pugh," he said, "I like you because you're so frank and manly, and that's why I speak. I shan't go out with this expedition if that half Spanish fellow is going too. I hate him. Look how he has been pestering Bessy all the evening. I don't like it. Why did you ask him here?"

"My dear fellow," exclaimed Dutch, "be reasonable. You expressed a wish to meet him."

"So I did. Yes, so I did, but I don't like him now. I don't like his ways. Pugh, if I was a married man, I would not have that fellow in my house for worlds."

"My dear John Studwick," said Dutch, uneasily, "this is foolish. He is a foreigner, and it is his way."

"I don't like his way," cried the young man, whose cheeks were flushed and eyes unnaturally bright. "If he won Bessy from me, I should kill him. I was afraid of you once, but that's passed now."

"But, my dear boy," said Dutch, laying his hand on his shoulder, "you must expect your sister to form an attachment some day."

"Yes, some day," said the young man. "Some day; but let her wait till I'm gone. I couldn't bear to have her taken from me now. She is everything to me."

"My dear Studwick, don't talk like that."

"Why not?" he replied with a strange look. "Do you think I don't know? I shall only live about six months: nothing will save me."

"Nonsense, man! That sea trip will set you right again. Come, let's get back into the drawing-room."

He led the way back, and, seeking his opportunity, whispered to Bessy Studwick that her brother was low-spirited, and taking her from the Cuban's side, he made John Studwick happy by bringing her to him.

The Cuban's eyes flashed, and he arose and crossed the room, so that when Dutch looked in that direction it was to see that he whispered something to Hester, who glanced across at him where he was standing by Bessy.

The next minute he was seized by Mr Parkley, who backed him up into a corner, where he seized one particular button on the young man's breast – a habit he had, going to the same particular button as a small pig seeks the same single spot when in search of nutriment.

"Dutch," said Mr Parkley, as soon as they were alone, and while he was busily trying with his left hand to screw the button off, "Dutch, shake hands."

The young man did so wonderingly.

"That's right: no one's looking. That chap's going to sing another song, and little Hester's getting ready the music. See here, Dutch, you won't be offended at what I say?"

"Offended? Absurd!"

"Old, tried, staunch friend, you know. Wouldn't say a word to hurt you, and I love that little girl of yours like a father – just as if she was my own flesh and blood."

"And I'm sure Hester loves and respects you, Mr Parkley."

“Yes, yes, of course; and that’s what makes me so wild about it.”

“I don’t understand you, Mr Parkley,” said Dutch, uneasily.

“There, that’s what I was afraid of when I spoke. But I must say it now, Pugh. I’m afraid I made a mistake in asking you to invite that Cuban hero. I’ll tell him to come and stay with me.”

“Indeed, I beg you will do no such thing, Mr Parkley,” said Dutch hotly, as his face burned with mortification. “I understand what you mean, sir, and can assure you that your suspicions are unjust.”

“I’m very glad to hear you say so, Pugh, I am indeed,” said Mr Parkley earnestly. “Don’t be angry with me, my dear boy. I’m getting old – stupid, I suppose. There, don’t take any more notice of what I said.”

Under these circumstances it was hard work for Dutch Pugh to preserve an unclouded face before his guests, but he strove hard – the harder that he was annoyed at people for having the same fancies as those he had tried so hard to banish. It was, then, with no small feeling of pleasure that he welcomed the time when his guests departed, but even then he was not to be spared a fresh wound, for on taking Bessy Studwick down to the fly she said to him in a low voice:

“Dutch, I have been trying so hard to-night to love your wife. I do so hope you will be very happy.”

“Thank you, Bessy, thank you,” he said warmly. “I’m sure you wish me well.”

“I do, I do, indeed,” she whispered earnestly, “and therefore I say I do not like your new friend, that foreign gentleman. He is treacherous: I am sure he is. Good-night.”

“Good-night!” said Dutch to himself as he stood on the gravel path with the gate in his hand listening to the departed wheels; and then in spite of his determination the flood of evil fancies came rolling back, sweeping all before it.

“They all see it, and think me blind,” he groaned as he literally reeled against the gate. “Those thoughts, then, were a warning – one I would not heed. Hester – Hester – my love,” he moaned as he pressed his hands to his forehead. “Oh, my God, that it should come to this!”

He stood leaning against the gate post for a few minutes in a stunned, dazed way, but recovering himself he clenched his hands and exclaimed through his teeth:

“I will not believe it. She could not be no false.”

He strode in, apparently quite calm, to find Hester standing by the fire-place, looking very scared and pale, while Lauré, who had thrown himself back upon the couch, began to laugh in a peculiar way.

“Ah, you English husbands,” he said, banteringly, “how you do forsake your beautiful wives. But there, the fair visitor was very sweet and gracious. I almost fell in love myself.”

Dutch Pugh’s eyes flashed for a moment, but he said nothing, only glanced at his wife, who met his look in a troubled way, and then let her eyes fall to the carpet, while Lauré went on talking in a playful, bantering manner.

Story 1-Chapter VII. More Shadows

From that night a complete change seemed to have come upon the home of Dutch Pugh. He had more than once determined upon putting an end to the Cuban's stay, feeling at the same time as if he would like to end his life; but reason told him that his were, after all, but suspicions, and that perhaps they were unjust. Under the circumstances, he sought for relief in work, and strove night and day to perfect the arrangements which now fast approached completion. Captain Studwick was to be in command of the large yacht-like schooner that had been secured, and was being carefully fitted with the necessaries in stores and machinery. Two of the divers engaged in raising the copper had volunteered to go, and a capital crew had been selected. The cabins were comfortably furnished, there being plenty of space, and places were set apart for the captain's son and daughter, while a gentleman friend – a naturalist – had, on learning from Captain Studwick the part of the world to which the ship was to sail, petitioned hard, and obtained permission to go.

This last gentleman said his object was to collect specimens of the wonderful birds of Central America; but the probabilities are that if he had not been aware that Bessy Studwick was to be of the party, he, being a very bad sailor, would have stayed at home.

By degrees everything necessary was put on board the handsome vessel, and though the ship's destination was kept a secret, and the real object of her mission confided to few, she formed the general topic of conversation in the port, and plenty of exaggerations flew about.

The energetic way in which Dutch worked served to lull to a certain extent the sense of pain that he endured; but he suffered bitterly; and at last it had come to this: that he spent as little of his time at home as possible, returning there, however, at night faint and weary, but with a heart sickness that drove away the needful sleep.

It afforded him some gratification, though, to find that Miss Studwick often called at his home; and when, on more than one occasion, she came with her brother to the office, he read in her eyes the deep sympathy that she felt for him, and asked himself why he had not made this woman his wife.

He sat often quite late in the office, long after Rasp had grumblingly gone off with a final stoke at the fire, which afterwards sank and died out; and at such times, in the semi-darkness, with the goggle-eyed helmets seeming to stare at him and rejoice in his sufferings, he asked himself what he should do? Whether he should leave home for ever? Whether he should put her away from him, and wait till some time in the far-off distance of life when she might, perhaps, come to him, and ask his pardon for the wrong she had done.

“No!” he would exclaim, “I will not believe such evil of her. She is dazzled by this polished scoundrel, and poor, rough, I compare badly with him, for she cannot see our hearts.”

Should he end the matter at once?

No, he felt that he could not, for he had nothing but his bare, cruel suspicions to go upon, the greatest of which was that before long Hester would flee with this man, and his home would be wretched.

Wretched? If not wretched already, for all was wretched at home: Hester was low-spirited; for his own part, he rarely spoke; and the Cuban avoided him.

So far, Dutch had indulged in the hope that he might, after all, be deceiving himself, when one evening, on entering the little drawing-room suddenly, Hester started up, looking confused, and left the room, while the Cuban turned away with a short nod, and walked to the window.

From that hour every spare moment was devoted to watching: for the suspicion grew stronger now that before long, if he did not stay it, his home would be left desolate.

This lasted for some days, when the idea was checked by Lauré himself, who, as the time approached for the departure of the expedition, suddenly began to display great interest in the proceedings, so that Dutch felt compelled to own that his ideas of flight must be wrong; in fact, it was as if Lauré had divined his thoughts just as he was about to speak to Mr Parkley, and tell him his suspicions that the Cuban evidently meant to give up the expedition, and, much as it would tear his heart to speak, give the reasons for his belief.

Hardly, though, had he come to the conclusion that he was wrong, when a trifle set him off back in his former way of thinking, for his mind was now a chaos of wildering fancies, and the slightest thing set his jealous feelings in a blaze.

He would not speak to Hester; he would not take an open, manly way of seeing whether his suspicions were just; but, submitting his better parts to his distorted reason, he nursed his anguish, and so it fell out that one night he found himself watching his own house, in the full belief that his wife's illness in the morning before he left for the office was a subterfuge, and that the time had come for her to take some step fatal to her future.

"But I will stop it," muttered Dutch to himself, as with throbbing pulse and beating temples he avoided the gate, so as not to have his footsteps heard on the gravel, and, climbing the fence, entered his own garden like a thief.

He had hardly reached the little lawn when he heard the sound of wheels, and stepping behind a clump of laurels he stopped, listening with beating heart, for here was food for his suspicions.

As he expected, the fly stopped at the gate; a man in a cloak got out, went hastily up the path, knocked softly at the door, and was admitted on the instant.

Dutch paused, hesitating as to what he should do. Should he follow and enter? No, he decided that he would stay there, and stop them as they came out, for the fly was waiting.

Where would Hester be now? he asked himself, with the dimly-seen house seeming to swim before him; and the answer came as if hissed into his ear by some mocking fiend —

"In her bedroom, getting something for her flight."

Half-a-dozen steps over the soft grass took him where he could see the window, and of course there was a light there, and then —

The blood seemed to rush to his brain, a horrible sense of choking came upon him, and he groaned as he staggered back, for there, plainly enough seen, was the figure of Hester, her hair hanging loose as she lay back over the arm of a man, who was half-leading, half-carrying her towards the door.

All this in shadow was sharply cost upon the blind, and with a groan of mingled rage and misery Dutch rushed towards the house, but only to totter and fall heavily, for it was as though a sharp blow had been dealt him, and for some time he lay there passive and ignorant of what passed around.

He recovered at length, and lay trying to think — to call to mind what this meant. Why was he lying there on the wet grass, with this strange deathly feeling of sickness upon him?

Then all came back with a rush, and he rose to his feet to see that the light was still in the bedroom, but the shadows were gone.

With a cry of horror he ran to the gate, but the carriage was not there, and he stood listening.

Yes, there was the sound of wheels dying away. No, they had stopped, and he was about to rush off in pursuit when a hasty step coming in his direction stayed him, for he knew it well, and, drawing back, he let the Cuban pass him, then followed him softly as he stole round the house, going on tiptoe towards the dining-room window, where Dutch caught him by the shoulder.

"Ah," he said, laughing, "so our gallant Englishman is on the watch, is he? Does the jealous trembler think I would steal his wife?"

"Dog!" hissed Dutch, catching him by the throat, "what are you doing here?"

"What is that to you, fool!" exclaimed the Cuban, flashing into rage. "Loose me, you madman, or you shall repent it. Curse you, you are strong."

Blind to everything but his maddening passion, kept back now for so many days, and absorbed by the feeling that he could now wreak his vengeance upon the man who had wrecked his home, Dutch savagely tightened his hold upon his adversary, who, though a strong man, bent like a reed before him. It was no time for reason to suggest that he might be wrong; the idea had possession of the young man's soul that he was stopping an intended flight, and he drove the Cuban backwards, and had nearly forced him across a garden seat when Lauré, writhing like an eel, got partly free.

“Curse your English brute strength!” he muttered, and getting his arm from his cloak, he struck Dutch full on the temple with some weapon, and the young man fell once more prone on the grass.

Story 1-Chapter VIII. Breaking the Contract

Five days had passed since the encounter in the garden, and Dutch Pugh had not been back to his home. He had lain for some time stunned from the blow he had received, and then risen half-dazed, and in a wretched, dejected way made for the town, where, letting himself into the office, he had thrown himself upon the floor, and slept heavily till morning, to the great surprise of the clerks, who found him there when they came.

With an intense desire to hide his anguish from everyone, he had given out that he had fallen asleep after being many hours at work, and no notice was taken of his soiled clothes. Then, with the truth gradually oozing out, that no flight had been intended, but that for some reason, so Mr Parkley said, Señor Lauré had gone back to his hotel, Dutch worked on, superintending till the vessel was ready for sea.

The stores and machinery were complete for the purpose, and the passengers were on board. Moreover, a brother of Mr Parkley had been invited to assist in the business during the chief partner's absence, and together Mr Parkley and Dutch walked down to the dock.

"We had a sort of hint from Bessy Studwick that you haven't been home for some days, Pugh," said Mr Parkley.

"Don't talk about it, please."

"Well, I won't much," said Mr Parkley, "for I guess a great deal. It was all my fault, Dutch, my dear boy. I had no business to have proposed such a thing, and, believe me, if I had known what a scoundrel the fellow was, I would never have entered into this project with him."

"Pray say no more," exclaimed Dutch.

"I must, my dear boy, I must, for I want to clear myself. You see the preparation for this trip means five thousand pounds, and I cannot throw the matter over; the loss is too heavy, or else I would."

"Oh, no, it is impossible," exclaimed Dutch.

"If I had known my man sooner, I would have seen him at Hanover before I would have had anything to do with him. But look here, my dear Pugh, I couldn't help hearing a great deal about your domestic trouble. Haven't you been wronging the little woman?"

"If you have any respect or feeling for me, Mr Parkley, say no more."

"All right, my dear fellow," said the other, with a sigh, "I will not; only act like a sensible man in all things – home and business. Heigho, I really wish I was not going, but the idea of these hidden treasures sets me on fire."

Mr Parkley forgot all his hesitation as they stepped on board and saw how – in spite of the bustle and confusion consequent upon receiving late supplies of fresh meat and vegetables – ship-shape and excellent were Captain Studwick's arrangements. John Studwick was on board, seated upon a wicker chair, and his sister beside him; Mr Meldon, the young doctor, was leaning over the bulwarks, with a very tall, thin young man, the naturalist friend; the sailors were busy lowering bales and arranging coops and hens; and all was ready for the start – in fact, the dockmen were ready to warp the schooner out, and after a short run behind a tug down the harbour, they would have the open Channel before them.

There was a goodly concourse of people about the wharves, for the object of the schooner's trip had somehow gained wind, and while some expressed interest and curiosity in the voyage, others laughingly called it a fool's errand.

"Has anybody seen Señor Lorry?" said Mr Parkley at last.

"I had a note from him," said Captain Studwick, "He said he would be down here punctually at twelve. Has his luggage come, Oakum?"

“None on it, sir,” said the rough old sailor, pulling his forelock.

“That’s strange,” said the captain. “When did you see him, Parkley?”

“Last night, and he said he would be aboard in the morning, and glad of it, for he was sick of England.”

“Twelve o’clock now,” said the captain. “Well, the tide serves; I must give the word for getting out of dock. He must have a longer row for being late. He’s sure to come, of course.”

“Oh, yes,” said Mr Parkley; but he glanced uneasily at Dutch, as if he did not feel sure.

“Ready there,” cried the captain. “Now, my lads, be handy – cast off those ropes for’ard. Oh, here he is. Hold hard there.”

“But where’s his luggage?” said Mr Parkley.

“Oh, behind the crowd,” said the captain. “Come along, sir, we were going without you.”

“Indeed!” said the Cuban, with a smile. “I doubt that. Where would you go?”

“Where Mr Parkley told me,” said the captain. “Give me the order. I’ll find the place. Let’s see, Mr Pugh, we are to send you back in the tug, I suppose.”

Dutch nodded.

“Now, then, for’ard there,” cried the captain; “be ready to cast off. Are you ready?”

“Ay, ay,” came in chorus from the smart, well-picked crew.

“Stop!” exclaimed Lauré in a loud voice, and, turning to Mr Parkley, he pointed to Dutch and said, “That is your partner, is it not, Mr Parkley?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“And he will share in the profits of this expedition?”

“Certainly he will, sir.”

“Then, sir, I break our engagement. I shall have nothing to do with the voyage. The matter is entirely off.”

“Confound it all, sir!” cried Mr Parkley, in a passion. “You can’t do that.”

“But, sir, I have done it,” said the Cuban, lighting a cigar.

“What! After I’ve spent all this money in preparation?”

“I have told you,” said the Cuban, contemptuously – and he gave a malignant glance at Dutch.

“Mr Parkley,” said Dutch, stepping forward, “my private quarrel with this man shall not stand in your way. All this preparation has been made for the expedition, and my being your partner shall not stop it. Sir, our partnership is at an end.”

“Is it?” said Mr Parkley, with his teeth set. “No, I’ll be hanged if it is;” and as the men gathered round, wondering at what they had heard, he laid his hand on Dutch Pugh’s shoulder. “I’ve proved you, my lad, but I’ve not proved this man, who at the first touch bends and nearly breaks. We are partners, and mean to stay so, and Mr Lorry here will have to keep to his bond, or I’ll soon see what the law says to him.”

The Cuban smiled contemptuously.

“Suppose I say it was all a mad dream, and I know of no such place: what then?”

“Why, you are a bigger scoundrel than I took you for.”

“Sir!” cried the Cuban, menacingly.

“Oh, you want to frighten me with your big looks, sir,” cried Mr Parkley. “Now then, I ask you in plain English, will you fulfil your undertaking, and show me the place where the old Spanish galleons are sunk?”

“No,” said the Cuban, coolly, “I will not help to enrich my enemy!” and he again looked indignantly at Dutch.

“Mr Parkley!” exclaimed the latter, “I cannot see all this costly enterprise ruined because of my private trouble with this villain.”

“Villain!” cried Lauré, confronting Dutch, whose face flushed and whose hands were half raised to seize his enemy.

“Be silent,” he said, in a low, hoarse voice, “I’ve that within me that I can hardly control. If you rouse it again, by the God who made me, I’ll strangle you and hurl you over the side.”

The Cuban involuntarily shrank from the menacing face before him, and Dutch by a strong effort turned to Mr Parkley.

“Make terms with him, sir. I will not stand in your way.”

“Yes, I’ll make terms with him,” exclaimed Mr Parkley, angrily. “Now, sir, I ask you again will you fulfil your contract?”

The Cuban half-closed his eyes, puffed forth a ring of smoke, and said quietly, —

“In my country, when one man strikes another the insult is washed out in blood. Your bold partner there has struck me, a weaker man than himself, and I cannot avenge the insult, for you cold islanders here boast of your courage, but you will not equalise the weak and strong by placing the sword, the knife, or the pistol in their hands. You say no; that is the law. You call in your police. Fools! cowards! do you think that will satisfy me?”

“Did Mr Pugh strike you, then?” said Mr Parkley.

“Yes, three cruel blows,” hissed the Cuban, with his face distorted with rage.

“Then you must have deserved it,” cried Mr Parkley.

“You think so,” said the Cuban, growing unnaturally calm again. “Then I say I must have satisfaction somehow. Your partner makes me his enemy, and you must suffer. I shall not fulfil my contract. I will not take you where the galleons lie. You have made your preparations. Good. You must suffer for it, even as I suffer. I give up one of the dreams of my life. I will not go.”

A pang shot through Dutch Pugh’s breast, for in this refusal to depart he saw an excuse to remain in England, and once more the hot blood rose to his face.

“You absolutely refuse, then, to show Captain Studwick and me where the objects we seek are hid?” said Mr Parkley, turning up his cuffs as if he meant to fight; and the Cuban’s hand went into his breast.

“I absolutely refuse,” said the Cuban, disdainfully.

“You know, I suppose, that you forfeit half the result,” said Mr Parkley.

“Yes,” said the Cuban, moving towards the gangway, “I know I lose half the result.”

“You know I have spent five thousand pounds in preparations,” said Mr Parkley, calmly.

“Yes,” sneered the Cuban, “and you have your law. Go to it for revenge; it may please you.”

“No,” said Mr Parkley, looking round at the frowning faces of his friends; “that means spending another thousand to gain the day, and nothing to be obtained of a beggarly Cuban adventurer, who has neither money nor honour.”

“Take care!” cried Lauré, flashing into rage, and baring his teeth like some wild cat. But the next instant, with wonderful self-command, he cooled down, standing erect, proud and handsome, with his great black beard half-way down his breast. “Bah!” he exclaimed, “the English diving-master is angry, and stoops to utter coward’s insults.”

“I’ll show you, Mr Lorry, that I am no coward over this,” said Mr Parkley, firmly. “You mean to throw us over, then, now that we are ready to start.”

“You threaten to throw me over,” said the Cuban, smiling disdainfully. “If you mean, do I still refuse to go, I say yes! yes! yes! You and your partner shall never touch a single bar of the treasure. Ha! ha! What will you do now?”

“Start without you,” said Mr Parkley, coolly. “Captain Studwick, see that this man goes ashore.”

The Cuban was already close to the gangway, but he turned sharply round, and took a couple of steps towards the last speaker.

“What!” he said, with a look of apprehension flashing out of his eyes. “You will go yourself without one to guide you?”

“Yes,” said Mr Parkley; “and if you went down on your knees now to beg me, damme, sir, you’ve broke your contract, and I wouldn’t take you.”

“Ha – ha – ha – ha – ha!” laughed the Cuban, derisively, as he quickly recovered his composure. “A beggarly threat. Do you not know that it took me five years of constant toil to make the discovery? and you talk like this!”

“Yes,” said Mr Parkley. “It took a beggarly mongrel foreigner five years, no doubt; but it would not take an enterprising Englishman five weeks.”

The Cuban’s hand went into his breast again as he heard the words “beggarly mongrel foreigner,” and Captain Studwick grasped a marlin-spike, ready to strike his arm down if he drew a weapon; but the rage was crushed down directly, and Lauré laughed again derisively.

“Go, then, fools, if you like. But I know: it is an empty threat. Ha, ha, ha! Go alone. A pleasant voyage, Señor Parkley, and you, too, Señor Captain. You will perhaps find me there before you.”

“Perhaps,” said Mr Parkley. “But go I will, and hang me if I come back till I have found it.”

“Well, for the matter o’ that, Master Parkley and Capen Studwick,” said a rough voice, “if it means putting the schooner at anchor where them Spanish galleons was sunk in the Carib Sea, if you’ll let me take the wheel, and you’ll find fine weather, I’ll steer you to the very spot.”

Story 1-Chapter IX. 'Pollo's Evidence

"What?" shrieked the Cuban, rushing forward, with outstretched hands, but only to control himself directly and smile contemptuously.

"I says as I'll clap this here schooner right over two or three spots where old ships went down, and also off the coast where one on 'em lies buried in the sand, all but her ribs and a few planks," said the old sailor, Sam Oakum.

"He's a liar – a cheat. Bah!" exclaimed the Cuban with contempt.

"I wouldn't advise you to say them sorter things, gov'nor," said Oakum, quietly. "I knowd a chap as rubbed the skin off the bridge of his nose wunst and blacked both his eyes agin my fist for saying less than that."

"Bah!" said the Cuban, snapping his fingers.

"And do you know, Oakum?" exclaimed Mr Parkley, eagerly. "Can you prove it?"

"If anybody would pass a man a bit o' 'bacco, I could, I dessay," said the old fellow quietly. "Thanky, mate. Just pass the word for 'Pollo to come aft, will you? He's in the galley."

A sailor who had given Oakum the tobacco ran forward, while all waited in breathless attention – the Cuban standing like a statue, with folded arms, but, in spite of his apparent composure, smoking furiously, like a volcano preparing for an eruption.

The sailor came back directly.

"Says he's cooking the passengers' dinner, and can't leave it, sir," said the sailor.

"Tell the cook to come here directly. I want him," exclaimed the captain, sternly; and the sailor ran off, returning with 'Pollo, the black cook, rubbing his shiny face.

"I speck, sah, if de rose meat burn himself all up, you no blame de cook, sah," he said.

"No, no, 'Pollo; only answer a question or two."

"Yes, sah; d'reckly, sah."

"Look ye here, 'Pollo, old mate," said Oakum; "you and I have had some rum voyages in our time, old nigger."

"You call me ole mate, sah," said 'Pollo, angrily, "I answer hundred tousan queshtum. You call me nigger, sah, I dam if I say noder word."

"It's all right, 'Pollo, I won't any more. You're a coloured gentleman; and, though I chaff you sometimes, I know that I can always depend on you, fair weather or foul."

The black nodded, showed his white teeth, and his eyes twinkled.

"Now look here, 'Pollo, old man; do you remember being in the little brig off Caraccas, when we had the gold?"

"Yes, sah, I membah well; and membah when we had do tree hundred lilly women aboard de big ship, and de big horse alligator woman. Yah, yah, yah!"

"So do I, 'Pollo; but what did we do when we were in the brig?"

"Catch de fish," said 'Pollo.

"To be sure we did; but what did we find lying down fathoms deep in the clear water?"

"You mean de ole 'Panish gold ship, sah?"

"There!" said Sam Oakum, turning round with a grim smile on his mahogany face; "Ain't that there corroborative evidence, sir?"

"We find two ole ship, sah, and one on de shore," said 'Pollo, volubly, "and I dibe down, sah."

"Did you find anything?" said Mr Parkley, eagerly.

"No, sah, him too deep down, but I membah perfect well, sah, all about 'em. All 'Panish ship, sah."

"That will do, 'Pollo," said Mr Parkley. "Now go and see to the dinner. By-the-way, 'Pollo, will you come into the cabin after dinner, and join Mr Oakum in drinking a glass of wine to the success of our voyage?"

"I hab great pleasure, sah," said the black, with his eyes twinkling; and as he went away bowing and smiling, Mr Parkley turned to the Cuban.

"Now, Mr Lorry, or Lauré, or whatever your name is, will you have the goodness to step ashore? This is my ship, and this expedition belongs to me and my partner. You have refused to carry out your contract before twenty witnesses, and now you see that I can do without you."

"But," said Lauré, "the man is mad. He cannot take you; but I will not carry my revenge so far. Make me a good concession and I will consent to go."

"I thank you, Señor Lauré, for endorsing the statement of our old friend, Oakum, and the ship's cook, and since you are so kind, I will make you a concession."

"You consent," said the Cuban, more eagerly than he intended.

"Yes," said Mr Parkley. "You shall be allowed to walk off the ship instead of being kicked off. Captain Studwick, see that man off this deck."

A look that was almost demoniacal overspread the Cuban's face, and shaking his fist menacingly, he stepped on to the wharf and disappeared through the crowd.

"Now, then," said Mr Parkley, triumphantly, "we are ready. Captain Studwick, westward ho! Hallo, what now? What is it, Rasp?" as that individual came panting up.

"Are you sure as you've got all your company aboard?" said Rasp.

"Yes, I think so. Eh, captain?"

"My crew is all right, certainly," said the captain. "I don't know anything about yours."

"To be sure, I did not think to look after them as they had promised to be aboard in good time. Where are John Tolly and James Morrison?"

"What, them?" said Oakum. "Oh, they came aboard at nine this morning."

"Yes," said one of the sailors, "but they went ashore again about ten; I saw 'em go."

"There," said Rasp, "where would you have been without me? I see John Tolly go by the orifice half-an-hour ago, so drunk he could hardly walk, and Morrison as well, and –"

"Tut, tut, tut! we must have them," exclaimed Mr Parkley. "The scoundrels! to deceive us like this. Pugh, come ashore, we must get the police to help us."

"Then we shall not sail to-day," said the captain, with a shrug. "Never mind, we shall have the more time for getting ship-shape."

"Nonsense!" said Mr Parkley eagerly; "we shall soon be back."

The captain shook his head, for he knew better; and night had fallen, and no more had been seen of the two divers on whom so much depended.

As the day wore on, Mr Parkley and Dutch returned to the ship two or three times to report progress, if such it could be called, for nothing was heard of the two divers.

"Dutch Pugh," said Mr Parkley, on one of these meetings, "I shall never forgive myself. Here am I, as I thought, such a business-like man, and what do I do but go and forget to look after the very mainspring of my works. I fit all my wheels together, and then when I want to wind up there's no springs. What should we have done without divers?"

Night closed in without success, and a little party assembled in the cabin, for as the ship might sail at any time, those who occupied the place of passengers felt that it was hardly worth while to return ashore. Mr Parkley kept a bright face on the matter, but it was evident that he was a good deal dispirited, though he chatted merrily enough, and talked to John Studwick and his sister of the beauties of the land they were about to visit.

"If we get off, Mr Parkley," said John Studwick, quietly.

"Get off, sir; why of course we shall. These two scoundrels will come off to-morrow morning, penniless, and with sick headaches. The rascals!"

Mr Parkley was reckoning without his host, for at that moment the two divers, each with twenty pounds in his pocket above the advance pay he had drawn, were on their way to London, and the man who had given the money was now forward in the darkest part of the deck, crouching beneath the high bulwarks of the large three-masted schooner, whispering with one of the men.

Their discussion seemed to take a long time, but it ended in the other man of the watch joining them, and the conversation still went on.

It was interrupted by the coming on deck of Captain Studwick, and silence ensued, while the captain took a turn round the deck, and gave an eye to the riding lights, for, as evening had come on, the vessel had been warped out of dock, and lay a couple of hundred yards out in the great estuary, fast to one of the buoys.

“We might have some of the lads taking a fancy to go on shore,” he had said to Mr Parkley, when he complained of having to take a boat to come off; “and we shall be all the more ready to drop down with the tide. I don’t want to find my crew like yours to-morrow morning – missing.”

Finding all apparently quite right, and the lanterns burning, brightly, Captain Studwick took another turn round the deck, peeped down into the forecabin, where the men were talking and smoking, then went right forward and looked over at the hawser fast to the buoy, said a word or two of warning to the men, and went below.

It was now ten o’clock, and excessively dark – so dark that it was impossible to see across the deck, and the lights hoisted up in the rigging seemed like great stars. The buzz of conversation in the forecabin had grown much more subdued, and then suddenly ceased, though a dull buzzing murmur could be heard from the deckhouse, where the dim light of a smoky lantern, hung from the roof, shone upon the bright cooking apparatus with which the place was furnished, and upon the glistening teeth of ’Pollo, the black cook, and Oakum, the old sailor, both smoking, and in earnest converse.

“Yes, ’Pollo,” said Oakum, “it seemed to bring up old times, and some of our vyges, so I thought I’d come and have a palaver before we turned in.”

“I glad to see you, Mass’ Sam Oakum, sah, and I hope you often gin me de pleasure ob your company during de voyage. I ’spect you, Mass’ Oakum, and you always ’spect colour genlum, sah, dough we use quarrel some time.”

“Only chaff, ’Pollo.”

“Course it was, sah, only chaff, and nuffum at all. And now I tink ob it, sah, I hav ’plendid ’rangement here, and supply for de cooking; and when, by an’ by, you find de beef too salt, and de biscuit too hard, juss you drop in here, sah, after dark, and ’Pollo most likely find lilly bit ob somefin nice leff from de cabin dinner.”

“Thanky, ’Pollo, thanky,” said Oakum. “But what do you say, eh ship-mate? I think we can find the old galleons again?”

“I quite ’tent, sah, to put dis ship in de hands ob such sperienced navigator as Mass’ Sam Oakum, who know all ober de world quite perfeck. You tink we sail in de morning?”

“If they catch them two skulking scoundrels of divers, ’Pollo. I’d just like to ropesend that Mr John Tolly. Gets three times the pay o’ the other men, and is ten times as saucy.”

“Top!”

“Eh?” said Oakum.

“What dat, Mass’ Oakum, sah?” said the black, whose eyes were rolling and ears twitching. Oakum listened attentively for a few moments, and then went on.

“Nothing at all, my lad, that I could hear.”

“I sure I hear somefin, sah. Let’s go and see.”

They both stepped out on to the deck, and stood and listened, for it was impossible for them to see, though the light from the deckhouse made them stand out plainly in view if anyone else was on the watch.

They saw nothing, for as they stepped out, a man, who was stealing aft, dropped softly down and crouched under the bulwarks.

The hawsers creaked softly as they swung in the tide, and a faint light shone up from the forecastle hatch, while from aft there was a tolerably bright glow from the cabin skylight. Here and there the riding lights of other vessels rose and fell as they were swayed by the hurrying waters, while the lights of the shore twinkled like stars on a black background, but, saving the rippling noise of the tide against the great schooner's side, all was perfectly still.

"False alarm, 'Pollo," said Oakum, leading the way back.

"No, sah," said 'Pollo, reseating himself, cross-legged, beneath the lantern. "I sure I hear somefin, sah, dough I no say what it was."

"I've often wished for you as a mate in a dark watch, 'Pollo," said Oakum, hewing off a quid of tobacco, and thrusting it into one cheek. "You would not go to sleep."

"Not ob a night, sah," said 'Pollo, complacently, "but I no so sure bout dat if de sun shine hot; I go sleep den fass enough."

They had hardly resumed their conversation when the man who had dropped down under the bulwarks rose, and went softly by the deckhouse, walking rapidly aft to the side, where he climbed over, after running his hand along and finding a rope, slid down, and took his place in a large boat already half-full.

A few moments later and another man crept softly along the deck, went over the side, and slid into the boat.

Another and another followed, and then one man who had been waiting by the forecastle hatch, instead of going aft, opened a sharp knife and crept forward to where the stout coir hawser was made fast to the buoy. It was drawn very tight, for the tide was running in fast, and a few sharp cuts would have divided the strands, with the result that the schooner would have drifted up with the current, and, if it had not fouled, and perhaps sunk some smaller vessel in its course, have run ashore.

The man listened attentively but all was still, and raising his knife he began to saw through the strands, when, rising, he shut the knife with a snap and exclaimed:

"No, hang it all, I won't. It's too bad; and there's a woman aboard. Bad enough as it is."

Then following the example of those who had gone before, he went softly aft, feeling his way along the bulwarks till his hand came in contact with the rope, and he, too, slid down into the boat.

"Well, did you cut the great rope?" whispered a voice.

"Yes, gov'nor, all right. But not deep," added the man to himself.

"Quick then, quick then," whispered the former speaker, "undo this little rope and let the boat float away."

The boat's painter was loosened – but not without rattling the iron ring through which it was run – dropped over the side with a splash, and just faintly grating against the vessel's side the boat glided away, appearing for a few moments in the faint glow cast from the stern windows, and then seeming to pass into a bank of utter darkness.

"I no care what you say, Mass' Oakum, sah," said 'Pollo a few moments before; and his great black ears seemed to start forward like those of a hare, "I sure I hear de rattle ob a rope; and you see if dare isn't a boat under de side."

He leaped softly up, and ran on deck, followed by Oakum.

"Dere, I sure I right," whispered the black, pointing astern. "Boat full ob men."

"I can't see nowt," growled Sam. "Let's go forward and ask the look-out if they heerd anything. Hear a boat touch the side, mates?" he said aloud.

There was no answer.

"The lubbers are asleep," he cried, angrily; and hurrying to where the men should have been, he found that they were missing, and ran to the hatchway. "Below there!" he shouted. "On deck here, some of yer!"

All silent, and he lowered himself down to find a lantern burning, but not a soul there even in the bunks, the men's kits being also gone.

“Deserted, by jingo!” cried Oakum, slapping his thigh, as he began to ascend the ladder. “Here, 'Pollo, run and call the skipper.”

“What's wrong?” cried Captain Studwick, from out of the darkness.

“Not a blessed man, sir, left aboard;” and the captain brought his foot down with a savage stamp upon deck.

Story 1-Chapter X. Off at Last

The outcry brought the doctor, Mr Wilson, and John Studwick on deck the latter panting, and evidently in a terrible state of alarm.

“Quick, father, the boat, save Bessy, don’t mind me,” he gasped.

“There’s nothing to fear, my boy,” exclaimed the captain, catching the young man’s arm. “Only the men have gone ashore – forsaken the ship. Now go below. Here, you Oakum, what do you mean, you scoundrel? Where’s Mr Jones?”

“Here, sir,” said the mate, who had hurried from his berth. “What’s wrong?”

“Wrong?” exclaimed the captain, stamping about the deck in his rage. “Why, the men have forsaken the ship. What were you about?”

“I beg pardon, Captain Studwick,” said the mate, sharply; “but it was my watch below. You said you would see to the first watch with Oakum.”

“So I did, so I did,” cried the captain. “Here, Oakum.”

“You said I could go below, Capen,” said Oakum, gruffly.

“Did you know anything of this?”

“If I’d know’d anything of it, I should have come and told you,” growled Oakum. “Didn’t I give the alarm as soon as I know’d?”

“Yes, yes, yes,” cried the captain. “There, I beg your pardon, Mr Jones. Don’t take any notice, Oakum. It’s enough to make any man mad. How am I to face Mr Parkley and Mr Pugh when they come off in the morning?”

“Lads on’y gone off to have a good drink, p’raps, sir,” suggested Oakum.

“Drink? No. They’ve been got at and bribed, or persuaded not to go. The scoundrels! I’ll have them before the nearest magistrate and punish them for this.”

“Got to ketch ’em first,” growled Oakum to himself.

“Look here, when did you find this out?” exclaimed the captain.

“When you heerd me shout,” said Oakum. “’Pollo here thought he heard a noise, and we came and looked.”

“And I see de boat go astern wif all de men in, sah,” said ’Pollo, importantly.

“It’s a planned thing, or the men would not have gone off like that,” said the captain. “Mark my words, John, that foreigner’s at the bottom of this. Did either of you see him come near the ship?”

“I did, sah,” cried ’Pollo.

“You did?” exclaimed the captain.

“Yes, sah, jus’ ’fore dark I see um get in boat ’low de wharf, and two men row boat wif um.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, sah, I quite sure. I see um sit in de stern wrap up in um cloak, and smoke cigar. But he nebber come nigh de ship.”

“I thought as much,” groaned the captain. “Here, go below, John. The night air’s chilly. There’s nothing the matter, my child,” he continued tenderly, “only some of the crew have absconded.” For just then Bessy Studwick, very quiet and trembling, had come to his side. “Well, gentlemen, I’m very sorry, but I could not help it, and now I shall have to ask you to share the watch with Mr Jones and myself. Oakum and ’Pollo, go below. Oakum, you will take the next watch with Mr Jones; Mr Meldon, or you Mr Wilson, will, perhaps, join me in the morning watch.”

Both gentlemen expressed their willingness, and the night passed off without further misadventure.

Captain Studwick was quite right, for the Cuban had hovered about the schooner until darkness set in, when, watching his opportunity, he caught the attention of one of the men, who absolutely refused to listen to him at first, but as Lauré bribed higher, and vowed that it was a mad voyage, of which he had himself repented, as he would not expose the men to the risks of the deadly coast where the treasure lay, the man began to listen.

“There are fevers always on those shores, of the most deadly kind,” he whispered; “and I shall feel as if I had sent a party of good British seamen to their death.”

At last his words and his money began to tell. This man was won over, and when the others were brought under the persuasive ways of the Cuban, the dread of punishment for desertion was mastered by another sovereign or two, and after his last words they gave way.

“Take your choice,” he had said at last; “a dog’s death and your body for the sharks in that pestilent clime, or the money I give you. You can take the night train for London, have your run there, and then get a good vessel afterwards.”

An additional sovereign to the man he felt most likely to be his tool made him promise to cut the hawser, and then all went well for the infamous design, except that this man repented of part of his bargain, and the crew of stout, able seamen was taken off, and landed a mile or so above where the schooner lay in the tideway.

By eight o’clock in the morning Mr Parkley and Dutch came off to announce that they had discovered through Pollo that when he saw Tolly and the other diver they were on their way to the station, and had taken tickets for London.

“Did you ever have worse news?” said Mr Parkley, bitterly. “It may be months before we can get others who will go, for Layman, my other man, is ill.”

“Yes,” said the captain, quietly.

“What do you mean?” exclaimed Mr Parkley, aghast.

“Our friend the Cuban has seduced all the men away, and stopped the expedition.”

“I’ll be – No, I won’t swear,” exclaimed Mr

Parkley, turning red with fury. “Stopped the voyage, has he! Got my divers away, and the crew, has he! Look here, Dutch Pugh; look here, Captain Studwick. I’m a man who takes a good deal of moving, but when I do move it takes more to stop me. I’ll move heaven and earth to carry this plan out, and I’ll spend every sixpence I’ve got, but what I’ll beat that scoundrel.”

“You will apply to the magistrates about the men?” said the captain; “at least, shall I?”

“No,” said Mr Parkley, sharply. “Might just as well commence proceedings against that scoundrel. Waste of time. Dutch Pugh, you’ll stand by me?”

“Indeed I will, Mr Parkley,” said Dutch, calmly, as he held out his hand.

“And I’m sure I will,” exclaimed the captain.

“I knew you would,” said Mr Parkley, warmly. “I’m determined now, for it’s evident that that rascal will try all he can to thwart me. Come down in the cabin, and let’s see what’s to be done. We’ll have a meeting.”

They were all seated round the cabin table soon after, and the matter was discussed in all its bearings, Captain Studwick saying that he had no fear of being able to get a dozen good men in a day or two, if they were prepared to pay pretty highly.

“Then you must pay highly,” said Mr Parkley; “but look here, every step you take must be with the knowledge that this Lauré is trying to thwart you.”

“I will not boast,” said Captain Studwick, “but if I get a crew on board here again, I think it will take two Laurés to trick me.”

“Good!” said Mr Parkley, beginning to brighten up. “What I want is to get off at once. It will be horrible to stay, for we shall be the laughing-stock of the whole town. The chaff was beginning last night.”

“But about divers?” said the captain.

“Yes, there is the difficulty. It is not every man who will train for it, as it is a risky thing. Perhaps I may be able to train one or two of the men we get. At all events, go I will, and I will not be beaten.”

“I’m afraid that would be but a poor chance,” said Dutch, who sat there pale and troubled, but had hardly spoken.

“Don’t throw cold water on it, Pugh, for Heaven’s sake,” cried Mr Parkley, testily.

“I do not wish to do that,” said Dutch. “I wish to help you.”

“Well, then,” cried Mr Parkley, sharply, “I shall take old Rasp. He’ll go to oblige me, old as he is; and if it is necessary I will go down myself. I’ve not been down for years now, but sooner than that scoundrel shall crow over me I’ll do all the diving myself.”

“There will be no necessity,” said Dutch, quickly.

“What do you mean?” exclaimed Mr Parkley.

“I will go with you myself,” said Dutch.

“What!” cried Mr Parkley, joyfully. “You? You go with me? My dear Pugh, I shall never forget this.”

He rose and grasped the young man’s hand with both of his own, and his face flushed with pleasure.

“Yes,” said Dutch, quietly, “I will go, and with old Rasp I think we can manage.”

“Manage!” cried Mr Parkley, “why, you are a host in yourself. But look here, my dear boy. Gentlemen, you will excuse us. Come on deck.”

He led the way, and Dutch followed him to the side of the schooner, where he took him by the button.

“I’m so grateful, Pugh,” he exclaimed, “you can’t think; but it won’t do. The business would be all right with another, but I can’t take you away.”

“Why not?” said Dutch, sharply.

“Your poor little wife, my boy, I could never look her in the face again.”

“For God’s sake don’t mention her,” cried Dutch, passionately. “There, there,” he cried, mastering himself, “you need not consider that.”

“But, my dear Pugh, are you not too hasty – too ready to believe? No, no, it won’t do, you misjudge her. I won’t let you go. In a few days all will be well again.”

“Parkley,” exclaimed Dutch, hoarsely, “it will never be all right again. I speak to you as I would speak to no other man. Heaven knows how I have loved that woman. But I have no home now. I shall never see her again.”

“No, no, no, don’t speak like that, my dear boy. You are too rash. Come, have patience, and all will be right. You shall not go.”

Dutch smiled bitterly.

“You are mad just now, but it will pass off; and look here, my dear boy, it was all my fault for getting you to take the cursed scoundrel in.”

“Don’t speak of it, pray,” cried Dutch.

“I must, my dear boy. Now, look here. After being guilty of one wrong to that poor little woman of yours, how can I do her another by taking her husband away?”

“I am no longer her husband, and she is no longer my wife,” said Dutch, sternly. “I tell you I shall go.”

“No, no; I will not let you.”

“I am your partner, and I shall insist upon it. Stay at home and let me take the lead in the expedition. You may trust me.”

“Better than I would myself,” said Mr Parkley, warmly.

“Then let me go. It will be a relief to me from the torture I have suffered these last weeks. Parkley, you cannot dream of what I have felt.”

“Do you really earnestly mean all this?” said Mr Parkley, gazing in the other’s troubled face.

“Mean it? Yes, it would be a real kindness.”

“Time cures all wounds,” said Mr Parkley, “so perhaps it will be best, and you will make arrangements for her while you are away.”

“She has the house,” said Dutch, bitterly, “and what money I have. I shall write to her mother to join her. Is that enough?”

Mr Parkley held out his hand, and the two men grasped each other's for a moment, and then turned back to the cabin.

“Mr Pugh goes with us, Studwick; Rasp I know will come when he hears that Mr Pugh is with us.”

“Indeed,” said Dutch, “I should have thought not.”

“You'll see,” said Mr Parkley, writing a few lines in his pocket-book and tearing off the leaf. “Now, then, about Rasp. Whom can we trust to take this ashore?”

“Let me go,” said Mr Meldon, the young doctor, “I will deliver it in safety.”

“You will?” cried Mr Parkley. “That's well; but mind you don't get tampered with, nor the man this is to fetch.”

Mr Meldon started, being rowed ashore in a boat they hailed. The captain was ready to suspect everyone now, but in an hour old Rasp came grumbling aboard, with a huge carpet bag, which dragged him into the boat in which he came off, and nearly pulled him back into it when he mounted the side.

“Oh, yes, I'll go,” he said, as soon as he encountered his employers on the deck. “Hain't got enough clean shirts, though. I allus thought that Tolly was good for nowt, and the forrener a bad un.”

“And now, Rasp, I want you to go ashore again for me,” said Dutch.

“I'll take him with me,” said the captain, “and keep a sharp look-out. Mr Parkley is going too.”

“I don't want no sharp look-outs,” said Rasp, gruffly. “I can take care o' mysen'.”

Rasp's mission was a simple one, namely, to purchase certain articles of outfit, for, with stern determination, the young man had set his face against revisiting his home. Moreover, as if distrustful of himself, he stayed on board, meaning to remain there for good.

The captain and mate both left for the shore, leaving Dutch in charge of the vessel, and so earnestly did they work that by nightfall they had secured six fresh men, and were hopeful of obtaining another half-dozen – all they required – by the following day.

The new-comers were of a rougher class than those who had been wiled away, but for all that they were sturdy, useful men, and, anxious as the leaders of the expedition were to start, it was no time for choosing.

That night, little thinking that every action in connection with the vessel had been closely watched with a powerful glass from the upper window of a house overlooking the estuary, Captain Studwick returned with the mate, taking the precaution to give the men plenty of liquor, and placing them under hatches for safety.

Rasp had long been back with the necessaries Dutch required, bringing with them a letter, which the young man read, tore to shreds, and then sent fluttering over the side; and at last the party, feeling hopeful of success on the morrow, retired for the night, saving such as had to keep watch.

The next day, however, brought no success; not a man of those unemployed could be induced to undertake the voyage, and to Captain Studwick's great annoyance he found that by some means the whole business of the voyage had been turned into ridicule, and the men he addressed responded to his questions with a coarse burst of laughter. With the determination, then, of sailing the next morning with the crew he had, and putting in at Plymouth with the hope of obtaining more, he returned on board, and was in the act of relating his ill-success, when Oakum hailed a boat, pulled towards them by a couple of watermen, with half-a-dozen sailors in her stern.

It was growing dark, but those on deck could make out that the men had their long bolster-like kits with them, and the captain's heart beat with joy as he heard, in answer to the hail, that the men had come from one of the sailors' boarding-houses, having arrived there that afternoon.

“Simpson’s, on West Quay,” said one of the watermen. “He heerd you were looking out for hands, and he gave me this.”

He handed a up letter in which the boarding-house keeper asked for five pounds for securing the men and talking them into coming, and as the sailors came on deck, and proved quite willing to sign for the voyage, the money was paid and the boat pushed off.

They were not a handsome set of men, three being Englishmen, one a Dane, and the other two Lascars, one a long black-haired fellow, the other a short-haired, closely-shaven man, with a stoop, and a slight halt in one leg. He was nearly black, and did not look an attractive addition to the party; but the men declared he was an old ship-mate, and a good hand, evidently displaying an inclination, too, to refuse to go without him, so he was included.

“I think we can set our friend at defiance now,” said the captain, rubbing his hands as the men went below.

“I don’t know,” said Mr Parkley. “He’s one of those treacherous, cunning scoundrels that will steal a march on us when it is least expected. It’s a fine night, and not so very dark; the tide serves; so what do you say to dropping down at once, and putting a few miles of sea between us and our friend?”

“The very thing I should have proposed,” said the captain; “and, what’s more, I say make all sail for our port, in case our friend should charter a fresh vessel and be before us.”

“He would not get the divers.”

“No, perhaps not; but he might make up a party who could overhaul and plunder us. I shall not be happy till we are well on the way.”

“Good, then, let’s make our start. It will astonish Pugh when he comes up from his berth to find us full-handed and well on our way.”

“Is he lying down, then?” said the captain.

“Yes, I persuaded him to go, as he was the watch again to-night. The fellow is ill with worry and anxiety, and we can’t afford to have him knocked up. You’ll start, then, at once.”

“In a quarter of an hour or so,” said Captain Studwick. “Here’s a large barque coming up, and we may as well let her clear us first.”

Giving the word to the mate, the first half-dozen men were called up, and a couple of sails made ready for hoisting, so as to give steerage way, and the motions of the dimly-seen barque were watched.

“I don’t want her to run foul of us,” said the captain, “for if she did, I should be ready to swear that it was one of the Cuban’s plans.”

“Hardly,” replied Mr Parkley. “If any fresh hindrance is to come to us, it will be from the shore. If you take my advice, you will not let a boat approach the ship to-night.”

“I don’t mean to,” said the captain. “All right, she’ll give us a pretty good wide berth. Hallo! What’s that?” he said, crossing over to port.

“Boat from the shore, sir,” said one of the men; and at the same moment came a hail out of the darkness.

“Ahoy there! Heave us a rope.”

Oakum stepped forward, and was about to cast a rope down, when the captain stayed him.

“What is it?” he said sharply. “Keep off, or you may have something through your planks;” and as he spoke he peered down into the boat. “Here, Jones, keep a sharp look-out on the other side, and see that no boat comes up.”

“Is that Captain Studwick?” said a woman’s voice.

“Yes, and what then?” said the captain. “Now, it won’t do. The trick’s too clear. How many have you in that boat?”

“No one but myself,” replied the same voice. “Pray, pray let me come on board.”

“Who are you, and what do you want?” exclaimed the captain. “Quick! I’ve no time to waste.”

“Let her come on board,” cried Mr Parkley, hastily. “Don’t you know her?” he whispered; “it’s Mrs Pugh.” Then leaning over the side – “Hester, my child, is that you?”

“Yes,” was the hoarse reply. “Mr Parkley, for Heaven’s sake, take me on board.”

“There, I told you so,” exclaimed Mr Parkley; “let down the steps.”

“I tell you it’s some ruse of that cursed Cuban,” cried the captain, angrily. “If you give way we shall be stopped again. Keep that boat off below there.”

“No, no!” cried Mr Parkley. “Stop. Studwick, I take the responsibility on myself. Oakum, lower the steps, and throw that rope.”

“Ay, ay, sir,” said the old sailor. “Am I to do it?” he continued to the captain.

“Yes, if he wishes it,” was the testy reply; and then in a low voice he said to the mate, “Slip the hawser, and haul up the jib and staysail. I’m going to the wheel.”

His orders were rapidly executed, and the long, graceful vessel began almost imperceptibly to move through the water.

“If it is any trick,” said the captain, as he went aft to the man he had stationed at the wheel, “it shall take place at sea. What’s that?”

He turned back instantly, for at that moment what sounded like a slight scuffle was heard by the gangway he had left.

Story 1-Chapter XI. In Bessy's Cabin

So determined was Captain Studwick not to be lightly trifled with that a pistol was in his hand as he ran back to the side, but his alarm was unnecessary, for the scuffling noise was caused merely by Mr Parkley catching their visitor as she tottered and nearly fell on the deck.

“Let me see my husband, Mr Parkley,” she moaned, “for pity’s sake let me see my husband. If I saw him and spoke to him, he would listen to me.”

“But, my dear child,” began Mr Parkley.

“I shall die if I do not see him,” she moaned again. “I have been so ill – I have suffered so much, and this evening the news came that he was going away – away without seeing me. Oh, God, what have I done that I should suffer so!”

“My dear child – my dear Mrs Pugh.”

“I must see him – pray, pray take me to him,” she sobbed, “it is more than I can – more than I can bear.”

Mr Parkley caught her again just in time, for she swooned away, and laying her upon the deck he tried hard to restore her. Then looking up he became aware that the lights of the town were fast receding.

“Why, Studwick,” he exclaimed, “the schooner’s moving.”

“Yes,” said the captain.

“But the boat this poor girl came off in?”

“Ashore by this time.”

“But we can’t take her. Hang it, man, we cannot have domestic differences on board. She must go back.”

“We must now land her at Plymouth,” said the captain. “Send for my Bessy, man, she will soon bring her to. How foolish of the little woman to come aboard.”

“Shall I fetch the young lady, sir?” said Sam Oakum gruffly, as he stood with a look of disgust upon his face.

“Yes, for goodness’ sake, do. Quick!” exclaimed Mr Parkley, whose efforts to restore animation were all in vain.

Just as Sam went aft, though, Mrs Pugh began to revive, stared wildly about, and sitting up saw the captain bending over her.

“Captain Studwick,” she cried, catching his hand and drawing herself upon her knees to cling to him, “don’t send me back – don’t send me away. Let me go too. I could not bear to part from my husband like this. He is angry with me,” she whispered, “I cannot tell you why, but he has not spoken to me for days, and I have been so – so ill.”

“Yes, yes, you shall see him, my dear, but stand up. You must not make a scene.”

“Oh no,” she exclaimed, rising hastily, “I will do anything you say, only let me see him and explain. Let me go with you. If I could talk to him he would believe me, and all would be well again. If not,” she said with a hysterical cry, “I shall go mad – I shall go mad.”

“Come, let me take you below,” said the captain, for she was clinging tightly to his arm.

“Yes, yes,” whispered the poor trembling woman. “I could not help that; I am trying so hard to be calm, but my poor breast is so care-laden that a cry would escape. Let me go with you, Captain Studwick. I will be so quiet – so careful.”

“It is impossible, my dear child,” he said in a husky voice, for her agony affected him.

“No, no, don’t say that; I will help Bessy nurse your poor son. She loves me, and believes in me, and I will give no trouble. If you set me ashore I shall die of grief. I cannot live to be separated from my husband – for him to leave me like this.”

“Well, well, well, I’ll see what I can do,” said the captain in the quieting way that one would speak to a child; but she peered instantly into his face.

“You are deceiving me,” she cried. “You are trying to calm me with promises, and you mean to set me ashore. Mr Parkley,” she wailed, turning to him, “you know me, and believe in me: you know the cause of this trouble. Take me to my dear husband, and help me to drive away this horrible belief of his, or I shall die.”

“My dear child – my dear child,” he said, drawing her to him, “I will try all I can.”

“But you will set me ashore again when I strove so hard to get to him. I was so ill in bed, and he has not been near me. I found out that you were taking Dutch from me, and I could not stay. Let me see him – oh, let me see him!”

“You shall, my dear, as soon as you are calm.”

“But he is here,” she whispered, not daring to raise her voice lest, in her excited state, it should get the mastery over her, and she should burst forth in hysterical wails.

“Yes, my child, he is here. He is asleep below.”

“Poor Dutch!” she whispered to herself; and then with a faint, weary smile she laid her hands in those of her old friend. “There, you can see how calm and patient I will be,” she continued. “No one shall suspect any trouble. I will be so quiet and patient, and if he will not listen to me, I will not complain, so long as I am near him – only wait till God changes his heart towards me.”

“There, then, you shall stay – till we get to Plymouth,” exclaimed Mr Parkley, hastily passing his hand across his eyes. “Don’t let the men see that anything’s the matter, my dear.”

“No: oh, no,” she replied. “I’m quite calm now. Ah, here’s Miss Studwick.”

“You here, Mrs Pugh!” exclaimed the captain’s daughter, who believed that she was coming to her father.

“Yes, I could not stay,” sobbed Hester. “I was obliged to come. Oh, Bessy, dear Bessy, don’t shrink from me,” she wailed, as the men gladly drew away and left them together.

“Hush! don’t say a word here,” said Bessy, glancing round, and speaking hoarsely; “come down to my cabin.”

Hester tottered, and would have fallen, but Bessy caught her arm and led her below, where, as soon as they were alone, the former fell upon her knees, and held up her hands, catching those of Bessy as she stood before her.

“Listen to me, Miss Studwick,” she moaned. “Don’t condemn me unheard. I thought you believed in me, but you shrank from me just now.”

Bessy did not speak, but gazed down on the sobbing woman with a look of pity.

“My dear husband has allowed cruel suspicions to creep into his heart, and he wrongs me – he does, indeed. Oh, Bessy, Bessy, you loved him once, I know, I know you did, and you must have hated me for taking his love from you.”

A low sigh burst from Bessy’s breast, but she did not speak.

“You know,” sobbed Hester, “how true and noble and frank he is.”

“I do,” said Bessy softly.

“Then, what would the woman be who could betray him, even in thought? Would she not be the vilest, the most cruel of wretches?”

“She would, indeed,” said Bessy coldly.

“Bessy – Miss Studwick,” cried Hester, with a low wail of misery, “if I have committed any sin it is that of loving my dear husband too well. God – God knows how innocent I am. Oh! it is too hard to bear.”

She sank lower on the cabin floor, weeping silently, but only by a great effort, for the heavy sobs kept rising to her lips, and in her agony the intense desire to obtain relief in uttering loud cries was almost more than she could master.

Bessy stood looking down upon her with brows knit and lips pressed together, for her heart whispered to her that this was a judgment on this woman, who had robbed her of her love, and that she ought to rejoice over her downfall. Then, too, the thought came that, this idol fallen, she might, perhaps, herself be raised up in its place, and a flash of joy irradiated her mind, but only for a moment. Then her better nature prevailed, and bending down she lifted the prostrate woman with ease, and laid her upon the couch-like locker that filled one side of the cabin, kneeling down beside her, and drawing the dishevelled head upon her bosom.

“Hester,” she whispered, “I did hate you, very, very bitterly, as intensely as I once loved Dutch Pugh; but all that is passed. When I came to your house, and began to know you better, I used to go home and kneel down and pray for his happiness with you, while, when I heard of his trouble, my hatred began to fight its way back, so that the last day or two I have felt ready to curse you for the wreck you have made.”

“Oh, no, no, no,” sobbed Hester, clinging to her; “I am innocent.”

“Yes, I know and believe that now,” said Bessy; “and I will help you to win him back to the same belief.”

“But you will bring him to me quickly, or they will set me ashore,” wailed Hester, clinging tightly to her companion as she uttered a sigh of relief. “If I could but stay only to see him sometimes, and know that he was safe, I should wait then patiently until he came to me and told me that all this dreadful dream was at an end.”

“And you believe that he will do this?”

“Believe!” cried Hester, starting up, and gazing full at her companion. “Oh, yes, I believe it. It may be long first, but the time will come, and I can wait – I can wait – I can wait.”

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