

Castlemon Harry

Marcy the Blockade Runner



Harry Castlemon
Marcy the Blockade Runner

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CHAPTER I

MARCY HAS A VISITOR

The boys who have read the first volume of this series of books, in which we followed the fortunes of our Union hero, Marcy Gray, and described the persevering but unsuccessful efforts he made to be true to his colors in deed as well as in spirit, will remember that we left him at his home near Nashville, North Carolina, enjoying a brief respite from the work he so heartily detested, that of privateering. He had made one voyage in the *Osprey* under Captain Beardsley, during which he assisted in capturing the schooner *Mary Hollins*, bound from Havana to Boston with an assorted cargo. When the prize was brought into the port of Newbern the whole town went wild with excitement, Captain Beardsley's agent being so highly elated that he urged the master of the *Osprey* to run out at once and try his luck again, before the capture of the *Hollins* became known at the North. But Beardsley, who was afraid to trust landsharks any farther than he could see them, declared with a good deal of earnestness that he would not budge an inch until the legality of the capture had been settled by the courts, the vessel and cargo sold, and the dollars that belonged to him and his crew were planked down in their two hands. Knowing that it would take time to go through all these formalities, Marcy Gray asked for a leave of absence, which Beardsley granted according to promise, and in less than half an hour after the *Osprey* was hauled alongside the wharf, her disgusted young pilot, wishing from the bottom of his heart that she might sink out of sight before he ever saw her again, left her and went home as fast as the cars could take him. When we last saw him he had reached his mother's house, and was reading a letter from his cousin, *Rodney the Partisan* a portion of which we gave to the reader at the close of the first volume of this series.

"Rodney is full of enthusiasm, isn't he?" exclaimed Marcy, when he had finished reading the letter. "He says he looks for 'high old times' running the Yankees out of Missouri, but I am afraid he'll not enjoy them as much as he thinks he will. Perhaps the Yankees are not good runners. But Rodney has been true to his colors and I have not. I said I never would fight against the Union, but I have stood by and seen a gun fired at the old flag; and I have no doubt that the skipper of the *Hollins* when he saw me aboard the privateer, took me for as good a rebel as there was in the crew. Perhaps he will see his mistake some day. I shall have to accept my share of the prize money, for if I don't Beardsley's suspicions will be aroused; but I'll put it away and send it to the master of the *Hollins* the first good chance I get. Has Wat Gifford been here since I went to sea? You know he warned me of two secret enemies I would have to look out for, and hinted that he would some day tell me who the rest are." ["But I think I know already," added Marcy mentally.] While he was at sea he had had ample leisure to think over the situation, and had made up his mind that he knew right where the most serious danger that threatened him and his mother was coming from.

"Walter has been here," replied Mrs. Gray, "and I understand that he has since gone back to the army, his furlough, which was a short one, having expired. I was glad to see Walter, for it was a very great relief to visit with some one to whom I knew I could talk freely; but I must say he left a very unpleasant impression on my mind. He told me, in so many words, that we are suspected of being traitors at heart, and that there are but few of our neighbors we can trust."

"And who are they?" inquired Marcy. "When we know who our friends are, it will be no trouble for us to pick out our enemies."

"I asked Walter that very question, and after some hesitation he was obliged to confess that he could not name a single person. There are some who denounce secession in the very strongest terms, but that doesn't prove anything, for Walter has often done the same thing himself, and he is a rebel soldier," said Mrs. Gray sadly. "Only think of it, Marcy! To not one of the many who were our warm friends in times past, can we go for advice and sympathy, now that trouble is coming upon us. Is it not dreadful?"

"Who cares for advice or sympathy?" exclaimed the boy wrathfully. "We've got each other and Jack to go to when the pinch comes, and outsiders can just mind their own business and live to themselves, and let us do the same. Traitors! That word doesn't apply to us, mother."

"I know it doesn't; but for all that I am afraid that the 'outsiders,' as you call them, will not let us live to ourselves. Young Gifford almost as good as told me that some of our near neighbors intend to keep themselves posted in regard to our movements."

"The – the impudence of the thing!" exclaimed the young pilot, pounding his knees with his clenched hands. "Who's going to keep them posted? Where do they expect to get their information? Through the overseer?"

"Through the overseer," whispered Mrs. Gray, in reply.

"Are you afraid to speak the words out loud?" cried Marcy, who had seldom been so excited as he was at that moment. "Great Moses! Have things come to such a pass that we dare not talk in our ordinary tones in our own house, but must carry on our conversation in whispers?"

"I was in hopes that my letters would prepare you for something like this," said his mother slowly.

"Well, they didn't. Of course I knew I should find things changed, but I never thought we should be spied upon in our own house," answered Marcy. "Traitors, are we, when we haven't done the first thing to deserve the name! But is there no way in which that villain Hanson can be got rid of?"

"There is but one way that occurs to me now," was the reply. "When his contract expires we can tell him that we do not intend to employ an overseer any longer."

"And that will be almost a year from now," groaned Marcy. "How can we live for so many months, knowing all the while that our every movement is watched, and that some one is constantly trying to catch every word we say? I don't believe I can stand it. Did Gifford say anything about –"

Marcy paused, got upon his feet, and opened quickly, but silently, one after another, all the doors that led from the room in which he and his mother were sitting. There were no eavesdroppers among the servants yet but that was no sign that there wouldn't be some to-morrow or next day. An overseer who was left as much to himself as Hanson was, held great power in his hands; and some negro servants are as open to bribery as some white people are. Having made sure that there was no one listening at the door, Marcy drew his chair close to his mother's side before he spoke again.

"Did Gifford say anything about the money – the thirty thousand dollars in gold you have hidden in the cellar wall?" he asked, in suppressed tones.

"He did, and it troubles me more than anything else he said during his visit," replied Mrs. Gray, glancing nervously around the room, as if she feared that there might be a listener concealed behind some of the chairs or under the sofa. "In spite of my utmost care, that matter, which I hoped to keep from the knowledge of even the most faithful among the servants, has become known. I cannot account for it. It fairly unnerves me to think of it, for it suggests a most alarming possibility."

"Did Gifford say, in so many words, that you were known to have money in the house?"

"He did not. He said it was suspected."

"And what is the alarming possibility you just spoke of?" continued Marcy.

"Why, I am afraid that there is some trusted person nearer to me than the overseer is – some one right here in the house who has been watching me day and night," answered his mother, shivering all over and drawing nearer to her sturdy son, as if for protection. "You don't know how it makes me feel, or how keenly I have suffered since young Gifford's visit."

"I wish he had stopped away," said Marcy, almost fiercely.

"I don't," replied his mother. "He meant it for the best, and wouldn't have told me a word if I had not insisted. You must not blame Walter. It is best that I should understand the situation; and Marcy, you know you would not have told me a word of all this if Gifford had told it to you."

"Perhaps he did say something to me about it," answered the boy, with an air which said that his mother had not been telling him anything he did not know before. "But I have been more careful of your feelings than Gifford was."

"And did you mean to leave me all in the dark and utterly ignorant of the perils that surround us?" said Mrs. Gray reproachfully. "Do you think that would have been just to me? Don't imagine, because you are my protector and the only one I have to depend on while Jack is at sea, that you have all the courage there is between us. I know you would shield me entirely if you could, but it is impossible; and you must let me bear my part. I shall have to whether you consent or not. But you haven't yet told me where you have been, how you captured that vessel, what the captain said about it, or – or anything," she added, with a feeble attempt to bring the boy's usual smile back to his face. "Remember, I am deeply interested in all that you do."

"Well, you wouldn't be if you had seen the cowardly work I helped Beardsley carry out," replied Marcy. "In the first place, Crooked Inlet is buoyed in such a way that the stranger who tries to go through it will run his vessel so hard and fast aground that she will be likely to stay there until the waves make an end of her, or the shifting sands of the bar bury her out of sight."

"That's murderous," exclaimed Mrs. Gray, with a shudder. "Is Captain Beardsley about to turn wrecker?"

"He means to wreck any war vessel that may give chase to his schooner," answered Marcy. "If we are pursued, I can take the *Osprey* through all right; but if the man-of-war attempts to follow us, and allows herself to be guided by the buoys, she'll stick. Oh, it's lovely business – a brave and honorable business," exclaimed the boy, running his hands through his hair and tumbling it up as he used to do at school when he found anything in his books that was too hard for him. "I have the profoundest contempt for the villain who brought me into it, and despise myself for yielding to him."

"But, Marcy, what else could you have done? Gilford assured me it was the only course open to you, and that by shipping as pilot on board that privateer you have somewhat allayed suspicion."

"Mother," said Marcy, placing his arm around her neck and whispering the words in her ear, "Captain Beardsley doesn't need a pilot any more than he needs some one to command his piratical craft. I suspected as much all the while, and the minute we got up to Crooked Inlet I knew it. He can tell you more about the coast in five minutes than I could in an hour."

"Of course, a trader – " began Mrs. Gray.

"Mother," repeated Marcy, "Lon Beardsley is not and never has been a trader. He's a smuggler between this country and Cuba. He says himself that he never made a voyage farther away from home than the West Indies. He knows every inch of the coast like a book."

"Then what does he want of you?" inquired Mrs. Gray, with a look of surprise. "Why can he not permit you to stay at home in peace, as he knows I want you to do? Do you still think he wants to test your loyalty to the South?"

"That's just what he is up to," replied Marcy. "He came here in the hope that I would refuse his offer, so that he would have an excuse for getting me into trouble."

Yes, that was one object Captain Beardsley had in view when he proposed to make Marcy Gray pilot of the privateer, but there was another behind it, and one that was much nearer to the smuggler's heart. As Marcy had told his friend Wat Gifford, on the day the two held that confidential conversation in front of the Nashville post-office, Beardsley wanted to marry Mrs. Gray's plantation; and when he found that he must give up all hope in that direction, like the poor apology for a man that he was, he hit upon a plan for taking vengeance upon Marcy's mother. If she proved, when the test was applied, to be friendly to the South and its cause, he would not dare lift a finger against her or

her property, for he knew that if he did his neighbors would quickly interest themselves in the matter; but if she would only refuse to permit Marcy to ship on board the privateer, then he would have a clear field for his operations. He could accuse Marcy's mother of being a Yankee sympathizer, and that would turn the whole settlement against her at once, because she was already suspected of Union sentiments, and some of her nearest neighbors were so certain that she was loyal to the old flag and opposed to secession, that they thought it their duty to cease visiting her. It would be no trouble at all, Beardsley thought, to arouse public feeling against her; but unfortunately for the success of his plans, Mrs. Gray did not refuse her consent; the boy took the position offered him on the *Osprey* made one voyage at sea, and did his duty as faithfully as any other member of the crew.

"I know Beardsley wanted to find out where I stood," repeated Marcy. "He expected and hoped that I would refuse to accept his proposition so that he would have an excuse for persecuting us; but being disappointed there, he intends to work in another direction. He means to make trouble on account of the money you have in the cellar."

"But what business – what right has he with it?" said Mrs. Gray indignantly. "It's ours."

"I know it, and we're going to keep it; but if Beardsley can make sure that you went to Richmond, Wilmington, and Newbern for *money*– and I think you will find that he looks to Hanson, the overseer, to furnish him with the proof, and bring a gang of longshoremen up here from Plymouth some dark night – "

"Oh, Marcy!" cried Mrs. Gray, starting from her chair and clasping her hands in alarm, "don't speak of it!"

"I wish from the bottom of my heart that I need not have told you of it," said the boy, getting upon his feet and pacing the floor with restless, angry strides. "But Wat Gifford believes that something of the sort is going to happen, and so do I. Wat didn't say so, but I am sure that is what he would have told me if he had found me at home when he came here. You knew there was danger in every one of those gold pieces you brought home with you; else why did you take so much pains to put them where you thought no one would be likely to find them?"

"It is true I did know it, and was afraid that if the news got abroad in the settlement, some of our poor neighbors might be tempted to commit crime," answered Mrs. Gray. "We never had so large an amount of money in the house before, and its presence troubles me greatly; but I never dreamed that we had anything to fear from an organized band of freebooters."

"And the fear of what Beardsley will do, if he finds out that the money is really in the house, is what troubles me," said the young pilot dolefully. "That man is capable of any desperate deed when he thinks he has the power on his side. I know you never thought of such a thing at the time, but your trips about the country, which Wat Gifford says could not have been made without an object of some sort, have excited a good deal of talk among the neighbors. Captain Beardsley posted Hanson, and Hanson, so Wat told me, is more to be feared than any one else, for he is right here on the place. These secret enemies will drive us both crazy."

"We'll not give them the satisfaction of knowing that they can trouble us in the least," replied his mother, with dignity. "Now we will dismiss them entirely from our minds, while you tell me all the interesting things that happened during your cruise."

"There isn't a thing to tell," was Marcy's answer. "We sighted the *Hollins* inside Diamond Shoals, threw a couple of shrapnel at her and she came to; that's all there was of it. Her skipper was a sailorman all over, and plucky, too; and if he had had anything to fight with, he would have made things lively for us. I never before felt so sorry for anybody as I did for him; but of course I didn't have a chance to tell him so. I may some day meet him under different circumstances."

When the boy said this he did not really believe that such a thing ever could occur, but nevertheless it did. Strange things happen in this world sometimes, and in process of time it came about that the young pilot again stood face to face with the master of the *Mary Hollins* no longer a prisoner pleading with Captain Beardsley that his men might not be ironed like felons, but standing

free on the quarter-deck of an armed vessel, with a hundred blue-jackets ready to do his bidding, and the Stars and Stripes waving proudly and triumphantly above him. And Beardsley – he was there, too; and perhaps we shall see what sort of heart he kept up when he found himself thrust into the "brig" so quickly that he did not have time to tell what his name was.

"How long does your leave of absence extend?" inquired Mrs. Gray, after a little pause.

"Until I am ordered to report," replied Marcy, with a laugh. "Perhaps the captain didn't know I wrote it out that way, but that isn't my fault. It was his business to read the paper before signing it. If he wants me he will have to send for me. You ought to have heard that Newbern mob whoop and yell when the crew of the *Hollins* were marched off to jail. They called them 'Abolitionists' and 'nigger-lovers'; but the prisoners kept their eyes straight to the front, and marched on as though they didn't hear a word of it. It was a shame to treat brave men that way."

Just as the young pilot ceased speaking there was a gentle knock at the door; and so sudden and unexpected was it, that it brought both him and his mother to their feet in a twinkling. How long had the person who gave that knock been within reach of the door, was the first thought that arose in the mind of each. Had some one crept along the hall and listened at the key-hole in the hope of hearing some of their conversation?

"If that is the case," Marcy whispered to his mother, "she has had her trouble for her pains. We haven't said a dozen words that could have been heard the length of this room. 'Come in!'"

The door opened to admit one of the numerous female house servants, who announced that there was a gentleman on the gallery who had called to see Mrs. Gray on very important private and particular business.

"She looks innocent enough," thought Marcy, who could not bring himself to believe, as his mother evidently did, that some of the domestics were watching their movements and reporting the result of their observations to the overseer. "I don't think she heard a word, and she certainly could not have seen anything." And then, finding that his mother was looking at him as if she meant him to understand that she knew what the visitor's business was, and desired him to take it off her hands, he said, aloud: "Who is the gentleman, and do you know what he's got to say that is so very important and particular?"

"I don't know, sah, what he want to speak about," answered the girl, "but de man is Mr. Kelsey."

Marcy could hardly keep back an exclamation of disgust, and in an instant he was on his guard. The man's name and the message he had sent in warned him to be on the lookout for treachery. Kelsey was one of Beardsley's "renters" – that is to say, he hired from the captain a few acres of ground, on which he managed to raise enough corn and potatoes to keep his family from absolute want, and a little log cabin in which he found shelter when he was not absent on his hunting and thieving expeditions. Marcy had not seen him since his return from Barrington, but he had heard of him as a red-hot Confederate who went about declaring that hanging was too good for Yankees and their sympathizers. When Marcy heard of this, he told himself that the man was another Bud Goble, who, when the pinch came, would take to the woods and stay there as long as danger threatened.

"I'll be with him directly," he said, addressing himself to the girl, who went out, closing the door behind her.

"What in the name of wonder can that worthless man want with me?" whispered Mrs. Gray, when she thought she had given the domestic time to get out of hearing. "He has never been in this house before except to beg."

"And he wouldn't be here now if he hadn't been sent," replied the boy.

"Oh, Marcy!" said his mother.

"That is just what I mean. It isn't old clothes or grub that he is after this time."

"But Beardsley couldn't have put him up to anything. He is in Newbern."

"No odds. He left plenty of friends behind to do his dirty work, and this fellow, Kelsey, is one of them. It will take a sharper man than he is to pull the wool over my eyes."

"Don't be over-confident, my son. He is not too insignificant – no one is too insignificant these times to do us some terrible injury. Be careful how you treat him and what you say to him. It might be dangerous to make him angry, for he has powerful friends behind him. Don't be gone long, for I shall be uneasy until you return."

"I'll be right back," promised Marcy; and, giving his mother a reassuring kiss, he left the room and went out on the porch to see what Beardsley's friend and spy wanted.

The latter looked just as he did the last time Marcy saw him – too lazy to take a long breath. He was tall and lank, his hair fell down upon his shoulders, his whiskers were as tangled and matted as a little brush heap – in short, he was as fine a specimen of a poor white as one could find anywhere in the seceded States. He looked stupid as well as shiftless, but the young pilot knew he wasn't. He was as sly as a fox and as cunning as well, and Marcy confessed to himself that he stood more in fear of him than he did of Captain Beardsley. When the man heard Marcy's step upon the porch, he tried to assume the servile air which was characteristic of poor Southern whites before the war; but he did not succeed very well. His manner seemed to say that he knew he was dealing with one he could crush whenever he felt like it, and of whom he need not stand in fear; and Marcy was quick to notice it.

"Sarvent, sah," said Kelsey, rising to his feet and taking off his tattered hat, which, however, he almost instantly replaced. "I heared that you had got back again from sea, an' that you had whopped the Yankees first time tryin', same as our fellers done down to Charleston."

"Yes, sir," replied Marcy, seating himself, and depositing his feet on the railing, as if to indicate that he was quite at the service of his friend Kelsey as long as the latter wanted to talk to him. "We whipped them, and we could do the same thing again." ["And that's nothing but the truth," he added, to himself. "When an armed vessel meets one that's not armed, the helpless one is bound to go under every time."]

It is hard to tell just what Kelsey expected the boy to say in response to his greeting, but in spite of his usual self-control his face showed that he had not looked for any such answer as this. Marcy spoke and acted as if he were delighted with the success that had attended the *Osprey's* first cruise at sea, and proud of being able to say that he was one of her crew.

"You sent in word that you desired to see my mother on very particular business," continued Marcy. "She doesn't feel like seeing anybody to-day – upset by the war news, you know – and I am here to speak for her. It's nothing bad, I hope?"

Kelsey straightened up on his seat and assumed a business air, as if these words had suggested an idea to him.

"Yes, it's kinder bad," said he. "We uns know that you are true blue, fur if you wasn't you wouldn't be on that privateer; an' if your maw wasn't true blue, she wouldn't a let you go."

["That sounds exactly like Beardsley," said Marcy, to himself.] "Well, what of it? Didn't I do my duty faithfully?"

"I ain't sayin' nothing agin that," replied the man hastily.

"But – you're fur Jeff Davis, ain't you?"

Instead of answering in words, Marcy pulled down the corner of his right eye and looked at Kelsey as if to ask him if he saw anything green in it.

"What do ye mean by them movements?" demanded the visitor.

"I mean that I am not going to talk politics with you," was the reply. "This settlement is full of traitors, and I'm going to hold my tongue unless I know who I am talking to. If I do that, I shan't get into trouble by speaking too freely in the hearing of a Yankee spy."

"But look a-here, Mister Marcy," protested Kelsey.

"If you came to pry into our private affairs, you might as well jump on your mule and go home, for you'll not get a word from me. I ought to put the dogs on you, for if all I hear is true you're the worst kind of a traitor." ["And so you are," thought Marcy, closely watching the effect of his words, although he did not seem to be doing so; "you're a traitor to the old flag."]

The visitor was astonished beyond measure, and it was fully a minute before he could collect his wits sufficiently to frame a reply.

CHAPTER II

HIDING THE FLAGS

"I think I have taken the right course," soliloquized the young pilot, who mentally congratulated himself on the ease with which he had "got to windward" of this sneaking spy. "If I fight him with his own weapons I shall probably get more out of him than I could in any other way."

"You heard that I was a traitor?" exclaimed Kelsey, as soon as he could speak. "Mister Marcy, the man who told you that told you a plumb lie, kase I ain't. I whooped her up fur ole Car'liny when she went out, I done the same when our gov'ner grabbed the forts along the coast, an' I yelled fit to split when our folks licked 'em at Charleston. Any man in the settlement or in Nashville will tell ye that them words of mine is nothing but the gospel truth."

Marcy knew well enough that his visitor's words were true, but he shook his head in a doubting way, as he replied:

"That may all be; but *I* didn't hear you whoop and yell, and you must not expect me to take your word for it. You must bring some proof before I will talk to you."

"Why, how in sense could ye hear me whoop an' yell, seein' that you was away to school in the first place, an' off on the ocean with Beardsley in the next?" exclaimed Kelsey. "Ask Dillon, an' Colonel Shelby, an' the postmaster, an' see if they don't say it's the truth."

"You have mentioned the names of some of our most respected citizens," said Marcy slowly, as if he were still reluctant to be convinced of the man's sincerity. "And if they, or any of them, sent you up here to talk to my mother – why, then, I shall have to listen to you; but mind you, if you are trying to play a game on me – "

"Mister Marcy," said Kelsey solemnly, "I ain't tryin' to come no game.

Them men done it sure's you're born."

"Did what?"

"Sent me up here this mawnin'."

"That's one point gained, but won't mother be frightened when she hears of it?" thought Marcy, leaning his elbows on his knees and covering his face with his hands so that his visitor could not see it. "Some of the best men in the country have so far forgotten their manhood, and the friendship they once had for our family, that they can send this sneaking fellow here to worm something out of us."

"I don't believe a word of it," he cried, jumping to his feet and confronting his visitor.

"Ye – ye don't believe it?" faltered Kelsey, springing up in his turn. "Well, I – I – look a-here, Mister Marcy, mebbe this is something else you don't believe. Them men whose names I jest give you, say that you an' your maw an' all the rest of the Gray family is Union. What do ye say *tothat*?"

"I say that they had better attend to their own business and let me attend to mine," answered Marcy. "Are Colonel Shelby and the rest of them for the Union?"

"Not much; an' nuther be I."

"Are you in favor of secession?"

"I reckon." replied Kelsey earnestly; and Marcy knew all the while that he could not have told what the word secession meant.

"Then why don't you prove it – you and Colonel Shelby, and the rest of the neighbors who are saying things behind my back that they don't care to say to my face? Why don't you prove your loyalty to the South by shouldering a musket and going into the army?"

"Why, we uns has got famblies to look out fur," exclaimed the visitor, who had never had this matter brought squarely home to him before.

"That makes no difference," answered the boy, who wondered if Kelsey's family would fare any worse while he was in the army than they did now, while he was out of it. "Every man in this

country must show his good will in one way or another. And there's that loudmouthed fellow Allison, who went out of his way to insult me in the post-office just before I went to sea. Nashville is full of such braggarts as he is. When they can't find anything else to talk about they talk about me; and I have smelt powder while they haven't." ["No odds if it was our own powder and the wind blew the smoke into my face," he said to himself.]

By this time Marcy had the satisfaction of seeing that he had taken the wind completely out of Kelsey's sails, and that the man who had come there to trouble him was troubled himself. He even began to fear that he had gone too far, and that if he did not change his tactics the visitor would go away without giving a hint of the errand that had brought him to the house; for Kelsey picked up the hat he had placed upon the floor beside his chair, put it on his head and leaned forward with his hands on his knees, as if he were about to get upon his feet. That wouldn't do at all. There was something in the wind – something that Captain Beardsley, aided by Colonel Shelby and others, had studied up on purpose to get Marcy into a scrape of some kind, and Marcy was very anxious to know what it was.

"You hinted a while ago that Colonel Shelby had sent you here to tell me some bad news," said the young pilot, in a much pleasanter tone of voice than he had thus far used in addressing his visitor. "Are you ready now to obey orders and tell me what it is?"

"Well, I dunno. I reckon mebbe I'd best ride down an' see the colonel first," replied the man. But his actions said plainly that he *did* know, and that he had no intention of facing his employer again until he could tell him that his instructions had been carried out.

"Of course, you must do as you think best about that; but if it is anything that concerns my mother or myself – "

"I should say so," exclaimed Kelsey. "I don't reckon it'll do any harm to tell you – but ain't there anybody to listen? It's very important an' private."

"I think you may speak with perfect freedom; but in order to make sure of it – " Marcy finished the sentence by getting up and closing both the doors that opened upon the veranda. "Now we're safe," said he; whereupon Kelsey revealed the whole plot in less than a score of words.

"Mebbe you don't know it," said he, in a whisper which was so loud and piercing that it could have been heard by an eavesdropper (if there had been one) at least fifty feet away, "but you are harboring a traitor right here on the place."

"Who is it?"

"Your mean sneak of an overseer."

It was now Marcy's turn to be astonished. He knew that there was not a word of truth in what the man said, and that if the overseer really was a Union man the planters round about would have sent a person of more influence and better social standing than Kelsey to tell him of it; but after all the plot was not as simple as it looked at first glance.

"Where's your proof?" was the first question he asked.

"Well, Hanson has been talkin' a heap to them he thought to be Union, but it turned out that they wasn't. They was true to the flag of the 'Federacy."

"What do Colonel Shelby and the rest want me to do?" inquired Marcy, catching at an idea that just then flashed through his mind. "If they will write me a note stating the facts of the case and asking me to discharge Hanson, I will attend to it before the sun goes down."

"Well, you see they don't keer to take a hand in the furse at all, seein' that there's so many Union folks in the settlement," said Kelsey. "They've got nice houses an' nigger quarters, an' they don't want 'em burned up."

"But they are willing that I should get into trouble by discharging Hanson, and put myself in the way of having my house and quarters destroyed, are they?" exclaimed the boy, his face growing red with indignation, although, as he afterward told his mother, there wasn't really anything to arouse his indignation. "You may tell those gentlemen that if they want the overseer run off the plantation,

they can come here and do it. If the Union men are as vindictive as Colonel Shelby seems to think they are, I don't care to get them down on me."

"But the Union folks won't pester you uns," said Kelsey, speaking before he thought.

"Ah! Why won't they?"

"Kase – kase they think you're one of 'em."

"I don't see how they can think so when they know that I belong to a Confederate privateer."

"Them men, whose names I give ye a minute ago, thought that mebbe you'd be willing to turn Hanson loose when you heard how he had been swingin' his tongue about that there money."

Kelsey had come to the point at last. He looked hard at Marcy to see what effect the words would have upon him, and Marcy returned his gaze with an impassive countenance, although he felt his heart sinking within him.

"What money?" he demanded, in so steady a voice that the visitor was fairly staggered. The latter believed that there was rich booty hidden somewhere about that old house, and he hoped in time to have the handling of some of it.

"I mean the money your maw got when she went to Richmon' an' around," replied the man, who, in coon hunters' parlance, began to wonder if he wasn't "barking up the wrong tree."

"Can you prove that she brought any money back with her?"

"No, I can't," answered Kelsey, in a tone which said as plainly as words that he wished he could. "I – me – I mean that the neighbors suspicion it."

"Oh, that's it. Let those officious neighbors keep on talking; and when they have talked themselves blind, you may tell them, for me, that what money we have is safe," said Marcy, with a good deal of emphasis on the adjective. "If you want to see what mother brought back from the city, go and look at the servants. Every one of them is dressed in a new suit. Now go on and tell me the bad news. I'm getting impatient to hear it."

"Heavings an' 'arth! Haven't I told it to ye already?" Kelsey almost shouted. "I think it is bad enough when you an' your maw are keepin', right here on the plantation, a man who is all the time waitin' an' watchin' fur a chance to do harm to both of ye. If you don't think so, all right. I was a fule fur comin' here, an' I reckon I'd best be lumberin'. If anything happens to ye, bear in mind that I give ye fair warnin'."

"I will," answered Marcy. "And in the mean time do you bear in mind that I am ready to discharge Hanson at any time Colonel Shelby proves to my satisfaction that he is a dangerous man to have around; but I shall make no move unless the colonel says so, for I don't want to get into trouble with my neighbors." ["I wonder if I have done the right thing," thought Marcy, as the visitor mounted his mule and rode out of the yard. "The next plotter I hear from will be Hanson himself."]

The boy remained motionless in his chair until Kelsey disappeared behind the trees that bordered the road, and then got up and walked into the sitting-room, where he found his mother pacing the floor. Her anxiety and her impatience to learn what it was that brought Kelsey to the house were so overpowering that she could not sit still.

"Another plot to ruin us," whispered the boy, as he entered the room and closed the door behind him.

"Oh, Marcy, it is just what I was afraid of," replied Mrs. Gray. "Who is at the bottom of it this time?"

"The same old rascal, Lon Beardsley; but he's got backing I don't like.

There's Colonel Shelby for one, the postmaster for another, and Major Dillon for a third."

"The most influential men in the neighborhood," gasped Mrs. Gray, sinking into the nearest chair. "And the best."

"They used to be the best, but they are anything but that now. When men will stoop as low as they have, they are mean enough for anything. I suppose you ought to hear what that fellow said to me, but I don't know how I can tell it to you."

"Go on," said his mother, trying to bear up bravely. "I must hear every word."

Marcy knew that it was right and necessary that his mother should be kept fully informed regarding the plots that were laid against them, and that she should know what the planters were thinking and saying about her; for if she were kept in ignorance, she would be at a loss how to act and speak in a sudden emergency. She might be surprised into saying something in the presence of a secret enemy that would be utterly ruinous. So he drew a chair to her side and told her everything that had passed between Kelsey and himself. He did not try to smooth it over, but repeated the conversation word for word; and when he came to the end, his mother was as much in the dark as Marcy was himself. She said she couldn't understand it.

"There are but two things about it that are plain to me," answered Marcy, "perhaps three. One is that the house is watched by somebody, and that the neighbors knew I was at home almost as soon as you knew it yourself. Another is that the suspicions aroused in the minds of some of our watchful neighbors are so strong that they amount to positive conviction. They are as certain that there is money in this house as they would be if they had caught you in the act of hiding it."

"Doesn't that prove that the overseer is not the only spy there is on the place?" said Mrs. Gray. "And I was so careful."

"I never will believe that anybody watched you at night," said Marcy quickly. "The neighbors saw you when you went away and came back."

"But I brought goods with me on purpose to allay their suspicions."

"I am really afraid you didn't succeed. The other thing I know is, that you need not think yourself safe out of Captain Beardsley's reach even when he is at sea. As I said before, he has friends ashore to work for him while he is absent."

"What can we do? What do you advise?" asked his mother, after she had taken time to think the matter over.

"There is but one thing we can do, and that is to wait as patiently as we can and see what is going to happen next. This last plot is not fully developed yet, and until it is we must not make a move in any direction. I am as impatient as you are, and so I think I will ride out to the field and give the overseer a chance to say a word if he feels in the humor for it."

"Be very cautious, Marcy," said Mrs. Gray.

The young pilot replied that sleeping or waking he was always on the alert, and went out to the little log stable, which did duty as a barn, to saddle his horse. A long lane led through the negro quarter to the field in which the hands were putting in the time in clearing out fence corners and burning brush, while waiting for the early crops to get high enough for hoeing. The overseer's mule was hitched to the fence, and the overseer himself sat on a convenient stump, watching the hands at their work, and whittling the little switch that served him for a riding-whip. The man was almost a stranger to Marcy. The latter had seen and spoken to him a few times since his return from Barrington, but of course he did not like him, for he could not forget that his mother was afraid of him, and would be glad to see him leave the place. He liked him still less two minutes later, for, as he drew rein beside the overseer's perch, threw his right leg over the horn of his saddle and nodded to the man, the latter said, first looking around to make sure that none of the blacks were within hearing:

"I was sorry to see that man ride away from the big house a while ago."

"What man?" inquired Marcy. He looked over his shoulder and saw that the front of the house was entirely concealed from view, and that the road that ran before it "was shut out from sight by the trees and the whitewashed negro quarter. It followed then, as a matter of course, that Hanson could not have seen anybody ride away from the house. He was deep enough in the plot to know that if mother and son had not had a visitor, they ought to have had one.

"I suspicioned it was that shiftless, do-nothing chap, Kelsey," replied the overseer. "Looked sorter like his mu-el."

"Oh, yes; Kelsey has been up to see us," answered Marcy. And then he tapped his boot with his whip and waited to see what was coming next. If the overseer wanted to talk, he might talk all he pleased; but Marcy was resolved that he would not help him along. Hanson twisted about on the stump, cleared his throat once or twice, and, seeing that the boy was not disposed to break the silence, said, as if he were almost afraid to broach the subject:

"Have much of anything to talk about?"

"He talked a good deal, but didn't say much."

"Mention my name?"

"Yes. He mentioned yours and Shelby's and Dillon's and the postmaster's."

"Say anything bad about us?" continued the overseer, after waiting in vain for the boy to go on and repeat the conversation he had held with Kelsey.

"Not so very bad," answered Marcy, looking up and down the long fence to see how the work was progressing.

"Looka-here, Mister Marcy," said Hanson desperately. "Kelsey told you I was Union, didn't he? Come now, be honest."

"If by being honest you mean being truthful, I want to tell you that I am never any other way," said the boy emphatically. "What object could I have in denying it? I don't care a cent what your politics are so long as you mind your own business, and don't try to cram your ideas down my throat. But I'll not allow myself to be led into a discussion. Kelsey did say that you are Union; and if you are, I don't see why you stay in this country. You can't get out any too quick."

"Are you going to discharge me?"

"No, I am not; and I sent word to Shelby and the rest that if they want you run off the place, they can come up here and do it. I shall have no hand in it."

Marcy could read the overseer's face a great deal better than the overseer could read Marcy's; and it would have been clear to a third party that Hanson was disappointed, and that there was something he wanted to say and was afraid to speak about. That was the money that was supposed to be concealed in the house.

"Was that all Kelsey said to you?" he asked, at length.

"Oh, no. He rattled on about various things – spoke of the ease with which the *Osprey* captured that Yankee schooner, and let fall a word or two about the battle in Charleston harbor."

"Is *that* all he said to you?"

"I believe he said something about being a good Confederate, and I asked him why he didn't prove it by shouldering a musket. I don't go about boasting of the great things I would do if I were only there. There's no need of it, for I have been there." ["But it was because I couldn't help myself," he added mentally.]

"But folks say you're Union, all the same," said Hanson.

"What folks? Are they soldiers?"

"No. Citizens."

"Then I don't care that what they say," replied Marcy, snapping his fingers in the air. "When they put uniforms on and show by their actions that they mean business, I will talk to them, and not before."

Marcy waited patiently for the overseer to say "money," and the latter waited impatiently for Marcy to say it; and when at last the boy made up his mind that he had heard all he cared to hear from Hanson, he brought his leg down from the horn of his saddle, placed his foot in the stirrup, and gathered up the reins as if he were about to ride away.

"Kelsey didn't say nothing to get you and your maw down on me, did he?" inquired Hanson, when he observed these movements.

"I shouldn't like for to lose my place just because I am strong for the Union and dead against secession."

"If you lose your place on that account, it'll be because Colonel Shelby and his friends will have it so," answered Marcy. "You are hired to do an overseer's work; and as long as you attend to that and nothing else you will have no trouble with me. You may depend upon that."

"But before you go I'd like to know, pine-plank, whether you are friendly to me or not," continued Hanson, who was obliged to confess to himself that he had not learned the first thing, during the interview, that could be used against Marcy or his mother.

"I am a friend to you in this way," was the answer. "If I found you out there in the woods cold and hungry, and hiding from soldiers who were trying to make a prisoner of you, I would feed and warm you; and I wouldn't care whether you had a gray jacket or a blue coat on."

"He's a trifle the cutest chap I've run across in many a long day," muttered the overseer, as Marcy turned his filly about and rode away. "I couldn't make him tell whether he was Union or secesh, although I give him all the chance in the world, and he didn't say "money" a single time. Now, what's to be done? If the money is there and Beardsley is bound to have it, he'd best be doing something before that sailor gets back, for they say he's lightning and will fight at the drop of the hat. I reckon I'd better make some excuse to ride over town so't I can see Colonel Shelby."

"I think I have laid that little scheme most effectually," was what Marcy Gray said to himself as he rode away from the stump on which the overseer was sitting. "They haven't got a thing out of me, and I have left the matter in their own hands. If there is anything done toward getting Hanson away from this country (and I wish to goodness there might be), Shelby and his hypocritical gang can have the fun of doing it, and shoulder all the responsibility afterward."

But what was the object of the plot? That was what "banged" Marcy, and he told his mother so after he had given her a minute description of his brief interview with the overseer. Was it possible that there were some strong Union men in the neighborhood, and that Beardsley hoped Marcy would incur their enmity by discharging Hanson on account of his alleged principles? Marcy knew better than to believe that, and so did his mother.

"I'll tell you what I think to be the most reasonable view of the case," said the boy, after taking a few turns across the floor and spending some minutes in a brown study. "Beardsley knows there is no man in the family; that we'd be only too glad to have somebody to go to for advice; and he hoped we would take that ignorant Hanson for a counselor, if he could make us believe that he was really Union. But Hanson didn't fool me, for he didn't go at it in the right way. He's secesh all over. The next thing on the program will be something else."

"I trust it will not be a midnight visit from a mob," said his mother, who trembled at the bare thought of such a thing.

"So do I; but if they come, we'll see what they will make by it. They might burn the house without finding anything to reward them for their trouble."

"Oh, Marcy. You surely don't think they would do anything so barbarous."

"They might. Think of what that Committee of Safety did at Barrington."

"But what would we do?"

"Live in the quarter, as Elder Bowen and the other Union men in Barrington did after their houses were destroyed. And if they burned the servants' homes as well as our own, We'd throw up a shelter of some sort in the woods. I don't reckon that Julius and I have forgotten how to handle axes and build log cabins. The practice we have had in building turkey traps would stand – Say," whispered Marcy suddenly, at the same time putting his arm around his mother's neck and speaking the words close to her ear, "if a mob should come here to-night and go over the house, we'd be ruined. There are those Union flags, you know."

"I never once thought of them," was the frightened answer. "Suppose I had had a mob for visitors while you were at sea? Our home would be in ashes now. Those flags are dangerous things, and must be disposed of without loss of time. I am sorry you brought them home with you. Don't you think you had better destroy them while you have them in mind?"

"Of course I will do it if you say so, and think it will make you feel any safer; but I was intending – you see – "

His countenance fell, and his mother was quick to notice it. "What did you intend to do with them?" she asked.

"One of them used to float over the academy," replied Marcy. "Dick Graham, a Missouri boy, than whom a better fellow never lived, stole it out of the colonel's room one night because he did not want to see it insulted and destroyed, as it would have been if Rodney and his friends could have got their hands upon it. He gave it to me because he knew it would some day be something to feel proud over, and said he hoped to hear that it had been run up again."

"But, Marcy, you dare not hoist it here," exclaimed Mrs. Gray.

"Not now; but there may come a time when I shall dare do it. The other flag – well, the other was made by a Union girl in Barrington, who had to work on it by stealth, because her sister, and every other member of her family except her father, were the worst kind of secesh. Rodney thought sure he was going to put the Stars and Bars on the tower when the Union colors were stolen, but our fellows got mine up first, and would have kept it there if they had had to fight to do it. But I'll put them in the stove if you think best."

"You need not do anything of the kind," said Mrs. Gray, whose patriotism had been awakened by the simple narrative. "I shall not permit a party of beardless boys to show more loyalty than I am willing to show myself."

"Bully for you, mother!" cried Marcy. "We'll see both of them in the air before many months more have passed over our heads. Now, think of some good hiding place for them, and I'll put them there right away. Not in the ground, you know, for if the Union troops should ever come marching through here, we should want to get them out in a hurry."

"How would it do to sew them up in a bed-quilt?" said Mrs. Gray, suggesting the first "good hiding place" that came into her mind.

"That's the very spot," replied Marcy. "Put them in one of mine, and then I shall have the old flag over me every night."

No time was lost in carrying out this decision, and in a few minutes mother and son were locked in the boy's room, and busy stitching the precious pieces of bunting into one of the quilts. It never occurred to them to ask what they would do or how they would feel if some half-clad, shivering rebel should find his way into the room and walk off with that quilt without so much as saying "by your leave." Probably they never dreamed that the soldiers of the Confederacy would be reduced to such straits.

CHAPTER III

BEARDSLEY BETRAYS HIMSELF

Never before had the hours hung as heavily upon Marcy Gray's hands as they did at the period of which we write. There was literally nothing he could do – at least that he *wanted* to do. He did not care to read anything except the newspapers, and they came only once a day; he had never learned how to lounge around and let the hours drag themselves away; he very soon grew weary of sailing about the sound in the *Fairy Belle* with the boy Julius for a companion; and so he spent a little of his time in visiting among the neighboring planters, and a good deal more in "pottering" among his mother's flower beds. Visiting was the hardest work he had ever done; but he knew he couldn't shirk it without exciting talk, and there was talk enough about him in the settlement already.

To a stranger it would have looked as though he had nothing to complain of. He was cordially received wherever he went, often heard himself spoken of as "one of our brave boys" (although what he had done that was so very brave Marcy himself could not understand), and visitors at Mrs. Gray's house were as numerous as they ever had been; but Marcy and his mother were people who could not be easily deceived by such a show of friendship. Some of it, as they afterward learned, was genuine; while the rest was assumed for the purpose of leading them on to "declare" themselves. It was a mean thing for neighbors to be guilty of, but you must remember that, like Rodney Gray when he wrote that mischievous letter to Bud Goble, they did not know all the time what they were doing. Of course the high-spirited Marcy grew restive under such treatment; and when, after long waiting, the postmaster handed him a letter from Captain Beardsley, ordering him to report on board the *Osprey* without loss of time, he did not feel as badly over it as he once thought he should. On the contrary, he appeared to be very jubilant when he showed the letter to Allison and half a score of other young rebels who were always to be found loafing around the post-office at mail time.

"I'm off to sea again," said he. "Now the Yankees had better look out."

"It must be an enjoyable life, Marcy," replied Allison. "You see any amount of fun and excitement, draw big prize-money in addition to your regular wages, and, better than all, you run no sort of risk. It may surprise you to know that I have been turning the matter over in my mind a good deal of late, and have come to the conclusion that I should enjoy being one of a privateer's crew. What do you think about it?"

"I am not acquainted with a single fellow who would enjoy it more," answered Marcy, who told himself that Allison was just coward enough to engage in some such disreputable business. "You are just the lad for it. It is such fun to bring a swift vessel to and haul down the old flag in the face of men who are powerless to defend it."

Sharp as Marcy Gray was, his strong love for the Union and his intense hatred for the business in which he was perforce engaged, sometimes led him to come dangerously near to betraying himself. Allison looked sharply at him, but there was nothing in Marcy's face to indicate that he did not mean every word he said.

"I am heartily glad I am going to sea again," continued the latter; and he told nothing but the truth. The companionship of the ignorant foreigners who composed the *Osprey's* crew was more to his liking than daily intercourse with pretended friends who were constantly watching for a chance to get him into trouble.

"Do you think I could get on with Captain Beardsley?" inquired Allison.

"You might. The crew was full when I left the schooner, but I will speak to the captain, if you would like to have me."

"I really wish you would, for I am anxious to do something for the glorious cause of Southern independence. When do you sail?"

"I don't know. About all the captain says in his letter is that he wants me to report immediately."

"Does he say whether or not the *Hollins* has been sold yet?"

"Oh, yes; he speaks of that, and congratulates me on the fact that I have eight hundred and seventy-five dollars more to my credit on the schooner's books than I did when I left her at Newbern."

"W-h-e-w!" whistled Allison. "How long did it take you to make the capture?"

"Four or five hours, I should say."

"Eight hundred and seventy-five dollars for four or five hours' work! Marcy, you have struck a gold mine. You will be as rich as Julius Caesar in less than a year."

"How long do you suppose Uncle Sam will allow such – such work to be kept up?" exclaimed Marcy.

"Oh, no doubt he would be glad to stop it now if he could; but when he tries it, he will find that he's got the hardest job on his hands he ever undertook. There never was a better place for carrying on such business than the waters of North Carolina. Our little inlets are too shallow to float a heavy man-of-war."

"No matter how big the job may be, you will find that these small-fry privateers" (it was right on the end of Marcy's tongue to say "pirates") "will be swept from the face of the earth in less than a year; so that I shall have no chance to get rich. But I'll have to be going, for I must start for Newbern this very night. I suppose you will all be in the army by the time I get back, so good-by."

Allison and his friends shook hands with him, wished him another successful voyage, and Marcy mounted and rode away, his filly never breaking her lope until she turned through the gate into the yard, and drew up before the steps that led to the porch. His mother met him at the door and knew as soon as she looked at him that he had news for her.

"Yes, I've got orders from Beardsley," said the boy, without waiting to be questioned. "And if Jack were only here, and I was about to engage in some honorable business, I should be glad to go. Mother, on the day we captured the *Hollins* we robbed somebody of fifty-six thousand dollars."

"Oh, Marcy, is it not dreadful!" said Mrs. Gray.

"It is, for a fact. We're having a bully time now, but the day will come when we'll have to settle with the fiddler. You will see. Yes, the vessel and her cargo sold for fifty-six thousand dollars. Half of it went to the government, and half of the remainder was divided among the three officers, Beardsley getting the lion's share, I bet you. The sixteen members of the crew get an equal share of the other fourteen thousand, the difference in rank between the petty officers and foremast hands being so slight that Beardsley did not think it worth while to give one more than another; but he hints that he has got something laid by for me."

"My son, it will burn your fingers," said Mrs. Gray.

"I can't help it if it does. I'll have to take all he offers me, but, of course, I don't expect to keep it. Now, mother, please help me get off. The longer I fool around home the harder it will be to make a start."

Marcy wanted to caution his mother to look out for Hanson while he was gone; but he did not do it, for he well knew that she had enough to trouble her already, and that the mention of the overseer's name would awaken all her old fears of spies and organized bands of robbers. He sent word to Morris, the coachman, to have the carriage brought to the door, loitered about doing nothing while his mother packed his valise, and in twenty minutes more was on his way to Newbern, which he reached without any mishap, not forgetting, however, to send a telegram on from Boydtown informing Beardsley that his orders had been received, and that the pilot was on his way to join the *Osprey*.

"And I wish I might find her sunk at her dock, and so badly smashed that she never could be raised and repaired," was what he thought every time he looked out of the car window and ran his eyes over the crowds of excited people that were gathered upon the platforms of all the depots they passed. "But, after all, what difference does it make? If I don't go to sea I shall have to live among

secret enemies, and I don't know but one thing is about as bad as the other. If any poor mortal ever lived this way before, I am sorry for him."

Although Marcy was almost a stranger in Newbern, he had no difficulty in finding his vessel when he got out of the cars. He walked straight to her, and while he was yet half a block away, the sight of her masts told him that she was still on top of the water. She would soon be ready to sail, too, for her crew were rushing her stores aboard, while Captain Beardsley walked his quarter-deck smoking a cigar and looking on. His face seemed to say that he was a little surprised to see his pilot; but if he was he did not show it in his greeting.

"Well, there, you did come back, didn't you?" said he, extending his hand.

"Of course I came back," replied Marcy. "What else did you expect me to do? I was on the road in less than two hours after your order came to hand."

"That's prompt and businesslike," said the captain approvingly. "But I didn't look for you to appear quite so soon. How's everybody to home?"

"All right as far as I could see; and Allison wants to join your crew."

"The idea!" exclaimed Captain Beardsley. "Well, he can just stay where he is for all of me, hollering for the Confederacy and doing never a thing to help us gain our independence. His place is in the army, and I won't have no haymakers aboard of me. See any Union folks while you was to home?"

"I saw and talked with one man who said he was for the Union," answered the young pilot. He was prepared for the question, and positive that if he managed the matter rightly, Beardsley would soon let him know whether or not he was concerned in that little plot, as Marcy believed he was. But, as it happened, no management was necessary, for keeping a secret was the hardest work Beardsley ever did.

"Did, hey?" he exclaimed, throwing the stump of his cigar over the stern and looking very angry indeed. "I always suspected that man Hanson. You discharged him, of course."

"No, I didn't," replied Marcy. "It wouldn't have been safe. I told Kelsey that if the colonel and his friends desired that he should be run off the place, they could attend to the matter themselves. I wouldn't have the first thing to do with it. I was given to understand that there were many Union men in the settlement, and I didn't care to give them an excuse for burning us out of house and home."

"That was perfectly right. And what did Shelby say?"

"I didn't hear, for he sent no message to me."

"Did you say anything to Hanson about it?"

"I did, and told him that as long as he attended strictly to his business he would have no trouble with me."

Marcy had purposely avoided speaking Colonel Shelby's name and Hanson's, preferring to let Captain Beardsley do it himself. The latter walked squarely into the trap without appearing to realize that he had done it, and the young pilot was satisfied that his commander was the man who needed watching more than anybody else.

"I can't say that I hope Beardsley will be killed or drowned during the cruise," thought Marcy. "But I do say that if he was out of the way I would have less trouble with my neighbors."

"Never mind," said Beardsley, after a little pause. "When I get home I will ask Shelby and Dillon to tell me all about it; and if that overseer of yours is really Union, perhaps I can make him see that he had better go up to the United States, where he belongs."

The captain took a turn or two across the deck, looked up at the topmasts as he might have done if the schooner had been under way and he wanted to make sure that everything was drawing, and then he leaned up against the rail.

"Oh!" said he, as if the thought had just come to him, "what do you think of your good fortune? Eight hundred dollars don't grow in every boy's dooryard. I tell you. And, Marcy," he went on in a lower tone, "I've got as much more laid by for you. I told you I would do the fair thing, and I meant every word of it. You're pilot, you know."

"Thank you, sir," replied the boy – not because he felt grateful to Captain Beardsley for giving him nearly nine hundred dollars of another's man's money, but because he knew he was expected to say it.

"Seventeen hundred dollars and better will keep your folks in grub and clothes for quite a spell, won't it?" the captain continued. "But law! what am I saying? It ain't a drop in the bucket to such rich people as you be."

Marcy listened, but said nothing. He thought he knew what Beardsley had on his mind.

"Some folks pertend to think we're going to have the very toughest kind of a war, but I don't," said the latter. "The Yankees don't come of fighting stock, like we Southern gentlemen do; but if a war should come, I suppose your folks are well fixed for it?"

"About as well fixed as most of the planters in the settlement," answered the pilot. "You know we've had the best of crops for a year or two back."

"But I mean – you see – any money?" inquired the captain cautiously – so very cautiously that he thought it necessary to whisper the words.

"Oh, yes; we have money. How could we live without it?"

"That's so; how could you? I reckon you've got right smart of a lot, ain't you?"

"Mother has some in the bank at Wilmington, but just how much I don't know. I never asked her."

The young pilot's gaze was fastened upon the men who were at work getting the provisions aboard, but for all that, he could see that Beardsley was looking at him as if he meant to read his most secret thoughts.

"I don't believe there's no money in that there house," was what the captain was saying to himself.

"Sly old fox," thought Marcy. "I knew he would betray his secret if I only held my tongue and gave him a chance to do it." And then he asked the captain when he expected to get the schooner ready for sea, and whether or not any prizes had been brought into port during his absence.

"There's been one prize brought in worth ten thousand dollars more'n our'n, dog-gone it all – there she is right over there – and there's been three blockade-runners went out and two come in," was the captain's answer. "I didn't see why they should call 'em blockade-runners when we didn't think there was a blockade at all, excepting the paper one that appeared in Lincoln's proclamation; but seeing that the brig *Herald* ain't been heard from since she run out of Wilmington, I begin to mistrust that there's war vessels outside, and that the *Osprey* may have a chance to show her heels. If that happens we'll make the best time we know how for Crooked Inlet, and trust to you to bring us through."

"You won't need any help from me," was what the boy said to himself. "I'll bet my share of that prize-money, that if we get into trouble with a Union cruiser you will take command of the schooner yourself and sail her through Crooked Inlet as slick as falling off a log."

"The folks around here and Wilmington have been hoping that the *Herald* might be captured, and that the United States people will have the backbone to hold fast to her," added Captain Beardsley.

"Why do they hope for any such bad luck as that?" inquired Marcy, considerably surprised.

"May be it wouldn't be bad luck. You see she is a Britisher, the *Herald* is, and her cargo was consigned to an English house all fair and square. A blockade, to be legal and binding upon foreign nations, must be effectual," said the captain, quoting the language his agent had often used in his hearing. "A paper blockade won't do; and if the Yankees can't send ships enough here to shut up our ports completely, any Britisher or Frenchman can run in and out as often as he feels like it, and the Yankees dassent do a thing to him. If the *Herald* has been captured she will have to be given up."

"But suppose Uncle Sam won't give her up?"

"We are hoping he won't, for that will get the British folks down on him; and between the two of us we'll give him such a licking that he'll never get over it. See?"

Yes; Marcy saw, now that the situation had been explained to him, but it was something he had never thought of before. Almost the first lesson he learned in history was that England had no love for the United States, and if she took a hand in the war that was surely coming, why then —

"Why, then, France may help Uncle Sam," exclaimed Marcy. "She has always been friendly to us, and didn't she send troops here during our Revolutionary war to help us whip the English?"

"She did; but what was the reason she sent them troops over here?" demanded the captain, who had heard this question discussed a good many times while Marcy was at home on his leave of absence. "Was it because she had any love for republican – republican – ah – er – institutions? No, sir. It was because she wanted to spite the English for taking Canady away from her. France won't lift a hand to help the Yankees if we get into a row with them."

Beardsley took another turn about his quarter-deck, lighted a fresh cigar, and became confidential.

"Something tells me that this business of privateering ain't a going to last long, and so I think some of dropping it and starting out in another," said he. "Any idea what it is?"

Marcy replied that he had not.

"Well, it's trading – running the blockade."

"To what ports?" asked the boy.

"I can't rightly tell till I get some word from them vessels that's just went out," was the answer. "But it'll be Nassau or Havana, one of the two. I'll take cotton out – cotton is king, you know, and must be had to keep all them working people in England from starving – and bring medicine back. Medicine is getting skurse and high-priced already. And percussion caps. They're the things you can make money on. Why, I have heard it said that there wasn't enough gun caps in the Confederacy to fight a battle with till Captain Semmes made that tower of his through the Northern States, buying powder and bullets, and making contracts with the dollar-loving Yankees to build cannon to shoot their own kin with. But I want to see how the land lays before I go into the business of running the blockade. If there's big risk and little profit I ain't in."

"What port will you run out of?" was Marcy's next question; and when the captain said it would probably be Wilmington, the boy was delighted, for he expected to hear him announce that after he gave up privateering and took to blockade-running he would no longer need the services of a pilot. But if such a thought came into Beardsley's mind he did not speak it aloud. Just then he was called to another part of the deck and Marcy picked up his valise and went below.

"Beardsley doesn't mean to let me go," he soliloquized, as he tossed the valise into his bunk and opened the locker in which he had stowed his bedding for safe-keeping. "He's got me fast, and there's no chance for escape as long as the *Osprey* remains in commission. Well, there's one comfort: Beardsley is not a brave man, and he'll make haste to lay the schooner up the minute he has reason to believe that it is growing dangerous outside."

Marcy went on deck again, and having nothing to do with the loading of the vessel, sauntered around with his hands in his pockets. He fully expected that Beardsley would have something more to say about the money that was supposed to be hidden in Mrs. Gray's house; but he didn't, for the captain had almost come to the conclusion that there was no money there. If there was, Marcy could not be surprised into acknowledging the fact, and so Beardsley thought it best to let the matter drop until he could go home and hold a consultation with the overseer.

Bright and early the next morning the privateer cast off her fasts and stood down the river, reaching the sound in time to catch the flood tide that hurried her up toward Crooked Inlet. It was now the middle of July, and the Union and the Confederacy stood fairly opposed to each other. The Confederate Government, having established itself at Richmond, had pushed its outposts so far to the north that their sentries could see the dome of the Capitol across the Potomac. There were nearly eight hundred thousand square miles in the eleven seceded States, and of this immense territory all that remained to the Union were the few acres of ground enclosed within the walls of Fortress Monroe

and Forts Pickens, Taylor, and Jefferson. Loyal Massachusetts men had been murdered in the streets of Baltimore; battles of more or less importance had been fought both in the East and West, and on the very day that Marcy joined the privateer, the future leader of the Army of the Potomac won a complete victory over the rebel forces at Rich Mountain. The Richmond papers had very little to say about this fight, except to assure their readers that it was a matter of no consequence whatever; but they had a good deal to say concerning the "gallant exploit" that Captain Semmes had performed a few days before at the passes of the Mississippi. Well, it was a brave act – one worthy of a better cause – to run the little *Sumter* out in the face of a big ship like the Brooklyn and when Marcy read of it he recalled what his Cousin Rodney had once said to him while they were talking about sailor Jack, who was then somewhere on the high seas:

"He may never get back," said Rodney. "We'll have a navy of our own one of these days, and then every ship that floats the old flag will have to watch out. We'll light bonfires on every part of the ocean."

That was just what Captain Semmes intended to do, and history tells how faithfully he carried out the instructions of the Richmond Government.

Somewhat to Marcy's surprise, Captain Beardsley turned the command over to him when the schooner reached Crooked Inlet, and Marcy took her safely through and out to sea. If there were any war ships on the coast – and it turned out that there were, for the brig *Herald* had been captured and taken to a Northern port – they were stationed farther down toward Hatteras Inlet, and the schooner's lookouts did not see any of them until she had been some hours at sea. At daylight on the morning of the third day out the thrilling cry from the crosstrees "sail ho!" created a commotion on the privateer's deck, and brought Marcy Gray up the ladder half dressed.

"Where away?" shouted Captain Beardsley.

"Broad on our weather beam and standing straight across our bows," was the encouraging response from aloft.

"Can you make her out?" asked the captain, preparing to mount to the crosstrees with a spy-glass in his hand. "You're sure she isn't a cruiser?"

"No, sir. She's a brig, and she's running along with everything set."

"Then we must cut her off or she'll get away from us. Put a fifteen-second shell in that bow gun, Tierney! Stand by the color halliards, Marcy!"

These orders were obeyed with an "Ay, ay, sir," although the brig was yet so far away that she could not be seen from the deck; but as the two vessels were sailing diagonally toward each other, she did not long remain invisible. The moment Marcy caught sight of her top-hamper, and while he stood with the halliards in his hand waiting for the order to run up the Stars and Stripes, Captain Beardsley began swearing most lustily and shouting orders to his mates, the sheets were let out, the helm put down, and the privateer fell off four or five points. Marcy knew the meaning of this before the excited and angry Beardsley yelled, at the top of his voice:

"The rascal is trying to dodge us. He's got lookouts aloft. Run up that flag, Marcy, and see if that won't quiet his feelings. Them war ships down to Hatteras have posted him, and if we don't handle ourselves just right we'll never bring him within range."

Marcy lost no time in running up the old flag; but if the master of the brig saw it he was not deceived by it. He showed no disposition to run back to Hatteras, and put himself under protection of the war ships there, as Marcy thought and hoped he would, but put his vessel before the wind, squared his yards, and trusted to his heels. It looked to Marcy like a most desperate undertaking, for you will remember that the schooner was far ahead of the brig, and that the merchant captain was about to run by her. It didn't seem possible that he could succeed, but the sequel proved that he knew just what his vessel was capable of doing. She came up at a "hand gallop," and finally showed herself from water-line to main-truck in full view of the privateer's crew. Her canvas loomed up like a great

white cloud, and her low, black hull, by comparison, looked no bigger than a lead pencil. She went like the wind, and Marcy Gray told himself that she was the most beautiful object he had ever seen.

"I hope from the bottom of my heart that she will get away," was the one thought that filled his mind.

Perhaps the wish would have been even more fervent if he had known who was aboard that brig.

CHAPTER IV

TWO NARROW ESCAPES

"Another Cuban trader," shouted Captain Beardsley, standing erect upon the crosstrees and shaking his eye-glass in the air. "She's worth double what the *Hollins* was, dog-gone it all, and if we lose her we are just a hundred thousand dollars out of pocket. Pitch that shell into her, Tierney. Take a stick out of her and I'll double your prize money. Run up our own flag, Marcy. May be it will bring him to his senses."

The howitzer's crew sprang at the word. The canvas covering was torn off the gun and cast aside, the train-tackles were manned, and a minute afterward a fifteen-second shrapnel went shrieking toward the brig, all the privateer's men standing on tiptoe to watch the effect of the shot. To Marcy's great delight the missile struck the water far short of the mark, *ricocheted* along the surface a few hundred yards farther, and finally exploded, throwing up a cloud of spray, but doing no harm to the brig, which never loosened tack or sheet, but held gallantly on her way. A moment after the shrapnel exploded, her flag – the old flag – fluttered out from under the lee of her spanker, and little puffs of smoke arose from her port quarter. Some of her crew were firing at the privateer with rifles. Of course, the distance was so great that they never heard the whistle of the bullet, but it was an act of defiance that drove Captain Beardsley almost frantic.

"When we catch her I'll hang the men who fired those shots," he shouted, jumping up and down on his lofty perch. "What are you standing there gaping at, Tierney? Give that gun more elevation and try her again."

"I had her up to the last notch in the rear sight, sir," replied Tierney. "I can't give the gun any more elevation. The cascabel is down to the bottom of the screw now. I can't reach the brig into an eighth of a mile."

"Try her again, I tell you," roared the enraged captain. "Are you going to stand chinning there while a hundred thousand dollars slips through our fingers?"

The captain continued to talk in this way while the howitzer was loaded and trained for the second shot; but he might as well have saved his ammunition, for this shrapnel, like the first, did no harm to the brig. It didn't frighten her company, either, for they set up a derisive yell, which came faintly to the ears of the privateer's crew.

"Oh, how I'd like to get my hands on that fellow!" shouted Captain Beardsley. "I'd learn him to insult a Confederate government vessel.

I'd – "

Marcy Gray, who stood holding fast to the halliards, looking aloft and listening to what Beardsley had to say, saw the lookout, who had remained at his post all this time, touch the captain on the shoulder and direct his gaze toward something in the horizon. Marcy looked, too, and was electrified to see a thick, black smoke floating up among the clouds. Could it be that there was a cruiser off there bearing down upon them? He looked at Captain Beardsley again, and came to the conclusion that there must be something suspicious about the stranger, for the captain, after gazing at the smoke through his glass, squared around and backed down from aloft with much more celerity than Marcy ever saw him exhibit before.

"It is a cruiser," thought the young pilot, when the captain assumed charge of the deck and ordered the schooner to be put about and headed toward Crooked Inlet. "She has heard the sound of our guns and is coming up to see what is the matter."

Marcy couldn't decide whether the captain's pale face and excited, nervous manner were occasioned by the fears that had been conjured up by the sudden appearance of that strange vessel in the offing, or by the rage and disappointment he felt over the loss of the valuable prize he had

so confidently expected to capture. He hauled down the schooner's flag, packed it away in the chest where it was usually kept, and then had leisure to take a look at the crew. Could they be the same men who had so valiantly fired into that unarmed brig a short half hour before?

"It *is* a cruiser," repeated Marcy, turning to the side to conceal the look of exultation which he knew the thought brought to his face. "It can't be anything else, for the whole ship's company are scared out of their boots. We were so busy with the brig that we never saw her until she got so close on to us that she is liable to cut us off from the Inlet. If she comes within range of us Captain Beardsley will find that there is a heap of difference between shooting and being shot at. I hope – "

Marcy was about to add that he hoped the on-coming war ship would either capture or sink the *Osprey*, and so put a stop to her piratical career; but if she did, what would become of him? If one of those big shells came crashing into the schooner, it would be as likely to hit him as anybody else, and if the privateer were cut off from the Inlet and captured, he would be taken prisoner with the rest of the crew and sent to some Northern prison. Of course, Marcy could not make the captain of the war ship believe that he did not ship on the privateer of his own free will, and that he was strong for the Union; and indeed it would be dangerous for him to try, for the folks at home would be sure to hear of it sooner or later, and then what would happen to his mother? As the young pilot turned these thoughts over in his mind, he came to the conclusion that he would feel a little safer if he knew that the schooner would reach the Inlet in advance of the steamer, but he was obliged to confess that it looked doubtful. She was coming up rapidly, land was a long way off, and it would be many hours before darkness came to their aid.

"That rain squall out there is our only salvation," Marcy heard the captain say to one of the mates. "When it comes up we'll haul our wind and run for Hatteras. The cruiser will hold straight on her course, and if the squall lasts long enough we may be able to run her out of sight."

Although Captain Beardsley was frightened at the prospect of falling into the hands of those whose flag he had insulted, he did not lose his head. The plan he had suddenly adopted for eluding the steamer proved that he could take desperate chances when it was necessary. By hauling his wind (which in this case meant shaping the schooner's course as near as possible toward the point from which the wind was blowing), he would be compelled to pass within a few miles of the steamer, and if the rain-cloud, under cover of which he hoped to escape, lifted for the space of one short minute, he was almost certain to be discovered. The squall came up directly behind the steamer, and in about half an hour overtook and shut her out from view.

"Now's our time," exclaimed Beardsley. "Flatten in the fore and main sails and give a strong pull at the headsail sheets. Tierney, go to the wheel."

Marcy lent a hand, and while the orders were being obeyed was gratified to hear one of the crew remark that the squall was something more than a squall; that it was coming to stay, and that they would be lucky if they saw the end of it by sunrise the next morning. If that proved to be the case they would have nothing to fear from the steamer. All they would have to look out for was shipwreck.

Half an hour was all the time that was necessary to prove that the sailor knew what he was talking about. The wind blew a gale and the rain fell in torrents. Just before the storm reached them, Captain Beardsley thought it would be wise to shorten his canvas, but all he took in were the gaff-topsails and fore-topmast staysail. Shortly afterward it became necessary to reef the sails that were left, and when that had been done the captain declared that he wouldn't take in anything else, even if he knew that the wind would take the sticks out of the schooner by the roots. He would rather be wrecked than go to prison any day.

Things could not have worked more to Beardsley's satisfaction if he had had the planning of the storm himself. The privateer's crew never saw the steamer after the rain and mist shut her out from view; and when the sun arose the next morning, after the wildest night Marcy Gray ever experienced on the water, there was not a sail in sight.

"I wish it was safe for us to stand out and try our luck again," said Captain Beardsley, who had been aloft sweeping the horizon with his glass. "But the Yankee war ships are getting too thick for comfort."

"Don't you expect to find some of them about Hatteras?" inquired Marcy.

"Of course I do. I believe the one that was chasing us yesterday came from there, and that that brig we lost held some communication with her before she sighted us. If she hadn't been warned by somebody, what was the reason she began dodging the minute she saw us? I hope to slip in between them, or at least to get under the protection of the guns of the forts at the Inlet before any of the cruisers can come within range. Privateering is played out along this coast. As soon as we get into port I shall tear out the bunks below, reduce my crew, and go to blockade running."

"But you'll run the same risk of capture that you do now," Marcy reminded him.

"But I won't be captured with guns aboard of me," said Beardsley, with a wink that doubtless meant a great deal. "Perhaps you don't know it, but I gave orders, in case that steamer sighted us again, to throw everything in the shape of guns and ammunition overboard. Then they couldn't have proved a thing against us."

"The size of your crew would have laid you open to suspicion," replied Marcy.

"Yes; but suspicion and proof are two different things," was the captain's answer. "But I am afraid of them howitzers, all the same, and am going to get shet of them the minute we get to Newbern. I don't reckon I can give you a furlong to go home this time, 'cause it won't take two days to get the schooner ready to take out a load of cotton."

"But you'll not need a pilot any longer," said Marcy, who was very much disappointed.

"What's the reason I won't? Do you reckon I'm going to run out of Hatteras in the face of all the war ships that are fooling around here? Not much. And I'm not going to hug the coast, neither. I'll make Crooked Inlet my point of departure, like I always have done, and then I'll stand straight out to sea till I get outside the cruisers' beat. See? Then I'll shape my course for Nassau. It'll give us a heap of bother and we'll go miles out of our way; but we'll be safe."

"But suppose we are captured after all your precautions; what then?"

"Well, if we are we'll lose our vessel and be sent to jail; but we'll not be treated as pirates, don't you see? The Northern folks are awful mad 'cause our President has issued letters of mark-we and reprisal, and their papers demand that every one of us who is taken shall be hung to the yardarm. To tell you the honest truth, that kinder scared me, and that's one reason why I want to get out of the business of privateering."

"And you think you will still need a pilot?"

"Can't you see it for yourself from what I have told you?" asked Beardsley, in reply. "And, Marcy, you'll make more money with less risk than you do in this business. It ain't to be expected that men will run the risk of going to jail for regular foremast hands' wages. They want more money, and it's right that they should have it. Why, them blockade-runners I told you about paid their hands five hundred dollars apiece for the run to Nassau and back. What do you think of that?"

"I think it is good wages," replied Marcy. ["If the business was only safe and honorable," he added, to himself.]

"Of course it is good wages. I don't expect to get a crew for any less; but, as I said before, I'll do the fair thing by you. If you go home you will have to enlist – I've heard the folks say that everybody had got to show his hand one way or the other – and then you would get only twelve or thirteen dollars a month. Think of that!"

Marcy was right when he told himself that the captain had him fast, and that there was no release for him as long as the *Osprey* remained in commission. It was a gloomy outlook, but the only thing he could do was to make the best of it.

As soon as the captain thought it safe to do so every inch of the privateer's canvas was given to the breeze, and she made good headway toward her destination. That day and the ensuing night

passed without excitement of any sort, and at sunrise the next morning two objects were in plain sight from the schooner's deck. One was the entrance to Hatteras Inlet, and the other was a large steamer in the offing. The two vessels had been in view of each other ever since daylight. They were both headed for the same point – one making the most desperate efforts to place herself under cover of the guns of the forts, and the other making equally desperate efforts to bring the schooner within range of her bow-chaser before she could get there. It was a close and exciting race, and the crews of both vessels watched it anxiously. The black smoke rolled in thick clouds from the steamer's funnels, and the privateer's topmasts snapped and bent like fishing-rods, while her white-faced captain paced his quarter-deck, dividing his attention between his imperilled top-hammer and the pursuing steamer, and rubbing his hands nervously. At last the climax came. A puff of white smoke arose from the steamer's bow, and a shell from an old-fashioned smooth-bore thirty-two pounder dropped into the water about half way between her and the flying schooner. If that same steamer had had for a bow-chaser the heavy rifled gun she had a few months later, the result would have been different. As it was, Captain Beardsley gathered courage, and the anxious look left his face.

"If that's the best he can do we're all right," said he gleefully. "If this breeze holds half an hour longer we'll show him our flag."

"Shall we give him an answer from one of the howitzers, sir?" inquired Tierney.

"Not for your life!" replied Beardsley, quickly. And then he added in a lower tone, addressing himself to Marcy, who stood near, "That would be a bright idea, wouldn't it? This breeze may die away any minute, and we don't want to do anything to make them Yankees madder at us than they be now. Another thing, we mustn't give 'em anything to remember this schooner by. We may be caught when we try to run the blockade with our cargo of cotton, and we don't want anybody to recall the fact that we once had guns aboard. See?"

It was a long time before Marcy Gray could make up his mind how the chase was going to end, although he noticed when it first began that there were two things in the schooner's favor. One was that she was so far out of range that her pursuer could not cripple her, and the other was, that the wind that was favorable to her was unfavorable to the steamer, so that the latter could not use her sails. He also took note of the fact that Beardsley hugged the shore pretty closely, and this made it evident that he intended to beach the schooner rather than permit her to fall into the hands of the Yankees. But he was not driven to such extremity. The breeze held out, and although the steamer continued to fire her bow-chaser at intervals, the privateer rounded the point unharmed; while the pursuer, not caring to trust herself within range of the rifled guns on shore, veered around and stood out to sea. A look through his glass showed Beardsley that the half-finished batteries had been manned in readiness to give the war ship a warm reception if she had ventured to follow the privateer through the Inlet.

"Marcy, run up the flag so that our friends in the forts can see who we are!" commanded Beardsley. "The last time we sailed through here we had a prize following in our wake, and we would have had a more valuable one to-day if that brig hadn't been warned by them Yankees outside."

The Confederate emblem proved to be as good as a countersign, and Captain Beardsley was permitted to sail on through the Inlet without going ashore to give an account of himself. As soon as he was safe inside the bar he directed his course toward Newbern, which he reached without any more adventures; but there were no cheers to greet him as his schooner was pulled into the wharf. Beardsley's agent, who was the first to spring over the rail, looked very much disgusted.

"Why, Captain, how is this?" were the first words he uttered. "I didn't expect to see you come back empty handed."

"No more did I expect to come back that way," was the captain's reply. "But we can't always have luck on our side. There is too many cruisers out there."

"Did you see any of them?"

"Well, I reckon. We had a race with two of them, and I ain't going privateering no more."

"Scared out, are you?" said the agent, with some contempt in his tones. "Well, it may interest you to know that while you were fooling around out there, doing nothing, we have fought the battle that will bring us our independence."

"*You* did?" exclaimed Beardsley, who knew that the agent thought he had played the part of a coward in making such haste to get back to port. "You didn't have nary hand in it. You stay around home, yelling for the Confederacy, and flinging your slurs at we uns who have been under the fire of a Yankee war ship, but you ain't got the pluck to go into the service yourself. We didn't see but one merchantman while we was gone and she was a brig; and as she carried three times the canvas we did she had the heels of us, and besides she wouldn't let us come within range. It was all we wanted to do to get into Hatteras, on account of the cruiser that fired on us. What battle was it that gained us our independence?"

"Bull Run," replied the agent.

"Where's that?"

"Somewhere up in Virginia. We had thirty-five thousand men and the Yankees more than twice as many; but we threw them into a panic and run them clear into Washington. I expect our army has got the city by this time."

"I didn't think the Yankees would fight," said the captain reflectively.

"Then the war is just as good as over."

"That's what the Richmond papers say."

"And it won't be no use for me to go blockade running?"

"Oh, yes it will. Peace hasn't been declared yet, and you had better make money at something while you can. After all, I don't know that I blame you for coming back. We've lost two blockade-runners and one privateer since you went out."

"There, now"; exclaimed Beardsley. "And I'd have lost my own vessel if I hadn't had the best of luck. What you sneering at me for?"

"Well, you see you were safe outside, and I was sure you would come back with a prize. I was disappointed when I saw you coming up the river alone."

"Not more disappointed than I was myself," answered the captain. "That brig was worth a power of money, and I might have been chasing her yet if that man-of-war hadn't hove in sight."

This was all the conversation Marcy overheard between Beardsley and his agent, for the two drew off on one side and talked earnestly in tones so low that he could not catch a word they said. It was plain that they came to an understanding on some point, for shortly afterward they went into the cabin, and Marcy was commanded to station himself at the head of the companion ladder and pass the word for the crew as fast as their names were called. He could see that the schooner's books and papers had been placed upon the cabin table, and that led him to believe that the reduction of the crew was to begin immediately. When the first man who was sent below came on deck again with his wages in his hand, Marcy whispered:

"What did the captain say when he paid you off B+?"

"He didn't say he was gallied," replied the sailor, with a knowing look, "but I'll bet he is. The booming of that war ship's guns was too much for his nerves, and he's going to quit pirating and go to blockade running. I don't see but that one is about as dangerous as the other." One by one the members of the crew were sent into the cabin, and as fast as they received their money and their discharges they bundled up their clothes and bedding and went ashore. At last there were only six foremast hands left, including Marcy Gray, and these were summoned into the cabin in a body to listen to what Captain Beardsley had to propose to them. He began with the statement that privateering was played out along that coast, because numerous cruisers were making it their business to watch the inlets and warn passing vessels to look out for themselves. It was no use trying to catch big ships that would not let him come within range, and so he had decided to put his howitzers ashore, tear out the berths and gun decks fore and aft, and turn the *Osprey* into a freighter. He would change her

name, too, give her another coat of paint, and take the figures off her sails, so that she could not be recognized from the description the *Hollins's* men would give of her when they went North.

"I have kept you men because you are the best in the crew," said Beardsley in conclusion, "and of course I want none but good men and true aboard of me; but you needn't stay if you don't want to. I want you to understand that blockade running is a dangerous business, and that we may be captured as others have been; but if you will stand by me, I'll give you five hundred dollars apiece for the run – one hundred to spend in Nassau, and the balance when you help me bring the schooner safe back to Newbern. What do you say?"

The men had evidently been expecting something of this sort, for without a moment's hesitation Tierney, speaking for his companions, replied that the captain's liberal offer was accepted, and they would do all that men could do to make the *Osprey's* voyages profitable. Marcy said nothing, for Beardsley had already given him to understand that he was to be one of the blockade-runner's crew. He was the only native American among the foremast hands, and the only one who could sign his name to the shipping articles, the others being obliged to make their marks. When this had been done the men returned to the deck, and the agent went ashore to make arrangements for landing the guns, to hunt up a gang of ship carpenters, and find a cotton-factor who was willing to take his chances on making or losing a fortune. He worked to such good purpose that in less than an hour two parties of men were busy on the schooner – one with the howitzers and the other with the bunks below – and a broker was making a contract with Beardsley for taking out a cargo of cotton. When the broker had gone ashore Beardsley beckoned Marcy to follow him into the cabin.

"The schooner owes you seventeen hundred dollars and better," said he, as he closed the sliding door and pointed to a chair. "It's in the bank ashore, and you can have it whenever you want it. Would you like to take out a venture?"

It was right on the point of Marcy's tongue to reply that he would be glad to do it; but he checked himself in time, for the thought occurred to him that perhaps this was another attempt on the part of Captain Beardsley to find out something about the state of his mother's finances. So he looked down at the carpet and said nothing.

"There's money in it," continued Beardsley. "Suppose you take out two bales of cotton, sell it in Nassau for three times what it was worth a few months ago, and invest the proceeds in quinine; why, you'll make five hundred percent. Of course I can't grant all the hands the same privilege, so I will make the bargain for you through my agent, and Tierney and the rest needn't know a thing about. What do you say?"

"I don't think I had better risk it," answered Marcy.

"What for?" asked Beardsley.

"Well, the money I've got I'm sure of, am I not?"

"Course you are. Didn't I say you could have it any minute you had a mind to call for it?"

"You did; but suppose I should put it into cotton, as you suggest, and the *Osprey* should fall into the hands of one of those war ships outside. There'd be all my money gone to the dogs, or, what amounts to the same thing, into the hands of the Yankees. I may want to use that money before the war is over."

"But didn't you hear the agent say that we ain't going to have any war?"

We've licked 'em before they could take their coats off."

"But perhaps they'll not stay whipped. My teachers at the academy were pretty well posted, and I heard some of them say that a war is surely coming, and in the end the Southern States will wish they had never seceded."

"Well, them teachers of yours was the biggest fules I ever heard tell of," exclaimed Beardsley, settling back in his chair and slamming a paper-weight down upon the table. "Why, don't I tell you that we've got 'em licked already? More'n that, I don't mean to fall into the hands of them cruisers outside. I tell you that you'll miss it if you don't take out a venture. And as for your mother needing

them seventeen hundred dollars to buy grub and the like, you can't pull the wool over my eyes in no such way as that. She's got money by the bushel, and I know it to be a fact."

"Then you know more than I do," replied Marcy, his eyes never dropping for an instant under the searching gaze the captain fixed upon him. "Now, I would like to ask you one question: You have money enough of your own to load this vessel, have you not?"

"Why, of course I – that's neither here nor there," replied Beardsley, who was not sharp enough to keep out of the trap that Marcy had placed for him. "What of it?"

"I know it to be a fact that you could load the schooner with cotton purchased with your own money if you felt like it," answered the young pilot, "but you don't mean to do it. You would rather carry cotton belonging to somebody else, and that is all the proof I want that you are afraid of the Yankees. If you want to do the fair thing by me, why do you advise me to put my money into a venture, when you are afraid to put in a dollar for yourself?"

"Why, man alive," Beardsley almost shouted, "don't I risk my schooner? Every nigger I've got was paid for with money she made for me by carrying cigars and such like between Havana and Baltimore."

"That's what I thought," said Marcy, to himself. "And you didn't pay a cent of duty on those cigars, either."

"I do my share by risking my schooner," continued the captain. "But I want somebody to make something besides myself, and if you don't want to risk your money, I reckon I'll give the mates a chance. That's all."

"What in the name of sense did I go and speak to him about them cigars for?" he added, mentally, as the pilot ascended the ladder that led to the deck. "I think myself that there's a war coming, and if we get licked I must either make a fast friend of that boy or get rid of him; for if he tells on me I'll get into trouble sure."

It looked now as though Marcy might some day have it in his power to make things very unpleasant for Captain Beardsley.

CHAPTER V

A CAT WITHOUT CLAWS

"I really believe I've got a hold on the old rascal at last," said Marcy to himself, as he leaned against the rail and watched the men, who, under direction of the mates, were hard at work getting the howitzers ashore. "From this time on he had better be careful how he treats my mother, for he may fall into the hands of the Yankees some day; and if that ever happens, I will take pains to see that he doesn't get back to Nashville in a hurry. I'll go any lengths to get a letter to the Secretary of the Treasury, telling him just who and what Beardsley is, and then perhaps he will stand a chance of being tried for something besides piracy and blockade-running."

Marcy's first care was to write to his mother. While omitting no item of news, he took pains to word the letter so cautiously that it could not be used against him in case some of his secret enemies in and around Nashville, the postmaster and Colonel Shelby, for instance, took it into their heads to open and read it instead of sending it to its address. They had showed him that they were quite mean enough to do it. Then he went ashore to mail the letter and take notes, and was not long in making up his mind that he was not the only one who thought there was going to be a war. Although the Newbern people were very jubilant over the great victory at Bull Run, they did not act as though they thought that that was the last battle they would have to fight before their independence would be acknowledged, for Marcy saw infantry companies marching and drilling in almost every street through which he passed, and every other man and boy he met was dressed in uniform. As he drew near to the post-office he ran against a couple of young soldiers about his own age, or, to be more exact, they ran against him; for they were coming along with their arms locked, talking so loudly that they could have been heard on the opposite side of the street, and when the *Osprey's*

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