

Henty George Alfred

**A Roving Commission: or,  
Through the Black Insurrection  
at Hayti**



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**Henty G.**

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# Henty G. A. George Alfred A Roving Commission; Or, Through the Black Insurrection at Hayti

## PREFACE

Horrible as were the atrocities of which the monsters of the French Revolution were guilty, they paled before the fiendish outrages committed by their black imitators in Hayti. Indeed, for some six years the island presented a saturnalia of massacre, attended with indescribable tortures. It may be admitted that the retaliation inflicted by the maddened whites after the first massacre was as full of horrors as were the outrages perpetrated by the blacks, and both were rivalled by the mulattoes when they joined in the general madness for blood. The result was ruin to all concerned. France lost one of her fairest possessions, and a wealthy race of cultivators, many belonging to the best blood of France, were annihilated or driven into poverty among strangers. The mulattoes, many of whom were also wealthy, soon found that the passions they had done so much to foment were too powerful for them; their position under the blacks was far worse and more precarious, than it had been under the whites. The negroes gained a nominal liberty. Nowhere were the slaves so well treated as by the French colonists, and they soon discovered that, so far from profiting by the massacre of their masters and families, they were infinitely worse off than before. They were still obliged to work to some extent to save themselves from starvation; they had none to look to for aid in the time of sickness and old age; hardships and fevers had swept them away wholesale; the trade of the island dwindled almost to nothing; and at last the condition of the negroes in Hayti has fallen to the level of that of the savage African tribes. Unless some strong white power should occupy the island and enforce law and order, sternly repress crime, and demand a certain amount of labour from all able-bodied men, there seems no hope that any amelioration can take place in the present situation.

*G. A. HENTY.*

## CHAPTER I

### A FIGHT WITH A BLOODHOUND

Now, look here, Nathaniel – "

"Drop that, Curtis, you know very well that I won't have it. I can't help having such a beast of a name, and why it was given me I have never been able to make out, and if I had been consulted in the matter all the godfathers and godmothers in the world wouldn't have persuaded me to take such a name. Nat I don't mind. I don't say that it is a name that I should choose; still, I can put up with that, but the other I won't have. You have only just joined the ship, but if you ask the others they will tell you that I have had at least half a dozen fights over the name, and it is an understood thing here that if anyone wants a row with me he has only got to call me Nathaniel, and there is no occasion for any more words after that."

The speaker was a pleasant-faced lad, between fifteen and sixteen, and his words were half in jest half in earnest. He was a general favourite among his mess-mates on board H. M. frigate *Orpheus*. He was full of life and fun, exceptionally good-tempered, and able to stand any amount of chaff and joking, and it was understood by his comrades that there was but one point that it was unsafe to touch on, and that sore point was his name. It had been the choice of his godmother, a maiden aunt, who had in her earlier days had a disappointment. Nat had once closely questioned his father as to how he came by his name, and the latter had replied testily:

"Well, my boy, your Aunt Eliza, who is, you know, a very good woman – no one can doubt that – had a weakness. I never myself got at the rights of the matter. Anyhow, his name was Nathaniel. I don't think there was ever any formal engagement between them. Her own idea is that he loved her, but that his parents forbade him to think of her; for that was at a time before her Aunt Lydia left all her money to her. Anyhow, he went abroad, and I don't think she ever heard of him again. I am inclined to think it was an entire mistake on her part, and that the young fellow had never had the slightest fancy for her. However, that was the one romance of her life, and she has clung to it like a limpet to a rock. At any rate when we asked her to be your godmother she said she would be so if we would give you the name of Nathaniel. I own it is not a name that I like myself; but when we raised an objection, she said that the name was very dear to her, and that if you took it she would certainly make you her heir, and more than hinted that if you had any other name she would leave her money to charitable purposes. Well, you see, as she is worth thirty thousand pounds if she is worth a penny, your mother and I both thought it would be folly to allow the money to go out of the family for the sake of a name, which after all is not such a bad name."

"I think it beastly, father, in the first place because it is long."

"Well, my boy, if you like we can shorten it to Nathan."

"Oh, that would be a hundred times worse! Nathan indeed! Nat is not so bad. If I had been christened Nat I should not have particularly minded it. Why did you not propose that to aunt?"

His father shook his head. "That would never have done. To her he was always Nathaniel. Possibly if they had been married it might some day have become Nat, but, you see, it never got to that."

"Well, of course, father," the boy said with a sigh, "as the thing is done it cannot be helped. And I don't say that aunt isn't a good sort – first-rate in some things, for she has always tipped me well whenever she came here, and she says she is going to allow me fifty pounds a year directly I get my appointment as midshipman; but it is certainly hard on me that she could not have fallen in love with some man with a decent name. Nathaniel is always getting me into rows. Why, the first two or three years I went to school I should say that I had a fight over it once a month. Of course I

have not had one lately, for since I licked Smith major fellows are more careful. I expect it will be just as bad in the navy."

So when he first joined Nat had found it, but now that he was nearly sixteen, and very strong and active, and with the experience of many past combats, the name Nathaniel had been dropped. It was six months since the obnoxious Christian name had been used, as it was now by a young fellow of seventeen who had been transferred to the *Orpheus* when the frigate to which he belonged was ordered home. He was tall and lanky, very particular about his dress, spoke in a drawling supercilious way, and had the knack of saying unpleasant things with an air of innocence. Supposing that Glover's name must be Nathaniel, he had thought it smart so to address him, but although he guessed that it might irritate him, he was unprepared for an explosion on the part of a lad who was proverbially good-tempered.

"Dear me," he said, in assumed surprise, "I had no idea that you objected so much to be called by your proper name! However, I will, of course, in future use the abbreviation."

"You had better call me Glover," Nat replied sharply. "My friends can call me Nat, but to other people I am Glover, and if you call me out of that name there will be squalls; so I warn you."

Curtis thought it was well not to pursue the subject further. He was no coward, but he had the sense to see that as Nat was a favourite with the others, while he was a new-comer, a fight, even if he were the victor, would not conduce to his popularity among his mess-mates. The president of the mess, a master's mate, a good-tempered fellow, who hated quarrels, broke what would have been an awkward silence by saying:

"We seem to be out of luck altogether this trip; we have been out three weeks and not fired a shot. It is especially hard, for we caught sight of that brigantine we have been in search of, and should have had her if she hadn't run into that channel where there was not water enough for us to follow her."

"Yes, that was rough upon us, and one hates to go back to Port Royal without a prize, after having taken so many that we have come to be considered the luckiest ship on the station," another said. "Still, the cruise is not over yet. I suppose by the way we are laying our course, Marston, we are going into Cape François?"

The mate nodded. "Yes; we want fresh meat, fruit, and water, and it is about the pleasantest place among these islands. I have no doubt, too, that the captain hopes to get some news that may help him to find out where those piratical craft that are doing so much mischief have their rendezvous. They are all so fast that unless in a strong breeze a frigate has no chance whatever of overhauling them; there is no doubt that they are all of Spanish build, and in a light breeze they sail like witches. I believe our only chance of catching them is in finding them at their head-quarters, wherever that may be, or by coming upon them in a calm in a bay. In that case it would be a boat affair; and a pretty sharp one I should think, for they all carry very strong crews and are heavily armed, and as the scoundrels know that they fight with ropes round their necks they would be awkward customers to tackle."

"Yes, if we happened to find them all together, I don't think the captain would risk sending in the boats. One at a time we could manage, but with three of them mounting about fifty guns between them, and carrying, I should say, from two hundred to two hundred and fifty men, the odds would be very great, and the loss, even if we captured them, so heavy that I hardly think the captain would be justified in attempting it. I should say that he would be more likely to get out all the boats and tow the frigate into easy range. She would give a good account of the whole of them."

"Yes, there is no doubt about that; but even then we should only succeed if the bay was a very narrow one, for otherwise their boats would certainly tow them faster than we could take the frigate along."

It was Glover who spoke last.

"I don't think myself that we shall ever catch them in the frigate. It seems to me that the only chance will be to get hold of an old merchantman, put a strong crew on board and a dozen of our guns, and cruise about until one of them gets a sight of us and comes skimming along to capture us."

"Yes, that would be a good plan; but it has been tried several times with success, and I fancy the pirates would not fall into the trap. Besides, there is very little doubt that they have friends at all these ports, and get early information of any movements of our ships, and would hear of what we were doing long before the disguised ship came near them. It can hardly be chance, that it matters not which way we cruise these fellows begin their work in another direction altogether. Now that we are here in this great bay, they are probably cruising off the west of Cuba or down by Porto Rico or the Windward Islands. That is the advantage that three or four craft working together have: they are able to keep spies in every port that our ships of war are likely to go into, while a single vessel cannot afford such expenses."

"I don't think that the expenses, Low, would be heavy; the negroes would do it for next to nothing, and so would the mulattoes, simply because they hate the whites. I don't mean the best of the mulattoes, because many of them are gentlemen and good fellows; but the lower class are worse than the negroes, they are up to any devilment, and will do anything they can to injure a white man."

"Poor beggars, one can hardly blame them; they are neither one thing nor the other! These old French planters are as aristocratic as their noblesse at home, and indeed many of them belong to noble families. Even the meanest white – and they are pretty mean some of them – looks down upon a mulatto, although the latter may have been educated in France and own great plantations. The negroes don't like them because of their strain of white blood. They are treated as if they were pariahs. Their children may not go to school with the whites, they themselves may not sit down in a theatre or kneel at church next to them, they may not use the same restaurants or hotels. No wonder they are discontented."

"It is hard on them," Glover said, "but one can't be surprised that the whites do fight shy of them. Great numbers of them are brutes and no mistake, ready for any crime and up to any wickedness. There is lots of good in the niggers; they are merry fellows; and I must say for these old French planters they use their slaves a great deal better than they are as a rule treated by our planters in Jamaica. Of course there are bad masters everywhere, but if I were a slave I would certainly rather be under a French master than an English one, or, from what I have heard, than an American."

"Very well, Glover, I will make a note of that, and if you ever misbehave yourself and we have to sell you, I will drop a line to the first luff how your preference lies."

Early the next morning the frigate dropped anchor at Cape François, the largest and most important town in the island, with the exception of the capital of the Spanish portion of San Domingo. The *Orpheus* carried six midshipmen. Four of these had been ashore when on the previous occasion the *Orpheus* had entered the port. Nat Glover and Curtis were the exceptions, Curtis having at that time belonged to the frigate for but a very few weeks, and Nat having been in the first lieutenant's bad books, owing to a scrape into which he had got at the last port they had touched at. After breakfast they went up together to the first lieutenant, whose name was Hill.

"Please, sir, if we are not wanted, can we have leave for the day?"

The lieutenant hesitated, and then said:

"Yes, I think the other four will be enough for the boats. You did not go ashore last time you were here, I think, Mr. Glover," he added with a slight smile.

"No, sir."

"Very well, then, you can go, but don't get into any scrape."

"I will try not to, sir," Nat said demurely.

"Well, I hope your trial will be successful, Mr. Glover, for if not, I can tell you that it will be a long time before you have leave again. These people don't understand that sort of thing."

"He is a nice lad," Mr. Hill said to the second lieutenant as the two midshipmen walked away, "and when he has worked off those animal spirits of his he will make a capital officer, but at present he is one of the most mischievous young monkeys I ever came across."

"He does not let them interfere with his duty," the other said. "He is the smartest of our midshipmen; he is well up in navigation, and has any amount of pluck. You remember how he jumped overboard in Port Royal when a marine fell into the water, although the harbour was swarming with sharks. It was a near touch. Luckily we threw a bowline to him, and the two were hauled up together. A few seconds more and it would have been too late, for there was a shark within twenty feet of them."

"Yes, there is no doubt about his pluck, Playford, and indeed I partly owe my life to him. When we captured that piratical brigantine near Santa Lucia I boarded by the stern, and she had such a strong crew that we were being beaten back, and things looked very bad until he with the gig's crew swarmed in over the bow. Even then it was a very tough struggle till they cut their way through the pirates and joined us, and we went at them together, and that youngster fought like a young fiend. He was in the thick of it everywhere, and yet he was as cool as a cucumber. Oh yes, he has the making of a very fine officer. Although I am obliged to be sharp with him, there is not a shadow of harm in the lad, but he certainly has a genius for getting into scrapes."

The two midshipmen went ashore together. "I don't know what you are going to do, Curtis, but after I have walked through the place and had a look at it, I shall hire a horse and ride out into the country."

"It is too hot for riding," the other said. "Of course I shall see what there is to be seen, and then I shall look for a seat in some place in the shade and eat fruit."

"Well, we may as well walk through the town together," Nat said cheerfully. "From the look of the place I should fancy there was not much in it, and I know the fellows who went on shore before said that the town contained nothing but native huts, a few churches, and two or three dozen old French houses."

Half an hour indeed sufficed to explore the place. When they separated Nat had no difficulty in hiring a horse. He had been accustomed, when in England, to ride a pony, and was therefore at home in the saddle; he proceeded at a leisurely pace along the road across the flat plain that surrounded Cape François. On either side were plantations, – sugar-cane and tobacco, – and he occasionally passed the abode of some wealthy planter, surrounded by shady trees and gardens gorgeous with tropical plants and flowers. He was going by one of these, half a mile from the town, when he heard a loud scream, raised evidently by a woman in extreme pain or terror. He was just opposite the entrance, and, springing from his horse, he ran in.

On the ground, twenty yards from the gate, lay a girl. A huge hound had hold of her shoulder, and was shaking her violently. Nat drew his dirk and gave a loud shout as he rushed forward. The hound loosed his hold of the girl and turned to meet him, and, springing upon him with a savage growl, threw him to the ground. Nat drove his dirk into the animal as he fell, and threw his left arm across his throat to prevent the dog seizing him there. A moment later the hound had seized it with a grip that extracted a shout of pain from the midshipman. As he again buried his dirk in the hound's side, the dog shifted his hold from Nat's forearm to his shoulder and shook him as if he had been a child.

Nat made no effort to free himself, for he knew that were he to uncover his throat for a moment the dog would seize him there. Though the pain was terrible he continued to deal stroke after stroke to the dog. One of these blows must have reached the heart, for suddenly its hold relaxed and it rolled over, just as half a dozen negroes armed with sticks came rushing out of the house. Nat tried to raise himself on his right arm, but the pain of the left was so great that he leant back again half-fainting. Presently he felt himself being lifted up and carried along; he heard a lady's voice giving directions, and then for a time he knew no more. When he came to himself he saw the ship's doctor leaning over him.

"What is the matter, doctor?" he asked.

"You are badly hurt, lad, and must lie perfectly quiet. Luckily the messenger who was sent to fetch a doctor, seeing Mr. Curtis and me walking up the street, ran up to us and said that a young officer of our ship was hurt, and that he was sent in to fetch a doctor. He had, in fact, already seen

one, and was in the act of returning with him when he met us. Of course I introduced myself to the French doctor as we came along together, for we fortunately got hold of a trap directly, so that no time was lost. The black boy who brought the message told me that you and a young lady had been bitten by a great hound belonging to his master, and that you had killed it. Now, my lad, I am going to cut off your coat and look at your wounds. The Frenchman is attending to the young lady."

"Mind how you touch my arm, doctor! it is broken somewhere between the elbow and the wrist; I heard it snap when the brute seized me. It threw me down, and I put my arm across over my throat, so as to prevent it from getting at that. It would have been all up with me if it had gripped me there."

"That it would, Glover. I saw the dog lying on the grass as I came in. It is a big bloodhound; and your presence of mind undoubtedly saved your life."

By this time he had cut the jacket and shirt up to the neck. Nat saw his lips tighten as he caught sight of the wound on the shoulder.

"It is a bad bite, eh, doctor?"

"Yes, it has mangled the flesh badly. The dog seems to have shifted his hold several times."

"Yes, doctor, each time I stabbed him he gave a sort of start, and then caught hold again and shook me furiously. After the first bite I did not seem to feel any pain. I suppose the limb was numbed."

"Very likely, lad. Now I must first of all see what damage was done to the forearm. I am afraid I shall hurt you, but I will be as gentle as I can."

Nat clenched his teeth and pressed his lips tightly together. Not a sound was heard as the examination was being made, although the sweat that started out on his forehead showed how intense was the pain.

"Both bones are broken," the surgeon said to his French colleague, who had just entered the room and came up to the bedside. "The first thing to do is to extemporize some splints, and of course we shall want some stuff for bandages."

"I will get them made at once," the doctor replied. "Madame Demaine said that she put the whole house at my disposal."

He went out, and in a few minutes returned with some thin slips of wood eighteen inches long and a number of strips of sheeting sewn together.

"It is very fortunate," the surgeon said, "that the ends of the bone have kept pretty fairly in their places instead of working through the flesh, which they might very well have done."

Very carefully the two surgeons bandaged the arm from the elbow to the finger-tips.

"Now for the shoulder," the doctor said.

They first sponged the wounds and then began feeling the bones again, giving exquisite pain to Nat. Then they drew apart and consulted for two or three minutes.

"This is a much worse business than the other," Dr. Bemish said when he returned to the bedside; "the arm is broken near the shoulder, the collar-bone is broken too, and the flesh is almost in a pulp."

"Don't say I must lose the arm, doctor," Nat said.

"Well, I hope not, Glover, but I can't say for certain. You see I am speaking frankly to you, for I know that you have pluck. The injury to the collar-bone is not in itself serious, but the other is a comminuted fracture."

"What is comminuted, doctor?"

"It means that the bone is splintered, lad. Still, there is no reason why it should not heal again; you have a strong constitution, and Nature works wonders."

For the next half-hour the two surgeons were at work picking out the fragments of bone, getting the ends together, and bandaging the arm and shoulder. Nat fainted under the pain within the first few minutes, and did not recover until the surgeons had completed their work. Then his lips were

wetted with brandy and a few drops of brandy and water were poured down his throat. In a minute or two he opened his eyes.

"It is all over now, lad." He lay for sometime without speaking, and then whispered, "How is the girl?"

"Her shoulder is broken," Dr. Bemish replied. "I have not seen her; but the doctor says that it is a comparatively simple case."

"How was it the dog came to bite her?"

"She was a stranger to it. She is not the daughter of your hostess. It seems her father's plantation is some twelve miles away; he drove her in and left her here with Madame Demaine, who is his sister, while he went into town on business. Madame's own daughter was away, and the girl sauntered down into the garden, when the hound, not knowing her, sprang upon her, and I have not the least doubt would have killed her had you not arrived."

"Are you going to take me on board, doctor?"

"Not at present, Glover; you need absolute quiet, and if the frigate got into a heavy sea it might undo all our work, and in that case there would be little hope of saving your arm. Madame Demaine told the French doctor that she would nurse you as if you were her own child, and that everything was to be done to make you comfortable. The house is cool, and your wound will have a much better chance of getting well here than in our sick-bay. She wanted to come in to thank you, but I said that, now we had dressed your arm, it was better that you should have nothing to disturb or excite you. When the girl's father returns – and I have no doubt he will do so soon, for as yet, though half-a-dozen boys have been sent down to the town, they have not been able to find him – he must on no account come in to see you at present. Here is a tumbler of fresh lime-juice and water. Doctor Lepel will remain here all night and see that you have everything that you require."

The tumbler was held to Nat's lips, and he drained it to the bottom. The drink was iced, and seemed to him the most delicious that he had ever tasted.

"I shall come ashore again to see you in the morning. Dr. Lepel will go back with me now, and make up a soothing draught for you both. Remember that above all things it is essential for you to lie quiet. He will put bandages round your body, and fasten the ends to the bedstead so as to prevent you from turning in your sleep."

"All right, sir; I can assure you that I have no intention of moving. My arm does not hurt me much now, and I would not set it off aching again for any money."

"It is a rum thing," Nat thought to himself, "that I should always be getting into some scrape or other when I go ashore. This is the worst of all by a long way."

A negro girl presently came in noiselessly and placed a small table on the right-hand side of the bed. She then brought in a large jug of the same drink that Nat had before taken, and some oranges and limes both peeled and cut up into small pieces.

"It is lucky it was not the right arm," Nat said to himself. "I suppose one can do without the left pretty well when one gets accustomed to it, though it would be rather awkward going aloft."

In an hour Dr. Lepel returned, and gave him the draught.

"Now try and go to sleep," he said in broken English. "I shall lie down on that sofa, and if you wake up be sure and call me. I am a light sleeper."

"Had you not better stay with the young lady?"

"She will have her mother and her aunt with her, so she will do very well. I hope that you will soon go to sleep."

It was but a few minutes before Nat dozed off. Beyond a numbed feeling his arm was not hurting him very much. Once or twice during the night he woke and took a drink. A slight stir in the room aroused him, and to his surprise he found that the sun was already up. The doctor was feeling his pulse, a negro girl was fanning him, and a lady stood at the foot of the bed looking at him pitifully.

"Do you speak French, monsieur?" she asked.

"A little," he replied, for he had learned French while at school, and since the frigate had been among the West Indian islands he had studied it for a couple of hours a day, as it was the language that was spoken in all the French islands and might be useful to him if put in charge of a prize.

"Have you slept well?" she asked.

"Very well."

"Does your arm hurt you very much now?"

"It hurts a bit, ma'am, but nothing to make any fuss about."

"You must ask for anything that you want," she said. "I have told off two of my negro girls to wait upon you. Of course they both speak French."

Half an hour later Dr. Bemish arrived.

"You are going on very well, Glover," he said after feeling the lad's pulse and putting his hand on his forehead. "At present you have no fever. You cannot expect to get through without some, but I hardly expected to find you so comfortable this morning. The captain told me to say that he would come and see you to-day, and I can assure you that there is not one among your mess-mates who is not deeply sorry at what has happened, although they all feel proud of your pluck in fighting that great hound with nothing but a dirk."

"They are useless sort of things, doctor, and I cannot think why they give them to us; but it was a far better weapon yesterday than a sword would have been."

"Yes, it was. The room is nice and cool, isn't it?"

"Wonderfully cool, sir. I was wondering about it before you came in, for it is a great deal cooler than it is on board."

"There are four great pans full of ice in the room, and they have got up matting before each of the windows, and are keeping it soaked with water."

"That is very good of them, doctor. Please thank Madame Demaine for me. She was in here this morning – at least I suppose it was she – and she did not bother me with thanks, which was a great comfort. You are not going to take these bandages off and put them on again, I hope?"

"Oh, no. We may loosen them a little when inflammation sets in, which it is sure to do sooner or later."

Captain Crosbie came to see Nat that afternoon.

"Well, my lad," he said cheerfully, "I see that you have fallen into good hands, and I am sure that everything that is possible will be done for you. I was talking to the girl's mother and aunt before I came in. Their gratitude to you is quite touching, and they are lamenting that Dr. Bemish has given the strictest orders that they are not to say anything more about it. And now I must not stay and talk; the doctor gave me only two minutes to be in the room with you. I don't know whether the frigate is likely to put in here again soon, but I will take care to let you know from time to time what we are doing and where we are likely to be, so that you can rejoin when the doctor here gives you leave; but mind, you are not to dream of attempting it until he does so, and you must be a discontented spirit indeed if you are not willing to stay for a time in such surroundings. Good-bye, lad! I sincerely trust that it will not be very long before you rejoin us, and I can assure you of a hearty welcome from officers and men."

Three days later, fever set in, but, thanks to the coolness of the room and to the bandages being constantly moistened with iced water, it passed away in the course of a week. For two or three days Nat was light-headed, but he woke one morning feeling strangely weak. It was some minutes before he could remember where he was or how he had got there, but a sharp twinge in his arm brought the facts home to him.

"Thank God that you are better, my brave boy," a voice said in French, as a cool hand was placed on his forehead; and turning his head Nat saw a lady standing by his bedside. She was not the one whom he had seen before; tears were streaming down her cheeks, and, evidently unable to speak, she hurried from the room, and a minute later Doctor Lepel entered.

"Madame Duchesne has given me the good news that you are better," he said. "I had just driven up to the door when she ran down."

"Have I been very bad, doctor?"

"Well, you have been pretty bad, my lad, and have been light-headed for the past three or four days, and I did not for a moment expect that you would come round so soon. You must have a magnificent constitution, for most men, even if they recovered at all from such terrible wounds as you have had, would probably have been three or four times as long before the fever had run its course."

"And how is the young lady?"

"She is going on well, and I intended to give permission for her to be carried home in a hammock to-day, but when I spoke of it yesterday to her mother, she said that nothing would induce her to go until you were out of danger. She or Madame Demaine have not left your bedside for the past week, and next to your own good constitution you owe your rapid recovery to their care. I have no doubt that she will go home now, and you are to be moved to Monsieur Duchesne's house as soon as you are strong enough. It lies up among the hills, and the change and cooler air will do you good."

"I have not felt it hot here, doctor, thanks to the care that they have taken in keeping the room cool. I hope now that there is no fear of my losing my arm?"

"No; I think that I can promise you that. In a day or two I shall re-bandage it, and I shall then be able to see how the wounds are getting on; but there can be no doubt that they are doing well, or you would never have shaken off the fever so soon as you have done."

"Of course the *Orpheus* has sailed, doctor?"

"Yes. She put to sea a week ago. I have a letter here that the captain gave me to hand to you when you were fit to read it. I should not open it now if I were you. You are very weak, and sleep is the best medicine for you. Now, drink a little of this fresh lime-juice. I have no doubt that you will doze off again."

Almost before the door closed on the doctor Nat was asleep. A fortnight later he was able to get up and sit in an easy-chair.

"How long shall I have to keep these bandages on, doctor?"

"I should say in another fortnight or so you might take them off the forearm, for the bones seem to have knit there, but it would be better that you should wear them for another month or six weeks. There would indeed be no use in taking them off earlier, for the bandages on the shoulder and the fracture below it cannot be removed for some time, and you will have to carry your arm in a sling for another three months. I do not mean that you may not move your arm before that, indeed it is desirable that you should do so, but the action must be quiet and simple, and done methodically, and the sling will be necessary at other times to prevent sudden jerks."

"But I shall be able to go away and join my ship before that, surely?"

"Yes, if the arm goes on as well as at present you may be able to do so in a month's time; only you will have to be very careful. You must remember that a fall, or even a lurch against the rail, or a slip in going down below, or anything of that kind, might very well undo our work, for it must be some time before the newly-formed bone is as strong as the old. As I told you the other day, your arm will be some two inches shorter than it was."

"That won't matter a rap," Nat said.

That afternoon Nat had to submit to what he had dreaded. The doctor had pronounced that he was now quite convalescent, and that there was no fear whatever of a relapse, and Monsieur and Madame Duchesne therefore came over to see him. He had seen the latter but once, and then only for a minute, for she found herself unable to observe the condition on which alone the doctor had allowed her to enter, namely, to repress all emotion. Madame Demaine came in with them. Since her niece had been taken away, she had spent much of her time in Nat's room, talking quietly to him about his English home or his ship, and sometimes reading aloud to him, but studiously avoiding any allusion to the accident. Monsieur Duchesne was a man of some thirty-five years of age, his wife

was about five years younger, and they were an exceptionally handsome couple of the best French type. Madame Duchesne pressed forward before the others, and to Nat's embarrassment bent over him and kissed him.

"You cannot tell how we have longed for this time to come," she said. "It seemed so cold and ungrateful that for a whole month we should have said no word of thanks to you for saving our darling's life, but the doctor would not allow it. He said that the smallest excitement might bring on the fever again, so we have been obliged to abstain. Now he has given us leave to come, and now we have come, what can we say to you? Ah, monsieur, it was our only child that you saved, the joy of our lives! Think of the grief into which we should have been plunged by her loss, and you can then imagine the depth of our gratitude to you."

While she was speaking her husband had taken Nat's right hand and pressed it silently. There were tears in his eyes, and his lips quivered with emotion.

"Pray do not say anything more about it, madam," Nat said. "Of course I am very glad to have saved your daughter's life, but anyone else would have done the same. You don't suppose that anyone could stand by and see a girl mauled by a dog without rushing forward to save her, even if he had had no arm of any kind, while I had my dirk, which was about as good a weapon for that sort of thing as one could want. Why, Harpur, our youngest middy, who is only fourteen, would have done it. Of course I have had a good deal of pain, but I would have borne twice as much for the sake of the pleasure I feel in having saved your daughter's life, and I am sure that I have had a very nice time of it since I have begun to get better. Madame Demaine has been awfully good to me. If she had been my own mother she could not have been kinder. I felt quite ashamed of being so much trouble to her, and of being fanned and petted as if I had been a sick girl. And how is your daughter getting on? The doctor gave me a very good account of her, but you know one can't always quite believe doctors; they like to say pleasant things to you so as not to upset you."

"She is getting on very well indeed. Of course she has her arm in a sling still, but she is going about the house, and is quite merry and bright again. She wanted to come over with us to-day, but Dr. Lepel would not have it. He said that a sudden jolt over a stone might do a good deal of mischief. However, it will not be long before she sees you, for we have got leave to have you carried over early next week."

## CHAPTER II

### REJOINED

Four days later Monsieur Duchesne came down with six negroes and a cane lounging chair, on each side of which a long pole had been securely lashed. Nat's room was on the ground floor, and with wide windows opening to the ground. The chair was brought in. Nat was still shaky on his legs, but he was able to get from the bed into the chair without assistance.

"I shall come over to see you to-morrow," Madame Demaine said, as he thanked her and her husband for their great kindness to him, "and I hope I shall find that the journey has done you no harm."

Four of the negroes took the ends of the poles and raised them onto their shoulders, the other two walked behind to serve as a relay. Monsieur Duchesne mounted his horse and took his place by Nat's side, and the little procession started. The motion was very easy and gentle. It was late in the afternoon when they started, the sun was near the horizon, and a gentle breeze from the sea had sprung up. In half an hour it was dusk, and the two spare negroes lighted torches they had brought with them, and now walked ahead of the bearers. It was full moon, and after having been so long confined in a semi-darkened room, Nat enjoyed intensely the soft air, the dark sky spangled with stars, and the rich tropical foliage showing its outlines clearly in the moonlight.

Presently Monsieur Duchesne said:

"I have a flask of brandy and water with me, Mr. Glover, in case you should feel faint or exhausted."

Nat laughed.

"Thank you for thinking of it, monsieur, but there is no fatigue whatever in sitting here, and I have enjoyed my ride intensely. It is almost worth getting hurt in order to have such pleasure: we don't get such nights as this in England."

"But you have fine weather sometimes, surely?" Monsieur Duchesne said.

"Oh yes, we often have fine weather, but there are not many nights in the year when one can sit out-of-doors after dark! When it is a warm night there are sure to be heavy dews; besides, the stars are not so bright with us as they are here, nor is the air so soft. I don't mean to say that I don't like our climate better; we never have it so desperately hot as you do, and besides, we like the cold, because it braces one up, and even the rain is welcome as a change, occasionally. Still, I allow that as far as nights go you beat us hollow."

The road presently began to rise, and before they reached the end of the journey they were high above the plain. As they approached the house the negroes broke into a song, and on their stopping before the wide verandah that surrounded the house, Madame Duchesne and her daughter were standing there to greet them as the bearers gently lowered the chair to the ground. The girl was first beside it.

"Ah, monsieur," she exclaimed as she took his hand, "how grateful I am to you! how I have longed to see you! for I have never seen you yet; and it has seemed hard to me that while aunt and the doctor should have seen you so often, and even mamma should have seen you once, I should never have seen you at all."

"There is not much to see in me at the best of times, mademoiselle," Nat said as he rose to his feet, "and I am almost a scarecrow now. I wanted to see you, too, just to see what you were like, you know."

He took the arm that Monsieur Duchesne offered him, for although he could have walked that short distance unaided, he did not know the ground, and might have stumbled over something. They went straight from the verandah into a pretty room lighted by a dozen wax candles. He sat down

in a chair that was there in readiness for him. The girl placed herself in front of him and looked earnestly at him.

"Well," he said with a laugh, "am I at all like what you pictured me?"

"You are not a scarecrow at all!" she said indignantly. "Why do you say such things of yourself? Of course you are thin, very thin, but even now you look nice. I think you are just what I thought you would be. Now, am I like what you thought I should be?"

"I don't know that I ever attempted to think exactly what you would be," Nat said. "I did not notice your face; I don't even know whether it was turned my way. I did take in that you were a girl somewhere about thirteen years old, but as soon as the dog turned, my attention was pretty fully occupied. Madame Demaine said your name was Myra. I thought that with such a pretty name you ought to be pretty too. I suppose it is rude to say so, but you certainly are, mademoiselle."

The girl laughed.

"It is not rude at all; and please you are to call me Myra and not mademoiselle. Now, you must get strong as soon as you can. Mamma said I might act as your guide, and show you about the plantation, and the slave houses, and everywhere. I have never had a boy friend, and I should think it was very nice."

"My dear," her mother said with a smile, "it is not altogether discreet for a young lady to talk in that way."

"Ah! but I am not a young lady yet, mamma, and I think it is much nicer to be a girl and to be able to say what one likes. And you are an officer, Monsieur Glover!"

"Well, if I am to call you Myra, you must call me Nat. Monsieur Glover is ridiculous."

"You are very young to be an officer," the girl said.

"Oh, I have been an officer for more than two years," he said. "I was only fourteen when I joined, and I am nearly sixteen now."

"And have you been in battles?"

"Not in a regular battle. You see England is not at war now with anyone, but I have been in two or three fights with pirates and that sort of thing."

"And now, Myra, you must not talk any more," her father said. "You know the doctor gave strict orders that he was to go to bed as soon as he arrived here."

At this moment the door opened and a slave girl brought in a basin of strong broth.

"Well, you may stop to take that."

Nat spent a delightful month at Monsieur Duchesne's plantation. For the first few days he lay in a hammock beneath a shady tree, then he began to walk, at first only for a few minutes, but every day his strength increased. At the end of a fortnight he could walk half a mile, and by the time the month was up he was able to wander about with Myra all over the plantation. Monsieur Duchesne, on his return one day from town, brought a letter for him. It was from the captain himself:

*Dear Mr. Glover, – I hope you are getting on well, and are by this time on your legs again. As far as I can see, we are not likely to be at Cape François again for some time, therefore, when you feel quite strong enough, you had better take passage in a craft bound for Jamaica, which is likely to be our head-quarters for some time. Of course if we are away, you will wait till our return. I have spoken to a friend of mine, Mr. Cummings – his plantation lies high up among the hills – and he has kindly invited you to make his place your home till we return, and it will be very much better for you to be in the pure air up there than in this pestilential place.*

Nat would have started the next day, but his host insisted upon his staying for another week.

"You are getting on so well," M. Duchesne said, "that it would be folly indeed to risk throwing yourself back. Every day is making an improvement in you, and a week will make a great difference."

At the end of that week the planter, seeing that Nat was really anxious to rejoin his ship, brought back the news that a vessel in port would sail for Port Royal in two days.

"I have engaged a cabin for you," he said, "for although we shall be sorry indeed to lose you, I know that you want to be off."

"It is not that I want to be off, sir, for I was never happier in all my life, but I feel that I ought to go. It is likely enough that the ship may be short of middies, one or two may be away in prizes, and it will be strange if no one falls sick while they are lying in Port Royal. It would be ungrateful indeed if I wanted to leave you when you are all so wonderfully kind to me."

M. Duchesne drove Nat down to the port the next morning. The midshipman as he left the house felt quite unmanned, for Myra had cried undisguisedly, and Madame Duchesne was also much moved. They passed M. Demaine's house without stopping, as he and his wife had spent the previous evening at the Duchesnes', and had there said good-bye to him.

"It is quite time that I was out of this," Nat said to himself as he leaned on the rail and looked back at the port. "That sort of life is awfully nice for a time, but it would soon make a fellow so lazy and soft that he would be of no use on board ship. Of course it was all right for a bit, but since I began to use my arm a little, I have wanted to do something. Still, it would have been no good leaving before, for my arm is of no real use yet, and the doctor said that I ought to carry it in a sling for at least another month. But I am sure I ought to feel very grateful to our doctor and Lepel, for I expect I should have lost it altogether if they hadn't taken such pains with it at first. Well, it will be very jolly getting back again. I only hope that the captain won't be wanting to treat me as an invalid."

To Nat's delight he saw, as he entered Port Royal, the *Orpheus* lying there, and without landing he hailed a boat and went on board. As soon as he was made out there was quite a commotion on board the frigate among the sailors on deck and at the side, while those below looked out of the port-holes, and a burst of cheering rose from all as the boat came alongside. As he came up on to the deck the midshipmen crowded round, shaking him by the hand; and when he went to the quarter-deck to report his return, the lieutenants greeted him as heartily. The captain was on shore. Nat was confused and abashed at the warmth of their greeting.

"It is perfectly ridiculous!" he said almost angrily, as he rejoined the midshipmen; "as if there was anything extraordinary in a fellow fighting a dog!"

"It depends upon the size of the dog and the size of the fellow," Needham, the senior midshipman, said, "and also how he got into the fight."

"The fact is, Needham, if I had killed the dog with the first stroke of my dirk nobody would have thought anything about the matter, and it is just because I could not do so, and therefore got badly mauled before I managed it, that all this fuss is made! It would have been much more to the point if you had all grumbled, when I came on board, at my being nursed and coddled, while you had to do my duty between you, just because I was such a duffer that I was a couple of minutes in killing the dog instead of managing it at once."

"Well, we might have done so if we had thought of it, but, you see, we did not look at it in that light, Nat," Needham laughed; "there is certainly a good deal in what you say. However, I shall in future look upon my dirk as being of more use than I have hitherto thought; I have always considered it the most absurd weapon that was ever put into anyone's hand to use in action. Not, of course, that one does use it, for one always gets hold of a cutlass when there is fighting to be done. How anyone can ever have had the idea of making a midshipman carry about a thing little better than a pocket-knife, and how they have kept on doing so for years and years, is most astonishing! For the lords of the admiralty must all have been midshipmen themselves at one time, and must have hated the beastly things just as much as we do. If they think a full-sized sword too heavy for us – which it certainly isn't for the seniors – they might give us rapiers, which are no weight to speak of, and would be really useful weapons if we were taught to use them properly."

"Well, we won't say anything more about your affair, Nat, if you don't like it; but we sha'n't think any the less, because we are all proud of you, and whatever you may say, it was a very plucky action. I know that I would rather stand up against the biggest Frenchman than face one of those

savage hounds. And how is the arm going on? I see you still have the arm of your jacket snipped open and tied up with ribbons, and you keep it in a sling."

"Yes; the doctor made such a point of it that I was obliged to promise to wear it until Bemish gives me permission to lay it aside." He took it out of the sling and moved it about. "You see I have got the use of it, though I own I have very little strength as yet; still, I manage to use it at meals, which is a comfort. It was hateful being obliged to have my grub cut up for me. How long have you been in harbour here?"

"Three days; and you are in luck to find us here, for I hear that we are off again to-morrow morning. You have missed nothing while you have been away, for we haven't picked up a single prize beyond a little slaver with a hundred niggers on board."

When the captain came off two hours later with Dr. Bemish he sent for Nat.

"I am heartily glad to see you back again, Mr. Glover, and to see you looking so vastly better than when I saw you last; in fact, you look nearly as well as you did before that encounter."

"I have had nothing to do but to eat, sir."

"Well, the question is, how is your arm?"

"It is not very strong yet, sir, but I could really do very well without this sling."

"Well, you see I have to decide whether you had better go up to the hills until we return from our next cruise or take you with us."

"Please, sir, I would much rather go with you."

"Yes; it is not a question of what you like best, but what the doctor thinks best for you. You had better go to him at once, he will examine your arm and report to me, and of course we must act on his decision."

Nat went straight to the doctor.

"Well, you are looking better than I expected," the latter said, holding the lad at arm's-length and looking him up and down; "flesh a good deal more flabby than it used to be – want of exercise, of course, and the result of being looked after by women. Now, lad, take off your shirt and let me have a regular examination."

He moved the arm in different directions, felt very carefully along each bone, pressing rather hard at the points where these had been broken, and asking Nat if it hurt him. He replied "No" without hesitation, as long as the doctor was feeling the forearm, but when he came to the upper-arm and shoulder he was obliged to acknowledge that the pressure gave him a bit of a twinge.

"Yes, it could hardly be otherwise," the doctor said; "however, there is no doubt we made a pretty good job of it. Stretch both arms out in front of you and bring the fingers together. Yes, that is just what I expected, it is some two and a half inches shorter than the other; but no one will be likely to notice it."

"Don't you think, doctor, that I can go to sea now? The captain said that you would have to decide."

"I think a month up in the hills would be a very desirable thing, Glover. The bones have knit very well, but it would not take much to break them again."

"I have had quite enough of plantations for the present, doctor, and I do think that sea air would do me more good than anything. I am sure I feel better already for the run from Cape François here."

The doctor smiled. "Well, you see, if you did remain on board you would be out of everything. You certainly would not be fit for boat service, you must see that yourself."

"I can't say that I do, sir; one fights with one's right arm and not with one's left."

"That is so, lad, but you might get hit on the left arm as well as the right. Besides, even on board, you might get hurt while skylarking."

"I would indeed be most careful, doctor."

"Well, we will see about it, and talk it over with the captain."

All that evening Nat was in a state of alarm whenever anyone came with a message to any of his mess-mates; but when it was almost the hour for lights out he turned into his hammock with great satisfaction, feeling sure that if it had been decided that he must go ashore next morning a message to that effect would have been sent to him. The sound of the boatswain's whistle, followed by the call "All hands to make sail!" settled the question. He had already dressed himself with Needham's assistance, but had remained below lest, if the captain's eye fell on him, he might be sent ashore. As soon, however, as he heard the order he felt sure that all was right, and went up on deck. Here he took up his usual station, passing orders forward and watching the men at work, until the vessel was under sail. The want of success on the last cruise made all hands even keener than usual to pick up something worth capturing.

"I suppose there is no clue as to the whereabouts of those three pirates," he said to Needham as the latter, after the vessel was fairly under weigh, joined him.

"No; twice we had information from the captains of small craft that they had seen suspicious sail in the distance, but there is no doubt that the niggers had been either bribed or frightened into telling us the story, for in each case, though we remained a fortnight cruising about, we have never caught sight of a suspicious sail. When we returned here we found to our disgust that they must have been at work hundreds of miles away, as several ships were missing, and one that came in had been hotly chased by them, but being a fast sailer escaped by the skin of her teeth. That is the worst of these negroes, one can never believe them, and I think the best way would be when anyone came and told a yarn, to go and cruise exactly in the opposite direction to that in which he tells us he has seen the pirates."

"It is a pity we cannot punish some of these fellows who give false news," Nat said.

"Yes; but the difficulty is proving that it is false. In the first place, one of these native craft is so much like another that one would not recognize it again; besides, you may be sure that the rascals would give Port Royal a wide berth for a time. On our last cruise we did take with us the negro who brought the news, but that made the case no better. He pretended, of course, to be as anxious as anyone that the pirates should be caught, and as he stuck to his story that he had seen a rakish schooner where he said he did, there was no proof that he was lying, and he pretended to be terribly cut up at not getting the reward promised him if he came across them.

"I have no doubt that he was lying, but there was no way of proving it. You see, the idea of getting hold of a trader and fitting her up with a few guns and some men is all well enough when you have only got to deal with a single schooner or brigantine, but it would be catching a tartar if these three scoundrels were to come upon her at once. Of course they are all heavily armed and carry any number of men, nothing short of the frigate herself would be a match for them. And one thing is certain, we can't disguise her to look like a merchantman. Do what we would, the veriest landlubber would make her out to be what she is, and you may be sure the pirates would know her to be a ship of war as soon as they got a sight of her topsails."

"You have not heard, I suppose, where our cruising ground is going to be this time?" Nat asked.

"No, and I don't suppose we shall know for a few hours. You may be sure that whatever course we take now will not be our real course, for I bet odds that after dark some fast little craft will sneak out of harbour to take the pirates news as to the course we are following, and to tell them that we have not taken a negro this time who would lead us a dance in the wrong direction. I should not be surprised if we are going to search the islands round Cuba for a change. We were among the bays and islets up north on our last cruise, and the captain may be determined to try fresh ground."

Needham's guess turned out to be correct, for after darkness fell the ship's course was changed, and her head laid towards Cuba. After cruising for nearly three weeks without success, they were passing along the coast of the mainland, when Nat, who had now given up his sling, went aloft with his telescope. Every eye on deck was turned towards the island, but their continued failures had lessened the eagerness with which they scanned the shore, and, as there was no sign of any break in its outline,

it was more from habit than from any hope of seeing anything that they looked at the rugged cliffs that rose forty or fifty feet perpendicularly above the water's edge, and at the forest stretching up the hillsides behind them.

"You have seen nothing, I suppose, Tom?" he asked the sailor stationed in the main-top.

"Not a thing, Mr. Glover."

Nat continued his way up, and took his seat on the yard of the topsail. Leaning back against the mast, he brought his telescope to bear upon the land, and for half an hour scanned every rock and tree. At last something caught his eye.

"Come up here, Tom," he called to the sailor below. "Look there, you see that black streak on the face of the cliff?"

"I see it, yer honour."

"Well, look above the first line of trees exactly over it: isn't that a pole with a truck on the top of it?"

"You are right, sir! you are right!" the sailor said, as he got the glass to bear upon the object Nat had indicated, "that is the upper spar of a vessel of some sort, sure enough."

"On deck there!" Nat shouted.

"What is it, Mr. Glover?" the first lieutenant answered.

"I can make out the upper spar of a craft in among the trees over there, sir."

"You are sure that you are not mistaken?"

"Quite sure, sir. With the glass I can make out the truck quite distinctly. It is certainly either the upper spar of a craft of some kind or a flag-staff, of course I cannot say which."

The first lieutenant himself ran up the ratlines and joined Nat. The breeze was very light, and the *Orpheus* was scarcely moving through the water. Nat handed his telescope to Mr. Hill.

"There, sir, it is about a yard to the west of that black streak on the rock."

"I see it," the lieutenant exclaimed after a long gaze at the shore. "You are right, it must be, as you say, either the spar of a ship or a flag-staff; though how a ship could get in there is more than I can say. There, it has gone now!"

"The trees were rather lower at the point where we saw it, and the higher trees have shut it in."

He descended to the deck followed by Nat.

"Well, what do you make of it, Mr. Hill?" enquired the captain, who had come out of his cabin on hearing Nat's hail.

"There is no doubt that Mr. Glover is right, sir, and that it is the upper spar of a craft of some kind, unless it is a flag-staff on shore, and it is hardly the sort of place in which you would expect to find a flag-staff. It is a marvel Mr. Glover made it out, for even with his glass I had a great difficulty in finding it, though he gave me the exact bearing."

"Thank you, Mr. Glover," the captain said. "At last there seems a chance of our picking up a prize this cruise. The question is, how did she get there?"

"I am pretty sure that we have passed no opening, sir. I have been aloft for the past half-hour, and have made out no break in the rocks."

"That is quite possible," the captain said, "and yet it may be there. We are a good three-quarters of a mile off the shore, and some of these inlets are so narrow, and the rocks so much the same colour, that unless one knows the entrance is there, one would never suspect it. At any rate we will hold on as we are for a bit."

The hail had set everyone on deck on the *qui vive*, and a dozen telescopes were turned upon the shore.

"Unlikely as it seems, Mr. Hill," the captain said, after they had gone on half a mile without discovering any break in the line of rock, "I am afraid that it must have been a flag-staff that you saw. There may be some plantation there, and the owner may have had one put up in the front of his house. However, it will be worth while to lower a boat and row back along the foot of the cliff for

a mile or so, and then a mile ahead of us; if there is an opening we shall be sure to find it. Tell Mr. Playford to take the gig; Mr. Glover can go with him as he is the discoverer."

The boat was lowered at once, and as soon as the officers had taken their place the six men who composed the crew bent their backs to the oars, the coxswain making for a point on the shore about a mile astern of the frigate, which was lying almost becalmed. The men had taken muskets and cutlasses with them, for it was probable enough that a watch might have been set on the cliff, and that, should there be an inlet, a boat might be lying there ready to pounce out upon them as soon as they reached it.

Every eye was fixed upon the boat as she turned and rowed along within fifty yards of the foot of the rocks.

"I thought I could not have been so blind as to pass the entrance without seeing it," one of the sailors who had been on watch aloft said, in a tone of satisfaction. "Now, I don't mind how soon the boat finds a gap."

But when the boat had paddled on for another mile without a pause, a look of doubt and dissatisfaction showed itself on every face.

"You are quite sure, Mr. Hill," the captain asked, "that it was a staff of some kind that you saw, and not, perhaps, the top of a dead tree whose bark had peeled off?"

"I am quite certain, sir. It was too straight and even for rough wood; and I made out a truck distinctly: but it is certainly strange that no entrance should be discovered. I am afraid that 'tis but a flag-staff after all."

"I can hardly imagine that," the captain said. "I have often seen flag-staffs in front of plantation houses, but never one so high as this must be to show over the trees. If it had been nearer to the edge of the cliff it might have been a signal-post, but they would hardly put it a mile back from the edge of the cliff and bury it among trees. At any rate, if we find no entrance I will send a landing-party ashore to see what it really is, that is to say if we can find any place where the cliff can be scaled."

"What is it, Mr. Needham?" as the midshipman came up and touched his hat.

"The boat is rowing in to shore, sir."

The two officers went to the side.

"They have either found an entrance or some point at which the rock can be scaled – Ah, there they go!" he went on, as the boat disappeared from sight, "though from here there is no appearance whatever of an opening."

It was some minutes before the boat again appeared. It was at once headed for the frigate.

"Mr. Playford has news for us of some sort," the captain said, "the men are rowing hard." In a few minutes the boat came alongside. The second officer ran up the accommodation ladder.

"Well, Mr. Playford, what is your news?"

"There is an inlet, sir, though if we had not been close in to those rocks I should never have noticed it. It runs almost parallel with the coast for a quarter of a mile. I thought at first that it ended there, but it makes a sharp angle to the south-east, and continues for a mile or so, and at the other end there is a large schooner, I have no doubt a slaver. I fancy they are landing the slaves now. There is a barracoon on the shore and some storehouses."

"Did they see you?"

"No, sir; at least I don't think so. Directly I saw that the passage was going to make a turn, I went close in to the rocks on the other side, and brought up at the corner where I could get a view without there being much fear of our being seen, and indeed I don't think that it would have been possible to make us out unless someone had been watching with a glass."

"We shall soon know whether they saw you, Mr. Playford. If they did they will probably set all hands to work to tow the schooner out, for though there is not wind enough to give us steerage-way, these slavers will slip along under the slightest breath. They can hardly have made the frigate out. They probably thought the hiding-place so secure that they did not even put a watch on the cliffs."

Of course if there was anyone up there they could have seen the boat leave our side, and would have watched her all along.

"Did you see any place at which the cliff could be climbed?"

"No, sir, and up to the turn the rocks are just as steep inside as they are here, but beyond that the inlet widens out a good deal and the banks slope gradually, and a landing could be effected anywhere there, I should say."

"We will send the boats in as soon as it gets dark, Mr. Hill. If they saw us coming they would drive off the slaves into the woods before we could get there, so the best plan will be to land a strong party at the bend, so that they can get down to the barracoon at the same time that the others board the schooner. No doubt this is a regular nest of slave-traders. It has long been suspected that there was some depot on this side of the island. It has often been observed that slavers when first made out were heading in this direction, and more than once craft that were chased, and, as it seemed, certain to be caught in the morning, have mysteriously disappeared. This hiding-place accounts for it.

"You did not ascertain what depth of water there was at the mouth of the creek, Mr. Playford?"

"Yes, sir, I sounded right across with the boat's grapnel; there is nowhere more than two and a half fathoms, but it is just about that depth right across."

"Then it is evident that we cannot take the frigate in. What is the width at the mouth?"

"About thirty yards."

An hour later the *Orpheus* anchored opposite the mouth of the inlet, which, however, was still invisible.

"I think that, as this may be an important capture, Mr. Hill, it would be as well for you to go in charge of the boats. Mr. Playford will take the command of the landing-party. I should say that twenty marines, under Lieutenant Boldero, and as many blue-jackets, would be ample for that. He had better take the long-boat and one of the gigs, while you take the launch, the pinnace, and the other gig. If they have made us out, we may expect a very tough resistance, and it may be that, although Mr. Playford saw nothing of them, they may have a couple of batteries higher up."

"Likely enough, sir."

"You had better let the landing-party have a start of you, so that if they should unmask a battery on the side on which they are, they can rush down at once and silence it."

"Very good, sir."

The sun was now approaching the horizon; as soon as it dipped behind it the boats were lowered, and the sailors, who had already made all preparations, at once took their places in them. Needham was in command of the gig that carried a portion of the landing-party, Nat was in charge of the other gig, and Low was in charge of the pinnace, Mr. Hill going in the launch. Nat had first been told off to the gig now commanded by Needham, but the captain said to the first lieutenant, "You had better take Glover with you, Mr. Hill, and let Needham go with Mr. Playford. Scrambling along on the shore in the dark, one might very well get a heavy fall, and it is as well that Glover should not risk breaking his arm again."

## CHAPTER III

### A SLAVE DEPOT

Night fell rapidly as soon as the sun had set, and by the time the boats reached the mouth of the inlet it was already dark. The two boats under the second officer entered first, rowed up the inlet to the bend, and landed the marines and sailors on the opposite side; the boarding-party lay on their oars for five minutes and then followed. The oars were muffled, and the men ordered to row as noiselessly as they could, following each other closely, and keeping under the left bank. They were about half-way up when the word "Fire!" was shouted in Spanish, and six guns were simultaneously discharged. Had the Spaniards waited a few seconds longer, the three boats would all have been in line with the guns. As it was, a storm of grape sent the water splashing up ahead of the pinnace, which, however, received the contents of the gun nearest to them. It was aimed a little low, and fortunately for the crew the shot had not yet begun to scatter, and the whole charge struck the boat just at the water-level, knocking a great hole in her.

"We are sinking, Mr. Hill," Low said. "Will you come alongside and pick us up?"

Although the launch was but a length behind, the gunwale of the pinnace was nearly level with the water as she came alongside. Its occupants were helped on board the launch, which at once held on her way. Half a minute later six guns were fired from the opposite bank. The boats were so close under the shore that their position could not be made out with any certainty. Three men were hit by the grapeshot, but beyond this there were no casualties.

"Keep in as much as you dare," Mr. Hill said to the coxswain; "the battery opposite will be loaded again in a couple of minutes, but as long as we keep in the shadow of the shore their shooting will be wild."

The battery, indeed, soon began to fire again, irregularly, as the guns were loaded. The shot tore up the water ahead and astern of the boats, but it was evident that those at the guns could not make out their precise position. Another five minutes and the boats were headed for the schooner.

"You board at the bow, Mr. Glover, I will make for her quarter. Now, lay out, lads, as hard as you can, the sooner you are there the less chance you have of being hit."

A moment later a great clamour arose behind them. First came a British cheer; then rapid discharges of pistols and muskets, mingled with the clash of cutlasses and swords; a minute or two later this ceased, and the loud cheer of the marines and seamen told those in the boats that they had carried the battery. The diversion was useful to the boats. Until now the slavers had been ignorant that a party of foes had landed, and the fact that a barracoon full of slaves, and the storehouses, were already threatened, caused something like consternation among them. The consequence was that they fired hastily and without taking time to aim. Before they could load again the boats were alongside, unchecked for an instant by the musketry fire which broke out from the deck of the schooner as soon as cannon had been discharged.

Boarding-nettings had been run up, but holes were soon chopped in these by the sailors. Headed by Nat, the crew of the gig leapt down on to the deck, for the greater part of the slaver's crew ran aft to oppose what they considered the more dangerous attack made by the occupants of the crowded launch. The defence was successfully maintained until the crew of the gig, keeping close together and brushing aside the resistance of the few men forward, flung themselves upon the main body of the slavers, and with pistol and cutlass hewed their way through them till abreast of the launch. The slavers attacked them furiously, and would speedily have annihilated them, but the crew of the launch, led by Mr. Hill, came swarming over the bulwarks, and, taking the offensive, drove the slavers forward, where, seeing that all was lost, they sprang overboard, striking out for the shore to the right.

Severe fighting was now going on opposite the schooner, where the landing-party were evidently attacking the barracoon and storehouses.

"To the boats, men!" Mr. Hill shouted, "our fellows are being hard pressed on shore; Mr. Glover, you with the gig's crew will remain in charge here."

Indeed, it was evident that the resistance on shore was much more obstinate than had been expected. Nat stood watching the boat. Just as it reached the shore one of the sailors shouted, "Look out, sir!" and he saw a big mulatto rushing at him with uplifted sword. His cutlass was still in his hand, and throwing himself on guard he caught the blow as it fell upon it, and in return brought his cutlass down on his opponent's cheek. With a howl of pain the man sprang at him, but Nat leaped aside, and his cutlass fell on the right wrist of the mulatto, whose sword dropped from his hand, and, rushing to the side, he threw himself overboard. In the meantime a fierce struggle was going on between the sailors and seven or eight of the slavers who, being unable to swim, had thrown themselves down by the guns and shammed death, as had Nat's antagonist, who was first mate of the schooner. The fight was short but desperate, and one by one the slavers were run through or cut down, but not before three or four of the sailors had received severe wounds.

"Get a lantern, mate," one of these growled, "and see that there are no more of these skulking hounds alive."

The sailors, furious at what they considered treachery, fetched a light that was burning in the captain's cabin, and without mercy ran through two or three unwounded men whom they found hiding among the fallen. It was soon clear that the reinforcement that had landed had completely turned the tables. Gradually the din rolled away from the neighbourhood of the storehouses, there was some sharp firing as the enemy fled towards the wood behind, and then all was quiet. Presently there was a shout in Mr. Hill's voice from the shore:

"Schooner ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Load with grape, Mr. Glover, and send a round or two occasionally into that wood behind the houses; I am going to leave thirty men here under Mr. Playford, and to take the rest over to the opposite side and carry the battery there."

"Ay, ay, sir."

And as the guns pointing on that side had not been discharged, he at once opened fire on the wood. A minute later the launch and gig rowed past the schooner and soon reached the opposite side. Ten minutes passed without any sound of conflict being heard, and Nat had no doubt that the battery had been found deserted. It was not long before the boats were seen returning. They rowed this time to the schooner.

"Mr. Glover," the first lieutenant said as he reached the deck, "do you lower the schooner's cutter, put all the wounded on board, take four of your men and row out to the frigate and report to the captain what has taken place. Tell him that Mr. Playford carried the battery on the right in spite of the guns, and that I have spiked those in the battery on the left, which I found deserted. Say that we have had a sharp fight on shore with a large number of negroes led by two or three white men and some mulattoes, and that I believe there must be some large plantations close at hand whose owners are in league with the slavers. You can say that we found a hundred and twenty slaves in the barracoon, evidently newly landed from the schooner, and that I intend to find the plantations and give them a lesson in the morning. How many wounded have you here?"

"There are fourteen altogether, sir; ten of them were wounded in the first attack, and four have been wounded since by some of the slavers who shammed death."

"There are eight more in the launch, happily we have only two men killed. You had better give all the wounded a drink of water; I have a flask, and I dare say you have one: empty them both into the bucket."

There was a barrel half full of water on deck; a bucketful of this was drawn, and the two flasks of spirits emptied into it, and a mug of the mixture given to each of the wounded men. They were then assisted down into the schooner's boat; four of the gig's crew took their places in it, and Nat, taking the tiller, told them to row on.

Half an hour later they came alongside the frigate. A sailor ran down the ladder with a lantern. Nat stepped out and mounted to the deck. The captain was standing at the gangway.

"We have been uneasy about you, Mr. Glover. We heard a number of reports of heavier guns than they were likely to carry on board a slaver, and feared that they came from shore batteries."

"Yes, sir, there were two of them mounting six guns each. Mr. Playford, with the landing-party, captured the one on the eastern side; Mr. Hill, after the schooner was taken and the enemy on shore driven off, rowed across and took the other, which he found unoccupied."

"What is the loss?"

"Only two killed, sir, but there are twenty-two wounded, two or three of them by musket-shots, and the rest cutlass wounds. They are all in the boat below, sir."

A party was at once sent down to carry up such of the wounded as were unable to walk. As soon as all were taken below, and the surgeon had begun his work, the captain asked Nat to give him a full account of the proceedings.

"I cannot tell you much of what took place ashore, sir," he said, "as Mr. Hill left me in charge of the schooner. After we had carried her, he went ashore with the crews of the launch and pinnace to help Mr. Playford."

"Tell me all you know first."

Nat related the opening of the two batteries, and how one had been almost immediately captured by Mr. Playford.

"So the pinnace was sunk?"

"Yes, sir, the enemy's charge struck her between wind and water, and she went down at once; her crew were picked up by the launch. I hear that none of them were injured." Then he told how they had kept under the shelter of the shore, and thus escaped injury from the other battery, and how the schooner had been captured.

"It was lucky that your men got a footing forward, Mr. Glover. You did well to lead them aft at once, and thus assist Mr. Hill's party to board."

Nat then related the sudden attack by the slavers who had been feigning death.

"It was lucky that it was no worse," the captain said. "No doubt they were fellows who couldn't swim, and if there had been a few more it would have gone hard with you. And now about this fight on shore; it can hardly have been the crew of the schooner, for, by the stout resistance they offered, they must have been all on board."

"Yes, sir."

Nat then gave the message that Mr. Hill had sent.

"No doubt, Mr. Glover; I dare say this place has been used by slavers for years. Probably there are some large barracoons where the slaves are generally housed, and planters who want them either come or send from all parts of the island. I will go ashore myself early to-morrow morning. There is no question that this is an important capture, and it will be a great thing to break up this centre of the slave-trade altogether. Now that their hiding-place has once been discovered, they will know that our cruisers will keep a sharp look-out here, and a vessel once bottled up in this inlet has no chance whatever of escape. You can go with me, it is thanks to the sharpness of your eyes that we made the discovery."

The sun had not yet shown above the eastern horizon when the captain's gig passed in through the mouth of the inlet, and ten minutes later rowed alongside the wharf in front of the barracoon.

"There is another wharf farther along," the captain said; "we may take that as proof that there are often two of these slavers in here at the same time. Ah, there is Mr. Hill! I congratulate you on

your success," he went on, as the first lieutenant joined him; "there is no doubt that this has been a regular rendezvous for the scoundrels. It is well that you attacked after dark, for the cross fire of those batteries, aided by that of the schooner, would have knocked the boats into matchwood."

"That they would have done, sir. I was very glad when I saw the boat coming, as I thought it was probable that you were on board her, and we are rather in a difficulty."

"What is that, Mr. Hill?"

"Well, sir, as soon as we had settled matters here we followed the enemy, and found a road running up the valley; and as it was along this that most of the fellows who opposed us had no doubt retreated, I thought it as well to follow them up at once. We had evidently been watched, for a musketry fire was opened upon us from the trees on both sides. I sent Mr. Boldero with the marines to clear them out on the left, and Mr. Playford with twenty seamen to do the same on the right, and then I pressed forward with the rest. Presently a crowd of negroes came rushing down from the front, shouting, and firing muskets. We gave them a volley, and they bolted at once. We ran straight on, and a hundred yards farther up came upon a large clearing.

"In the middle stood a house, evidently that of a planter. A short distance off were some houses, probably inhabited by the mulatto overseers, and a few huts for his white overseers, and some distance behind these were four large barracoons. We made straight for these, for we could hear a shouting there, and had no doubt that the mulattoes were trying to get the slaves out and to drive them away into the wood. However, as soon as we came up the fellows bolted. There were about a hundred slaves in each barracoon. No doubt the fellows who attacked us were the regular plantation hands. I suppose the owner of the place made sure that we should be contented with what we had done, and should not go beyond the head of the inlet; and when the firing began again he sent the plantation men down to stop us until he had removed the slaves. I left Mr. Playford in command there, and brought twenty men back here; and I was just going to send off a message to you saying what had taken place, and asking for instructions. You see, with the slaves we found here, we have over five hundred blacks in our hands. That is extremely awkward."

"Extremely," the captain said thoughtfully. "Well, I will go back with you and see the place. As to the houses – the plantation house and the barracoons – I shall have no hesitation in destroying them. This is evidently a huge slaving establishment, and, as the blacks and their overseers attacked us, we are perfectly justified in destroying this den altogether. If I could catch their owner I should assuredly hang him. The difficulty is what to do with all these unfortunate creatures; the schooner would not hold more than two hundred if packed as close as herrings. However, the other thing is first to be thought of."

Nat followed his commander and the lieutenant to the plantation, or, it should rather be said, to the depot; for the clearing in the valley was but a quarter of a mile long and a few hundred yards wide. It was evident that if the owner had a plantation it was at some distance away, and that the men with whom they had fought were principally mulattoes and negroes employed about the place, and in minding the slaves as they were brought in.

They passed straight on to the barracoons. The sailors had already brought the slaves out and knocked off their irons. The poor creatures sat on the ground, evidently bewildered at what had taken place, and uncertain whether they were in the hands of friends or enemies.

"Some of the men have found the cauldrons in which food is cooked," Mr. Hill said, "and are now preparing a meal for them; and as we found some hogsheads of molasses and stores of flour and rice they will get a better meal than they are accustomed to. I have set some of the strongest slaves to pump water into those big troughs there; the poor beggars will feel all the better after a wash."

"They will indeed. I don't suppose they have had one since they were first captured in Africa."

In half an hour a meal was served. As an effort of cooking it could hardly be termed a success, but was a sort of porridge, composed of flour and rice sweetened with molasses. There was some difficulty in serving it out, for only a few mugs and plates were found at the barracoons. These were

supplemented by all the plates, dishes, and other utensils in the houses of the owner and overseers. By this time the negroes had been taken in parties of twenties to the troughs, where they had a thorough wash.

"This is all very well, Mr. Hill," the captain said, "but what are we to do with all these people? Of course we must move them down to the water, and burn these buildings, in the first place because the scoundrels who are at the bottom of all this villainy should be punished, and in the second place because in all probability they will collect a large number of negroes and mulattoes and make an attack. We cannot leave a force here that could defend itself; therefore, whatever we decide upon afterwards, it is clear that all the slaves must be taken down to the houses on the inlet. I should set the men to open all the stores, and load the negroes with everything that can be useful. I expect you will find a good deal of cotton cloth and so on, for no doubt the man here dealt in other articles besides slaves, and he would, moreover, keep cottons and that sort of thing for sending them up the country into market. However, take everything that is worth taking in the way of food or otherwise, and carry it down to the storehouses by the water, then set all the houses and sheds here on fire. When you see them well alight you can bring the men down to the shore; then we must settle as to our course. It is a most awkward thing our coming upon all these slaves. If there were only those who had been landed from the schooner there would be no difficulty about it, as we should only have to put them on board again, but with four hundred others on our hands I really don't know how to manage. We might stow a hundred in the frigate, though I own I should not like it."

"No, indeed," Mr. Hill murmured; "and four hundred would be out of the question."

The captain returned to the inlet and made an examination of the storehouses there. They were for the most part empty. They were six in number, roughly constructed of timber, and some forty feet long by twenty wide, and consisted only of the one floor. They stood ten feet apart. The barracoon was some twenty yards away. In a short time the slaves began to pour in, all – men, women, and children – carrying burdens proportionate to their strength. They had now come to the conclusion that their new captors were really friends, and with the light-heartedness of their race laughed and chattered as if their past sufferings were already forgotten. Mr. Playford saw to the storing of their burdens. These filled one of the storehouses to the roof. There was, as the captain had anticipated, a large quantity of cotton cloth among the spoil. Some of these bales were placed outside the store, twenty of the negroes were told off to cut the stuff up into lengths for clothing, and by mid-day the whole of the slaves were, to their delight, attired in their new wraps. Among the goods that had been brought down were a number of implements and tools – axes, hoes, shovels, and long knives. Captain Crosbie had, by this time, quite made up his mind as to the plan to be pursued.

"We must hold this place for a time, Mr. Hill," he said as the latter came down with the last body of sailors, after having seen that all the buildings in the valley were wrapped in flames. "I have been thinking over the question of the slaves, and the only plan that I can see is to go for a two or three day's cruise in the frigate, in hopes of falling in with some native craft with which I can make an arrangement for them to return here with me, and aid in carrying off all these poor creatures. These five storehouses and the barracoon will hold them all pretty comfortably. Two of the storehouses had better be given up to the women and children. We will make a stockade round the buildings, with the ends resting in the water, and get the guns from those batteries and put them in position here. With the help of those on board the schooner, a stout defence can be made to an attack, however formidable. I shall leave Mr. Playford in command with forty men on shore; Mr. Glover will be in charge of the schooner with five-and-twenty more. The frigate will remain for a couple of days at her present anchorage, and I will send as many men as we can spare ashore to help in finishing the work before she sails.

"In the first place there must be a barrack run up for the men on shore between the barracoon and the storehouses. It must be made of stout beams. I don't mean squared, but young trees placed side by side so as to be perfectly musket-proof. The palisades should be made of strong saplings,

wattled together, say, ten feet high. A hundred and fifty sailors, aided by three hundred and fifty able-bodied negroes, should make quick work of it. The schooner's crew can see to the removal of the guns from the batteries and their establishment upon platforms behind the palisade. I should divide the twelve guns into four batteries, three in each. The armourer shall come off in the morning to get out the spikes, and the carpenters shall come with their tools."

"There are a dozen cross-cut saws among the things that we have brought down, sir."

"That is good. How many axes are there?"

"Four dozen, sir."

"Good! I will send all the hatchets we have on board. I think, Mr. Hill, that you had better take up your position on board the schooner until we sail. How about water? That is a most important point."

"The slaves have brought down a large number of staves, sir. They are evidently intended for sugar hogsheads; they are done up in separate packets. I should say there were a hundred of them."

"That is satisfactory indeed. I will send the cooper ashore, and with a gang of the black fellows he will soon get them all into shape. I see that they have relied upon the stream that comes down from the hills for their supply. One of the first moves of anyone attacking the place would be to divert its course somewhere up in the hills. However, with such a supply as these hogsheads would hold, we could do without the stream for weeks. The twenty marines who came ashore with Lieutenant Boldero will remain as part of the garrison."

The work was at once begun. The sailors looked upon it as a pleasant change from the ordinary routine of life on board ship, and threw themselves into it vigorously, while the blacks, as soon as they understood what was wanted, proved themselves most useful assistants. Accustomed in their African homes to palisade their villages, they knew exactly what was required. Some, with their hoes, dug a trench four feet deep; others dragged down the poles as the sailors cut them, erected them in their places, and trod the earth firmly round them. Others cut creepers, or split up suitable wood, and wove them in and out between the poles; and, by the time darkness fell, a surprising amount of work had been accomplished.

One of the storehouses was turned over to those who could not be berthed on board the schooner, most of the slaves preferring to sleep in the open air, which to them was a delightful change after being cooped up for weeks in the crowded hold of a ship, or in the no less crowded barracoons. Sentries were posted as soon as it became dark, but the night passed off without an alarm, and at daybreak all were at work again. The launch returned to the frigate when work was knocked off, and came back with a fresh body of men in the morning, and with the carpenters, coopers, and all the available tools on board. By the evening of the third day the work was completed. Four banks of earth had been thrown up by the negroes against the palisade, and on each of these three guns were mounted. The hut for the garrison had been completed. The hogsheads were put together and filled with water, and a couple of hundred boarding-pikes were put ashore for the use of the negroes.

Nat had been fully employed, with the schooner's crew, in removing the guns from the batteries, and placing them on the platforms constructed by the carpenters on the top of the earthworks.

"It is quite possible," the captain said to Mr. Playford, "that this creek is used by pirates as well as slavers. They may come in here to sell goods they have captured suitable for use in the islands, such as cotton cloths and tools, and which it would not pay them to carry to their regular rendezvous. It will be great luck if one or two of them should put in here while I am away. It would greatly diminish the difficulty we have of getting the slaves away."

"That would be fortunate indeed, sir. Even if two came in together we could give a good account of them, for as the palisade is mostly on higher ground than the huts, we should only have to slue the guns round and give them such a warm welcome that they would probably haul down their flags at once."

"Yes. You had better tell Mr. Glover to run up the Spanish flag if any doubtful-looking craft is seen to be making for the entrance, and I should always keep a couple of signallers up on the cliff, so as to let you know beforehand what you might have to expect, and to see that there is nothing showing that could excite their suspicions, until it is too late for them to turn back."

Doubtless what was going on in the inlet had been closely watched from the woods, for in the evening of the day on which the frigate sailed away scattered shots were fired from the forest, and the sound of the beating of tom-toms and the blowing of horns could be heard in the direction of the plantation whose buildings they had destroyed.

The lieutenant had gone off to dine with Nat, and they were sitting on deck smoking their cigars when the firing began.

"I almost expected it," he said. "No doubt they have been waiting for the frigate to leave before they did anything, as they would know that at least half of those who have been ashore would re-embark when she left. I have no doubt the scoundrels whose place we burnt have sent to all the planters in this part of the islands to assemble in force to attack us. If they have seen us making the palisade and mounting the guns, as no doubt they have done, they certainly will not venture to assault the place unless they are in very strong force, but they can make it very unpleasant for us. It is not more than eighty yards to the other side of the creek, and from that hill they would completely command us. You will scarcely be able to keep a man on deck, and we shall have to stay in the shelter of the huts. Of course on this side they would scarcely be able to annoy us, for they would have to come down to the edge of the trees to fire, and as we could fire through the palisade upon them they would get the worst of it."

"We might row across in the boats, sir, and clear the wood of them if they became too troublesome."

"We should run the risk of losing a good many men in doing so, and a good many more as we made our way up through the trees and drove them out, and should gain nothing by it, for as soon as we retired they would reoccupy the position. No; if they get very troublesome I will slue a couple of guns round and occasionally send a round or two of grape among the trees. That will be better than your doing so, because your men at the guns would make an easy mark for them, while we are farther off, and indeed almost out of range of their muskets."

The firing soon died away, but in the morning it was reopened, and it was evident that the number in the wood had largely increased. Bullet after bullet struck the deck of the schooner, and Nat was obliged to order the greater part of the crew to remain below, and to see that those who remained on deck kept under the shelter of the bulwark. Presently a sharp fire broke out from the trees facing the palisade, and this was almost immediately replied to by the blue-jackets and marines. The fire of the assailants soon slackened, and Nat thought that it had only been begun with the object of finding out how strong a force had been left behind. Presently two of the guns on shore spoke out, and sent a volley of grape into the wood in which his own assailants were lurking. It had the effect of temporarily silencing the fire from that quarter. This, however, was but for a short time. When it began again it was taken up on the other side also, the party which had made the demonstration against the palisade evidently considering that the schooner, which lay midway between the two shores, was a safer object of attack than the stockade. As the bulwark now offered no shelter, all went below. Two of the men were about to pull up the boat which was lying at the stern, and Nat went to the ladder to take his place in it, when he was hailed from shore.

"You had better stay where you are, Mr. Glover, until it gets dusk. You would only be a mark for every man with a musket, up in the trees above us, and, so far as I can see, there is nothing we can do until they begin work in earnest."

"Very well, sir," Nat shouted back, "I will come off after it gets dusk."

Firing continued all day, but died away at sunset, and soon afterwards Nat went ashore.

"This is very awkward," the lieutenant said. "It is most unpleasant being potted at all day by fellows who won't show themselves, but I can't see that we can help it. By the noise and jabbering that breaks out at times, I should think that there must be some hundreds of them on this side alone, and we shall have to wait till they begin in earnest. Their leaders must know that they can be doing us no harm by their distant fire, and they must sooner or later make an attack on us. You see they have a strong temptation. They must have seen that none of the slaves have been taken away, and as there are five hundred of them, and I suppose they are worth from twenty to forty pounds a head, it is a big thing, to say nothing of the stores. Then I have no doubt they are thirsting for revenge, and although they must see that they will have to fight very hard to take the place, they must try without delay, for they will know that the frigate will be back again before very long, and will probably bring some craft with her to carry away the slaves. So I think we must put up with their fire till they harden their hearts and attack us in earnest. They will make the attack, I expect, about the centre of the palisade, for your guns would cover both our flanks. If we are hard pressed I will light a port fire, and you had better land with twenty of your men, leaving five to take care of the ship and work a gun or two should they try to take us in flank."

"I should not be surprised if they tried to-night. Shall I bring ten of the men on shore at once, sir?"

"Well, perhaps it would be as well. Forty men are not a very large force for this length of palisade and to work some of the guns at the point where they may attack us, and I expect their first rush will be a serious one, and we shall have all our work cut out for us. There is one thing; we can rely, in case of their making a way in, on the slaves. By this time they quite understand that we are friends and that the people who had been firing on us are their enemies, and I believe they would fight like demons rather than fall into their hands again. I have torn up a bale of white calico and have given a strip of it to each man to tie round his head, so that we can tell friend from foe and they can recognize each other in the dark. The enemy won't reckon on that, and will think that they have only a small body of whites to deal with. Do you notice how silent the woods are now? I think we may take that as a sign that they are preparing for mischief."

"The sooner it comes the better. Have you plenty of port fires, Mr. Playford?"

"Yes, a large boxful came on shore with the last boat yesterday."

Nat went off again, and picked out ten men to land with him.

"Get the other boat down," he said to the petty officer. "You will understand that if any attack is made on the flanks of the work you are to open fire at once upon them with grape. If a blue light is burned at the edge of the water ten men are to land instantly. You will remain in charge of the other five. So far as we know they have no boats, but they may have made a raft, and may intend to try and take the schooner, thinking that the crew will probably be on shore. So you must keep a sharp look-out on the other side as well as this. Light a blue light if you see a strong party coming off, and we will rejoin you at once."

He again landed with the ten men he had chosen.

"I have six men on watch," the lieutenant said, "and have put one of the blacks with each. I fancy their ears are sharper than ours are, and they will hear them coming before our men do."

Having nothing to do, Nat went into the barracoon and the other houses in which the slaves were placed. The contrast between their condition now and when he had seen them four days before, when they had first been found, was striking indeed. Now they were clean, and looked picturesque in their bright calico clothes. The look of dull and hopeless misery had passed away, and it seemed to him that with the good and plentiful food they had received they were already perceptibly plumper. They would have risen as he entered, but he signed to them to keep their places. They now had room to lie down in comfort, and while some sat chatting in groups others moved about. They were evidently proud of their arms, and some of them, seizing their pikes or hatchets, made signs how they would fight their enemies. A ship's lantern was burning in each hut.

In the women's huts the scene was still more interesting. The little children ran up to Nat with a new-born confidence in white men. Some of the women brought up babies to show him, and endeavoured to make him understand that these would soon have died had it not been for the sailors. The windows and doors stood open, and the evening breeze cleared the huts of the effluvia always present where a number of negroes congregate together. The sight of the poor creatures enraged Nat still more against the slavers, and made him long for them to begin their attack.

"It is quite pleasant to see them," he said as he joined Mr. Playford. "They are wonderfully changed in this short time. One would hardly have thought it possible. What will become of them?"

"I expect we shall take them to Jamaica, and that there they will be let out as free labourers to the planters. You see there is no law against the slave-trade, though public opinion is so strong on the subject at home that I have no doubt such a law will be passed before long. So, of course, we have not captured the slaves because of their being slaves, but simply as we should capture or destroy other property belonging to an enemy. Then, too, many of the slavers act as pirates if they get the chance, and there can be little doubt that a considerable quantity of the goods we found are the proceeds of piracy. Besides, you must remember that they fired at us before we fired at them. So we have plenty of good reasons for releasing these poor beggars. You see these seas swarm with scoundrels of all kinds, and it is quite safe to assume that all ships that cannot show that they are peaceful traders are engaged in nefarious business of some kind or other."

## CHAPTER IV

### A SHARP FIGHT

Mr. Playford and Nat were still talking when a sailor came up to him with one of the negroes.

"What is it, Tomkins?" the lieutenant asked.

"Well, sir, this 'ere black seems to hear something; he keeps pointing up into the wood and whispering something in his own lingo and looking very excited, so I thought I had better bring him here to you."

"Quite right, Tomkins; no doubt he does hear something, their ears are a good deal better than ours are. I will go up with you."

Accompanied by Nat, Mr. Playford went up on to the bank of earth that had been thrown up against the palisade, and found that the negroes there were all in a state of excitement, pointing in various directions and shaking their pikes angrily.

"They are coming, there is no doubt of that," he said. "I should say, by the motions of the blacks, that they are scattered through the wood. Well, we are ready for them. You had better get your slow matches alight, my lads; don't take the covers off the vents until the last moment, the dew is heavy."

They were joined now by Lieutenant Boldero. "I think I can hear them," he said.

"Yes. I should not have noticed if it had not been for the blacks, but there is certainly a confused noise in the air."

Listening attentively, they could hear a low rustling sound, with sometimes a faint crack as of a breaking stick.

"As soon as we think that they have got to the edge of the trees we will throw a fireball out in that direction, and then let them have it. We must keep them from getting closer if we can; when they once get near the foot of the palisade we shall not be able to depress our guns enough to fire upon them."

In a short time there was no question that a large number of men were making their way down through the wood. The blacks were now brought out from the houses and ranged along at the foot of the bank, where they were ordered to stay for the present, as were they to man the line they would be exposed to the assailants' bullets, while powerless to do any service until the latter began to attempt to scale the stockade.

"They must be gathering at the edge of the trees now," the lieutenant said at last. "Now, Tomkins, light that fireball and heave it over."

The ball, which was formed of old junk, was about the size of a man's head. The material had been smeared with tar mixed with sulphur, and Tomkins held in his hand the lanyard attached to it. He applied a slow match to it, and it broke into a blaze at once. Swinging it round his head, he hurled it far in front of him. By its light as it fell a crowd of figures could be seen gathered along the edge of the forest. A fierce yell broke from them, and loud shouts were raised by the leaders ordering them to charge, but before they could get into motion four guns poured a storm of grape among them, followed directly afterwards by the contents of four others. An appalling din of yells and shrieks was heard, but without an instant's hesitation a score of figures in European dress darted forward, followed by a mass of blacks, behind whom came another thirty or forty Europeans or mulattoes driving the negroes before them.

"Pick off the whites!" Lieutenant Boldero shouted to the marines, and a dropping fire of musketry was at once opened.

The distance, however, from the edge of the trees to the palisades was but some fifty yards; the light was dim and uncertain, and in a minute from the first shot being fired the assailants were swarming along the foot of the palisade. There was no hesitation, and it was evident that the men who

led the attack had made every preparation. A number of the assailants carried ladders; these were placed against the wall, and the whites and mulattoes swarmed up, closely followed by the negroes. So sudden and unexpected was this assault that in several places they obtained a footing inside the palisades, but with a wild yell the slaves at once rushed up the bank and fell upon them. At the same moment the boom of the schooner's guns told that they had made out parties of the enemy advancing against the flanks of the works.

The arrival of the slaves soon changed the position. The assailants were cut down, run through, or forced to leap down over the stockade that they had just crossed. In spite of the shouts of the lieutenant, the slaves, thirsting for vengeance, leapt down after them, and fell with such fury upon the assailants that these, seized with a panic, fled. At the edge of the trees, however, the efforts of the whites checked the flight. Guns and pistols were discharged for the first time, and a fierce fight presently raged.

"We must go down and lend them a hand," the lieutenant said. "Keep your men here, Mr. Glover, to get the guns loaded again; I will take my blue-jackets and the marines. Light a port fire or two, else, in spite of their white head-gear, we shall be hurting our friends."

The sailors and marines soon scrambled down the ladders, and, led by their officers, rushed forward with loud cheers. Their arrival at once decided the fortune of the fray. Rushing through their black allies, they fell with sword and cutlass, musket and bayonet, upon the Europeans, whose pistols had given them a decided advantage over the slaves, but who could not stand the charge of the marines and seamen. These pursued them for some little distance, but when beyond the range of the lights of the stockade Lieutenant Playford halted them. The slaves, however, continued the pursuit for some time, and then they, too, returned, having overtaken and killed many of their flying enemies.

"There is nothing more to be done till daylight," Mr. Playford said. "Indeed, I do not think that we shall hear any more of these fellows, who, to do them justice, fought well. Our guns must have done a good deal of execution, though they would have done much more had they not been so close; the bullets had hardly begun to scatter. However, we shall see in the morning. It is lucky that we armed the slaves, or it would have gone very hard with us. You see, we had half our men at the guns, and the others were too thinly scattered along the line to be able to defend it against so determined an attack. I expect they never calculated on the slaves being armed, and thought that they had only forty or fifty men to deal with. After the lesson that they have had I don't think they will molest us again, unless there are any troops in the neighbourhood that they can bring up."

The palisades were recrossed and sentries set; grog was served out to the seamen and marines; the slaves were mad with delight, and danced and sang songs of triumph for some time. As soon, however, as the lieutenant motioned them to return to their huts they did so at once. Many of them were wounded more or less severely, but they seemed to think nothing of this, being too much pleased with the vengeance they had taken to care aught for the pain. Nat prepared to return to the schooner with his men, none of whom were, however, seriously hurt, as they had been held in reserve. Altogether, three sailors and a marine had been killed and six severely wounded.

"Are you going on board, Mr. Playford?"

"No; I shall stay ashore till morning. I do not think that there is the remotest chance of the attack being renewed; however, it is clearly my duty to stay here."

As soon as it was daylight Nat went on shore again, and with ten of his own men, ten marines, and a hundred of the slaves, went over the ground to collect the wounded, and learn the loss of the assailants. All the wounded sailors had been carried into the fort when the fight ceased. Six Spaniards and nine mulattoes lay dead either on the earthen rampart or at the foot of the palisade. All of them were pierced in several places by pikes, or mutilated with blows of axes. Round them lay some twenty plantation negroes, and thirty others had fallen at the edge of the wood, shattered by the discharges of the cannon or killed in the hand-to-hand conflict; among them were twelve of the released slaves. Not a single white or mulatto was found alive.

The party pursued their way for a quarter of a mile into the wood. Here and there were scattered the bodies of the assailants who had been overtaken by their pursuers. The latter had done their work thoroughly, for not a single man was found to be breathing. When they came to a point beyond which the slaves by signs apprised them that they had not gone, they returned, collecting and carrying down the bodies of the dead as they went. They found on their return that two trenches, four feet deep and thirty feet long, had already been dug, at the edge of the forest and as far from the camp as possible. In one of these the bodies of the Spaniards and mulattoes were laid, and in the other that of the negroes. The earth was then filled in.

"It has been an unpleasant job, but a necessary one," Lieutenant Playford said, when he knew that the work was done, and the whole party re-entered the fort. "In a climate like this the place would have been uninhabitable in a couple of days if we had not buried them all."

In the afternoon two fresh graves were made, and the fallen sailors were reverently laid to rest in one, the dead slaves in the other. Water was brought up in buckets by the negroes from the edge of the creek, and all signs of the conflict on the rampart and at the foot of the palisade either washed away or covered with earth. Then matters resumed their former aspect.

Early the next morning the look-out on the cliff ran down and reported that a large brigantine was just entering the inlet. Mr. Playford shouted the news to Nat.

"I will send off the marines to you," he said. "I will remain here with the blue-jackets."

The Spanish flag was at once run up to the peak. In two or three minutes the boat with the marines came alongside. They and the greater part of the sailors at once lay down on the deck, while the few who remained on foot took off their straw hats and white jumpers, tied handkerchiefs round their heads, and gave themselves as unseamanlike an appearance as possible. Ten minutes later the brigantine appeared round the point; there was scarce a breath of wind, and she had two boats towing her. A flag hung from her mast-head, and as Nat turned his glass upon it he exclaimed to Boldero, who, having removed his coat and cap, was standing by his side:

"It is the black flag; the fellow must be pretty sure of his welcome or he would never venture to haul it up."

In the meantime the guns ashore had been slued round, and were now pointed on a spot somewhat ahead of the schooner. She came slowly along until within some four or five lengths of the latter, then there was a sudden shout on board, followed by a tremendous hubbub. It was clear that the line of palisades surrounding the huts had been noticed and the guns seen.

The brigantine was crowded with men. She carried twelve guns in her ports, and a long swivel eighteen-pounder in her bow. There was now no longer any motive for concealment, the marines and seamen leapt to their feet with a cheer, and a moment later the schooner's two foremost guns, which would alone bear on the boats, spoke out, while almost at the same moment two of those on the rampart sent a shower of grape into them. Both boats sank immediately, those of the crews who were uninjured swimming to the brigantine. Contradictory orders were shouted on board the pirate. One by one her guns on the port side answered those on the ramparts.

"Get ready, my lads!" Nat shouted, "she will be alongside directly."

The impetus of the schooner's way was indeed sufficient to take her slowly but surely forward, and the pirate slightly changed his course so as to bring her outside the schooner. Playford saw what his object was, and the remaining guns poured their charges of grape across the deck of the brigantine, committing terrible havoc. Before they could be loaded again she was alongside the schooner, and so covered by her from the fire of the guns on shore. As the vessels came abreast of each other at a distance of two or three feet only, Nat and the young marine officer leapt on to the pirate's deck followed by their men. The resistance of the pirates was desperate. Although they had suffered much loss from the fire of the guns, they were still numerically stronger than their assailants, and, fighting as they did with the desperation of despair, they not only held their ground, but pushed their assailants back towards the bulwark.

For three or four minutes the fight continued without any marked advantage to either party; the pistols of the seamen and pirates and the muskets of the marines were empty, and they were fighting hand to hand. Then slowly the advantage turned against the pirates, but the issue was still undecided when there was a loud cheer, and Mr. Playford with fifteen sailors leapt on the deck of the pirate from the other side, the approach of the boat having been unnoticed in the heat of the fray. The pirates now broke; their captain had fallen, and, outnumbered and hopeless, some threw down their arms, while others jumped overboard. Those who surrendered were at once bound and battened down in the hold of the schooner, some eight or ten only gained the opposite shore and took to the woods. The victory had not been a bloodless one. Five of the frigate's crew had been killed, and there were few among Nat's command who were not more or less severely wounded.

"It was a sharp fight, Mr. Glover," Mr. Playford said.

"It was indeed, sir. At one time they fairly drove us back, but I think that we should have beaten them even if you had not brought help to us."

"I am sure you would," the lieutenant said warmly. "I could see as I boarded that although the men in front were fighting hard, those in the rear were hanging back as if they had had enough of it. Still, you might have lost more men than you did before you finished with them if we had not turned up. You see, fighting with pirates is quite a different thing from fighting with any other opponents. These fellows know well enough that there is no mercy for them, and that they have nothing before them but to fight until they die, or to be tried and hanged. The veriest coward would fight till the last with such an alternative as that before him. I would rather fight a hundred and fifty French or Spanish seamen than a hundred pirates. She is a fine roomy craft that we have taken, and I think we shall now be able to carry off all these blacks. No doubt it will be a close pack for them, but for a short voyage that will not matter. Now let us see to our wounded. After that is done we can get off the hatches and have a look round below. Of course she may have come in here for water, but it is likely that she has at least some booty in her hold."

This proved to be the case. She was half full of goods of a more or less valuable kind, and these, by the marks on the bales and boxes, had evidently formed part of the cargoes of three ships. Two days later the *Orpheus* was seen returning along the coast, and Nat was at once sent off by the lieutenant with his written report of what had taken place since she had sailed. The gig reached the side of the frigate just as the anchor was let go.

"I see your right arm is in a sling, Mr. Glover," the captain said as he handed him the report, "so I suppose that you have had some fighting."

"Yes, sir, we have had some pretty sharp fighting."

"What is your wound?"

"Only a chop with a cutlass, sir."

"Oh, you came to hand-to-hand work, did you?"

Nat gave no answer, for the captain had opened the report and was now running his eye down it.

"Very satisfactory," he said, as he handed it to the first lieutenant. "An attacking force handsomely repulsed and a pirate captured. Very good work indeed, very good. I see Mr. Boldero was wounded, Mr. Glover."

"Yes, sir, he was hit on the head with a pistol-shot. Fortunately the ball glanced off the skull. He was stunned for a time, but is now nearly himself again."

"Here is some work for you, Dr. Bemish," the captain said. "Mr. Playford reports that ten of the cases are serious. I am going ashore in my gig at once, and will take you with me. You had better send the cutter at once, Mr. Hill, to bring off the wounded. You may as well return in your own boat, Mr. Glover, Mr. Curtis can go in charge of the cutter. Mr. Needham can go with me."

Nat at once returned to his boat. He was overtaken by the captain's gig when half-way up the inlet. He rowed to the schooner, while the gig made straight for the landing-place where the lieutenant was standing.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Playford," the captain said as he stepped ashore. "You seem to have had a pretty busy time of it since we have been away. I certainly did not think they would attempt to attack you when you had those guns in position, and I did not reckon on the pirate. She is a fine brigantine; the schooner looks quite small beside her."

"Yes, sir, she is over three hundred tons. Her broadside guns are all twelve-pounders, and she carries an eighteen-pounder as a swivel. She had a crew of seventy men, of whom only eight or ten got ashore, the rest were all accounted for except twelve, who are in irons below. The credit of capturing her, sir, really belongs to Mr. Glover, for although I went off to his assistance he would have taken her without my aid, though the pirates were still fighting strongly."

"Well, it has been a very successful business altogether, Mr. Playford. The capture of the brigantine is specially fortunate, as I have failed to come across any native craft as I had hoped to do, but with this extra accommodation we shall be able to manage to carry off all the slaves. I see by your account that Mr. Glover had the marines as well as his own twenty men."

"Yes, sir, I sent Lieutenant Boldero and fourteen marines on board; he had lost six either killed or seriously wounded in the attack here. I own that I had hardly calculated upon the brigantine getting alongside the schooner. I thought that when we had smashed up her boats, which I made certain we should do, she would be so completely at our mercy that, being becalmed, she would haul down her flag; but she had sufficient way on her to take her alongside the schooner, and her captain put her there so cleverly that I could not fire at her except through the schooner. I saw at once that the whole position was changed, for if he had captured the schooner he might have put all his men into the boats and made a dash for shore; and as I had so few men fit for work it would have been awkward, though with the aid of the blacks I have no doubt I should have driven them off."

"Then I suppose your discharge of grape did not do him very much harm?"

"Not so much as it ought to have done, sir. You see the first two guns we fired destroyed his boats. The other guns were all too weakly handled to be trained on the pirate as he forged ahead, and as far as I could see not one of them did any serious execution among his crew. Yesterday I told off four negroes to each gun, and kept them at work all day learning how to train them under the direction of the sailors. If I had thought of that before we should have swept his decks with such effect that when she got alongside the schooner Mr. Glover's party would have had easy work of it."

"You could hardly think of everything, Mr. Playford, and you certainly did right in sending the marines off to the schooner directly you had news that this brigantine was entering the inlet. No doubt if you had wished to sink her it would have been better to have kept them on shore to help work the guns, but as she is a valuable prize, and we wanted her badly to help carry away the slaves, you were quite right not to try to damage her. You say she is half full of plunder?"

"Yes, sir, and there were nearly eight hundred pounds in money and thirty-four watches and some jewellery found in the captain's cabin."

"She is a valuable capture, and I should think the admiral would buy her into the service. She is just the sort of craft that we want. The schooner would be too small to tackle one of these heavily-armed pirates with their crowds of men. So your slaves fought well?"

"That they did, sir. If it had been daylight I doubt whether any of the whites who led the attack would have escaped. Of course they had no particular animosity against the negroes, but I believe that they would have followed the whites and mulattoes half across the island."

"Well, do you think that the two craft will carry all the slaves?"

"Hardly, sir; the schooner can stow a hundred and fifty. Of course it will be close work, but there will be room for that number to lie down, and with the hatches both open they will be all right. By rearranging the cargo a bit, two hundred could sleep in the hold of the brigantine. That would still leave rather over one hundred and fifty."

"Well, we must give up part of the hold of the frigate to them," the captain said, "there is no help for it. There are about that number of women and children, are there not?"

"Yes, sir."

"They had better go off in the frigate, then. Of course, the prisoners will be sent off too – I will pay a visit to the brigantine, and then go off myself, and will send the boats in as soon as I get there. You may as well be getting the men on board at once. As soon as they are all off, you will, of course, set fire to all the sheds here, but you may as well send off a boat-load of stores suitable for them to the frigate, and will, of course, victual these two craft. I shall send you another forty men to fill up the vacancies that have been caused, and to furnish a crew for the brigantine, of which, of course, you will take the command. You and the schooner will keep in close company. The marines will return to the ship. Mr. Needham will be your second on the brigantine."

"How about the guns, sir? They are all old pieces, and scarcely worth carrying away."

"Yes, but I won't leave them here to be used for defending this place again. You had better take them off their carriages, spike them, get them into the boats, and heave them overboard, well out in deep water. Do you think that you will be able to get everything done before dark, Mr. Playford?"

"Yes, sir, it is only nine o'clock now, and if you will send a strong working party, in addition to those who will be taking the slaves on board, to help with the stores and guns, I have no doubt that I shall be able to get the work done well before sunset."

"Very well. Mr. Hill will come on shore as soon as I return to the frigate."

The work went on without ceasing all day, and the pinnace, which had been recovered and repaired before the frigate sailed, and the launch, went backwards and forwards to the frigate with the women, children, and stores, while the boats of the brigantine and schooner carried the men to those craft, as soon as the stores for the voyage, and the bales of cotton and other goods that would be useful, had been taken off. When the two large boats had finished their work they were employed in carrying out the guns, which had, before the slaves embarked, been brought down by them to the edge of the water. By three o'clock all was finished, and the last boat-load of the sailors rowed out to the prizes, after having set fire to all the huts. These were soon in a blaze, to the delight of the negroes, who danced and shouted for joy. Half of these were sent below at once, as they crowded the decks to such an extent as to render it impossible for the sailors to work.

Those who remained were ranged in rows by the bulwarks from end to end of the craft; then the anchors were got up, and the sails dropped and sheeted home. The wind was very light, but was sufficient to give steerage-way, and with the British ensign flying at the peak the two vessels sailed out of the inlet and joined the frigate, which began to make sail as soon as they were seen issuing from the narrow mouth. Glad indeed were all on board the three vessels when, after a voyage unmarked by any adventure, they entered Port Royal, for although the negroes, feeling confident that they were in good hands, had been docile and obedient, they were still terribly in the way.

Though all had been made to take a bath every morning, the odour in the crowded prizes was almost overpoweringly strong. On arrival, the negroes were landed and lodged in some large government storehouses near the fort. Each was presented with ten yards of cloth on leaving for the shore, and they were, before being housed, permitted to sort themselves, so that families and friends might be together. Interpreters explained to them that it would be impossible to send them back to their friends in Africa, but that they would be apportioned out among the plantations of the island. The wages they were to receive were explained to them, and they were told that a government official would visit each plantation in turn, and would listen to any complaints that might be made as to their food and treatment, and at the end of three years all who wished it could either change masters or take up a piece of land, build a hut, and cultivate it on their own account.

The poor creatures were well satisfied with this. They were overjoyed at being united to their relations and friends, and to know that they would still be together; and were assured that they would be well cared for, and in time be as much their own masters as if at their villages in Africa. The schooner was sold; the brigantine was, as the captain had expected, bought into the service; Mr. Playford was offered and accepted the command of her. Mr. Normandy took his place as second

lieutenant of the *Orpheus*, and Mr. Marston received his promotion and the post of third officer. As the *Cerf*— which was the name of the brigantine — was to be considered as a tender of the frigate, those on board her were still borne on her books. Curtis and Glover were appointed to her, with a petty officer and forty men.

The pirates were tried and executed, with the exception of one, who was a mere lad. He had, he asserted, been forced to join the pirates — being spared by them when the rest of his comrades had been murdered, as they had lost their cook's mate, and required someone to fill his place. This, however, would not have saved his life had he not promised to lead his new captors to the chief rendezvous of the pirates, which had so long eluded the search that had been made for it. He acknowledged, however, that he was not acquainted with its exact position. He had sailed in and out four or five times, and had only a general idea of its position, but asserted that he should certainly know the island if he saw it. A fortnight after reaching Port Royal, the frigate and brigantine sailed in company.

The indications given by the boy pointed to an island lying a short distance off the northern coast of Venezuela.

There were originally, he said, four vessels working together, three brigantines and a large schooner, one of which had arrived from France only a short time before the *Cerf* sailed on her last voyage. The entrance to the pirates' stronghold was on the south side of the island, and was, he said, so well concealed that vessels might sail past the place a thousand times without noticing it. There were two batteries at the water's edge, inside the entrance, each mounting twelve eighteen-pounder guns that had been taken from prizes. The channel here was not more than fifty yards across. A very heavy boom was at all times swung across it just above the batteries, and this was opened only when one of the craft entered or left.

There was, however, he said, a spot on the outer side of the island where a landing could be effected, at a little ravine that ran down to the shore. This was thickly wooded, and some large trees growing at its mouth almost hid it from passing vessels. At other points the shore was steep, but there was so much vegetation on every ledge where trees or bushes could obtain a foothold, that from the sea it would seem that the cliffs were not too steep to scale.

The prisoner had been placed on board the *Cerf*, which, as soon as she was fairly at sea, was altered as far as possible in appearance by a white band with ports painted along her sides; a false stem of an entirely different shape from her own was fastened to her, her light upper spars sent down and replaced by stumpy ones, and other changes made that would help to alter her appearance.

Were she recognized by the pirates as she sailed past their island it would at once be suspected that one of the men recently captured had revealed the rendezvous, and that she was cruising near it to obtain an exact idea of the best mode of attack before other craft came up to assist her. They had no doubt that the pirates had already received news of the surprise and capture of the brigantine. Some of the men who escaped would doubtless have made for the nearest port, and hired a negro craft to take them to their own island, which they would have reached before the *Orpheus* arrived at Port Royal with her prizes. The pirates would therefore be on their guard, and would either have deserted their head-quarters altogether or have added to their defences. The sight of their late consort would confirm their fears that their whereabouts had become known, and it was therefore of importance that her identity should not be suspected.

Changed as she now was, she might be taken for a man-of-war brigantine. Her height out of water had been increased by four feet by painted canvas fastened to battens. She had ten ports painted on each side, and looked a very different craft from the smart brigantine that had sailed away from the island. It had at first been suggested by Mr. Playford that she should be disguised so as to look like a trader, but Captain Crosbie had decided against this.

"There are," he said, "three of these pirates, and even two of them might together be more than a match for you. By all accounts they are each of them as strong as you are in point of armament,

and would carry at least twice as many men as you have. Even if you beat them off it could only be at a very great cost of life, and I certainly should not like you to undertake such an enterprise unless you had at least double the strength of men, which I could not spare you. By going in the guise of a vessel of war they would not care to meddle with you. They would know that there would be no chance of booty and a certainty of hard fighting, and of getting their own craft badly knocked about, so that it will be in all respects best to avoid a fight. They may in that case not connect you with us at all, but take you to be some freshly-arrived craft. You had best hoist the Stars and Stripes as you pass along the coast."

When the changes were all effected the ships parted company. The brigantine was to sail east until within a short distance of Grenada, then to cruise westward along the coast of the mainland; thus going, there would be less suspicion on the part of those who saw her that she was coming from Jamaica. A rendezvous was appointed at the island of Oruba, lying off the mouth of the Gulf of Venezuela.

Their prisoner was French, and he was very closely questioned by Lieutenant Playford, who spoke that language well. He said that they always sailed north to begin with, then sometimes they kept east, and certainly he heard the names of Guadeloupe and St. Lucia. At other times, after sailing north they steered north-west, and came to a great island, which he had no doubt was San Domingo. It was not in this craft that he sailed, he was only transferred to her with some of the others for that cruise only. After they had once made either the western islands or San Domingo, they cruised about in all directions.

"The great point is," Mr. Playford said to the midshipmen after a long talk with the prisoner, "that at starting they generally hung about these islands, Guadeloupe, St. Lucia, and so on, for some time, and it was considered their best cruising ground, though also the most dangerous one, as we have always some cruisers in those waters. That would certainly place the island somewhere off the north coast of Caracas. He declared that the first day out they generally passed the western point of an island of considerable size with some high hills. The only island that answers to that account is, as you see in the chart, Margarita. Therefore I feel convinced that the pirate hold is in one of these groups, off Caracas, either Chimana, Borrshcha, or these two islets called Piritu Islands. Altogether, you see, there are over a dozen of these islands scattered along near the mainland.

"It is quite out of the general course of trade, as nothing would go into that bay except a craft bound for San Diego, or this place marked Barcelona, lying a short distance up the river. They would take care not to molest any of the little traders frequenting these ports, and might lie in an inlet in one of these islands for years without their being ever suspected, unless perhaps by some of the native fishermen, who probably supply them with fish and fruit from the mainland. Anyhow, I don't suppose a British cruiser is seen along that coast once a year."

## CHAPTER V

### A PIRATE HOLD

A fortnight later the *Cerf* passed along under easy sail between the island of Margarita and the mainland. She was now getting very close to the spot where, if the prisoner was right, the pirates' hold lay. The Stars and Stripes was hanging from the peak, and with her high bulwarks and ten ports on each side no one would have suspected that she was not, as she seemed, an American man-of-war, heavily armed. Passing close to another island, they headed more south into the bay as they neared Caracas. Every foot of the islands was closely scanned. Five miles farther, they came abreast of the Chimana isles, and pointing to one of these that lay nearer the shore than the others, the prisoner exclaimed that he was certain that that was the island.

"I am sure of it," he exclaimed, "both from the look of the island itself, and from that high range of mountains on the mainland to the south-east."

"You are quite sure?"

"Certain, captain; there are the large trees I spoke of growing down close to the water. It is behind them that there is a little ravine by which one can climb up."

No alteration was made in the ship's course, but she continued her way until sunset, when she dropped anchor off the mouth of the river La Pasqua, some twenty miles west of the islands.

As soon as it was dark Curtis was sent off in a gig manned by six rowers. The oars were muffled; the orders were to row round the island within an oar's length of the shore, and to find the entrance to the channel, which, if the prisoner was right as to the place, should be on the side facing the mainland. Pierre, the French lad, was taken with them. It was a long row to the island, but the gig was a fast one, and, at three o'clock in the morning, she returned with the news that Pierre's information had been correct. They had found the opening but had not entered it, as Mr. Playford had given strict orders on this point, thinking it probable that there would be a sharp look-out kept in the batteries, especially as the supposed cruiser would certainly have been closely watched as she passed.

An hour later the anchor was got up and the *Cerf* sailed for Oruba, off which she arrived three days later. There were no signs of the frigate, and indeed the *Cerf* had arrived at the rendezvous before the time fixed. At daybreak on the third morning the topsails of the *Orpheus* were made out from the mast-head, and four hours later she and the *Cerf* met, and Mr. Playford went on board the frigate to report.

"This is good news indeed," the captain said when he heard that the haunt of the pirates had been discovered. "Of course you have taken the exact position of the island, for we must, if possible, take them by surprise?"

"Yes, sir; it lies as nearly as possible in 64° 30' west longitude and 10° 22' north latitude."

"We will lay our course east, Mr. Playford, for, of course, you will keep company with us. The water is deep all along the coast, and there seems to be from thirty to thirty-eight fathoms to within a mile or two of the coast. I shall lay my course outside the Windward Islands as far as Blanquilla, thence an almost due south course will take us clear of the western point of Margarita and down to this island. We will discuss our plan of attack later on."

On the morning of the third day after leaving Oruba the island of Blanquilla was sighted. The frigate made the signal for Mr. Playford to go on board, and on entering the captain's cabin he found him and Mr. Hill examining the chart.

"You see, Mr. Playford, we are now as nearly as possible a hundred miles north of the island; with this wind we should pass the point of Margarita at about four o'clock in the afternoon; if it freshens we will take in sail, I want to be off the island say three or four hours before daybreak. You will send that French lad on board when you go back; as soon as we anchor he will go in the gig with

Mr. Hill to reconnoitre and make sure that there is no mistake about the place. When he finds that it is all right he will come back. The boats will be in the water, and the men on board in readiness, and will at once start, so that the landing may, if possible, be effected just at daybreak at this ravine on the north of the island. At the same hour you will sail in and take up your place opposite the mouth of the harbour, and fight anything that tries to come out.

"It is quite possible that as soon as our party attack the place on the land side any craft there may be there will cut their cables and try to make off. On no account try to enter; the batteries would blow you out of the water. You will start as soon as the boats leave the ship, and will therefore have light enough for you to go in and to avoid making any mistake, for you see there are half a dozen islands lying close together. There is no objection to their seeing you, and indeed I should be rather glad if they do, for in that case they are the less likely to discover the landing-party, and though they must see the frigate they will think that she is only lying there to cut them off if they try to escape. They will be manning their batteries and getting everything ready to give you a warm reception, and I hope that we shall drop upon them as if out of the clouds.

"Mr. Hill will command the landing-party, which will consist of a hundred and fifty seamen and the thirty marines, which, with the advantage of surprise, ought to be sufficient. As you report that the island is less than a mile long and not much more than half a mile across, the landing-party will soon be at work. After they have landed, Mr. Hill will divide them into two parties, and will endeavour to make his way round the inlet, keeping up among the trees, and then rush down upon the batteries. When he has captured these he will fire three guns as a signal to you. You will have your boats in readiness, and will at once tow the schooner in, and, on reaching the boom, bring her broadside to bear upon any craft there, and generally aid the landing-party with your guns. If, by good luck, the three craft we have been so long looking for are all there you will have a strong force to tackle; you may certainly take it that their crews will together mount up to three hundred men, and it is likely that there may be a hundred others who form what we may call the garrison of the place when they are away."

"Very well, sir."

The two vessels headed south under easy canvas, passed the point of Margarita at the hour that had been arranged, and then taking in still more sail proceeded slowly on until, about one o'clock in the morning, the island could be made out with the night-glasses. Then both were laid to, Captain Crosbie having forbidden anchoring, in the first place owing to the great depth of water, and in the next because, although the island was three miles away, the chain-cable running out might be heard at night if the pirates had anyone on watch on the hill. Nat, whose watch it was, saw the gig shoot away from the side of the frigate. An hour later and there was a bustle and stir on board the *Orpheus*, and all her boats were lowered. At five bells the crew began to take their places in them, and soon afterwards the gig returned. The watch below were called up and sail was made, and at half-past three the boats started, and the *Cerf* was headed towards the land. Dawn was just breaking when they reached the island. All was still. It had been arranged that, unless discovered, the attack on the batteries was not to be made until five o'clock, and just at that hour the *Cerf* arrived off the narrow entrance to the port. Half an hour before, a musket had been discharged on the hill above them, and it was clear that their coming had been observed; but as no sound of conflict could be heard inland there was every reason to suppose that the pirates had no suspicion of a landing having been effected on the other side.

"That is what I call being punctual," Nat said to Curtis as two bells rang out just as they opened the passage.

A light kedge anchor was dropped, and as this was done a patter of musketry broke out from the hill above them. Their action showed that the arrival of the brigantine was no matter of chance, but that she was there expressly with the intention of attacking the pirates' stronghold, and those who had been watching her, therefore, saw that any further attempt at concealment was useless. In the night the canvas band had been taken down, as there was no longer any reason for concealing the

identity of the brigantine. The musketry fire only lasted for a minute, for suddenly a roar of battle broke out within a hundred yards of the mouth of the entrance. The sailors burst into a loud cheer. It was evident that the landing-party had met with complete success so far, and had approached the batteries unobserved, and that a hand-to-hand fight was going on.

Above the cracking of pistols the cheers of the seamen could be plainly heard, but in two or three minutes the uproar died away, and then three guns were fired at short intervals. The boats were already in the water, the kedge lifted, and the crews bending forward in readiness for the signal.

"Take her in, lads!" the lieutenant shouted, and the schooner's head at once began to turn towards the inlet.

A moment later two broadsides were fired.

"There are two of their craft in there!" Curtis exclaimed. "Now our fellows have carried the batteries they have opened fire on them."

As he spoke there was another broadside, which was answered by a hurrah from all on deck. It was clear that they had had the good luck to catch all the pirates at once. Three minutes' rowing and the boom was in sight. Mr. Playford called to one of the boats to take a rope from the stern to the battery on the right-hand side, and ordered the others to cease rowing.

"We have way enough on her!" he shouted. "As soon as you get near the boom take her head round to port, and carry the rope to shore. You can fasten it to the chain at the end of the boom."

As he gave the order a gun spoke out from the battery on the right, followed almost immediately by one on the left.

"They are slueing the guns round!" Nat exclaimed. "We shall be having our share of the fun in another minute or two."

They could now obtain a view into the piece of water inside the passage. It was nearly circular, and some three hundred yards across. Two brigantines and a schooner were lying in line, within fifty yards of the opposite shore. A large range of storehouses stood by the water's edge, while the hillsides were dotted with huts, and dwelling-places of larger size. By the time that the brigantine was got into position by the side of the boom the pirates had loaded again, and several shots struck her.

Her guns were already loaded, and those on board poured a broadside into the brigantine at the end of the line. The sailors in the battery were working with might and main to slue all the guns round to bear upon the pirates. On the hillsides above them a scattered fire of musketry was being kept up, and Mr. Hill hailed the schooner.

"Mr. Playford, will you land a party of fifteen men on each side to clear the hills of those rascals? I don't think there are many of them, but they are doing us a good deal of damage, for they can hardly miss us closely packed as we are here."

"Ay, ay, sir. You hear the orders, gentlemen. Mr. Curtis, you land with fifteen men on the starboard side, and do you, Mr. Glover, take the party that lands to port. Clear the scoundrels out – give no quarter!"

The boats had just returned. The two midshipmen leapt into them, and a few strokes took them ashore.

"Up the hill, lads!" Nat shouted. "Don't fire until you are at close quarters. Give them one volley if they are together, then sling your guns, and go at them with the cutlass!"

There was but little fighting, however, for there were only ten or twelve pirates on either side, as their main force was distributed between the batteries and the ships. They were therefore very easily driven off, five or six of them being killed and the rest flying with all speed towards their village, where those who had escaped from the batteries were already going off in boats to the ships. The two midshipmen therefore returned to the schooner.

"Don't come on board!" Mr. Playford shouted. "See if you can free one end of the boom. If so we will go in and engage one of those craft."

It was found that the boom was fastened at Nat's side, and the chain was soon unwound from the stump of a large tree. Then the two boats together got hold of the end of the boom and swung it round so that the schooner could pass. The enemy kept up a heavy fire upon them while they were doing this, and just as the job was completed, Curtis's boat was smashed to pieces by a round shot. The breeze was very light, but it was in the right direction.

"Shall we tow, sir?" Nat called to his commander.

"Certainly not. Get your men on board at once."

The sails, which had been loosely furled, were dropped again, and the brigantine stole past the batteries, which saluted her with a rousing cheer, while the guns were worked with redoubled energy to keep down the fire of the pirates. The *Cerf* was swept with round shot and grape by the guns of the three piratical craft, but the distance to be traversed was so small, and the fire from the battery to which the pirates working their guns were exposed was so heavy, that the men fired wildly, and the *Cerf* suffered less than might have been expected while crossing the intervening two hundred yards of water. She was steered straight for the schooner, and as her bowsprit ran in between the pirate's masts the crew, who had been crouching forward, leapt down on to her deck, headed by their commander and the two midshipmen.

The pirates, although they had suffered heavily, were still in sufficient force to offer an efficient resistance, but their courage had been shaken by the suddenness of the attack. They had lain down to sleep with the assurance that the port was unknown and unsuspected, that the batteries that guarded it could sink any hostile ship that attempted to enter, and their dismay when these batteries were attacked and carried by an enemy who seemed to spring out of the earth, and their only retreat cut off, was overwhelming.

Already the heavy guns of the battery had done terrible execution. Two of the guns on that side had been dismantled, and a third of the crew killed; consequently, although a small portion of the number led by their captain fought desperately, and were killed to the last man, the majority leapt overboard at once and swam ashore. Leaving ten men in charge of the prize, the lieutenant called all the rest back on board the *Cerf*, which remained in the position in which she had run head on to the schooner, and she was now able to bring her broadsides into play upon the brigantines, the pieces forward raking them from stem to stern, while the batteries continued their terrible fire. In a few minutes the pirates began to take to the boats, which were lying by their sides just as they had come off from the shore. Once begun, the movement spread rapidly. The boats were soon crowded, and those who could not find places in them leapt overboard.

"Take the boat and a dozen men, Mr. Curtis, and haul down the black flag of the craft to starboard; and you, Mr. Glover, take one of the prize's boats and do the same to the other brigantine."

They turned to execute the order when all on board the *Cerf* were hurled to the deck – one of the brigantines had blown up with a tremendous explosion, that brought most of the huts on the hillside to the ground, carried away both masts of the *Cerf*, and drove fragments of wreckage high into the air, whence they fell partly in the pool, partly on shore. Fortunately for the *Cerf* only a few fragments of any size struck her deck, the pieces for the most part falling in a wider circle. Numbers of the pirates who had just landed from their boats were killed, and many more were injured by being hurled down on to the rocks, dazed and half-stunned. Those on board the *Cerf* who had escaped severe injury rose to their feet.

Not more than twenty-five did so. Lieutenant Playford lay dead, crushed under a mast; Curtis had been hurled against one of the guns and his brains dashed out; ten of the sailors had been killed either by the falling masts or by being dashed against the bulwarks; twelve had fallen under the enemy's fire as the *Cerf* crossed the pool; twelve others were hurt more or less either by the enemy's missiles or by the shock. It was three or four minutes before the silence that followed was broken. Then Mr. Hill hailed across the water:

"*Cerf* ahoy! have you suffered much?"

"Terribly," Nat shouted back; "Lieutenant Playford and Mr. Curtis are both killed. We have only twenty-five men in any way fit for service left."

"If you have got a boat that will swim send it ashore."

Nat looked over the side, the boat had been stove by a falling fragment; then he crossed to the prize, and found that one of the boats was uninjured. Four men were just getting into it, when Mr. Hill hailed again:

"Let them bring a rope with them, Mr. Glover; we will tow you over here."

The end of a hawser was put into the boat, and the men rowed with it to the battery.

"Mr. Glover!" the lieutenant again hailed.

"Yes, sir."

"I am sending the boat back again. I think that had they put a slow match in the magazine of the other brigantine it would have exploded before this. However, you had better remain where you are for a quarter of an hour, to be sure; then, before you move, board the brigantine and flood the magazine. Otherwise, as soon as you have left, some of these desperadoes might swim off to her and put a match there."

"Very well, sir, I will go at once if you like."

"No, there is no use running any unnecessary risk. You had better flood the schooner's magazine first."

"Ay, ay, sir."

Taking half a dozen hands with buckets, Nat went on board the prize and soon flooded the magazine; then he and those who were able to help did all they could for the wounded, several of whom, who had only been stunned, were presently on their legs again. When the quarter of an hour had passed he asked for volunteers. All the survivors stepped forward.

"Four men will be enough," he said. "Bring buckets with you."

It was not without a feeling of awe that Nat and the four sailors stepped on to the deck of the brigantine, for although he was convinced that had a match been lighted the explosion would have taken place long before, as it was now five-and-twenty minutes since the crew had deserted her, neither he nor the men had entirely recovered from the severe shock of the explosion. He led the way below; all was quiet; the door of the magazine was open, but there was no smell of burning powder, and they entered fearlessly.

"All right, lads; now as quick as you like with your buckets."

An abundance of water was thrown in; then, to make quite certain, Nat locked the door of the magazine, and put the key in his pocket. A cheer broke from the men in the battery as he and his companions again took their places in the boat and rowed to the *Cerf*. He was hailed again by Mr. Hill.

"I have changed my mind, Mr. Glover; now that I know there is no risk of another explosion, I think perhaps you had best remain where you are. We will give you a pull to get you free of the schooner, then you had better range the *Cerf* alongside of her; keep your guns and those of the brigantine both loaded with grape; send your boat ashore to fetch off the wounded."

"I have two boats now, sir; one of the brigantine's was left behind, and is uninjured."

"Then send them both ashore, the sooner we get the wounded off the better. I am going to move forward with all my men; we have spiked the guns here, and if they should come down into the batteries again you can clear them out. You will, of course, help us, if we meet with strong resistance, with your guns on the shore-side."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The two boats were sent ashore, and the wounded came off with Dr. Bemish. As soon as they all came on board Nat said:

"I will leave you with the wounded here, doctor, with four of my men to help you. We are so littered up that we could hardly work the guns, and as you see, three of them were dismantled by

the explosion; besides, the prize alongside would hamper us, therefore I will take the rest of the men on board the brigantine."

"I think that will be a very good plan, my lad," the doctor replied. "I quite agree with you, that with the spars and wreckage on one side and the prize on the other, you are practically helpless."

The men were at once set to work bringing up powder cartridges from the magazine; grape and round-shot they would find on board the brigantine.

In ten minutes the guns of that craft were reloaded. The two bodies of men from the batteries had by this time reached the storehouses. Not a shot had been fired, but a minute later there was a loud word of command, followed by a fierce yell, and in a moment both parties were engaged, a heavy fire being opened upon them from every spot of vantage on the hillside in front of them.

"Now, my lads, give them a dose of grape!" Nat shouted. "I expect they are two to one to our fellows still. Train them carefully."

Gun after gun sent showers of grape among the hidden foe, who were for the most part lying behind the cactus hedges of the gardens that surrounded the huts. The three forward guns assisted Mr. Hill's party, while the others aided that commanded by Needham. Although but four men to a gun, the sailors worked so hard that the pieces were discharged as rapidly as if they had been manned by a full complement, and their effect was visible in the diminution of the enemy's fire, and by the line of smoke gradually mounting the hill, showing that the pirates were falling back, while the cheers of the sailors and marines as they pressed steadily upwards, rapidly plying their muskets, rose louder and louder. Near the upper edge of the cleared ground the pirates made a stand, but the fire of the guns proved too much for them, and they took to the forest. Presently a sailor ran down to the shore.

"The first lieutenant says, sir, will you please continue your fire into the forest. He is going to cut down all the hedges and fire the huts, so that they will have to pass over open ground if they attack again."

"Tell Mr. Hill I will do so," Nat shouted back.

It was not long after the fire had been turned in that direction before the puffs of smoke that darted out from the edge of the forest ceased altogether. The sailors could now be seen slashing away with their cutlasses at the lines of cactus hedge, while the huts that still stood were speedily in flames. Numbers of women and children now came down to the shore, where they were placed in charge of six of the marines and a non-commissioned officer. A quarter of an hour later, while Nat was watching what was going on on shore, one of the men touched him.

"Look, sir, they are going down to the batteries!"

The men were at once ordered across to the guns on the other side, and these opened with grape upon two bodies of pirates, each some seventy or eighty strong, who were rushing down to the batteries. The discharge of the six guns did terrible execution, but the survivors without pausing dashed down to the works. Cries of disappointment and rage broke out from them on finding the guns spiked, and before they could be reloaded they ran up the hill again, and were in shelter in the forest.

"I fancy that is about the end of it," Nat said to the petty officer standing by his side. "I don't think that above fifty of either party got safely away."

"Not more than that, sir. I expect it has taken the fight out of them."

"It was a hopeless attempt, for although, if the guns had been loaded, they might have sunk us, our fellows on shore would soon have been upon them again, and it would have come to the same thing."

"Yes, sir, the same thing to the pirates, but not the same thing to us."

"No, you are right there; those twenty-four guns loaded with ball would have sent us to the bottom in no time. You see, our men only used grape before, and aimed at the decks."

Mr. Hill now hailed from the shore again:

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