

Brereton Frederick Sadleir

**Under the Star-Spangled
Banner: A Tale of
the Spanish-American War**



Frederick Brereton

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F. S. Brereton

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CHAPTER I

THE MARCHANT FOUNDRY

The city of Birmingham was wrapped in a mantle of fog so dense that the inhabitants found it difficult to move about. The thick, soot-laden atmosphere covered everything, and only a few faintly glimmering lights showed that they really existed.

The clock in the church tower had just struck two, and yet the street lamps were ablaze.

The pedestrians moved with the utmost care. Trudging along the sappy pavements, their footsteps sounded hollow and unreal, and were heard long before they themselves put in an appearance.

One of the inhabitants, however, contrived to find his way with comparative ease, for he was such an old resident that his feet would not go astray, however absent-minded their owner happened to be. There was a certain air of authority about him; yet there was that about the stern, calm features that denoted a warm heart and a kindly disposition. But still, as if the fog was not in existence, he hurried on, turning from the main street to the lower part of the town.

Ordinarily he could never accomplish this walk without meeting many an acquaintance, for Mr. Thomas Marchant was a well-known man. He was one of the magnates of this busy town, a wealthy employer of labor, and it was to the work his foundries gave that many of the inhabitants owed their prosperity.

Mr. Marchant was troubled; for only a year ago he was one of the wealthiest men in the city. His foundries were working night and day, and even then could hardly keep pace with the orders.

"I've never known such a rush," he said to his manager when discussing the matter. "It gives me great satisfaction, for our men will benefit by the increased orders as well as ourselves."

That was a short year ago, and now there was a different tale to tell. True, the iron foundry was still in full swing, but cotton mills, which Mr. Marchant owned in addition, were losing money every day, and in those few months he had been ruined; and he knew that the world would know him and speak of him as a bankrupt, while his possessions would be seized upon by the creditors.

The Marchant iron-works were in full swing. As Mr. Marchant entered, a mass of sputtering iron was dragged by a powerful man, dressed in rough trousers and thin vest, and protected by an apron of leather. Another dark and perspiring figure came to his aid, and the weight was dropped onto a small trolley, on which it was run to the big steam hammer standing near at hand.

Mr. Marchant watched them a moment, and then walked to his office, in which a somewhat untidily dressed gentleman was sitting.

"Good-day, Mr. Tomkins," he said.

"Good-afternoon, sir," Mr. Tomkins, who was the manager of the foundry, responded. Then, in a doubtful manner, he said, "There have been some visitors to see you this morning, and I told them to come again. One was Steinkirk."

"Does Hal know? Has he been told?" Mr. Marchant asked abruptly.

"No one has liked to break the news to him yet, sir. We weren't certain, and we hoped that things would turn out all right. I suppose it's hopeless now, sir?"

"Absolutely!" Mr. Marchant replied. "I am irretrievably ruined. The mills are gone, and to obtain money when the times were bad, I had to mortgage these works. I have nothing left. But I

have seen to one matter; if trouble has come upon me, there is no reason why it should swamp all whom I employ. The creditor will carry on the work, and you and all the others will remain as at present. Poor Hal! He is the one who will suffer, more even than his father. He is a beggar!" He sank his face into his hands and groaned.

"It's not so bad as that, sir," said Mr. Tomkins. "Hal's got plenty of spirit, and if there's no money, why, he'll put his shoulder to the wheel. You should see how he works here. He's in the casting-shed, and to look at him any day you'd think he had his bread to earn."

"Which he has from this moment," Mr. Marchant exclaimed. "You do me good, Tomkins. When I was a lad I had nothing. I had literally to slave for years, and to deny myself many a long day. Then fortune came with a rush which almost overwhelmed me. It has gone almost more quickly, and I must learn to make the best of my troubles. As for Hal, I think you are right. Let us go across and see him."

They left the office and entered a shed in which a number of men were at work. In a corner one of them was ramming a plug of clay into the orifice of a furnace, and was replacing the lining of similar material which protected the trough down which the molten metal was destined to run. At the end of the trough was an enormous bucket, suspended from a crane, which traveled backwards and forwards overhead.

The remainder of the shed was occupied with castings, or rather, with molds in various stages of preparation. Here and there were artisans at work, and amongst them, kneeling on the sand which covered the floor, was a youth who might well be taken for the son of a foundry hand. He was between seventeen and eighteen years of age, and of more than medium height. Dressed in a pair of rough trousers and a flannel shirt, he was to the casual observer merely an ordinary employee. But there was a certain something about this young fellow that made him different from the others at work in the shed. There was a grace about his figure, while his features were more refined than those commonly met with amongst the working classes.

This was the son of the owner, and he was known to all at the foundry as Hal Marchant.

It was delicate work upon which he was engaged. With a special tool he was smoothing down the mold, carefully rounding off corners, building up a portion here which had broken down. Finally he sat up, and, surveying the work with an air of satisfaction, exclaimed:

"That's finished, and I think it'll do. Now I'll get the foreman to pass it, and then we'll see it cast. Hallo! The guv', as I live! Why, you made me jump. What do you think of that?"

"Very good, old boy," Mr. Marchant replied. "You are an adept at the trade. What says the foreman?"

"He knows what he's up to, he does," the latter remarked. "Another week or so of this work and he'll be fit to boss the shed."

"Ah, that's satisfactory," said Mr. Marchant. "But I've something to say to you, Hal, so come to the office."

He turned and walked from the shed, taking no notice of the friendly glances his workmen threw in his direction.

"What can be wrong with the guv'?" he asked, looking after Mr. Marchant, and then at the manager. "What is it, Tomkins? Tell me."

For a moment the manager of the works wavered, uncertain whether to tell the truth.

"After all, he's got to know, sooner or later," he murmured. "Something's wrong, Hal," he continued. "There's no use in beating about the bush any longer. My only surprise is that you haven't seen for yourself that things were completely upset. I suppose every workman here knows what is going on, and it seems strange that they haven't dropped you a hint. The fact is, the foundry is broken, and the owner has lost every penny he possessed. He's ruined, and the works go to a creditor."

"Ruined! Part with the works! Why, we are full of orders, and by all accounts are in the most thriving condition!"

"Just so, Hal, that's the bitter pill about this matter. The cotton mills up Preston way have broken. For two years they have been working at a dead loss. Your father mortgaged the mills, hoping to tide over bad times. But instead of improving they became even worse. Then the foundry had to go to raise the money. The folks who advanced the money have claimed it, and your father is unable to pay; so the long and short of it is that he no longer owns these works; and, to put it bluntly, he has scarcely a sixpence left, and both he and you must work for a living."

Hal attempted to stutter out some answer, but a big lump rose in his throat, making him almost choke. And yet, had it been possible to read his thoughts at this trying time, there would have been found nothing selfish about them, for the question as to what was to become of himself had not crossed his mind. No; only the deepest sympathy with his father was felt, for they were the very best of friends.

"I can scarcely believe all you tell me," Hal said at length. "What will father do? It is a terrible blow for him."

"It's bad, and there's no denying that," Mr. Tomkins replied. "But come along and hear what the gov' has to say."

Hal followed the manager to the office and seated himself at the desk beside which his father had taken a place. They looked at each other in the most painful silence. Then Hal stretched out his hand and took his father's.

"I'm sorry, dad," he said. "I've heard all now, and only wish that I could help you."

"There is no help; nothing can mend what has happened," answered Mr. Marchant, in despondent tones. "I have lost everything, and now that you know, I only wish to discuss what is to happen to you. What will you do for a living? For myself, I shall probably remain to conduct the business for the new owner, and, of course, if you wish it, you may also stay."

"It is a difficult question to answer, dad," said Hal. "For the present, at any rate, I shall remain where I am, as if nothing had occurred. Perhaps later on, it will be better for me to go elsewhere."

"I think you are right. Stay where you are for a while, and later I will contrive to get a good post for you. There are reasons why I do not wish you to stay at the foundry longer than can be helped. Now I will go, for I have other matters to attend to."

"Good-by, dad. Don't be too downhearted," said Hal cheerfully. "Remember what you were when you were my age, and you will see that there is no reason why matters should not improve."

"Young men do not feel so acutely as the middle-aged," Mr. Marchant replied. "Nor do the latter set their faces against adversity as easily as they did in their earlier days."

He smiled half tearfully, and, waving his hand, went out into the dense fog.

"It's a bad business – a cruel affair altogether," said Mr. Tomkins, at length. "If the failure had been of his own doing, one might not have felt the same for him. But I know that he has been the most cautious and far-seeing of owners, and his mills have been patterns of well-ordered establishments. But now it is all finished with."

"One moment," exclaimed Hal. "Why should I leave the foundry?"

"Ah, I thought you'd want to know," the manager answered. "The fact is we are now the servants of a hard-fisted fellow. The gentleman who advanced the money sold the mortgage, and the buyer has a very evil reputation. It is because of this that your father advises you to quit. Moses Steinkirk is the fellow who has bought us up, and I fear we shall all have an uncomfortable time of it. Now we'll go back to the casting-pit. That wheel's got to be finished."

Quitting the office, they struck across the yard and entered the shed, to find that the mold upon which Hal had been engaged was completed.

"All ready for the metal, sir," said the foreman.

"The top cover of Mr. Hal's wheel was slung on a few minutes ago, and it will be as good a job as we ever put out. What do yer say, sir?"

"I don't know that it will be as good as the castings usually turned out from here," Hal replied. "Still, I hope it will do us credit."

"That it will, sir. Joe finished it up when you and the guv' cleared off, and he said as it was the best he'd seen for many a day."

"Jack, boy, you can let her go," sang out the foreman at this moment.

"Right yer are," was the gruff answer. "Now then, all of yer, bring the bucket closer, and mind yer toes."

Grasping a long iron rod, he thrust it into the lump of clay which closed the orifice of the furnace, and which was by this baked almost as hard as stone. A second later a jet of white-hot fluid poured out with a gurgle, and, emitting showers of sparks, rushed in a broad stream into the bucket.

"She's full. Up with her, boys!" cried the foreman.

At once the big crane creaked, and hoisting up the bucket, swung it towards the mold. Meanwhile two of the men had grasped the handles, and drawing the bucket to the orifice, tipped it. The fiery stream disappeared into the depths of the mold. Then it began to well up in the opening, and a moment or two later the empty bucket was whisked away.

"That's finished, so far. Now, Tom, up yer get, and see that she cools as she ought to," cried Mason.

Tom, the man he had beckoned to, stepped onto the framework, and, taking a rod, commenced to ram it into the opening through which the metal had been poured.

"That's finished, and we may as well go," said Tomkins. "It will take five hours for that to cool. Come along, Hal. Good-night to you, Mason."

"Good-night, sir. Good-night, Mr. Hal."

The words came from all parts of the shed, and replying to them cheerfully, Hal repaired to the office with the manager.

CHAPTER II

"FACE TROUBLES LIKE A MAN"

Seen in the glare of the furnace flames as he emerged from the foundry, Hal Marchant was a very different individual from the workman who had been so diligent in the casting-pit.

Then he had been much like his fellows – just a roughly clad artisan, covered with sand, and with hands and face streaked with soot and dirt. Now that he was ready to go into the town, however, he was a spruce and dapper young gentleman. He had the manners of his father, and though not a prig, nor less given to mirth than others of his age, he was a very respectable and creditable member of society.

But Hal was genuinely grieved about his father, and as he walked home, his thoughts were busy wondering what he would do, and how he could possibly extricate himself from his difficulties.

"Surely this man will allow father to work off the debt," he murmured. "I know for a matter of fact that we have numerous orders, and must be making money. Why, then, should he not be allowed to remain? It might take a few years to work off the amount, but it would be done."

But Hal did not know the world very well. If he had he would have realized that this was a business transaction, and that when the creditor had a power over the profits of the foundry, and particularly one with such a reputation, he was not likely to forego his claims.

"We must just make the best of a bad matter," Hal at length remarked. "I'll do my utmost to help, and all I make shall go to the funds to keep up the house."

He turned into the gates of the big mansion and, mounting the steps, opened the door with a latch-key. He paused on the threshold to listen, but there was not a sound in the house.

"Strange!" he murmured. "The guv' said he was returning at once, and these last few weeks one has usually known immediately whether he was at home by hearing his steps as he paced up and down the floor of his room. That was what first gave me an idea that something was wrong. But perhaps he is in, and has fallen asleep in his chair, as I have often known him to do."

Hal walked across the fine hall, and opening the door on the left, looked into an apartment which was evidently library and smoking room in one. He put his head through the doorway and inspected the apartment. But there was no sign of his father, and he was about to withdraw when a faint groan fell upon his ear. In an instant he darted in, and discovered a figure huddled in a chair in a dark portion of the room. It was Mr. Marchant.

Hal sprang to his side and looked eagerly in his face, but there was no sign of recognition, for the eyes were closed. He placed his hand on the wrist and felt for a pulse without success. Then the truth dawned upon him – slowly at first, and then with a whirl, and with all its cruel force.

"Dead!" he gasped. "Father dead!"

There was no doubt about it, and Hal had to face the matter. Once more he felt for a pulse, and then he went to the bell and pressed the button.

"Send for the doctor at once, please," he said when the servant arrived. "I am afraid that my father is dead."

"Dead, sir? Dead!" the girl exclaimed in a whisper.

"Yes, that is the case," Hal answered. "Send for Dr. Harding."

Five minutes later the doctor arrived. He pronounced life extinct. "A stroke," he said. "He died painlessly and swiftly. May we all do the same, for it is a merciful ending. But tell me, Hal, was there cause? Was there any sudden shock that you know of?"

"Yes; there was a great one," Hal answered slowly. "Father was ruined. To-morrow he would have been in the position of his manager, instead of the employer of hundreds of hands."

"Then he has had a merciful escape," said the doctor. "The blow was a heavy one, and the life to follow would have been extremely hard. And what of yourself, my boy?"

"I, too, have lost all my prospects," Hal answered steadily. "But I am hardly more than a boy. The world is before me, and I will make my way in it. This house will be sold, I suppose, and if all the debts cannot be met, someone will have to wait. It shall be my business to work, make money, and clear my father's name."

"A resolution to be proud of. Face troubles like a man, and half the battle is already won," exclaimed the doctor. "But I hope that when all is sold no debts will remain. Then you will be free to rise solely on your own account."

He pressed Hal's hand and left the house.

A week passed and found Hal in lodgings in the town, for Mr. Marchant's house had been sold, and, to Hal's relief, it was ascertained that not a penny was owing to any man.

"Now for myself," he said as he sat over the fire. "What to do is the question."

There was a knock at the door, and Mr. Tomkins put his head into the room. "Hallo!" he said. "Do you feel inclined for a chat?"

"Yes; come in. I'm wondering what to do with myself."

"And so am I," was the answer. "That is, I'm wondering what would be good for you. How about the foundry? Will you stick to it?"

"On no account," Hal replied. "I could not bear to go there now. In fact, I mean to leave Birmingham, for it would bring back these last few days every time I passed the old home. I must work, and pay my way, for at present I possess fifteen pounds and a few suits of clothes; that is all."

"I thought you'd not go back to the works," said Mr. Tomkins. "I've been there boy and man these twenty years, and I've risen to be manager. But I am leaving with my old master, for I cannot fancy the new. I'm lucky, too, for I've accepted the post of manager to another foundry in the north. Come along with me, and I'll see that you get something good."

Hal thanked him, and thought the matter over before answering.

"I scarcely know what to say," he said. "But I am determined to leave Birmingham. I couldn't stand it."

"It would be rough, I own," Mr. Tomkins said. "But what about coming north?"

"It is very good of you to suggest it, Tomkins," Hal answered, "but, before deciding, there is something that I should like to know about. Of course, I am not very well up in trade affairs, but I do happen to know that the Americans are very go-ahead in the matter of iron-works. They undertake bridge-building to a great extent, and I thought that it might be worth my while to cross the water. I certainly ought to get a job. They pay well out in America, Tomkins. What do you say to the plan?"

"Those Yanks are hard at work," he said. "They are go-ahead people, as you say, and there's no doubt that they can show us a thing or two in the way of bridges. Yes, anything to do with iron and engineering is booming across the Atlantic, and there must be lots of openings for youngsters. There's something else besides. In good old England we're overcrowded, but in America there's a demand for chaps who know a little above the ordinary. I should say it would be a good thing, Hal, and if you decide upon it, the traveling there, and the new life, will rouse you a bit, and help you to forget present troubles."

"You think well of it," said Hal. "Then I shall go to America and try my luck. I may as well start as soon as possible, and I wish very particularly to do so, for while in this city I run the chance of meeting old friends. Besides, if I went to see any of them, they might think that I was looking for help, and I want to make a place for myself."

"And quite right too. Independence is the thing," the manager cried, patting him on the back. "Now, look here, youngster, are you willing to rough it from the very commencement? If so, I can help you get to America."

"Quite," Hal answered promptly.

"Then come along with me to the office of a shipping firm I know. They've carried many a time for the foundry, and I've only to drop the manager a hint that you are wanting to get across at the cheapest rate possible, and I'll be bound he'll arrange."

"I've no cousins or relatives of any sort," he said, "and I've come to the conclusion that this is the best thing I can do."

"That's good! I'm certain you are doing what is right," Mr. Tomkins answered.

They went into the street, and within a few minutes were at the shipping office.

"Good-day, Mr. Tomkins. What can we do for you this time?" asked the clerk.

"A good deal, if you care. Can we come in behind? I want to speak to you about my young friend here."

"To be sure," the clerk replied. "Step in. Now, what is it?" he asked. "I recognize your companion. He is the son of the late Mr. Marchant."

"Quite so; and he wishes to go abroad to America, to make his way in the world. Can you do anything for him in the way of a cheap passage?"

"He could go for nothing, or rather, could earn a pound and food besides the berth. But he'd have to rough it."

"I'm ready for that, any day; in fact, I'd like to start right away," Hal said, eagerly.

"Then I may as well tell you that there is a vacancy for a greaser aboard the *Mohican*. Will you take that? There! A passage, your grub, and a pound at the end of the trip."

"You can put my name down for it," said Hal. "I'll go on the *Mohican*; and I thank you for your kindness."

"Not at all; it's nothing after the freights we got from your father's foundry. Good-day, sir; good-day, Tomkins. Excuse me, but I'm very busy." The clerk nodded in a friendly way, and departed.

"I put that down as a good omen," said Tomkins as they emerged into the street. "You're in luck, Hal, for right from the commencement you get what you want. The rest will come just the same, let us hope. Now I'll leave you, as I have matters to attend to."

He shook Hal's hand and walked up the street.

Hal returned to his rooms, and hunted out his belongings. It was getting dark as he went into the street with a bundle over his shoulder. He entered a shop which he had noticed on former occasions, wondering what class of people patronized it.

"How much for these?" he asked, opening his bundle, and displaying five suits which he had been in the habit of wearing in Birmingham.

"They're not much good to me," he said. "They're not the class o' togs I want. Six shillings the lot."

"Six shillings!" said Hal quietly. "They cost four times as many pounds, and that quite recently. Bid again."

"Six the figure. Not a penny more," exclaimed the man.

"I'll take four pounds for the lot," said Hal.

"You may, but not from me, young man. Good a'ternoon to yer."

"Good-day; I'll go elsewhere," said Hal quietly, and at once did up the fastenings of his bundle. Then he lifted it, and walked calmly out of the shop.

"Hold hard there!" cried the man, arresting him at the door. "Let's see the togs again." He inspected them closely; but it was merely a pretense, for anyone could see with half an eye that they were really good. "I'll make it three ten," he said.

"Very well, you can have them," Hal replied, glad to get so good a price.

Next day he was told that the *Mohican* would sail on Saturday.

"She's one of the intermediate boats," said the clerk. "Of course, she carries very few passengers – some thirty in all. You'd better be aboard on Friday, for she leaves the river early the following day. Good luck to you."

"And many thanks to you," Hal answered. "I'll do my best to fill the place you have obtained for me."

Hal took a cheap ticket to Liverpool, and trudged from the station to the dock in which the *Mohican* was lying.

Hal picked his way to the wide and slippery gangway, and began to cross it. A notice above an alleyway caught his eye. "Engineers only," it said.

He entered the alleyway, and walked along it till he came to a door on the left, where he knocked.

"Who's there? Come right in," someone cried in a sleepy voice.

Hal entered, and found a big man reclining full length on the settee. He was dressed in an old uniform, and had a handkerchief tied round his neck.

"Wall, what aer it?" he asked. "A feller can't no more get ter sleep upon this hulk than fly. Who aer yer?"

He sat up and surveyed Hal sleepily.

"I'm sorry I roused you. I'm the new hand – the greaser," said Hal.

"Oh, you're the greaser! Wall, yer aint the sort as ships aboard the *Mohican* every time. What aer it? Rows with the boss? High jinks at home? Broke; aint that it?"

"Not quite, but nearly," Hal answered with a smile. "I'm working my passage."

"So; then you've come to right ship ter do it. But you'd better get to your quarters; there, along the alleyway. So long, young 'un, and when yer want a bit of a help, come along to me. I'm Old Yank, the boss of the engine-room."

Closing the door, Hal went along the alleyway till he came to a large cabin, above which was painted "Greasers." No one was in, but one of the bunks had evidently not been appropriated.

"That will do for me," thought Hal. "I'll put my bundle here, and then have a look round."

Five minutes later he descended the ladder which led to the depths of the ship. Beneath him was a maze of machinery. Down below were one or two figures moving about. A wave of hot air ascended, while a loud whir, caused by the revolving armature of the dynamo, filled the engine-room.

Hal felt somewhat out of his element; but, congratulating himself on the fact that he had some right to be where he was, he hastened down the ladder, and dropped to the floor.

CHAPTER III

AN EVENTFUL VOYAGE

Lost in bewilderment, Hal stared at the machinery, wondering at its size and complexity, and which were the main and which the auxiliary parts. Then someone addressed him:

"Fine engines, and as clean as waste will make them," remarked a little man, who was dressed in naval uniform. "What can I do for you? I'm the 'second.'"

Hal turned round to find himself face to face with the second engineer.

"They are, indeed, very fine, and I have never seen anything like them before," he said. "But perhaps you will think I have no business here, so I had better tell you I am the new hand. I have shipped as a greaser."

"Ah, then you're the fellow I was told to expect. Now, tell me what you know about engines. Mind you, if you are ignorant of your surroundings, you have picked a very dangerous job. I've seen more than one man maimed for life, simply because he did not know where to look out for accidents, and therefore could not avoid them. On the other hand, I've known a greaser who had been at the game for many years meet his end simply and solely on account of carelessness. But I'm going ahead. What experience have you had?"

"I am sorry to say that I have never been in the engine-room of a ship before," Hal replied; "but I've worked amongst the machines we had at the foundry, and have learned to grease them, and also how to effect small repairs. Then I have spent some time in the turning shops, and, latterly, have been in the casting-pits and in the drawing-office."

"That's a record to be proud of. But it will be different here, and you will have much to learn. Come along with me. I'll take you round. Whip off your coat, and get hold of a handful of that cotton waste. After this you'll never be without it, for it's always wanted down here, and fellows get so used to having it; in fact, prefer it to a handkerchief."

Mr. Stoner, as the second in command of the ship's engines was known, smiled in a friendly way, and patted Hal on the shoulder as if to show that he had already made up his mind to patronize him during the voyage to America, so as to make it as pleasant as possible.

"When do you sail?" asked Hal, returning from the corner in which he had placed his coat.

"Late to-night, or to-morrow morning, I should think. We are due on the other side in about nine days, and put out again a week later."

Leading the way, he passed to the back of the nearer of two enormous pillars, which supported the cylinders above the revolving parts of the machinery. Then he pointed to the pistons, which drove the propeller shaft, and from these to the hundreds of other parts which it would be useless to attempt to describe.

"Chockful of bits that make the old girl go, isn't it?" said Mr. Stoner. "Now we'll get into the stoke-hole. The dirty part first, and afterwards the job you'll have to tackle. But it's as well for you to see all that we've got down here."

He passed into a lower part of the ship. A wave of heat fanned Hal's face as he followed, and he was conscious of stepping into a warmer atmosphere.

"Yes, it's warm," said the "second," "but nothing to what I've known it in the Suez Canal or in the Red Sea. That's where it *is* hot. Now for the coal bunkers," he said. "We've one here, and another amidships, which we usually keep in reserve. Look out for your head again, and follow closely."

After inspecting the bunkers, Mr. Stoner then led the way back to the engine-room, and began to show Hal round it.

"This'll be your particular job," he said, "and you will have to keep your ears open. I'll tell you all I can, and then hand you over to our 'fourth.' His name is Masters, and he's been with us only a few trips. He's our electrical expert, and is as mischievous as a monkey."

For half an hour longer the "second" devoted himself to Hal, and instructed him in his duties. Then, as someone came swarming down the ladder, he led him forward to the foot.

"Here's Masters," he said. "I'll hand you over at once. He'll tell you about the life, and will let you know your hours of duty, and when you grub. Good-by, and bear in mind what I have told you."

Hal thanked him, and was then introduced to the "fourth," a young fellow of his own age, but shorter and slighter than himself.

"There," said Mr. Stoner, "I've brought you a pal. He's not exactly green, and he's only a temporary hand. He's tramping it to the other side."

"Right; I know the sort. Out of work at home, and bitten with the Yanks," laughed the youth known as Masters. "By the way," he continued, "what's your name, and where do you come from?"

"As we are to be comrades," said Hal, "I'll tell you something about myself. But I must not forget that you are an officer, so that comrade is not quite the word I should have used."

"Officer!" Masters cried hotly. "Officer be hanged! You've got to remember nothing of the sort. I am an officer if you like, but we're not going to talk about it. We are aboard a vessel plying to America, and the Yanks don't take too much notice of officers. Everyone as good as his fellow, whether millionaire or pauper, is what they think. But I interrupted you."

"You asked me who I was," said Hal, "and I may as well tell you. Things have gone rather badly for me, and you will realize the truth when I tell you that, barely a week ago, I had a fair prospect of some day becoming the owner of a flourishing foundry. But there was a smash, and the shock killed my poor father. I had to do something for a living, and it occurred to me that I might manage to get employment over the water. A friend helped me to get this berth, and here I am, ready to be guided by you, and prepared to rough it to any extent."

"Which shows that you are starting with the right kind of spirit," exclaimed the "fourth." "This is no drawing room, I can assure you, and at times the work is very hard indeed. But you'll get used to it. But, I say, this isn't work. Come along with me."

Masters gathered up a handful of cotton waste and led the way amongst the engines. Hal followed, taking pains to listen to all that was told him. After all, he found that the duties of a greaser were not onerous, for the parts of the machinery requiring constant oiling were not numerous, and in most cases were automatically lubricated. Half an hour was sufficient for his lesson, and then he left the engine-room.

"Say, young feller," said Masters, who, on the strength of a few trips over to America, was much given to aping its ways and speech, "suppose we knock off now. You've had a tidy teaching, and by the time we're over you'll have had your fill of machinery. Let's get something inside, for the old ship sheers off precious soon, and then there won't be so much as a bite for us still we're out of the river. Come on, and I'll show you to your mess, and fix it for you with your mates. They are a rough set, but good fellows."

Climbing out of the engine-room and turning to the left till he came next to the room in which Hal had already deposited his belongings, then glancing into a cabin, ushered his companion in. It was a tiny place, and a fixed table in center of it seemed to fill it almost entirely. Round it sat some five or six men, dressed in blue cotton overalls, and for the most part with sleeves rolled to the elbow and grimy hands. They were the greasers, or rather, half of them.

"Here's a new pard," Masters sang out. "Look after him, men. He's tramping it."

"Walk in, and make yerself comfortable," one of the men answered. "Sit right down there, pard, and fall to at it."

Thus bidden, Hal entered and took a place at the table. There was a dish of smoking and extremely appetizing sausages before him, and within a minute the man who had welcomed him had forked one on to a plate, and had added a pile of potato to it.

"There yer are," said the first. "We're sailin' ter day, and coffee and tea aer the stuff we drink. It's a kind er rule on the line. Fall to, pard, and look lively, for the standby'll be soundin' afore long."

Hal took the advice given him, and after eating heartily felt like working again. For a few minutes he remained in the cabin chatting with the men, then rose from his seat, and was in the act of leaving, when a bell sounded far away, and he, as well as the other greasers, hurried to the engine-room.

"The signal's gone to 'stand by,'" said Masters, who stood on the plates below. "Keep your optic on that dial, and watch 'Old Yank' when he comes. Another thing, mind you touch your cap to him. He's boss down here, and knows it."

A few minutes later the first engineer made his appearance, and stood to look round at the engines and men, ere he went to inspect all more closely. Hal stood near him, and at once touched his cap.

"Helloo! that you?" cried the "first" in a friendly voice. "Hang me, but you've took to it like a duck. Cappin' the chief and all. Wall, come a few hours more, and we'll see the stuff you're made of."

He made a round of the engines, and then returned to the bottom of the long iron ladder, where he waited talking to the third officer, by name Mr. Broom. Suddenly the bell tinkled, and the hand on the dial placed on the wall pointed to "stand by."

Again the gong sounded, and, looking up, Hal saw that the hand now indicated half steam ahead. He saw the "chief" place his fingers on a big wheel and revolve it rapidly to the right. Then he moved a lever, and the big piston-rods shot downward, the crank plunged forward, swished round in a circle, and sent the propeller shaft rolling round. The *Mohican* trembled all along her length, and Hal felt her move ever so slightly. After that he had little time for observation, for his services were required.

About three in the morning the *Mohican* cleared the bar, and slowed up to allow the pilot to leave. Then the gong sounded again, and the lever was pushed right over, giving full steam to the engines.

"There, she'll stick at that if we've ordinary luck," said Masters. "Your watch is up, Marchant, and I'd advise you to turn in and make the most of the off time, for you'll feel pretty boiled in four hours if you don't get a rest."

Hoisting his weary body up the long ladder, Hal made for the greasers' cabin, and, without troubling to undress, threw himself on the bunk. He was asleep almost immediately, in spite of the proximity of the engines.

Four days passed uneventfully, and meanwhile the *Mohican* had been steadily forging a course towards America. The weather had been fine, but for the past two days a fresh breeze had been blowing from the north, and now a fine sleet was accompanying it.

When Hal turned in at night, and lay down to make the most of the respite allowed him, the *Mohican* was wallowing in the seas, and our hero was anything but comfortable. But he resolutely forced himself to swallow his evening meal. And now he lay down on the hard bunk, and at last he fell into an uneasy doze, when there was a terrific crash, and the *Mohican* was thrown on to her side. Hal was hurled from his bunk, and was brought to a sudden stop by striking against the wooden wall, now in the position of the floor. Close beside him was the door, and he struggled to it, aided by the light given by the electric burners, which still did their work.

Then shrill cries and a loud thumping proceeded from the engine-room.

"There's trouble down there. She's on her beam ends," thought Hal, in a half-dazed way. "I suppose she's sinking."

Next moment his soliloquy was cut short by the sudden righting of the ship. There was a tremendous tearing crash as the weight of water on her decks wrenched the rails and bulwarks away;

then she swung into her proper position, throwing Hal violently to the other side of the cabin. Instantly he sprang to his feet, and darted towards the engine-room. It was dangerous work descending, but Hal did not pause, and soon gaining the iron plates below, he saw a sight that made him pause in consternation.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "What a wreck!"

Close beside the door leading to the stoke-hole lay the "second," motionless. Just within the door stood one of the stokers clutching the ironwork, and looking upon the scene as if in a dream. Farther to the right lay two other figures, while in the center was the most ghastly sight of all. Up and down, thrusting with irresistible force, the piston-rod of the low-pressure cylinder worked, revolving the crank which still hung loosely to its bearings, and tossing six feet of broken propeller shaft from side to side.

Thump, thump, thump! Time and again the sharp end crashed upon the plates, tearing them like paper. Bang! The bearing gave way, and the shaft of steel plunged downward, threatening to crash through the bottom of the ship.

What was to be done? Cut off steam? Yes. But who would take the risk? for still that giant shaft swung like a flail, smashing the floor of the engine-room; and all the while a huge jet of scalding steam shrieked from a severed pipe close by.

"It must be done," said Hal to himself, taking in the situation at once. "I'll do it."

He waited a moment while the ship rolled her rails under, when he let his fingers slip from the ladder, and darted to the lever which cut off the steam.

Bang! Crash! The shaft struck the plates just beside his foot, and, giving him a violent blow upon the shoulder, sent him flying to the other side of the engine-room.

"I won't be beaten!" Hal exclaimed recklessly. "It must be done, or the ship will go to the bottom."

Once more he approached the lever, and with a jerk threw it over to the notch above which was stamped the word "Off." A moment later Hal felt a stunning blow on the side of his head, and fell to the floor as helpless and as unconscious as the "second."

What happened afterwards he did not know, but when he came to, he found himself lying in a corner of the engine-room, with Masters leaning over him, while a short length of rope secured him to a bolt in the wall, and prevented him from rolling with the ship.

"Pull yourself together now," said the latter. "There, sit up, and say how you feel. All right? Then I'll get off. We're in an awful mess below here."

He went across the iron plates, clinging to anything that would give him a holding. Hal watched him dreamily at first, and then with awakening interest. Then he moved, and a violent pang shot through his shoulder.

"George!" he groaned, "I feel badly knocked about. That shaft has given me a nasty bang, for my head's aching as if it would burst, and I am sore all over."

He lay back again, but thinking his services might be of use soon, sat up again and struggled to his feet.

"There's work to be done," he said doggedly, "and I am going to take a share of it."

CHAPTER IV

A CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

Hal stood up and looked about him, feeling still dazed. Shouts filled the engine-room, and figures were hurrying to and fro. Suddenly the voice of "Old Yank" rang out clear:

"Boys," he said hoarsely, "this here ship's done for right away ef we're not precious slippy. That 'ere shaft'll be breaking clean away with the next big roll, and will sweep the whole room. Bustle there, and let's get cables and anything that's handy to shear things up. Here, Masters, skip off, and see what's to be had."

The latter, who was behind the massive pillar that supported one end of the cylinders, started for the ladder.

"I'll help," cried Hal. "Hold on, Masters; I'll come with you."

"So; that aer the way – that aer the style of grit," answered the young engineer. "Come along then," he continued; "there's precious little time ter lose. That shaft has cracked the base of the big pillar, and ef another of those rolls catches her, she'll carry away every cylinder in the place."

He ran up the ladder, and Hal followed, feeling at first so stiff and sore that he could scarcely move.

"We want cables badly," said Masters. "Look here, Marchant, I'll skip along for'ard while you go aft. Find the quartermaster, and get him to help you. If he's my way I'll send for you, and if not I'll return. Savvey? Then off, and mind your toes as you cross the decks, for I've heard that there has been a clean sweep."

Turning on his heel, he groped his way along the passage, clinging to the rail to keep himself upon his feet. Hal went in the opposite direction, until he reached the alleyway, which led to the well-deck. And here another sight was presented to him.

"A clean sweep, as Masters said," he murmured. "Derricks the only things remaining, and not a sign of bulwarks. Ah! it's going to be a nasty place to cross."

Of this there could be no doubt, for the waist of the ship had filled to overflowing as she lay on her beam ends, and on righting, the water had torn the rails away on either side, and hurled overboard everything that was not built into the frame of the ship, or securely bolted to it. Only the derrick engine remained in the center, and Hal looked across a level sweep of wet and soppy deck between himself and the poop. At that moment an enormous wave curled over the side, and fell with all its force upon the *Mohican*. She shivered at the blow, and then recovering, reared her bows high in the air, sending the water rushing across the waist and over the side. Now was the time, and Hal made the most of it. He darted from the alleyway and raced across the slippery deck. Bump! The *Mohican* buried her bows deep in the sea, and at once a fresh wave rose high in the air, to fall with a crash upon the deck.

It was a moment of peril, and Hal sprang towards the derrick engine, and, passing his arms through the spokes of the fly-wheel, clung there with might and main. Instantly he was buried in a foaming mass of water. His limbs were almost pulled from his body, so great was the drag, but just as his strength was exhausted, the ship lurched and tossed the water off. A minute later Hal gained the poop, and clambered upon it by means of the hydrant pipes, for the ladders had long since gone overboard.

"Now for the quartermaster," he gasped.

He crossed to the deck-house, and pulled open a door. It shut to upon him with a bang, and he was precipitated across the narrow cabin.

"Hallo! What's up?" cried a man who was seated on the floor in one corner, busily preparing some lashings. "One of the greasers! What is it, lad?"

"I want some lengths of cable for the engine-room," Hal answered. "The propeller shaft has broken, and the cylinders may carry away. Can you help me?"

"Help! Why, I'm full up with work already," the quartermaster replied, "but ef yer want cables there's plenty of ten-foot lengths under the floor, in the lockers. Now you can see to it yourself, though how on airth you're going ter get 'em across to the engines is more than I can guess."

Hal knelt at the opening in the floor, and laboriously dragged five lengths of cable out.

"That's about all you'll manage," said the quartermaster. "You'd better get along with them."

"That will keep them from slipping when she rolls," he said to himself. "And now to get them across. They're heavy. Ah, I have it; a piece of rope will settle the matter."

He dived into the locker again, and finding a long cord, he at once passed it through the last link of the cables. Then he ran across to the edge of the poop, and having dragged them after him, he prepared to cross again to the alleyway.

"It's got to be done," Hal muttered. "Here goes!"

He dropped to the waist, and at once commenced to run across. Crash! A monstrous wave bumped on board, and catching him midway across the deck, washed him dangerously near the side; but a roll of the ship sent it in another direction, and gathering pace as the *Mohican* suddenly shot her bows into the air, the mass of water carried Hal aft, and finally flung him down, breathless, at the entrance of the alleyway.

"By George, that was a near one!" said Masters, who was standing near. "You're always in the wars. First you get smashed up by the shaft, and now you nearly sail overboard. Look here, if I hadn't gripped hold of your collar that time, you'd be a hundred yards astern by this. Hallo! What's this?"

"That? Oh, that's the rope I made fast to the cables," exclaimed Hal, struggling to his feet, to find that he still retained the length of cord in his hand.

"Tell you what, Marchant," said Masters, "for a greaser, and a green 'un aboard a ship, you walk right off with the prize! It takes no small allowance of grit ter do that rope trick. Come along, now; the 'chief' is waiting for the cables."

He shook Hal's hand heartily, then helped him to haul the cables to the engine-room.

"Good boys!" said the chief engineer, coming towards them. "Where did you get a hold of them?"

"He did it," answered Masters, pointing to Hal. "I can tell you, sir, that he has grit. He just clung to the rope after going across to the poop, and when I saw him he was within an inch of being over the side. He got caught by a sea, and got badly flung about. But still he hung on to the rope, and that's how it is that you see the cables here so soon."

"So; aer that so?" said the "chief." "Reckon you're a good 'un, young Marchant. I don't forget as it wur you as turned the steam off the old girl. Ef it wasn't fer that we'd all be down below by this. Wall, this aint the time fer gassing, but 'Old Yank' won't let it slip, and when the time comes round we'll let the right folks know. Now, you had better skip, and fetch a second heap. We shall want them, and more. Look extry slippy, boys, while we get these bits fixed."

Hal and Masters sprang to the ladder again, and prepared to cross the waist in search of more cables. There was little time to lose, for as they stood in the engine-room both had noticed a big crack in the massive pillar that supported the cylinders. The end of the propeller shaft had evidently struck it a tremendous blow, and had fractured it.

"It looks very nasty," said Masters, as they climbed to the alleyway; "and ef the old girl rolls like she did when the shaft went, why, it'll be a case of all up. We'd better hurry up."

They stood at the opening of the alleyway for a few moments then raced across the deck. This time Hal was more fortunate, for he, as well as his companion, escaped injury. They reached the poop in safety, and were soon hauling out more cable. A rope was run through the end links as before, and they started to return.

"Now's the time, and mind you run for it," exclaimed Masters, lowering himself to the waist.

Darting across as rapidly as he could, Hal had gained the shelter he aimed at before Masters was halfway there, and he turned just in time to see his companion caught by a mighty wave which came aboard at that moment. It hoisted the poor fellow high in the air, tossing him from his feet. Then it swept him along and dashed him violently against the corner of the alleyway. Hal just managed to grasp his coat as the water receded, and dragged him into the shelter. But Masters was badly hurt, for there was a long red seam along the side of his head, and he was bleeding profusely.

Picking him up, Hal carried him to the cabin and laid him on one of the bunks.

"Now for the rope and the cables," he said.

Stepping into the alleyway, he was retracing his steps when the *Mohican* rose high in the air, trembled violently as a sea struck her, and at once rolled heavily on to her beam ends.

"Good gracious! that will finish it!" exclaimed Hal. "Ah, what was that?"

A loud crash reached his ears, coming from the open door of the engine-room. He ran to the entrance and swarmed down the ladder.

Once more he was to see a sight that seldom meets the eye. The chief engineer had feared the effect of another roll, and though this one had lasted for only a few seconds, and the *Mohican* was now back in a more or less upright position, yet the sudden movement, the weight of so much metal thrown violently to one side, had proved too great a strain upon the fractured pillar. It had given way, and had carried the cylinders with it, the whole was bringing up against one of the massive ribs of the ship. One sharp angle, projecting beyond this support, had struck the steel plates and ripped them open.

A fountain of water spurted in as Hal reached the engine-room, swamping the place. Turning his eyes to other parts, he saw that the disaster was even greater than it at first seemed, for lying upon the floor were three greasers, while the "chief" was huddled at the foot of the broken pillar. At this moment Mr. Broom emerged from the stoke-hole.

"What a calamity!" he cried. "We are doomed. Nothing can save the *Mohican*. The next roll will shake those cylinders free, and then they will go through the side to the bottom, and we must follow. We are under-manned as it is, and now so many of our hands have been injured that we are helpless. What is to be done?"

He clung to the rail which surrounded the crank-pit, and looked despairingly at Hal.

"They are the same on deck," the latter answered. "The quartermaster told me that four of the hands had been swept overboard, while others had been seriously injured. But, wait. You want helpers, sir? Why not call upon the passengers? There are about forty aboard."

"The very thing!" cried the third engineer. "The work we want done can be managed by anyone with courage and muscle. Cut off, Marchant, and see what you can do. I shall be surprised if the whole lot don't volunteer to a man."

Hal at once darted up the ladder again, and, reaching the alleyway, turned to the right, and entered the big dining saloon. It was filled with ladies and gentlemen, the former reclining on the settees which ran round the side, while the latter were gathered in a group in the center discussing the probable fate of the ship. Hal at once walked up to them and dropped into a seat, for it was difficult to keep on one's feet owing to the movement of the ship.

"What is it? Has something more terrible happened?" asked a tall gentleman, who occupied the center of the group. "I suppose we must prepare for the worst?"

"No; I think not," Hal answered. "Gentlemen, I am sorry to have to bring you bad news. The propeller shaft broke, and before steam could be cut off the main support of the engines was fractured, and now the ship is in the greatest danger; for the cylinders have crashed against the side, and have made a large rent in the plates. If the wreck is not secured and the hole made tight, we shall certainly founder. The last roll the ship made completed the break."

"Then it is bad news!" exclaimed one of the passengers. "What will become of us all?"

"Wait; let us hear what this young fellow has to tell us," said the first speaker. "Perhaps he has something to propose."

"I have," Hal replied. "All our engine-room hands are injured, and we want help. Will any of the passengers volunteer?"

"Yes, here is one," exclaimed the tall passenger. "Here is a strong arm and a ready will. Command me, and I will do all that I can."

"And I, and I," came from each of the others in quick succession.

"You see that all are ready," said the first speaker, whose name was Mr. Brindle. "Now, what can we do?"

Hal thought for a moment before answering. Then he turned to the passengers and said:

"It is likely to be a long job, and therefore I propose that you divide into two parties – the first to commence work at once, and the others to come down in two hours' time. The first party had better bring all the blankets and bedding they can. We shall want something with which to stop the rent."

He rose from his seat, and staggered out.

"Well," said Mr. Broom, as our hero swung himself on to the floor below, "what luck?"

"They have volunteered to a man."

"I thought they would," was the satisfied answer. "But how are we to employ them? Tell you what, Marchant, some of the passengers will have to set to trimming. We've been taking coal from the starboard bunker, and this side is full, so that it will all have to be put over to the other. Will you boss the gang? I'm the only officer left down here, and most of the greasers have been hurt. I'll look to the engines, and will shear them up, if you'll take the other job."

"I'll do my best," said Hal. "Ah, here they come."

At that moment fifteen passengers began to descend the long ladder, each carrying a roll of blankets under his arm.

"Hallo, what's this?" the engineer exclaimed. "Bedding! What's that for?"

"I thought you'd want something to plug the rent," said Hal. "Don't you think it might do?"

"Do! Of course it will! Young fellow, you've a head on those shoulders. You're a puzzle. Do! Here, pile it all over by the dynamo; and let me thank you now, gentlemen, for the manner in which you have come forward."

"Not a bit of it," answered Mr. Brindle. "We're here for our own sakes as well as yours; though I own that we should have volunteered in any case. Now, what are we to do?"

"Put yourselves in his hands," said Mr. Broom. "He's shown that he has a head; he's got no end of pluck, too. Take your orders from him, and you'll be doing your very best for all hands."

He waved to the volunteers, and at once went to a group of stokers and greasers near by. Hal turned to the stoke-hole without a word, and, passing through the tunnel between the boilers, entered the place set aside for coal. It was divided down the center by a bulkhead, which reached from the floor to the deck above for the greater length of the bunker, but was cut down to a height of four feet some six yards from the door.

"Now, gentlemen," said Hal, "all this coal wants to be moved to the other side so as to check the list. I propose that a few toss the stuff down from above, while the others pitch it over the bulkhead."

A minute later all were engaged, plying the implements as if they had been accustomed to them and to no others all their lives.

"We'll have a breather now," said Hal, an hour after he and his comrades had set to work. "Let us have a five minutes' interval, and then at it again, for you will do better if you have a short rest."

The trimming gang stood there breathing heavily, and making the utmost of the respite. Some sat down upon heaps of coal, while others leaned against the sides, and placing their hands upon their hips, supported them there, as if their weight was too much for them.

"Time's up, gentlemen. We'd better set to again," said Hal.

"My hat, sir, but you are a stern taskmaster," cried Mr. Brindle, giving vent to a hearty laugh. "Here are we poor fellows ready to drop, and you give us a bare five minutes. But the lad is right. Gentlemen, think of the lives depending upon us."

An hour later the second batch of volunteers descended, and replaced the first, but Hal and Mr. Brindle remained at work.

All day long the two parties took it in turns to labor in the coal-bunker, and when night came, Hal was able to dismiss his gang, and inform Mr. Broom that the task was finished.

"Good!" exclaimed the latter. "Your fellows have worked like bricks, and have well earned a sleep. You, too, had better get one. Cut along up to your bunk, and leave this to me. I'm used to long hours, and will keep watch below. The *Mohican* is steering now. That sea-anchor is overboard, and we're able to keep fairly clear of water. Now, off you go."

He waved to the ladder, and Hal at once took his advice. He was, indeed, worn out with his labors, for all day long he had shoveled coal, till the skin was worn off his hands. Accordingly, he did not argue with the "third," but, going to the ladder, climbed to the alleyway. He went to a locker, and finding the remains of a loaf, tore a portion off, and went, munching it, to his bunk. Less than five minutes later he was so sound asleep that he would have slept the clock round had not a violent thirst from the coal-dust he had inhaled caused him to leave his bed in search of something to drink.

CHAPTER V

NO REST FOR THE WEARY

An uncouth object Hal looked as he left his bunk and sought something with which to quench his thirst.

He went to a filter which was kept near the stairway leading to the saloon. It was full, and he took a long and satisfying drink. That done, he returned to the alleyway, where he stopped and looked out.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "The sea is falling, and there is scarcely any wind. That gives the *Mohican* a better chance. But Mr. Broom will be wanting me."

He looked about, and seeing the nozzle of a hydrant at hand, gave it a turn by means of the key. Whipping his shirt off, he bent beneath the spouting water which gushed out, and thoroughly soused himself. "That's better," he said, catching a glimpse of himself in the glass. "I look more like a Christian again. Now for Masters."

He went to the engineer's cabin and knocked.

"Come in," someone cried.

Hal entered, to find the ship's doctor engaged in dressing Masters' wounds.

"Well, what now, my lad?" asked the doctor. "More casualties? If so, I shall be overwhelmed."

"It's nothing, sir," Hal answered. "I came to inquire after my friend. How is he? I left him here yesterday morning, with a big cut across his head, and haven't been able to come near him since."

"And we only discovered him a matter of half an hour ago. He has been lying here ever since. He has a crack across the top of his head that would kill the average nigger; but, thanks to an extraordinarily thick skull, he's none the worse."

Hal looked on for a few moments, then he left the cabin and climbed down to the engine-room. How changed the place was since the day he first descended! Then all was bustle, and after the ship had left port, the noise, the whirl of machinery had been unending. That was barely twenty hours ago, and now all was still. The wreck of a portion of the fine engines was piled against the side, wound round with innumerable lengths of cable. Then, at the end of it all, a mass of blanket and bedding bulged into the room, looking peculiarly out of place. As Hal glanced at the rent which had been plugged during the night, a mass of water struck the ship on that side, and drove in the caulk, a flood of water flowing in immediately.

"That's scarcely safe," thought Hal. "I had better find the 'third,' and tell him about it."

But there was no need to do so, for at this moment Mr. Broom appeared from behind part of the machinery.

"There's more work for us," he said wearily. "I've had my eye on that rent all night, and the plug has gone at last. How are you, youngster?"

"Fit and well," Hal answered. "But you look worn out, sir. Why not turn in? Leave this job to me. I'll get the same hands as I had before, and we'll soon see to it."

"You can't work without something to keep you going," the "third" replied. "Besides, I don't know that I am willing to have the job done by someone else. The poor old chief is dead, and the 'second' was knocked out of time by the first smash, so I'm in sole charge. I want a sleep, I own, but I'm not done yet. You cut up now, and perhaps when you return I'll take a turn at the breakfast table."

"But I'm as fresh as a lark," exclaimed Hal, "whereas you are completely done up. Give me directions what to do, and then turn in and have a sleep. There will be heaps to get in order when you awake, and as you are the only engineer officer left on the active list, you ought to take care of yourself."

"You're right there, lad," the "third" replied, sitting down suddenly upon a step of the ladder, and turning a deathly gray, his pallor showing through the thick layer of grime which covered his

face. "I'm done, and need a good rest to put me right. I'll tell you how we'll manage it. You slip up and get a bite and a cup of tea; then you can relieve me. You know what I want done. Plug this rent, and brace the wrecked machinery still more. Then, if another gale springs upon us, we shall feel secure."

"Very well, sir; I'll get my breakfast and relieve you," said Hal briskly. He hastened in search of breakfast. The mess-room was empty, and when Hal looked into the cabin occupied by the engineer officers, he found that it had been converted into a hospital, in which the wounded were being treated.

"Everything seems to be disorganized," he said. "I'll go to the pantry and see what the stewards can do."

He passed through the alleyway, and mounted the narrow stairs.

"Can I have some breakfast?" he asked of one of the stewards, who happened to be there.

"Breakfast! Of course you can," was the hearty answer. "You fellows down below have worked like bricks, and deserve something good."

"Did you ever see such a smash?" he proceeded, pointing to the shelves of the pantry. "Everything is upside down, and more than half the crockery has been shattered."

While speaking to Hal the steward had been plying a tin-opener, and at this moment turned out a big tongue on to a plate. He cut off a slice, and making a sandwich, handed it to Hal. Then a bowl of tea was put in his hand, and Hal was on the point of retiring when Mr. Brindle appeared.

"My young friend the greaser, I think," he exclaimed. "Ah, how are matters down below this morning? I assure you that I and my comrades were so fatigued by the healthy exercise you gave us, that we retired immediately the trimming was completed, and have slept like so many logs ever since. But, thank Heaven, all looks well to-day, and hope is high in everyone's heart."

"Yes, all is well," Hal responded; "but there is still work to be done."

"That sounds as though another call might be made for volunteers," said Mr. Brindle. "Come, now, is that not the case?"

"That is what I propose to do, Mr. Brindle. You see, the engine-room is practically deserted. But for a few stokers who keep steam in two of the boilers, and the third engineer, the place is quite empty. Mr. Broom is done up, and when I return will place me in charge, and go to his bunk. As soon as he has gone, I propose to replug the rent."

"Then you will most certainly want us," said Mr. Brindle. "Come in here, lad, and talk the matter over. No; you must not refuse. We are all equals and comrades on this ship, and no one could object to your taking a meal in the saloon, particularly at this time. Now, come along in, and take your breakfast comfortably."

It was useless to attempt to refuse compliance with Mr. Brindle's request simply on the ground that he was only a greaser in the engine-room. In ordinary circumstances, the presence of such a person in the saloon would have led to a scene, and the fact would have been reported to the captain. But things were changed now. The *Mohican* was little better than a wreck, her crew diminished, and those who were left were incapable of carrying on the work. The call for volunteers had at once placed regular hands and passengers on a common footing. Many of them had heard Mr. Brindle speaking to Hal, and they at once supported his request.

"You must come in, young sir," one of them cried. "Come along, or you will be offending everyone in the saloon."

Hal blushed, grasped the bowl of tea firmly, and tucking the roll of tongue and bread beneath one arm, made his way to a seat.

The passengers gathered round him and plied him with eager questions.

"Now, what is wanted?" asked one of them, with a laugh.

"The lives of all on board depend upon our exertions," Hal answered. "With good weather we need not fear, but if the gale blows up again, the *Mohican* may very easily go to the bottom. That rent has opened again, and must be closed. Will anyone help me do it?"

He looked round at the group of passengers, and was rewarded with an emphatic nod from each.

"We shall all be there," said Mr. Brindle. "And when the rent is patched, what follows?"

"The cylinder covers should be taken off and the piston-rods and cranks removed. I fancy I know enough about engines to instruct you, and if not, we must wait till to-morrow."

"Perhaps I could help you there," remarked Mr. Brindle. "On the plantations in Cuba a trained engineer is a rarity. As a consequence, one becomes something of an expert one's self. Many a time I have had to effect some minor repair, so that I have picked up some knowledge of machinery. Now, when shall we come?"

"As soon after breakfast as possible, and I would suggest that you bring more blankets."

"Very well, Marchant. We'll divide into two parties as before, and you can expect the first in a quarter of an hour."

Hal thanked him, and left the saloon. Then he went forward, and looked up the carpenter.

"We want some planks, a few hammers, and a saw down in the engine-room," he said. "Can you let us have them, Chipps?"

"You can take what you can find," was the answer. "There, the store is under the poop. Take a look round and help yourself."

Hal went into the space set apart for carpenter's stores, and dragged out two long planks. These he carried to the engine-room. Then he made other trips, bringing hammers, nails, a roll of canvas, a saw, and many useful things.

"Now for Mr. Broom," he said. "I'll get down and free the poor fellow, for he looked worn out with hard work and want of sleep."

Glad of the relief, Mr. Broom climbed the ladder, swaying from side to side, and looking as if he were incapable of controlling his limbs. But he was not the one to give in easily. He reached the top with an effort, went to the cabin, and, tumbling upon a bunk, fell into a deep slumber.

A few minutes later the first batch of passengers appeared, and a consultation was held.

"How are you going to do it, lad?" asked Mr. Brindle, looking at the rent in the vessel's side, and at the mass of blankets displaced by the sea. "It seems to me that something stronger is wanted – something behind the bedding, to force it into the opening and keep it in position."

"I thought of that," said Hal, "and I've got planks from the carpenter. I suggest that we cut lengths, which will go from end to end of the rent. Then back them with cross-pieces. If nailed together in that position, we shall have a fairly solid board, which can be pressed against the bedding and wedged in place."

"That's about as good a way as any," exclaimed Mr. Brindle. "But I've one idea. Get your canvas soaked with tar, and stretch it over the blankets. When the edges are squeezed into the rent they will keep the water out. Undoubtedly our first job is to get the plugging done. Now, young sir, put us at it."

It was work which was urgently needed; and the passengers, looking very business-like in their shirt-sleeves, set to at it so heartily that the rent was safely filled by afternoon.

"Now we'll tackle the cylinders and cranks," said Hal. "It has to be done, and better now than later on."

The work was tackled willingly, and when the "third" descended to the engine-room he found the rent safely plugged, the wreck of the engines securely braced, and the cylinder covers and all movable parts taken away, and made fast elsewhere.

He stopped abruptly at the bottom of the ladder, and fell back a pace in astonishment.

"Why, what's this?" he cried, as though he could not believe his senses. "The hole plugged as tight as a barrel, the wreck stayed up with yards of cable, and all the movable parts unshipped and set aside. Here, what's been happening? Have we fallen in with another ship, and borrowed a crew of engine hands?"

"It means that we carried out your orders, sir," said Hal. "You were dead tired, and left the engine-room to me. Our friends, the passengers, came to our aid again, and this is their handiwork."

"Yes, that is so, and glad have we been to help," Mr. Brindle interposed. "But allow me to tell you, Mr. Broom, though we have carried out your orders, it was under the direction of this lad. It seems extraordinary that he, who never saw the machinery of a big ocean-going steamer until a week ago, should so soon be placed in a position of responsibility. Few would have been so level-headed. The lad has won our admiration, for he is as free from conceit as he is full of resolution. He will get on in the world."

"So he will," the "third" responded. "The lad's got grit, sir – the stuff that won't give way whatever the danger. Who stopped the engines, and nearly got knocked into so much pulp? Why, this kid. I'm not going to say one word about the other part, though we don't forget in a hurry that it was he who stuck like blazes to the trimming. And now he just goes and packs me off to my bunk, and then coolly tidies the whole place up, and there isn't anything more to be done! Why, I might just as well have had my sleep out!"

"Ha, ha, ha! So you might," laughed Mr. Brindle. "But come along to the saloon. We are all in need of a meal."

"By George, we are!" Mr. Broom replied. "Come, Marchant; we'll defer the discussion of your good works till later. But when the time comes for you to seek for a job on the other side, you've one here who is your friend, and who will gladly help you."

"And here is another," exclaimed Mr. Brindle. "But to dinner now."

Early next day passengers and crew ascended to the deck, for the time had come to commit to the deep the bodies of those who had been killed.

It was a sad group that stood upon the planks, hats reverently in hand, and peered into the sea, soon to become the grave of those unfortunate comrades stretched still and motionless at their feet. Swathed in blankets, with fire-bars to bear them down to their last resting-place, the chief engineer and two hands lay awaiting the last rites at the hands of their friends. Very earnestly, and as if he would emphasize every word, the captain read the burial service, while the ship's bell tolled mournfully. Then, at a sign from the quartermaster, the grating upon which the bodies lay was tipped by two of the hands, and the three forms slipped from beneath the pall, and disappeared forever.

CHAPTER VI

A FRIEND IN NEED

It would be tedious to describe the manner in which the *Mohican* finally reached New York, for from the date of the accident to her machinery, and the successful plugging of the enormous rent in her side, all went well.

But what had once been a fine-looking vessel was now little better than a bare hulk, with smoke-stack and masts rising from a deck which was clear of everything save the broken remnants of fixtures which had defied the fury of the seas.

"There's one thing about her," said Mr. Broom to Hal, "she's been stripped clean, and looks dismantled, but she's right and tight still, and will well repay the overhauling which will be necessary before she can put to sea again. Wait till we get alongside the dock; there will be no end of excitement! And when it is known through what dangers we have come, we shall be the talk of New York; and won't the newspaper correspondents rush for us!"

And, indeed, this was the case. No sooner was the *Mohican* moored than thousands came down to look at her, and roamed all over her decks, marveling at the manner in which she had been buffeted, and at the pluck and skill which had brought her safely into port.

"I call it wonderful!" said the line manager, addressing the crew after their arrival. "Two weeks ago business called me across from England to New York, and I experienced the full fury of the same hurricane which wrought such destruction here. I know what your difficulties have been, and I am glad to be here to congratulate you all. It is difficult to thank you sufficiently, and it is almost impossible to single out any individual for special praise when all have worked so well. Your captain, however, has done remarkably; he has shown such seamanship, skill, and courage, that I at once promote him to the command of one of our big passenger ships. Your second and third engineers have well earned promotion, and, by all accounts, so has one of their subordinates. I refer to the youth called Marchant. He, too, shall be rewarded. And now, as by bringing the *Mohican* safely to port you have saved the company a considerable loss, I am glad to be able to tell you that two thousand pounds will be divided proportionately amongst you."

The manager bowed and retired, leaving the crew to discuss the matter. Next morning Hal found that his share was ten pounds, and to this a further sum of ten was added for stopping the engines at the time of the accident.

"You're a rich man," said Mr. Brindle chaffingly. "At any rate, you have made more in one trip than you would have earned in three or four months. What do you propose to do with yourself, may I inquire?"

"Really I cannot say, Mr. Brindle; of course, I am awfully lucky! The twenty pounds, with what I had before, will enable me to live while I am looking for a job."

"And have you any decided preference?" asked Mr. Brindle. "I mean, must the employment be in America? I have a proposal to make, and you must consider it before you decide. I am a Cuban planter. I told you that I had some rough engineering knowledge. It has been acquired amongst the machinery on my plantations. I want an engineer, one who can act as master in my absence. Will you accept the post? The pay shall be good. You shall have a percentage on the profits, and where your department is concerned I will give you a free hand. But in addition to the engines, I shall want you to help me with the management of the plantation."

He sat on the rail of the ship, and looked curiously at Hal; for he had taken a fancy to our hero, and was impressed by his behavior on the ship.

"It is very good of you, Mr. Brindle," Hal exclaimed. "I never expected to be offered such an important post, and I accept with pleasure. Tell me when I am to sail, and where I am to go to."

"I am glad you fall in with the plan," Mr. Brindle answered. "To tell you the truth, I have been itching to get hold of you ever since you set us to work at that trimming. You showed a fine example. You see, appearance and manner is everything when dealing with blacks; and the natives of Cuba, who are anything from genuine negro to almost pure Spanish, recognize and look up to a European who knows how to treat them, and can show them what to do. Now, as to marching orders, I have business which will keep me in New York for a few days; after that we'll go to Florida, where I have another plantation. From there we will sail to Havana, and three days later we shall reach the hacienda, which goes by the name of 'Eldorado,' and is one of the most beautiful spots I have ever seen. But when can you leave the ship? I should be glad to take you with me this evening."

"I can get away whenever I wish," Hal answered, overwhelmed by the prospect before him. "But where do you stay? I am sorry to say that my clothes are rough, and scarcely fitted for polite society."

"That is a matter that is easily arranged, my lad. Now, pack your traps, and come along. Leave the clothes to me, for as my engineer you are given a free kit, just as they say to the soldier."

Mr. Brindle smiled pleasantly, and, turning away, hurried to his cabin to collect his baggage.

Left to himself, Hal went below, and soon had his few belongings packed in a bag. Then he went the round of his friends, and took farewell of them.

"Lucky beggar!" exclaimed Masters, whom Hal found propped up in his bunk, with his head enveloped in bandages. "You are a fortunate fellow, Marchant! But you deserve it all. I wish you were staying, for, after what has passed, I am sure we should have been capital friends, and had some splendid trips together. And now you say you are off to Cuba, and I suppose in a few weeks' time you will be lording it over hundreds of niggers. Well, old man, must you go? Good-by, and the best of luck."

"Thank you," Hal answered, with a laugh. "A rapid recovery to you. As to my looking a swell and doing the grand, why, that's all humbug. Ta, ta; and if ever you come to Cuba, look me up."

Whatever idea Hal may have had of his appearance in the future, the matter was soon settled when he and Mr. Brindle had left the ship.

"There, in you hop," said the latter, motioning him to enter the cab which had pulled up beside the wharf.

Then he mentioned the name of a fashionable hotel, to which they were driven. They obtained rooms, then emerged from the enormous building, which rose for many stories into the air, and entered one of the numerous electric cars that run through the streets of New York, and within ten minutes they were entering the doors of a big tailoring establishment known as Riarty's Store.

"I always get my clothes here," said Mr. Brindle. "It is not more expensive than obtaining them locally in Cuba, and as they have my measure for suits, boots, and hats, I can get anything by writing. Ah, good-day, Mr. Riarty."

He suddenly stepped towards a florid man, whose enormous proportions almost dwarfed his own.

"This young gentleman is my overseer, and requires suitable clothes for plantation life," he said. "You can take his measure, and I should like the things in four days. But he wants a ready-made suit for wearing in town, and an evening one as well. Can you do it?"

"To be sure I can," was the ready answer. "Step this way. One of the assistants shall attend to you."

Hal was astonished at the extent of the order. In the old days – which already seemed so very long ago, though only a few weeks had actually elapsed – he would have thought nothing of it. Then he was the son of a wealthy man, and had no need to stint himself; now it was totally different, and a gentleman, who was not much more than a stranger, though one with a kind heart, would pay whatever was called for.

"But you are ordering too much," expostulated Hal. "I shall never need all these clothes. Besides, think of the cost!"

"The cost, my dear young sir; that is my affair," Mr. Brindle laughed pleasantly. "I can assure you that if you only do your duty by me you will rapidly repay the outlay. As to there being too many things, you will want every suit I have ordered. I am an old hand, and know now exactly what will be useful."

Hal was silenced, but determined to do his utmost to repay the kindness of his benefactor. Fortunately, Mr. Riarty had a smartly cut plain suit which fitted his youthful customer, and another of evening clothes which required but slight alteration.

"We'll take the first with us," said Mr. Brindle, "and Mr. Riarty can send the other to the hotel in time for dinner. Good-day, sir, and please do not disappoint me. Remember, in four days' time we require the bulk of the order. Come along now, my friend. By the way, I must have some shorter name for you. Marchant is far too long. How are you usually called? Hal? Ah, that is short, and sounds well. It fits your character, and is a good one."

Five days later they boarded the railway cars running south, and Hal had his eyes opened as to the possibilities of traveling in comfort. The saloons and dining-cars were decorated in sumptuous fashion; and when night came, the accommodation had nothing of the make-shift about it. Americans, he discovered, did not consider that discomfort went hand-in-hand with travel. Their railways were designed for speed, safety, and easy running, and their cars for rest and freedom from vibration. Mr. Brindle led the way into the smoking-room at the end of the cars, and pressed the button for the porter.

"We shall want two compartments through to Florida," he said. "See that it is a good one, and take our small traps there."

When the man had gone Mr. Brindle turned to Hal, and, pointing to a hand-bag, said:

"All save that may remain in the sleeping saloon, but the bag you see contains notes, gold, and valuable securities. Now, I am going to give you a job. Your duties will commence from this moment, for I place you in charge of the bag, and will beg of you never to allow it out of your sight."

"Then you may rely upon me to look after it, and wherever I go your bag shall come with me."

Hal was as good as his word. Hour after hour the train hurried on. Occasionally the cars would pull up at some wayside station to allow a change of locomotives, and then the passengers would descend and take a short walk to stretch their legs and take the stiffness out of them. On such an occasion Hal strolled along the platform, leaving Mr. Brindle reading in the car. It was a sultry morning, and, feeling hot and fatigued, he sat down on a bench, being joined first by one passenger and then by a second, the former entering into conversation with him.

"Busy scene, sir," he said with some foreign accent. "Traveling alone, sir?" continued the stranger. "I should say you're not. The gentleman with you is Señor – I mean, Mr. Brindle of Cuba?"

Hal felt annoyed at the catechism through which he was being put.

"Well," he answered curtly, "and what if he is?"

What reply the dark-bearded stranger was about to give was cut short by the sudden clanging of a bell, and by the cry from the conductor, "All aboard!"

Starting from the seat, Hal ran some dozen paces, when he remembered the bag intrusted to him, and which he had placed by his side. To his consternation it was not where he had left it on the bench; a moment later, however, he noticed with a thrill of surprise that the stranger had it, and was hastening with it along the platform.

"Hi, there! Stop!" cried Hal, running after him. "What do you mean by taking my bag?" he demanded indignantly, rushing up to the man, and grasping the handle.

"Señor's bag! Pardon, but this is my friend's," replied the dark, Spanish-looking stranger, feigning astonishment and some amount of anger.

"Your friend's! Nonsense! It's mine! Give it up!" Hal cried, and without more ado wrenched the bag away.

"Sir, how do you dare? Ah, but here is my friend himself. He will explain," the stranger replied hotly. "Then, señor, you shall answer."

"What is this? What is the trouble?" the second man, a short, swarthy-looking fellow, asked, joining them at this moment. "Come, the cars are about to start."

"The trouble!" his friend replied. "See; we hasten to board the train, and you forget your bag. I would rescue it for you when this fine gentleman wishes to prevent me."

"But the bag is not mine; it belongs to him," the second man replied blandly, indicating Hal with a wave of his hand.

At once the face of the first speaker changed. He smiled, showing an excellent set of teeth, and made a profuse apology.

"My dear señor, but you must pardon me," he said. "It was my error, and a grievous one indeed. A thousand pardons. Señor must have thought me a thief!"

Hal certainly did, but it was not quite wise to admit it, and as the cars were moving, he acknowledged by a curt nod the theatrical bow with which he was favored, and hurriedly exclaiming, "I am glad the matter is settled," turned on his heel and boarded the cars. But one thing struck his attention at the last moment and filled his mind with suspicion. In the hurry of replacing his hat the Spanish-looking stranger had displaced a coal-black beard, and disclosed for the fraction of a minute a clean-shaven chin. Next moment the beard was back in its place, and the two men had leaped on to the train.

"I don't like the look of those fellows," thought Hal, as he took his place beside Mr. Brindle. "It was a trick to steal the bag, and from what was said I feel sure that they know who we are, and what valuables I was in charge of. Do you happen to know either of those two men who were speaking to me on the platform?" he suddenly asked, leaning forward to address his companion.

"Do you mean those who joined the cars after you? No, I cannot say that I do; and yet something about the bearded one struck me as familiar. What about them? They seemed to me to be holding a heated conversation with you."

"They very nearly walked off with your bag," Hal answered. Then he described the facts of the case.

"Yes, it looks nasty," said Mr. Brindle at last. "It appears to me that those two are scoundrels. Strange, but one certainly seems to have a familiar face. Pshaw! It cannot be! But we must be on our guard in future."

CHAPTER VII

ALL BUT KILLED

Undoubtedly an attempt had been made to deprive Hal of his charge. Had Hal waited another minute before discovering the absence of his possession, the thieves would certainly have escaped with the valuables.

"Yes, they are rogues," said Mr. Brindle that evening, returning to the subject as he and Hal sat down to dinner, "and the more I think about it the more certain I feel that I am right. After dinner we will endeavor to ascertain who they are."

Accordingly, half an hour later, they rose from their seats, just as the train drew up at a platform, and walked from end to end of the long string of cars, failing, however, to see the two adventurers.

"They've gone; and, after all, it was to be expected," exclaimed Mr. Brindle. "I suppose they slipped off a few minutes after boarding the train. There can have been no difficulty, as we crawled out of the station. Well, we shall not be troubled again; but let it be a lesson to you, Hal. Nowadays, one ought to be most careful when dealing with strangers."

Sauntering back, they took their seats once more, and looked at the people on the platform. At length the bell clanged, and to the familiar cry of "All aboard!" the cars were once more set in motion.

"Hallo! Those fellows were here all the time," said Hal, glancing at two figures on the platform. "Look, Mr. Brindle! There are the men who tried to steal the bag!"

"Ah, is that so, Hal?" exclaimed Mr. Brindle. "Precious scoundrels they look too, and the one with the beard strikes me again as being a man I have met before. Well, we need not trouble, for the train is off, and they are left behind. Now, lad, we'll have a good sleep, and to-morrow, when we leave our berths for breakfast, we shall be within an hour of Sable Bay."

Ten minutes later our hero was lying between the sheets, looking sleepily at the shaded electric light above him.

Meanwhile, what had become of the two men who had attempted to deprive Hal of the bag?

No sooner had the car passed in which Mr. Brindle and his young engineer were seated, than the swarthy-looking foreigners leaped on to the step of the following one, and hastily passing through the smoking-saloon, entered a small cupboard set apart for the porter.

"That was well managed, Señor Capitan," the darker of the two at once exclaimed, seating himself. "Ha, ha, did you not see them look at us? It is clear that they suspected our game, and no doubt their inspection of the cars was to discover us and have us ejected. We have played our cards well. While they fancy that we are miles behind them, we are in reality but a few yards away. No doubt this negro will entertain us till the time for action arrives, and then we will have the gold you say the bag contains, even though that stalwart young Englishman objects."

He spoke in Spanish, gesticulating and gabbling the words, and introducing a tone of marked disdain when alluding to the porter. There was little doubt that he was a half-caste, and owed some part of his existence to the negro race to which he had alluded with such contempt.

"When do we make the attempt, Señor Capitan?" he asked. "See, it is half-past eight now, and the majority of passengers are thinking of going to bed. Shall you try at midnight, or will you think it best to wait till the early hours of to-morrow?"

The man addressed did not answer for the moment, but, removing the beard from his chin, slowly rolled a cigarette. He was a small, active-looking man, of undoubted Spanish blood. At first sight he would have been called a handsome fellow, but a glance at his eyes and mouth altered that impression. There was something not altogether pleasing about him.

"You are overhasty, and forget yourself, Pedro," he said at length. "One would have thought that it was all of your planning. Remember that it was I who decided how we would act; and do not forget that in undertaking to abstract this bag, I am risking far more than you."

"For which you will, no doubt, extract a proportionately large share of the booty," grumbled the one who had been called Pedro.

"Perhaps. And why not? Am I not the leader? and are you not the servant? But do not let us argue so, or we might quarrel, and that would be bad for one of us. Listen to me, and see that you do not interrupt. This English brat, who just awoke in time to upset the plan which I had devised so carefully, is still in charge of the precious bag for which we have traveled so far, and from which we hope to recoup ourselves. We know that he is about to retire for the night, for the porter has told us so. Very good. What of the others? They are weary, and will turn in early, so as to awake fresh and rested to-morrow. Our accomplice here, the negro whom you scowl at so heavily, will tell us when all in that car have retired. That will be our time. Any noise we may make will be unnoticed, owing to the fact that it is so early; while if this young fool of an Englishman shouts – well, perhaps the rattle of the train will drown everything!"

"Perhaps," Pedro growled. "And what if the sounds are heard?" he asked. "Supposing the Señor Englishman cries loudly for help?"

"Ah! then he must look to himself. We will deal gently with him till then; but if he refuses to be silent – In any case, you have the revolver and some inches of steel? Now we understand each other," said the Spaniard. "We will wait till all is clear, when we will enter the Señor Englishman's compartment and bind him. That done, this porter will signal for the cars to stop and will raise an alarm. Of course he will not know precisely what has happened, nor, if questions are asked will he have an idea of the appearance of the two mountebanks who have dared to commit robbery on the cars. Our friend, the Señor Brindle, will not dream of us; for did he not see us descend from the cars some miles back? By the time the passengers have collected their senses we shall be a mile behind, hidden in the forest, and it will be evil luck indeed if the bag which we covet is not with us. Then back to 'the ever-faithful island,' Cuba, the island of freedom, where a Spaniard who is poor may live in contentment, certain of being able to return to his native country with provision for the remainder of his life, and all plucked from the islanders. Yes, Pedro, we will return home and, later on, we will repeat the process of bleeding the Señor Brindle."

"Buenos, Señor Capitan! You are a veritable wonder!" Pedro cried excitedly, waving his cigarette in the air, and patting his comrade on the knee. "And now to pass the time. It is dull sitting here doing nothing but smoke and listen to the rattle of the train. Here, boy, bring glasses and a bottle."

Thus addressed, the porter produced a decanter of liquor and two tumblers, and for an hour or more the two conspirators refreshed themselves, and carried on an eager conversation in low tones, in the voluble, gesticulating manner common to their countrymen. At length the porter, who had departed and left them to themselves, returned to inform them that all was clear.

"Now for the money, Pedro!" the Spaniard exclaimed. "Wait, though; let us pay this good fellow for his services."

Taking a purse from his pocket, he placed four dollars in the porter's hand, and led the way into the smoking saloon. Two minutes later they were standing at the end of the car in which Hal was sleeping. They paused for a moment as if in fear, then they opened the door, and crept along the passage till they were outside the compartment he occupied.

"No, not there, Señor Capitan. The English boy has gone into the other bunk," Pedro whispered, pointing to the next compartment, in which Mr. Brindle lay. "See, I am sure of it, for here is his coat, hanging outside the door."

"Are you quite sure, Pedro?" the Spaniard asked doubtfully. "The porter said we should find him in the fifth from the forward end of the car, and this is certainly the one."

"That is as you say," was the reply. "But here are the young man's boots. It is clear the negro is mistaken."

For more than a minute the two crouched silently in the corridor, doubtful as to the compartment in which Hal slept, and in which lay the bag they hoped to capture. It was, indeed, a puzzle, and it was long before they could come to any solution. To enter the wrong compartment meant ruin to all their hopes. But more than that might come of it, for Mr. Brindle was a powerful man, and to be caught in his clutches would be no joke. It was not a pleasant thing to think about, and it troubled the Spaniard. He ground his teeth, and, muttering an oath, whispered in Pedro's ear:

"Keep the revolver," he said, "and give me the knife. Whatever happens, we must contrive to get away."

Convinced by the boots which Hal had placed too far to the right when leaving them in the corridor for the porter to attend to, they crept on a pace, and grasped the handle of the compartment in which Mr. Brindle was sleeping.

"Quick, the key!" whispered the Spaniard, trying the door, and finding it locked.

There was a grating sound and a faint click as the key was introduced, and the bolt thrown back. But slight though the noise was it reached Hal's ears, even amidst the rattle of the wheels, and startled him from his sleep. Ignorant as to what had disturbed him, he lay on his back, his eyes wide open. Another minute, and he would have turned over to sink into sleep once more, when something bumped heavily against the woodwork which separated his compartment from Mr. Brindle's.

"Don't move, or it will be the worse for you, Señor Englishman!" he heard a hoarse voice exclaim in threatening tones.

It took a few seconds for Hal to comprehend what was happening. "Don't move, or it will be the worse for you!" That meant that someone was in difficulties next door.

"By Jove, those rascals are making another attempt!" he exclaimed; and at once sprang from his bunk.

Flinging the door open, he rushed into the next compartment, to see kneeling on the floor, in the full glare of the electric light, which had been switched on by the Spaniard, Pedro, revolver in hand, the muzzle of which was pressed into Mr. Brindle's ear, while the other hand was placed over his mouth.

Hal had just time to notice that the other scoundrel was busily searching for the bag beneath the bunk, when both men turned and rushed at him, Pedro pressing the trigger of his revolver. There was a blinding flash, followed by a loud report, and Hal felt something strike him on the left shoulder with stunning force. Next second the Spaniard's face, with the long, coal-black beard, suddenly appeared before him in the smoke, and he struck at it with all his might, sending the ruffian staggering back; but he recovered himself in a moment, and rushed towards the doorway, throwing Hal to the floor as he passed.

"How is that now, lad? How do you feel, old boy? Better? That's it; you're smiling. That's the way. Pull yourself together, and drink this off."

It was Mr. Brindle who was speaking, and, scarcely understanding what was said, but feeling dazed and queer, and much inclined to close his eyes and sleep, Hal swallowed the contents of the tumbler which was placed to his lips. But suddenly Mr. Brindle's well-known voice brought him to his senses.

"By Jove, what a fright you gave me!" he said. "How do you feel, Hal? Come, pull yourself together and look at me."

"Eh, what? I'm all right! What's happening? Here, let me sit up!" exclaimed Hal, suddenly suiting the action to the word, and looking about him with wide-open eyes. "Why, what's this? I was asleep, and then – Those thieves! What is it, Mr. Brindle? I dreamed that they had made another attempt, and that I happened to hear them. It looked as though all was up with you, and I remember feeling in a terrible way. After that, everything seemed to stop, and I fell into a glorious dream."

"That is just about what has happened, my lad, and very fortunate it was for me that you awoke when you did; though for you, poor lad, it has meant trouble. Those Spanish scoundrels did make a second attempt, but, in their endeavor to get possession of the bag, they pitched upon the wrong compartment. I can tell you that it was a ticklish moment for me. As I lay there, not daring to move, I saw you come in. The only wonder to me is that the gentleman called Pedro did not have his revenge at once by shooting me. At any rate, he managed to put a bullet into your shoulder, and then he escaped from the car. The other rascal, whom you tackled so gamely, and who will have a splendid black eye for his pains, also got clear away, leaving some of his property behind him. Here it is."

He held up a mass of black hair, which had formerly covered the chin of the Spaniard.

"Now, Hal, you have the whole story," he continued. "You were wounded and fainted from loss of blood. A fellow passenger, who happens to be a doctor, has already examined and dressed the shoulder, and reports most favorably. A week will see you up and about, so he says, for the bullet was of very small caliber."

"What? A week in bed, Mr. Brindle!" exclaimed Hal, aghast. "Why, I am fit to get up now. See here, I feel quite myself again."

He struggled to his feet, but next moment he was glad to sit down again, and was forced, though much against his inclination, to confess that he was shaken. However, with his old dogged determination, he resolved not to give way, and not to submit to being put ignominiously to bed.

"I am a bit groggy," he admitted. "My legs don't seem quite to belong to me; but it's only a temporary matter. Thank you, I will have another sip."

The tumbler was raised to his lips, and he drank deeply, for the loss of blood had induced a violent thirst.

"There you see for yourself how fit you are," said Mr. Brindle. "And now, as the thieves have escaped, and your wound has been seen to, you will lie down and sleep till morning."

There was no gainsaying this direct order, for Mr. Brindle waited to see that Hal lay full length on the bunk. Then he left the section, and entered his own. As for Hal, though badly shaken, he suffered little pain. The injured shoulder felt numbed, but nothing more. After lying awake for half an hour, thinking over the little adventure through which he had passed, he, too, dozed off, and finally sank into a deep sleep, from which he was awakened by the opening of his door.

"Breakfast in half an hour," said Mr. Brindle, putting his head into the compartment. "How goes it with you this morning, old boy?"

"I feel quite myself," said Hal briskly, sitting up in his bunk. Then, to demonstrate the truth of his words, he stood up. "Yes," he continued, "I feel ever so much stronger than I did last night. I suppose the excitement and the shock had unnerved me, but now I am perfectly steady."

"That's good, Hal, and I am glad to see you making an effort. After all, there is no reason why a bullet wound in the shoulder should lay you up. Last night, as you say, the shock and suddenness of the injury had upset you, and no doubt you felt the rapid loss of blood. A few hours' sleep have made that good, so that you will quickly mend. I have no fear of the wound going wrong, for it was skillfully treated from the first. Now, let me lend a hand, and help to put your clothes on."

Half an hour later, with his left arm in a sling, and his empty sleeve pinned to the coat, arm in arm with Mr. Brindle, Hal entered the breakfast saloon, where they took their places at one of the many small tables. Numbers of other passengers were already there, and they looked at our hero with curiosity and admiration.

An hour later the engine steamed into a large station, and the passengers descended from the cars.

"Just look out for the youngsters, Hal," said Mr. Brindle. "They'll be coming to meet their dad."

"Youngsters? Your youngsters?" asked Hal, in surprise; for Mr. Brindle had never mentioned that he was married and had a family.

"Why, mine to be sure! There's Dora, the dearest blue-eyed girl that ever breathed; and Gerald, the biggest and most mischievous monkey that ever wore clothes. You'll know them at once. Ah, there they are, or I am mistaken."

"Hallo! There you are, dad!" cried the boy, a sturdy young fellow of some sixteen years. "Hi! Come along, Dora! Here he is, looking as fat and jolly as possible."

Breathless, and with hat tossed to the back of his head, the lad rushed at Mr. Brindle and embraced him, a graceful and pretty girl, looking charming and dainty in a white frock, following suit quickly.

"There, there, how glad I am to see you both again, my dears!" exclaimed Mr. Brindle. "Both of you looking as well as ever too. But I am forgetting my duties. Dora – Gerald – come here and let me introduce you a very great friend, who is to be my overseer. Steady now, shake hands gently, for he has been in the wars. Hal, my dear boy, let me present you to my dear children."

Each in turn shook Hal heartily by the hand, Dora looking sympathetically, and, at first, somewhat shyly at him; while Gerald, boy-like, took good stock of the new overseer, not fearing to look well into his face.

"What has happened to your arm, Mr. Marchant? What war have you been in? And are you very much hurt?" Dora asked these questions in rapid succession.

"Dora," said her father, "this young gentleman was shot by a ruffian who attempted to steal my bag. He has risked his life for me, and he is helpless. I place him in your charge. You have had some experience of nursing and will do your best. Now, let us get to the carriage."

Dora was a young lady about whom there was no nonsense. Here was a fellow-being who was obviously suffering; somehow he had come by his injury in protecting her father. That was enough for any daughter. For his sake she would look after Hal. So she marched our hero from the platform, chuckling secretly at the blush which had now changed his cheeks from dullest white to brilliant red. They stepped into the comfortable carriage, and at a crack of the whip, the team of mules set forward at a hand-gallop.

What thoughts were Hal's as he was driven to his new home? It seemed like a dream, for, a few weeks back, he was an orphan, with few friends. Then he had decided to start to America, where he would be entirely unknown. But what had happened? Friends seemed to have risen up on every side. Yes, it was good fortune. At least, that was what he thought as his eyes wandered from Mr. Brindle and Gerald to Dora. Never before had Hal taken notice of any girl.

And here he found himself unconsciously glancing at Dora, and listening eagerly to every word she said. It was sense too. Indeed, she discussed everyday matters with her father in a manner which opened Hal's eyes.

"She's clever," thought Hal, "and she's a pretty girl. How kind she was to me!"

And what of Dora? She, on her part, was taking stock of the overseer. Beneath her lashes she stole many a glance at him, always to meet his steady eyes, and turn away in confusion. But still, she was able to come to a conclusion. She saw a stalwart young man, who had yet an inch or more to grow. He had an open face, and eyes which never flinched or turned away.

"I like the new overseer," she said to herself. "He looks honest, brave, and kind. But how pale he is!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE LOSS OF THE "MAINE"

Thanks to a healthy constitution, and to the fact that, though painful, his wound was really a simple one, Hal Marchant was very soon off the sick-list, and in the stage of convalescence.

From the railway station at which the train had set them down, he and Mr. Brindle, together with Dora and Gerald, were driven into the country, along dusty roads which were fenced in on every side by luxuriant vegetation of every description and hue. Sometimes a long, flat, and unsightly marsh came into view, and at the sound of the wheels thousands of wild-fowl rose, screaming, into the air. But they soon began to ascend, though at a gentle slope, which the mules galloped up, still at the same steady pace.

Up and up the road mounted, curved suddenly to the left, and then quickly disappeared into a dense jungle of trees and growth, from which the delicious perfume of orange blossom was wafted.

"Here we are, and very thankful we ought to be, my lad," said Mr. Brindle, addressing Hal. "Look over there. Welcome to the 'Barn.' This is our winter residence, and here I guarantee that you will soon get back that color which you have lost."

He pointed with his cane to a fine bungalow which appeared at that moment at the end of an open glade, nestling beneath a wreath of foliage.

It was, indeed, a perfect place for an invalid. Perched high up on sandy soil, and surrounded by a forest of gorgeous orange trees, the house peeped over the top of the leaves at a scene beautiful beyond description. In the veranda, arm in sling, and with legs lazily stretched along the sides of a big cane chair, Hal could lie the whole day long, gazing across a sea of green shrubs and leaves – a sea which rustled musically, and was ever changing from brightest green to shimmering blue in the rays of the southern sun. And if he but lifted his eyes an inch or two, a rocky, irregular coast, and an ocean beyond, looking for all the world like a strip of brightly burnished steel, filled him with a sort of rapture, so that to lie there was no hardship, and the hours never dragged, but flew by almost too rapidly for his liking.

"You are an exceedingly good patient," said Dora one day, more than two weeks later, coming on to the veranda and taking a seat which stood vacant by his side; "but I suppose this obedience will not continue for long. The doctor who has been attending you says that your wound is merely a pin-prick – how he can be so very unfeeling I do not know! Still, he is convinced that it is now so far healed that it requires very little attention or dressing. That means, I suppose, that you will throw off my authority, and do your best to get into trouble again at the very first opportunity. What have you to say to that, sir?"

"Pin-prick! Quite so, Dora," Hal answered, with a smile. "The wound is, of course, quite a simple affair, and I am really fit for anything. As to more trouble, I can only say that, if it comes, I hope you will be there to nurse me again."

It was an unusual thing for Hal to indulge in pretty speeches, and it was as much as he could do to get the words out. His bashfulness made them stick in his throat, though he meant every syllable.

"I'm sure you've been awfully good to me, Dora," he said. "How can I repay you?"

"Oh, nonsense! Good, indeed! I have only done what any other girl would gladly have undertaken; and you forget, Hal, that you were wounded in helping my father. There, we are evens! We owe nothing to each other, though, if you ever have an opportunity, I am sure you will do your utmost for us."

"Hallo! What's this? Pretty speeches, and from my Dora, too! Who would have thought it!"

Mr. Brindle stepped on to the veranda just in time to overhear the end of the conversation between the young people, and burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

"There, it is only my chaff," he added with a smile. "A little gratitude on either side is what one would have expected. But how are you, Hal? When do you think you could travel?"

"Now; as soon as you like, Mr. Brindle," exclaimed Hal, springing to his feet. "Take a look at me. I am as well as ever; and as for the arm, beyond a little stiffness, which will soon pass away, I have no trouble with it."

"Then, we'll clear for the ever-faithful island of Cuba, and for our gay little hacienda, Eldorado. Hal, you shall see a spot which compares favorably with this. I built this house in which we are living more than fifteen years ago, but the hacienda not for some time later. To my eyes the latter is perfect. It is a gentleman's country residence, and, with its grounds, is a beautiful oasis in a desert of impenetrable jungle and burnt-out plantations – not to mention swamps innumerable, for which the eastern end of the island is notorious. But you shall judge for yourself. To-morrow we will make our preparations, and on the following day the steamer will sail with us from Tampa for Havana."

Accordingly, all at the "Barn" were extremely busy, Hal even taking his arm from the sling to lend a hand on occasion. By the second morning their packing was completed, and, leaving the house in possession of a negro caretaker, the party was driven away in the mule cart to the harbor at Tampa. Three days later they sighted the coast of Cuba, the biggest and one of the oldest of Spanish colonies in the West which remained at that moment in the hands of Spain.

"It is at once the finest and the most unfortunate island in these seas," remarked Mr. Brindle to Hal and Gerald, as they gazed towards the distant shore. "For years – I cannot at the moment recollect how many – the bulk of the inhabitants have been in rebellion. Fighting has taken place almost incessantly between the Spanish rulers and the native population; and things have come to such a pass that ruin stares everyone in the face. Planters and their laborers have had hard times indeed, but I trust a brighter future is in store for us. America has intervened between insurgents and Spaniards, and it seems that her influence will avert further bloodshed, and peace and prosperity will then return to this smiling land. I am sure I hope it will be so. Personally I have not lost, though others have. But it is a long story, lads, and I will reserve it for another time. Take a look through my glasses, Hal, and tell me what you see."

Mr. Brindle suddenly handed his field-glasses to Hal, and pointed towards the harbor.

"I see a big passenger boat in there," the latter said, after taking a long and steady look. "She is lying against the quay, and close beside her are two ships, which look like men-of-war – one flying Spanish colors, and the other the Stars and Stripes of America."

"Good! I thought so," Mr. Brindle exclaimed. "That vessel sailing beneath the colors of Yankee land is the battleship *Maine*, and she is here on a special visit, which it is hoped will cement a long friendship between the two countries. Now, I fancy we had better go below and prepare for dinner. The gong sounds in half an hour."

By half-past eight that night, the ever-memorable 15th of February, 1898, the ship upon which Hal and his friends were passengers had anchored in the harbor of Havana. On the upper deck, beneath the glare of the electric light, they made a group that was interesting and pleasing to the eye.

Stretched in hammock chairs, Mr. Brindle cigar in mouth, and all dressed in white, relieved in Dora's case by a sash of palest blue, they chatted in low voices, now and again lapsing into silence and listening to the sounds that came from other ships across the placid water and from the dimly lit streets of the town. Some sailor lad aboard the *Maine* was delighting his fellows with banjo and song, and our hero and his friends listened as if enchanted.

"Ah, honey, my honey" – the words came clear and strong; then they died down and became merged with the notes of the banjo, only to burst forth again as the audience took up the chorus, and sent it swelling across the harbor.

"How nice it sounds! How peaceful!" exclaimed Mr. Brindle, thoughtfully. "God grant that this visit from America to a Spanish port may settle every squabble. I am sure braver and more agreeable fellows could not have been sent; and if only the Dons are as friendly, all will be well. Listen! How

those lads love that song! They would sing it by the hour if they were able. But there sounds the bugle, and away they go to their hammocks. I think, Dora dear, that it is time you and Gerald also went to your bunks. Remember, we have a long and tiring day before us to-morrow, and you will be in need of all your energies. Now, off with you! Hal and I will stay on deck a little longer, as I wish to speak to him."

The two young people looked somewhat disappointed, but strict obedience being amongst their virtues, they said "good-night" and retired.

"Now for a stroll, Hal," commenced Mr. Brindle. "I have much to say to you, and you have a great deal before you, for which a little advice given now will prepare you. Within three days we shall be at Eldorado, and new duties and new faces will confront you. I want you to have some knowledge of them beforehand, for it will be better if my overseer can come to the plantation ready for any emergency. You will thus make a better start, and will be held in higher estimation by the men. That is the secret of plantation work. Respect yourself, show that you are capable, fair, and strong, and the negro hands will be ready to obey you in every particular."

Mr. Brindle took Hal by the arm, and walked him up and down beneath the awning. At length, having communicated to him all the information he wished, he led the way aft, and the two leaned against the rails at the stern of the ship.

Havana, one of the oldest harbors in the West, lay wrapped in the black mantle of night, dotted here and there by the riding light of some small fishing schooner, bobbing gently to the swell which ran through the harbor channel. Closer at hand were other lights, flashing, tier above tier, from the state cabins of the *City of Washington*—a leviathan which was filled to overflowing with passengers. She was a contrast to the *Maine*, aboard which all those who had been so merry and lighthearted seemed now fast asleep. But for her riding lights, and the reflection from her gunroom, she was enveloped in darkness, into which a flicker from her smoke-stacks sometimes flew, to disappear in a moment. Not a sound came from her deck. All was still, and every soul beneath her armor-plates, save the few who kept the watch, lay wrapped in sleep – sleep, alas! to extend forever and ever, to hold them in its cold embrace till the end of everything.

What was that? Crash! A second or two's interval, and then a nerve-shaking boom, an appalling explosion, a rush of flame into the night, that lights up the surroundings for miles. And then? Ah, Heavens! shriek upon shriek, the clatter of scattered wreckage and rent iron upon quay and neighboring ships, and the hissing of flaming woodwork falling into the sea. A minute before there floated as fine a vessel as ever sailed from the shores of America, carrying, too, as gallant a crew as ever shipped under the famous star-spangled banner. Where were they now?

Clinging to the rail, stunned by the roar of the explosion, and dazed by the suddenness of it all, Hal and Mr. Brindle looked at a heap of flaring wreckage, and wondered what had happened. Then the explanation burst upon them with a shock and a rush which almost unmanned them.

"She has blown up! The *Maine* has been smashed to pieces! How dreadful!" exclaimed Mr. Brindle, in a breath.

"Yes, something awful has happened," Hal answered. "Quick, sir; there may be men to be saved. Let us help; everyone will be required, and we may be of use. Come; I see them manning one of the boats."

Without waiting for further conversation, he sprang towards the gangway, followed closely by Mr. Brindle.

"That's it! More lads for the work. Slip along down that 'ere gangway, and get fixed up to your places," sang out a quartermaster, who stood on the deck close to the ladder leading to the boat below.

As cool as if nothing unusual had happened, he waited a few moments to collect more men, and then hurried down to the boat in which Hal and Mr. Brindle had taken their places.

"Get hold of them there oars," he cried hoarsely. "Some of yer aer new at the game, but yer can pull for what we want. There, shove her off, my lad, and out oars all of yer. Bust me! aer some

of yer goin' ter take two weeks about it? Bustle yourselves! Aer yer ready? Then fetch hold of your time from me. Now – pull – again – once more, my hearties – pull – at it, lads – we are nearer – good boys – with a will; – pull ho – all together – ah, steady there all."

Never could an amateur crew have had a better coxswain. There was no confusion, and no desperate hurry. Instead, coached by the quartermaster, they sent the boat flying through the water, and before they could have expected it, were close beside the *Maine*.

"She's down by the head," cried Mr. Brindle, who sat next to Hal. "Keep a look-out for any man in the water."

"Aye, she's down, and will go more too," the quartermaster shouted. "She's flaring like a torch, so I reckon we ought ter see any poor feller who happens ter be about in need of help."

Indeed, the bows of the *Maine* were crushed into shapeless wreckage, which was burning fiercely, the flames lighting up the whole of the harbor. By this time, too, the death-like silence, which had fallen immediately after the first cries for help, was broken by a roar of frightened voices from the town. People rushed from their houses demanding what had happened. Bells clanged the alarm, and the fire-brigade turned out, ready for any emergency. And, meanwhile, every ship in the harbor sent her boats on an errand of mercy, and soon the sailors, who but a few short minutes before had been sleeping peacefully, were being lifted from the water. But not all were there to be helped; numbers of the poor fellows had sunk, others still slept – the everlasting sleep – beneath the shattered plates of the *Maine*.

"Look, there is one sailor," cried Mr. Brindle suddenly, pointing to a figure struggling close beside the *Maine*, and seeming to be almost enveloped in flame. "Quick, quartermaster; let us row in and rescue him."

"No; can't be done. It's hard ter say it, but it can't," was the curt answer, given with a sad shake of the head. "That 'ere chap don't scorch, because he's under water. We should, though. We'd be blistered and dried like so many herrings. It's hard, sir, but it's out o' the question."

"Not quite," muttered Hal. "Hold on to my oar, Mr. Brindle. I'm going for him."

Next moment there was a splash, and he was overboard, swimming towards the flaming wreck as strongly as though he had never suffered a wound on his shoulder. A few lusty strokes took him close to the man, who by this was spinning round and round in the water, wholly unconscious, and on the point of sinking. His hand shot in the air, his fingers clutching desperately, while his eyes seemed on the point of bursting from their sockets. A sudden flare from the burning woodwork lit up the ghastly scene, and showed the poor fellow's mouth wide open in the act of giving vent to a cry for help. But just then the water swirled about him, overflowing his face, and hiding all but the pair of hands, which still grasped despairingly at the air.

"I'll save him whatever happens," said Hal to himself, sinking for a moment to escape the fierce heat of the flames, which burst forth furiously from the deck and sides of the unfortunate *Maine*. He swam beneath the water, and rising a minute later beside the man, grasped him by the shoulders, and easily turned him upon his back. From that moment all was plain sailing, for it was not for nothing that Hal had learned to swim. Floating beside the drowning sailor, he kicked out with his legs, and towed him towards the boat. Before he thought it possible they were alongside, and were being hauled on board.

"Good lad! You're one of the right sort!" sang out the quartermaster. "There, sit right down and get hold of your wind. Perhaps yer'll be wanting it again in a minute. Hillo! aint that another poor feller?"

He shielded his eyes from the glare by placing his hand to his forehead, and looked towards the *Maine* once more. A piece of wreckage floated into the light, and on it was seen another poor sailor, clinging for his life.

"Ah, there he aer! Can't yer see him, boys? He's right under the ship, and she's scorching the life out of him."

"Yes, he's too close to the fire again; and if we row in there we should all be shriveled," remarked Hal, very quietly. "Here, I'm for it again, so keep a look-out for me, quartermaster."

Once more he slipped overboard, and, pursuing the same tactics, escaped the heat by diving beneath the water. When he reached the plank upon which the sailor was lying, it was to find him, like the other, unconscious, and almost dead from the combined results of heat and smoke. He did not trouble to take the man from the float, but pushed it towards the boat, and in due time had the satisfaction of seeing him lifted from the water with the aid of many willing hands. Then the boat pulled round the flaming wreck, and, finding no one else in the water, went beneath the stern, which was free of flames, and made fast to a rope.

"Now, right aboard, my hearties!" cried the quartermaster. "If there's chaps blown into the sea, there's safe ter be a tidy few knocked silly between the decks, and they'll want helping. Aer there any man aboard this boat as feels like coming up? It's ticklish business, for this craft has tons of powder in her magazines, and I reckon the fire'll soon find it out. Aer anyone following?"

He sprang at the rope ladder which dangled overboard, and swarmed up it, followed by everyone who had accompanied him in the boat, save, of course, those who had been rescued from the sea.

"What, aer the whole crew of yer coming?" exclaimed the quartermaster. "George, but yer aer the finest set of pards I ever come across! Every blessed soul of yer itchin' ter get blow sky-high!"

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