

REID MAYNE

RAN AWAY TO
SEA

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Ran Away to Sea:

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Ran Away to Sea

Chapter One

I was just sixteen when I ran away to sea.

I did not do so because I had been treated unkindly at home. On the contrary, I left behind me a fond and indulgent father, a kind and gentle mother, sisters and brothers who loved me, and who lamented for me long after I was gone.

But no one had more cause to regret this act of filial disobedience than I myself. I soon repented of what I had done, and often, in after life, did it give me pain, when I reflected upon the pain I had caused to my kindred and friends.

From my earliest years I had a longing for the sea – perhaps not so much to be a sailor, as to travel over the great ocean, and behold its wonders. This longing seemed to be part of my nature, for my parents gave no encouragement to such a disposition. On the contrary, they did all in their power to beget within me a dislike for a sea life, as my father had designed for me a far different profession. But the counsels of my father, and the entreaties of my mother all proved unavailing. Indeed – and I feel shame in acknowledging it – they produced an effect directly opposite to that which was intended; and, instead of lessening my

inclination to wander abroad, they only rendered me more eager to carry out that design! It is often so with obstinate natures, and I fear that, when a boy, mine was too much of this character. Most to desire that which is most forbidden, is a common failing of mankind; and in doing this, I was perhaps not so unlike others.

Certain it is, that the thing which my parents least desired me to feel an interest in – the great salt sea – was the very object upon which my mind constantly dwelt – the object of all my longings and aspirations.

I cannot tell what first imbued me with a liking for the sea, for I had such a liking almost from the years of childhood. I was born upon the sea-shore, and this fact might explain it; for, during my early life, when I was still but a mere child, I used to sit at the window and look with admiring eyes on the boats with their white sails, and the beautiful ships with their tall tapering masts, that were constantly passing and repassing. How could I do otherwise than admire these grand and glorious structures – so strong and so graceful? How could it be otherwise, than that I should imbibe a longing to be on board of them, and be carried afar over yonder bright blue water?

As I grew older, certain books had chanced to fall into my hands, and these related to the sea – they told of lovely lands that lay upon its shores – of strange races of men and animals – of singular plants and trees – of palms and broad-leaved figs – of the banyan and the baobab – of many things beautiful and wonderful. These books strengthened the inclination I already

felt to wander abroad over the ocean.

Another circumstance aided in bringing about the climax. I had an uncle who had been an old skipper – that is, the master of a merchant-ship – and it was the delight of this old gentleman to assemble his nephews around him – there was a goodly number of us – and tell us tales of the sea, to which all were ever eager to listen. Many a budget did he deliver by the winter fireside – for, like the storyteller of the “Arabian Nights,” a thousand and one tales could he tell – stories of desperate adventures by flood and field – of storms, hurricanes, and shipwrecks – long voyages in open boats – encounters with pirates and Indians – battles with sharks, and seals, and whales bigger than houses – terrible conflicts with wild beasts – as bears, wolves, lions, and tigers! All these adventures had our old uncle encountered, or said he had, which to his admiring audience was pretty much the same thing.

After listening to such thrilling narrations, no wonder I became tired of home, no wonder my natural inclination grew into a passion I could no longer resist. No wonder I ran away to sea.

And I did so at the age of sixteen – the wonder is I did not go sooner, but it was no fault of mine that I did not; for from the time I was able to talk I had been constantly importuning my parents for leave to go. I knew they could easily have found a situation for me, had they been so minded. They could have bound me as an apprentice on board some of the great merchant vessels sailing

for India, or they could have entered me in the Royal Navy as a midshipman, for they were not without high interest; but neither father nor mother would lend an ear to my entreaties.

At length, convinced they would never consent, I resolved upon running away; and, from the age of fourteen, had repeatedly offered myself on board the ships that traded to the neighbouring seaport, but I was too small a boy, and none of them would take me. Some of the captains refused because they knew I had not the consent of my parents; and these were the very kind with whom I should have preferred going; since the fact of their being such conscientious men, would have ensured me good treatment. But as these refused to take me I had no other resource but to try elsewhere, and I at length succeeded in striking a bargain with a skipper who had no scruples about the matter, and I was booked as an apprentice. He knew I was about to run away; and more than this, assisted in the design by letting me know the exact day and hour he was to take his departure from the port.

And I was aboard at the time specified; and before any search could have been made for me, or even before I could have been missed, the vessel had tripped her anchor, spread her sails, and carried me off beyond the possibility of pursuit.

Chapter Two

I was not twelve hours on board – twelve minutes I might almost say – before I was completely cured of my sea fever; and I would have parted with the best tooth in my head to have set my legs once more on land again. Almost on embarking I was overhauled by sea-sickness, and in another hour it became so bad that I thought it would have turned me inside out.

Sea-sickness is a malady not pleasant under any circumstances – even to a first-cabin passenger, with a steward to wait upon him, and administer soothing prescriptions and consoling sympathy. How much more painful to a poor friendless boy treated as I was – sworn at by the surly captain – cursed and cuffed by the brutal mate – jeered and laughed at by the ruffian crew. Oh! it was horrid, and had the ship been sinking under me at that moment I verily believe I should not have made the slightest effort to save myself!

Forty-eight hours, however, gave me relief from the nauseous ailing, for this like many other diseases is often short-lived where it is most violent. In about two days I was able to stand up and move about the decks, and I was made to move about them with a vengeance.

I have above characterised the captain as “surly,” the mate “brutal,” and the crew a set of “ruffians”: I have spoken without exaggeration. With an exception or two, a more villainous gang I

never encountered – of course not before that time – for that was not likely; but never since either, and it has several times been the fortune of my life to mix in very questionable and miscellaneous company.

The captain was not only surly, but positively ferocious when drunk or angry, and one or both he generally was. It was dangerous to go near him – at least for me, or any one that was weak and helpless – for it was chiefly upon the unresisting that he ventured his ill-humour.

I was not long on board before I incurred his displeasure by some mistake I could not possibly help – I had a taste of his temper then, and many a one afterwards, for his spite once kindled against anyone was implacable as the hate of a Corsican, and never became allayed.

He was a short, stout, “bluffy” man, with features perfectly regular, but with fat round cheeks, bullet eyes, and nose slightly upturned – a face which is often employed in pictures to typify good-nature, jollity, and an honest heart; but with little propriety is it so employed in my opinion, since under just such smiling faces have I, during a long life’s experience, encountered the greatest amount of dishonesty combined with dispositions most cruel and brutal. Such a man was the skipper into whose tender care I had so recklessly thrown myself.

The mate was an echo of his captain. When the one said “no” the other said “no,” and when either said “yes,” the other affirmed it. The principal difference between them was that the

mate did not drink, and perhaps this lengthened, if it did not strengthen, the bond of friendship that existed between them. Had both been drinkers they must have quarrelled at times; but the mate never “tasted” as he affirmed, and when his superior was in his cups this enabled him to bear the abuse which not unfrequently the captain treated him to. In all matters of discipline, or of anything else, he was with the captain, for though brutal he was but a cowardly fellow and ever ready to fawn upon his master, “boot-lick” him as the sailors termed it.

There was a second mate, but this was a very secondary kind of a character, not worth description, and scarcely to be distinguished from the common “hands” over whom he exercised only a very limited control.

There was a carpenter, an old man with a large swollen rum-reddened nose, another crony of the captain’s; and a huge and very ugly negro, who was both cook and steward, and who was vile enough to have held office in the kitchen of Pluto. These were the officers of the ship, and for the men, they were, as already stated, as villainous a crew as I ever encountered. There were exceptions – only one or two, – but it was some time before I discovered them.

In such companionship then did I find myself – I just fresh from the tender protection of parents – from the company of kind friends, and associates. Oh! I was well cured of the sea fever, and would have given half my life to be on land again! How I reproached myself for my folly! How I reproached that friend

of the family – the old salt – whose visionary adventures had no doubt been the cause of my sea longings! how in my heart I now execrated both him, and his fanciful stories! Would I had never heard them! would that I had never run away to sea!

Repentance had arrived too late to be of any use. I could no longer return – I must go on, and how long? merciful heaven, the prospect was horrible! Months of my painful life were to be endured. Months! nay years, – for I now remembered that the wretch of a captain had caused me to sign some agreement – I had not even read it, but I knew it was an article of indenture; and I was told afterwards that it bound me for years – for five long years – bound me not an apprentice but in reality a slave. A slave for five years to this hideous brute, who might scold me at will, cuff me at will, kick me at will, have me flogged or put in irons whenever the fancy crossed his mind.

There was no retreating from these hard conditions. Filled with bright visions of “life on the ocean wave,” I had subscribed to them without pause or thought. My name was down, and I was legally bound. So they told me both captain and mate, and I believed it.

I could not escape, no matter how severe the treatment. Should I attempt to run away from the ship, it would be desertion. I could be brought back and punished for it. Even in a foreign port the chances of desertion would be no better, but worse, since there the sailor finds it more difficult to conceal himself. I had no hope then of escaping from the cruel thrall in which I now

found myself, but by putting an end to my existence, either by jumping into the sea or hanging myself from the yard-arm – a purpose which on more than one occasion I seriously entertained; but from which I was diverted by the religious teachings of my youth, now remembered in the midst of my misery.

It would be impossible for me to detail the number of cruelties and indignities to which I was forced to submit. My existence was a series of both.

Even my sleep, if sleep it could be called, I was not allowed to enjoy. I possessed neither mattress nor hammock, for I had come aboard in my common wearing clothes – in my school-jacket and cap – without either money in my pocket or luggage in my hands. I had not even the usual equipments of a runaway – the kerchief bundle and stick; I possessed absolutely nothing – much less a mattress or hammock. Such things a skipper does not find for his crew, and of course there was none for me. I was not even allowed a “bunk” to sleep in, for the forecandle was crowded and most of the bunks carried double. Those that were occupied by only one chanced to have for their tenants the most morose and ill-natured of the crew, and I was not permitted to share with them. Even still more inhospitable were these fiends – for I cannot help calling them so when I look back on what I suffered at their hands – I was not even allowed to lie upon their great chests, a row of which extended around the forecandle, in front of the respective bunks, and covered nearly the whole space of the floor. The floor itself did not leave room for me to lie down

– besides it was often wet by dirty water being spilled upon it, or from the daily “swabbing” it usually received. The only place I could rest – with some slight chance of being left undisturbed – was in some corner upon the deck; but there it was at times so cold I could not endure it, for I had no blanket – no covering but my scanty clothes; and these were nearly always wet from washing the decks and the scud of the sea. The cold compelled me to seek shelter below, where if I stretched my weary limbs along the lid of a chest, and closed my eyes in sleep, I was sure to be aroused by its surly owner, who would push me rudely to the floor, and sometimes send me out of the forecabin altogether.

Add to this that I was almost constantly kept at work – by night as by day. I may say there was no drudgery – no “dirty work” – that was not mine. I was not only slave to captain, mates, and carpenter, but every man of the crew esteemed himself my master. Even “Snowball” in the “cabin” – as the cook was jocularly termed – ordered me about with a fierce exultation, that he had one white skin that he could command!

I was boot-black for the captain, mates, and carpenter, bottle-washer for the cook, and chamber-boy for the men – for it was mine to swab out the forecabin, and wait upon the sailors generally.

Oh! it was a terrible life. I was well punished for my one act of filial disobedience – well rewarded for my aspirations and longings for the sea. But it is just the rôle that many a poor sailor boy has to play – more especially if like me he has run away to

sea.

Chapter Three

For many long days and nights I endured this terrible oppression without complaining – not but that I could have complained and would, but to what purpose? and to whom? There was none to whom I might appeal – no one to listen to my tale of woe. All hands were equally indifferent to my sufferings, or at least seemed so, since no one offered either to take my part, or say a word in my favour.

At length, however, an incident occurred which seemed to make me in some measures the protégé of one of the sailors, who, though he could not shield me from the brutalities of the captain or mate, was at least able to protect me from the indignities I had hitherto suffered at the hands of the common men.

This sailor was named “Ben Brace,” but whether this was a real name or one which he had acquired at sea, I could never tell. It was the only name that I ever heard given him, and that by which he was entered in the ship’s books. It is quite possible that “Ben Brace” was his real name – for among seamen such appellations as “Tom Bowline,” “Bill Buntline,” and the like are not uncommon – having descended from father to son through a long line of sailor ancestry.

Ben Brace then was the name of my protector, and although the name is elsewhere famous, for the sake of truth I cannot alter it. How I came to secure the patronage of Ben was not

through any merit of my own, nor indeed did it arise from any very delicate sympathy on his part. The companionship in which he had long lived had naturally hardened his feelings like the rest – though not by any means to so great an extent. He was only a little indifferent to human suffering – having witnessed much of it – and usage will make callous the most sensitive natures. Moreover, Ben had himself suffered ill-treatment, as I afterwards learnt from him – savage abuse had he suffered, and this had sunk into his spirit and rendered him somewhat morose. There was some apology for him if his manner was none of the gentlest. His natural disposition had been abused, for at bottom there was as much kindness in his nature as belongs to the average of men.

A rough, splendid seaman was Brace – the very best on board – and this point was generally conceded by the others – though he was not without one or two rivals.

It was a splendid sight to see Ben Brace, at the approach of a sudden squall, “swarming” up the shrouds to reef a topsail, his fine bushy curls blowing out behind, while upon his face sat that calm but daring expression, as if he defied the storm and could master it. He was a large man, but well proportioned – rather lithe and sinewy than robust, with a shock of dark-brown hair in their thick curls somewhat matted, covering the whole of his head; for he was still but a young man, and there were no signs of baldness. His face was good, rather darkish in complexion, and he wore neither beard nor whisker – which was rather odd for a sailor, whose opportunities for shaving are none of the best. But

Ben liked a clean face, and always kept one. He was no sea dandy, however, and never exhibited himself, even on Sundays, with fine blue jacket and fancy collars as some others were wont to do. On the contrary, his wear was dark blue Guernsey shirt, fitting tight to his chest, and displaying the fine proportions of his arms and bust. His neck a sculptor would have admired from its bold regular outline, and his breast was full and well rounded, though, like that of all sailors, it was disfigured by tattooing, and over its surface when bare, and on his arms, you might have observed the usual hieroglyphics of the ship – the foul anchor, the pair of pierced hearts, with the B.B., and numerous other initials. A female figure upon the left breast, rudely punctured in deep-blue, was no doubt the presumed portrait of some black-eyed “Sal” or “Susan” of the Downs.

Such was Ben Brace, my new-found friend and protector.

How I came to secure his protection was by a chance incident, somewhat curious. It was thus: —

I had not been long on board before I made a discovery that somewhat astonished me, which was, that more than half the crew were foreigners. I was astonished at this, because I had hitherto been under the impression that an English ship was always manned by English sailors – including of course Scotch and Irish – either of whom make just as good sailors as Englishmen. Instead of being all English, or Scotch, or Irish, however, on board the *Pandora* (for that I had learnt was the name of the ship, and an appropriate name it was), I soon

perceived that at least three-fourths of the men were from other countries. Were they Frenchmen? or Spaniards? or Portuguese? or Dutch? or Swedes? or Italians? No – but they were all these, and far more too, since the crew was a very large one for the size of the ship – quite two score of them in all. There seemed to be among them a representative of every maritime nation in the world, and, indeed, had every country in sending its quota selected the greatest scamp within its boundaries, they could hardly have produced a finer combination of ruffianism than was the crew of the *Pandora*! I have already hinted at exceptions, but when I came to know them all there were only two – my protector Brace, and another innocent but unfortunate fellow, who was by birth a Dutchman.

Among the mixed lot there were several Frenchmen, but one, named “Le Gros,” deserves particular notice. He was well named, for he was a stout, fat Frenchman, gross in body as in mind, with a face of ferocious aspect, more than half covered with a beard that a pirate might have envied – and indeed it was a pirate’s beard, as I afterwards learnt.

Le Gros was a bully. His great size and strength enabled him to enact the part of the bully, and upon all occasions he played it to perfection. He was a bold man, however, and a good seaman – one of the two or three who divided the championship with Ben Brace. I need hardly say that there was a rivalry between them, with national prejudices at the bottom of it. To this rivalry was I indebted for the friendship of Ben Brace.

It came about thus. By some trifling act I had offended the Frenchman, and ever after did he make it a point to insult and annoy me by every means in his power, until at length, on one occasion, he struck me a cruel blow on the face. That blow did the business. It touched the generous chord in the heart of the English sailor, that, despite the vile association in which he lived, still vibrated at the call of humanity. He was present, and saw the stroke given, and saw, moreover, that it was undeserved. He was lying in his hammock at the time, but instantly sprang out, and, without saying a word, he made a rush at Le Gros and pinned him with a John Bull hit upon the chin.

The bully staggered back against a chest, but in a moment recovered himself; and then both went on deck, where a ring was formed, and they went to work with the fists in right earnest. The officers of the ship did not interfere – in fact the mate drew near and looked on, rather as I thought with an interest in the combat, than with any desire to put an end to it, and the captain remained upon his quarter-deck, apparently not caring how it ended! I wondered at this want of discipline, but I had already begun to wonder at many other matters that occurred daily on board the *Pandora*, and I said nothing.

The fight lasted a good while, but ended as might be expected, when a fist combat occurs between an Englishman and Frenchman. The latter was badly thrashed, and that portion of his face that was not already black with hair was soon turned to a bluish-black by the rough, hard knuckles of his antagonist. He

was at length felled to the deck like a great bullock, and obliged to acknowledge himself beaten.

“Now you danged parley voo!” cried Brace, as he gave the finishing blow, “don’t lay finger on that boy again, or I’ll give you just twice as much. The boy’s English after all, and gets enough, without being bullied by a frog-eatin’ Frenchman. So mind what I say, one and all of ye,” and as he said this he scowled round upon the crowd, “don’t lay a finger on him again ne’er one of you.”

Nor did they one or any of them from that time forth. Le Gros’s chastisement proved effectual in restraining him, and its example affected all the others.

From that time forth my existence became less miserable, though for many reasons it was sufficiently still hard enough to endure. My protector was strong to shield me from the crew, but I had still the captain, the carpenter, and the mate for my tormentors.

Chapter Four

My condition, however, was greatly improved. I was allowed my full share of the “lob-scouse,” the “sea-pies,” and “plum-duff,” and was no longer hunted out of the forecabin. I was even permitted to sleep on the dry lid of a sailor’s chest, and had an old blanket given me by one of the men – who did it out of compliment not to myself but to Brace, whose good opinion the man wanted to secure. Another made a present of a knife, with a cord to hang it around my neck, and a tin platter was given me by a third. Such are the advantages of having a powerful patron. Many little “traps” were contributed by others of the crew, so that I soon had a perfect “kit,” and wanted nothing more.

Of course I felt grateful for all these odds and ends, though many of them were received from men who had formerly given me both cuffs and kicks. But I was never slow to forgive, and, friendless as I had been, I easily forgave them. I wanted all these little matters very badly. Boys who go to sea in the usual way go well provided with change of clothes – often two or three – with plates, knives, fork, and spoon, in short, a complete apparatus for eating.

In my hurry to get away from home I had not thought of bringing one single article of such things; and, consequently, I had nothing – not even a second shirt!

I should have been in a terrible fix, and was so, in truth, until

the day on which Ben Brace thrashed the French bully; but from that time forward my condition was sensibly better. I felt grateful, therefore, to my protector, but another incident occurred shortly after, that not only increased my gratitude to the highest degree possible, but seemed also to make the man's friendship for me still stronger than before.

The incident I am about to relate is one that has often occurred to sailor boys before my time, and no doubt will occur again, until governments make better laws for the regulation of the merchant service, with a view to control and limit the far too absolute power that is now entrusted to the commanders of merchant-ships. It is a positive and astounding fact, that many of these men believe they may treat with absolute cruelty any of the poor people who are under their command, without the slightest danger of being punished for it! Indeed, their ill-usage is only limited, by the length of time their unfortunate victim will stand it without making resistance. Among sailors, those who are known to be of an independent spirit and bold daring, are usually permitted to enjoy their rights and privileges; but the weak and unresisting have to suffer, when serving under mates and captains of this brutal kind, and it is to be regretted that there are too many such in the merchant navy of England.

The amount of suffering endured under such tyranny is almost incredible. Many a poor sailor of timid habits, and many a youthful sailor boy, are forced to lead lives that are almost unendurable – drudged nearly to death, flogged at will, and, in

short, treated as the slaves of a cruel master.

The punishment inflicted – if it can be called punishment where no crime has been committed – is often so severe as to endanger life – nay, more, life is not unfrequently taken; and far oftener are sown the seeds of disease and consequent death, which in time produce their fatal fruit.

Of course every one admits that the commander of a ship at sea should possess some extraordinary powers over his men, beyond those which are allowed to the master of a factory or the surveyor of a public work. It is argued that without such, he could not answer for the safety of his vessel. There should be one head and that should be absolute. This argument is in part true. Every sensible man will admit that some extraordinary powers should be granted to the captain of a ship, but the mistake has hitherto lain, not so much in his possessing this absolute power, as in the want of an adequate punishment for him whenever he abuses it.

Hitherto the punishment has usually either failed altogether, or has been so disproportioned to the crime, as to be of no service for example to others. On the contrary, it has only encouraged them in their absolute ideas, by proving almost their complete irresponsibility. The captain, with his mates at his back, his money, and the habitual dread which many of his crew feel for him, can usually “out-swear” the poor victim of his brutality, and often the latter is deterred from seeking redress by actual fear of still worse consequences in case he may be defeated. Often too the wearied sufferer, on getting once more to land – to his

home, and among his friends – is so joyed at the termination of his torments, that he loses all thoughts of justice or redress, and leaves his tyrant to depart without punishment.

The history of emigration would furnish many a sad tale of petty tyranny and spite, practised on the poor exile on the way to his wilderness home. There are chapters that might be written of bullyism and brutality – thousands of chapters – that would touch the chords of sympathy to the very core of the heart. Many a poor child of destitution – prostrated by the sickness of the sea – has submitted to the direst tyranny and most fiendish abuse on the part of those who should have cheered and protected him, and many a one has carried to his far forest home a breast filled with resentment against the mariner of the ocean. It is a matter of great regret, that the governments of migrating nations will not act with more energy in this matter, and give better protection to the exile, oft driven by misfortune in search of a new home.

A pity it is that better laws are not made for the guidance and restraint of merchant captains, who, taking them altogether, are naturally as honest, and perhaps not less humane, than any other class of men; but who thus entrusted with unbridled will and ill-defined powers, but follow the common fashion of human nature, and become tyrants of the very worst kind.

It is true that of late some salutary examples have been made, and one who richly deserved it has suffered the extreme punishment of the law; but it is to be feared that these good examples will not be followed up; public feeling will subside into

its old channel of indifference, and the tyranny of the skipper-captain, – with that of his brutal coadjutor, the mate, – will be allowed to flourish as of yore, to the torture of many an unfortunate victim.

These remarks are hardly applicable to my own particular case, for the fiends who tortured me would have done so all the same if the best laws in the world had existed. They were beyond all laws, as I soon after learnt, – all laws, human or divine – and of course felt neither responsibility nor fear of punishment. They had no fear even to take my life, as will be proved by the incidents I am about to relate.

Chapter Five

One of the disagreeables which a boy-sailor encounters on first going to sea is the being compelled to mount up “aloft.” If the master of the vessel be a man of considerate feelings, he will allow the apprentice a little time to get over the dread of climbing, by sending him only into the lower rigging, or no higher than the main or foretop. He will practise him a good deal upon the “shrouds,” so as to accustom his feet and fingers to the “ratlines” and other ropes, and will even permit him to pass a number of times through the “lubber’s hole,” instead of forcing him to climb back downwards by the “futtock shrouds.”

A few trials of this kind will take away the giddiness felt on first mounting to a high elevation, and thus a boy may safely be denied the use of the lubber’s hole, and may be sent up the futtock shrouds, and after that the topgallant shrouds, and so on to the royals, – if there be any on the ship, – and by thus gradually inducting him into the art of climbing, he will get over the difficulty without dread and without peril – for both of these may be encountered in first climbing to the upper rigging of a ship. It is usual then for masters, who are humane, to permit boys to become somewhat accustomed to the handling of ropes before sending them into the highest rigging.

But, alas! there are many who have not this consideration, and it is not uncommon for a youth, fresh from home and school, to

be ordered up to the topgallant crosstrees, or even the royal-yard, at the very first go, and of course his life is imperilled by the ascent. Not unfrequent have been the instances in which the lives of boys have been sacrificed in this very way.

Now it so happened that for two weeks after I had set foot upon board the *Pandora* I had never been ordered aloft. I had not even had occasion to ascend the lower shrouds, though I had done so of my own will, as I was desirous of learning to climb. In all my life I had never been higher than the branches of an apple-tree; and since I had now chosen the sea for my profession – though I sadly repented my choice – I felt that the sooner I learnt to move about among the rigging the better.

But, singular to say, for the first two weeks after embarking myself on the *Pandora* I found but little opportunity of practising. Once or twice I had climbed up the ratlines, and crawled through the lubber's hole to the maintop; and this I believed to be something of a feat, for I felt giddy enough while accomplishing it. I would have extended my enterprise by an attempt to ascend the topmast shrouds, but I was never allowed time, as the voice of either captain or mate would reach me from below, usually summoning me with an oath, and ordering me upon some other business, such as to mop out the cabin, swab the quarter-deck, black their boots, or perform some other menial act of service. In fact, I had begun to perceive that the drunken old skipper had no intention of teaching me anything of the seaman's craft, but had taken me aboard as a sort of slave-

of-all-work, to be kicked about by everybody, but by himself in particular. That this was in reality his design became every day more evident to me, and caused me disappointment and chagrin. Not that I was any longer ambitious of being a sailor, and could I have transported myself safely home again at that moment, it is not likely I should ever afterwards have set foot upon a ratline. But I knew that I was bent upon a long voyage, – how long or whither bound I could not tell, – and even though I might be able to desert from the *Pandora* when she reached her port, – a purpose I secretly meditated, – how should I act then? In a foreign land, without friends, without money, without the knowledge of a trade, how was I to exist, even if I could escape from the bondage of my apprenticeship? In all likelihood I should starve. Without knowing aught of seamanship, I should have no chance of getting a passage home again; whereas, if I had been allowed to practise with the rest, I might soon have acquired sufficient knowledge to enable me to “work my passage,” as it is termed, to any part of the world. This was just what I wanted, and it was on this account I felt so much aggrieved at finding it was the very thing I was not to be taught.

I had the hardihood on one occasion, – I know not what inspired me, – to make a remonstrance about this to the captain. I made it in the most delicate manner I could. My immediate answer was a knock-down, followed by a series of kicks that mottled my body with blue spots, and the more remote consequence of my “damned impudence,” as the captain called

it, was worse treatment than ever.

I would soon have learnt to climb had I been left to myself, but I was not allowed even to practise that. I was always called below by one or the other of my tyrants, and with an oath, a cuff, or a kick, ordered upon some piece of “dirty work.”

Once, however, I was not ordered “alow,” but “aloft;” once I was allowed to have my fill of climbing.

Snatching an interval when I thought both mate and master were asleep, I had gone up to the maintop.

Every one who has looked upon a full-rigged ship must have noticed some distance up the main-mast a frame-wood or platform, like a little scaffold. A similar construction may be observed on the fore and mizen-mast, if the ship be a large one. This platform is called the “top,” and its principal object is to extend the ladder-like ropes, called “shrouds,” that reach from its outer edge to the head of the mast next above, which latter is the topmast. It must here be observed that the “masts” of a ship, as understood by landsmen, are each divided into a number of pieces in the reckoning of a sailor. For instance, in a ship or barque there are three which are called respectively the main, fore, and mizen-masts – the main-mast being near the middle of the ship, the fore-mast forward, towards the bows, and the mizen-mast “aft,” near the stern or poop. But each one of these is divided into several pieces, which pieces have distinct names in the sailor’s vocabulary. Thus, the “main-mast,” to a sailor, is not the whole of that long straight stick which rises up out

of the middle of a ship's deck, and points like a spire to the sky. On the contrary, the main-mast terminates a little above the platform just mentioned, and which, from that circumstance, is designed the "maintop." Another mast, quite distinct from this, and made out of a separate piece of timber there begins, and runs up for nearly an equal length, but of course more slender than the main-mast itself, which latter supports it. This second is called the "main-topmast." Above that a third is elevated, supported upon the topmast head by cheeks, trestles, and crosstrees. This is shorter and more slender than the main-topmast, and is named the "main-topgallant-mast," and above this again, the "main-royal-mast" is similarly raised – though it is only in the largest and best rigged vessels that a "royal-mast" is used. The "main-royal-mast" terminates the structure, and its top, or head, is usually crowned with a flat circular piece of wood, called the "main-truck," which is the most elevated point in the ship. The fore and mizen-masts are similarly divided, though the latter is much shorter than either of the others and rarely has topgallant-sails, and still more rarely "royals."

I have given this explanation in order that you may understand that the maintop to which I say I climbed was not the most elevated point of the mast, but simply the platform near the head of the main-mast, as understood by sailors.

This platform is, in the common parlance of the crew, frequently designated the "cradle," and it merits the appellation, for in a vessel at sea and under a breeze it is generally "rocked"

about, either in long sweeps from side to side, or backward and forward from stem to stern, according to the ship's motion. It is the pleasantest part of the ship for one who is inclined to solitude, for once upon it, you cannot see aught of what is going on below, unless you look over the edge or down through the lubber's hole already mentioned. You may hear the voices of the crew, but not distinctly, as the surge of the sea itself, and the wind drumming upon the sails and whistling through the shrouds, usually drowns most other sounds. To me it was the greatest luxury to spend a few minutes in this retired spot. Sick of the association into which I had so heedlessly thrown myself – disgusted with the constant blasphemy ever in my ears, and above all, longing for repose, I would have given anything to have been permitted to spend my leisure hours in this aerial cradle, but I found no leisure hours nor moments for such indulgence, for my unfeeling tyrants gave me neither rest nor repose. The mate, in particular, seemed to take pleasure in rendering my existence as miserable as he could, and, discovering that I had a predilection for the “top,” seemed determined that of all other places I should not go there to rest myself.

One day, however, believing that he and the captain had both gone to sleep, – as they sometimes did in fine weather – I took the opportunity of ascending to my favourite perch; and, stretching my wearied limbs along the hard planks, I lay listening to the sad sighing of the winds and the waters. A sweet breeze fanned my brow, and, notwithstanding the danger which there was in falling

asleep there – for there was no “top armour” or netting upon the *Pandora*– I was soon in the land of dreams.

Chapter Six

My dreams were by no means of a pleasant nature.

How could they be, considering the life I was compelled to lead? With my spirit hourly harassed by indignities, and my body wearied with overwork, it is not likely I should have sweet dreams.

Though not sweet, however, they were short enough – at least my sleep was so, for my eyes had not been closed above five minutes when I was rudely awakened, not by a voice, but by a smart thwack upon the hips, administered by no light hand, and with an instrument that I knew by the feel to be what, in sailors' parlance, is called a "rope's end."

It needed no repetition of the stroke to awake me and cause me to start to my feet; had it done so, I should certainly have caught it again as sharply as before – for, on springing up, I saw the hand of the fellow who had struck me raised aloft to repeat the blow. He did repeat it, but my sudden rising spoiled his aim, and the rope's end doubled loosely over my shoulders.

I was not a little astonished on recognising the ruffian. It was the French bully – Le Gros!

I knew that he had the disposition to flog me with a rope's end, or anything else – for he still harboured a heart full of malice against me – I well knew that he was not wanting in the will; had we been in some corner of the earth all alone by ourselves,

I should not have been astonished at him flogging me almost to death – not a bit of it. But what surprised me was his daring to do so there and then. Ever since Brace had thrashed him, he had been as mute as a mouse – morose enough with me, but never offering any insult that might be resented by my protector.

What had happened then to cause this change? Had he again fought with Brace and beaten him? Or had my patron taken some offence at me and withdrawn his protection, thus leaving the ruffian free to chastise me for his own especial pleasure?

Surely some change must have taken place in our mutual relations, else Le Gros would never have dared to raise his hand against me in the manner he was doing?

Therefore was I surprised and puzzled – could it be that, finding me all alone upon the top, he had taken the fancy into his head that he could there give me a drubbing without being seen?

Surely that could not be his idea? If not seen, I could be heard. I might easily cry out, so that my protector would hear me; or even if he could not, I could tell him afterwards, and though that would not save me from the drubbing it would get me the satisfaction of seeing Le Gros catch one as well.

These reflections passed almost instantaneously through my mind – they occupied only a few seconds – just the interval that elapsed from the time I first stood to my feet till I recovered from the surprise I felt at being confronted by the Frenchman. It was a short pause, for the bully had again elevated the rope's end to come down with another thwack.

I leaped to one side and partially avoided the blow, and then rushing in towards the mast I looked down the lubber's hole to see if Brace was below.

He was not visible, and I would have cried out for him, but my eyes at that moment rested upon two objects and caused me to hold my voice. Two individuals were upon the quarter-deck below, both looking upward. It was not difficult to recognise them – the plump, jolly, false face of the skipper and the more ferocious countenance of his coadjutor were not to be mistaken. Both, as I have said, were looking upward, and the wicked expression that danced in the round bullet eyes of the former, with the grim smile of satisfaction that sat upon the lips of the latter, told me at a glance that the Frenchman and I were the objects of their attention.

The unlooked-for attack on the part of Le Gros was now explained: – he was not acting for himself, but as the deputy of the others! it was plain they had given him orders, and from the attitude in which they stood, and the demoniac expression already noticed, I felt satisfied that some new torture was intended for me.

I did not cry out for Brace, it would have been of no use. The brave fellow could not protect me from tyrants like these. They were his masters, with law on their side to put him in chains if he interfered, even with his voice – to shoot or cut him down if he attempted to rescue me.

I knew he dare not interrupt them, no matter what cruelty they

might inflict. It would be better not to get him into trouble with his superiors, and, under these considerations, I held my tongue and awaited the event. I was not kept long in doubt about their intentions.

“Hang the lazy lubber!” shouted the mate from below – “snoring in broad daylight, eh? Wake him up with the rope’s end, Frenchy! Wallop him till he sings out!”

“No,” cried the captain, to whom a better programme had suggested itself. “Send him aloft! He seems fond of climbing up stairs. Drive him to the garret! He wants to be a sailor – we’ll make one of him!”

“Ha! ha!” rejoined the mate with a hoarse laugh at the wit of his superior; “the very thing, by Jove! give him an airing on the royal-yard!”

“Ay – ay!” answered Le Gros, and then, turning to me, with the rope held in menace, he ordered me to ascend.

I had no alternative but obey, and, twisting myself around the topmast shrouds, I caught the ratlins in my hands and commenced climbing upward.

Chapter Seven

I climbed with slow and nervous step. I should have gone much slower but that I was forced upward by Le Gros, who followed me with the rope's end, with which he struck me behind whenever I made a stop. He delivered his blows with fiendish spite, striking me about the legs and over the posteriors, and trying to hurt me as much as possible. In this he succeeded, for the hard-knotted rope pained me exceedingly. I had no alternative therefore but to keep on upward or submit to his lashing. I kept on.

I reached the topmast crosstrees, and mounted upon them. Oh! it was a fearful sight to look down. Below me was nothing but the sea itself, for the masts, bent over by the breeze, were far from being perpendicular. I felt as if suspended in the air, with not even the earth beneath me – for the surface of the sea was below, glittering like the sky itself.

Beneath me, however, at my feet, was the dark, scowling face of Le Gros, who, with threatening voice and gestures, ordered me upward – still upward!

Upward! how could I climb father? Above me extended the topgallant rigging. Upon this there were no rattlins, nothing to rest the foot upon – nothing but the two black rigid ropes converging until they met at the head of the mast. How could I ascend them? It seemed beyond my power to do so.

But I was not even allowed to hesitate. The brute swung

himself near, and continued plying the knotted cord upon my shins, at the same time uttering oaths and ferocious threats that he would cut every inch of skin off my body if I did not go aloft.

I had no alternative but to try, and, placing myself between the ropes, I commenced drawing myself upward. After a severe effort I succeeded in getting upon the topgallant yard, where I again paused – I could go no further. My breath was quite gone and I had scarce strength to hold by the rigging and prevent myself from falling.

The royal-mast still towered above, and below, threatened the dark face of Le Gros. There was a smile upon it in the midst of its scowling – a smile of satisfaction at the agony he saw I was undergoing at that moment.

I could still hear the voices of the fiends below, calling out the commands: “Up with him, Frenchy – up to the royal-yard!”

I thought I heard other voices, and that of Brace repeating the words, “Avast there! avast! the lad’s in danger.”

I looked in a slanting direction toward the deck. I saw the crew standing by the forecandle! I thought there was confusion among them, and a scuffle, as if some were taking his part, and others approving of what was going on; but I was too frightened to make an exact observation at the moment, and too much occupied by the ruffian who was nearest me.

“Up!” he cried, “up, or pe Gar! I flog you to ze death for von land lobber – I vill sacr–r–é!”

And with this threat he again plied the instrument of torture,

more sharply than ever.

I could not stand it. The royal-yard was the highest point to which they intended to force me. If I could reach it then they would be satisfied, and would cease to punish me. It is a perilous feat, even for one who has had some practice in climbing, to reach the royal-yard of a big ship, but to me it appeared impossible that I could accomplish it. There was but the smooth rope – with neither knot nor loop to aid hand or foot. I must go up it hand over hand, dragging the whole weight of my body. Oh! it was a dread and perilous prospect, but despair or rather Le Gros, at length forced me to the trial, and, grasping the smooth stay rope, I commenced climbing upward.

I had got more than half-way – the royal-yard was almost within reach – when my strength completely failed me. My heart grew weak and sick, and my head swam with giddiness. I could sustain myself no longer, my grasp on the rope gave way, and I felt myself falling – falling – at the same time choking for want of breath.

For all this I did not lose consciousness. I still preserved my senses through all that terrible descent; and believed while falling that I should be killed by the fall, or, what was the same thing, drowned in the sea below. I was even sensible when I struck the water and plunged deeply below the surface, and I had an idea that I did not drop directly from the royal-mast into the sea, but that my fall was broken by something half-way down. This proved to be correct, as I afterwards learnt. The ship chanced to

be under full canvas at the time, and the maintopsail, swollen out by the fresh breeze, had caught me on its convex side as I came down. From this I had bounded off again, but the impetus of the fall had been thus lessened; and the second pitch into the sea was not so violent as it would otherwise have been. Otherwise, indeed, I should have been crushed upon the surface of the water, never to breathe again. Another circumstance happened in my favour: my body had turned round as I parted from the top, and I was going head downward; but, on striking the sail, the attitude was reversed, and I reached the water in a perpendicular position, with my feet downward. Consequently, the shock was less, and, sinking deeply in the waves, I was saved. All these points I learned afterwards, from one who had anxiously watched me in my descent.

When I rose to the surface of course it was with confused senses, and with surprise that I still lived – for I had been certain on letting go my hold that I was being hurled into eternity – yes, I fully believed that my end had come.

I now perceived that I was still living – that I was in the sea – that waves were dashing around me; and on looking up I saw the dark ship at a cable's distance from me, still passing away. I thought I saw men standing along the taffrail, and some clinging upon the shrouds; but the ship appeared to be going fast away, and leaving me behind in the water.

I had learnt to swim, and, for a boy, was a good average swimmer. Feeling that I was not hurt I instinctively struck out,

though not to follow the vessel, but to keep myself from sinking. I looked around to see if there was anything I might cling to, as I fancied that something might have been thrown out from the ship. I could see nothing at first, but as I mounted upon the top of a wave I noticed a dark round object, between me and the hull, which, notwithstanding that the sun was in my eyes, I made out to be the head of a man. He was still at some distance, but evidently nearing me, and as it approached I recognised the thick curly hair and countenance of my protector Brace. He had leaped overboard and was swimming to my rescue. In a few seconds he was by my side.

“Ho!” cried he, as he drew near and saw that I was swimming, “all right my lad! swim like a duck, eh? – all right – don’t feel hurt, do you? Lean on me, if you do.”

I answered that I felt strong enough to swim for half-an-hour if necessary.

“All right then,” he rejoined; “we’ll get a rope’s end in less time than that, though maybe you fancy you’ve had enough of rope’s end? Hang the inhuman scoundrels. I’ll revenge you yet, my lad. Ship ahoy!” he shouted, “this way with your rope! ahoy! ahoy!”

By this time the ship had worn round, and was returning to pick us up. Had I been alone in the water, as I afterwards ascertained, this manoeuvre would not have been executed; or, at all events, but very little pains would have been taken to rescue me. But Brace having jumped overboard rendered it necessary that the ship should be put about, and every effort made to

recover him, as he was a man of too much importance among the crew to be sacrificed with impunity. Neither mate nor captain dared leave him to his fate; and, consequently, the orders were given to “wear-ship.”

Fortunately the breeze was light, and the sea not very rough, and as the vessel passed near to where we were swimming, ropes were thrown out which both of us were able to seize, and by means of which we were soon hauled up, and stood once more safely upon deck.

The spite of my tormentors seemed to be satisfied for the time. I saw nothing of any of them when I got aboard, nor during the remainder of that day, as I was permitted to go below and remain in the forecabin during the whole of the afternoon.

Chapter Eight

Strange to say, I received somewhat better treatment after this occurrence, though it was not from any remorse at what had happened, or that either mate or captain had grown more humane or friendly. The reason was very different. It was because both perceived that what they had done had produced an unfavourable impression upon the crew. Many of the men were friends and admirers of Brace, and, along with him, disapproved altogether of the conduct of the officers, so that in the fore-castle and around the windlass there was a good deal of disaffected talk after this event, often spoken loudly enough. Brace, by his behaviour in leaping overboard to the rescue, had gained favour – for true courage always finds admirers whether they be rude or refined – and the number of Brace’s friends was increased by it. I heard that he had really interfered when I was being forced aloft, and had shouted out contradictory orders to those of the mate. This accounted for the confusion I had noticed on deck, and which was the result of several of his friends endeavouring to restrain him, while others were joining him in his appeal.

Both Captain and mate on the quarter-deck had heard all this, but pretended not to notice it. Had it been any other man than Brace they would have instantly put him in irons, or punished him still more severely, – especially if he had chanced to be one of the weaker and less popular of the crew. As it was, they

took no steps in the matter, and no one was punished for the expressions of remonstrance that had been used. But both captain and mate had noted the disaffection; and that was the reason why I was afterwards treated with more humanity, or rather with less cruelty – for insults and indignity were still occasionally offered me by one or the other.

I was from this time permitted to practise with the sailors, and had less of the dirty work to do. A sort of simple fellow, the Dutchman already mentioned – who was also much played upon, – shared with me the meaner drudgery, and had more than half of the spleen which the captain and mate must needs spend upon somebody. Indeed, the poor Dutchman, who, although a harmless creature, was a wretched specimen of humanity, came well-nigh being killed by their cruelty; and I have no doubt but that the injuries inflicted upon him, while on board the *Pandora*, would have brought him to an earlier grave than Nature designed for him, had it not been his sad fate to meet death at a still earlier period, – as I shall have occasion to relate.

The cruelties committed upon this man by the captain and mate of the *Pandora* would be incredible if told, – incredible, because it would scarce be believed that the human heart is capable of such want of feeling. But it seems to be a law of wicked natures, that where cruelty has once commenced its career and meets with no resistance on the part of its victim, the vile passion, instead of being satisfied, only grows stronger and fiercer, just like it is with savage beasts after they have tasted

blood. So seemed it with the officers of the *Pandora*, for if they even had cause for revenge against this poor sailor, they certainly took ample satisfaction; but it was just because they had no reason for revenge, – just because there was no resistance on the part of their victim that they delighted to torture him.

I remember many of their modes of torture. One was to tie him up by the thumbs, so that his toes just touched the deck, and there keep him for hours together. This position may appear easy enough to one who has never experienced it. It is far otherwise, – it is a torture worthy of the Inquisition. It soon elicits groans from its victim. Another mode of punishment – or rather of amusing themselves – practised by the worthies of the *Pandora's* quarter-deck on this poor sailor, was to sling him in his own belt half-way up to the yard-arm, and there leave him dangling about. This they jocularly called “slinging the monkey,” adopting the name of a favourite sport often practised by the sailors. Once they shut him up in an empty cask, and kept him for several days without food. A little biscuit and water was at length passed through the bung-hole, which the poor wretch greedily devoured barely in time to save himself from perishing of hunger and thirst. But there are other modes of chastisement too horrible and too abominable to be told, all of which were practised upon this unfortunate man – unfortunate in having no friend, for strange to say he received but little sympathy or commiseration from the rest of that wicked crew. Though a harmless creature enough, he was one of those unfortunates whose habits prevent them from

making either friends or associates.

It seemed as if the poor fellow's misery was to me an advantage, and shielded me from a good deal of ill-treatment I should otherwise have experienced. He stood between me and our common tyrants as a sort of breakwater or "buffer," upon which their inhumanity expended most of its strength!

I pitied him for all that, though I dared not make exhibition either of my pity or sympathy. I had need of both for myself, for although I have said that my condition was improved, I was still miserable – wretched as I could well be.

And why? you will ask, – Why wretched now, when I had got over most of the first difficulties, and was steadily progressing in the profession I had so ardently desired to belong to? It is quite true I was progressing, and rapidly. Under the tutorship of Brace I was fast becoming a sailor. In less than a week after I had made my plunge from the royal rigging, I could climb to the royal-yard without the slightest fear – ay, I had even in a fit of bravado gone higher, and put my hand upon the main-truck! In a week's time I knew how to twist a gasket, or splice a rope, as neatly as some of the sailors themselves; and more than once I had gone aloft with the rest to reef topsails in a stiffish breeze. This last is accounted a feat, and I had creditably performed it to the satisfaction of my patron. Yes, it is quite true I was speedily being transformed into a sailor; and yet I was far from being satisfied with my situation – or rather I should say – I was miserably ill-satisfied – perfectly wretched.

You are surprised and demand the reason. I shall give it in a few words.

I had not been many days on board the *Pandora* when I observed something which I fancied odd about the ship. I first noticed the manner and discipline, or rather want of discipline, of the crew, far different from what I had read of in books, which told of the exact obedience and punctilious respect between those who served and those who commanded. It might be, however, that those of which I had read were ships of war, and that in others the discipline was very different. As I had no previous knowledge of seamen, or their mode of life, I concluded that the rude behaviour of the *Pandora's* crew might be a fair specimen of it, and I was both pained and humiliated by the conclusion. It was a sad realisation – or contradiction rather – of all my young dreams about the free happy life of the sailor, and I was disgusted both with him and his life at the very outset.

Another circumstance attracted my attention at the same time – that was the number of hands on board the *Pandora*. She was not a very large ship – not over 500 tons by registry. In fact she was not a “ship,” speaking technically, but a “barque;” in other words, a ship with her mizen-mast rigged unlike the other two, or without a “square” topsail. In this, and a few other points, lies the difference between a barque and a ship – though the former is also usually smaller.

The *Pandora* was large enough for a barque, – carried a full suit of sail, even to flying-jibs, topgallant studding-sails, and

royals; and was one of the fastest sailors I have ever known. For her size, however, and the amount of merchandise she carried, I could not help fancying that she had too large a crew. Not over half of them seemed to be employed, even while wearing ship – and I was convinced that half of them could have done the work. I had been told often – for I used to make inquiry about such matters – that a crew of from ten or twenty hands was sufficient for a vessel of her size; what then could the *Pandora* want with twice that number? I counted them over and over. There were forty of them all told, including the worthies of the quarter-deck and Snowball in the caboose!

The circumstance made an impression upon me – somewhat undefined it is true – but day by day, as I observed the reckless and disgusting behaviour of both officers and men, and overheard some strange conversations, suspicions of a most painful character formed themselves in my mind and I began to dread that I had got into the company of real ruffians indeed.

These suspicions were at length confirmed, and to the fullest extent.

For several days after setting sail the hatches had been down and covered with tarpaulings. The weather had continued breezy, and as there was little occasion to go below they had been kept thus, though now and again a half-hatch had been lifted as something was required from the lower deck or the hold. I myself had not been sent below on any errand, and had never seen the cargo, though I had been told that it consisted chiefly of brandy,

and we were going with it to the Cape of Good Hope.

After a while, however, when the weather became fine, or rather when we had sailed into a southern latitude where it is nearly always fine, the tarpaulings were taken off, the hatches – both main and fore – were thrown open, and all who wished passed down to the “tween decks” at their pleasure.

Curiosity, as much as aught else, took me below; and I there saw what not only confirmed my suspicions but filled me with disgust and horror. The cargo, which was all down in the hold, and none of it on the lower deck, certainly appeared – what it had been represented – a cargo of brandy; for there were the great puncheons, scores of them, in the hold. Besides these there were some boxes of merchandise, a quantity of bar iron, and a large pile of bags which appeared to contain salt.

All this I saw without any uneasiness. It was not these that produced within me the feeling of disgust and horror. It was a pile of manufactured iron that lay upon the lower deck; iron wrought into villainous shapes and hideous forms, that, notwithstanding my inexperience, I at once recognised as shackles, manacles and fetters! What wanted the *Pandora* with these?

But the secret was now out. I needed to employ conjectures no longer. The carpenter was at work upon some strong pieces of oak timber, which he was shaping into the fashion of a grating, I perceived that it was intended for the hatchway.

I needed no more light. I had read of the horror of the “middle passage.” I recognised the intention of the carpenter’s job. I no

longer doubted that the *Pandora* was a slaver!

Chapter Nine

Yes – beyond a doubt I was on board a slave-ship – one regularly fitted up for the inhuman traffic – manned for it. I might also say armed – for although there were no cannon, I observed a large number of muskets, cutlasses, and pistols, that had been brought upon the deck from some secret hiding-place, and distributed to the men to be cleaned and put in order. From all this it was plain that the *Pandora* was bent upon some desperate enterprise, and although she might not sustain a combat with the smallest vessel of war, she was determined that no mere boat's crew should capture and rob her of her human freight. But it was to her sails more than to her armour that the *Pandora* trusted for success; and, indeed, built and rigged as she was, few ships of war could have overhauled her in open water, and with a fair wind.

I say that I no longer doubted of her true character. Indeed the people on board no longer made a secret of it. On the contrary, they appeared to glory in the occupation, regarding it in the light of achievement and enterprise. Over their cups they sang songs in which the “bold slaver” and his “jolly crew” were made to play the heroic, and many a coarse jest was uttered relating to the “black-skinned cargo.”

We had now passed to the southward of Gibraltar Straits, and were sailing in a track where there would be less likelihood

of falling in with English men-of-war. The cruisers, whose sole business it is to look after the slave-trade, would be found much farther south, and along the coasts where slaves are usually shipped; and as there was no fear of meeting with them for some days to come, the *Pandora's* crew had little else to do than enjoy themselves. A constant carousal, therefore, was kept up, and drinking, singing, dancing, and "skylarking" were practised from morning to night.

You may be surprised to know that a ship so evidently fitted out for slave-traffic could have thus openly and directly sailed out of a British port. But it is to be remembered that the period of which I am writing was many years ago; although so far as that goes, it would be no anachronism to lay the scene of my narrative in the year 1857. Many a slave-ship has sailed from British ports in this very year, and with all our boasted efforts to check the slave-trade it will be found that as large a proportion of British subjects are at present engaged in this nefarious traffic as of any other nation.

The attempt to put down the African slave-trade has been neither more or less than a gigantic sham. Not one of the governments who have engaged in this scheme of philanthropy have had more than a lukewarm interest in the matter, and the puny efforts they have made have been more for the purpose of pacifying a few clamorous philanthropists, than with a real design to stop the horrid traffic. For one slave-ship that is captured at least twenty pass free, landing their emaciated thousands upon

the shores of the western world. Nay – worse than ever – the tyrant who, with railroad speed, is demoralising the millions of France, lends his ill-gotten power to re-establish this barter of human souls, and the slave-trade will ere long flourish as luxuriantly as ever.

It would have been an easy matter for Great Britain long since to have crushed out every vestige of the slave-trade, even without adding one item to her expenditure. What can be more absurd than the payment of 300,000 pounds to Portuguese slave-merchants to induce them to abandon the traffic in slaves? Why it is a positive premium upon crime – an indemnity for giving up the trade of pillage and murder! I say nothing would have been easier than for England to have put an end to the very existence of this horror years ago. It would only have required her to have acted with more earnestness, and a little more energy – to have declared that a slave-dealer was a pirate, and to have dealt with him accordingly – that is, hanged him and his crew, when taken, from the yard-arm of their ship – and there was not a nation in the world that would have dared to raise voice against such a course. Indeed it is a perfect absurdity to hang a pirate and let a slaver escape: for if it be admitted that a black man's life is of as much value as a white man's, then is the slaver doubly a murderer, for it is a well-known fact, that out of every slave cargo that crosses the Atlantic, full one-third become victims of the middle passage. It is, therefore, a positive absurdity to treat the captain and crew of a slave-ship in any milder way than the

captain and crew of a pirate ship; and if a like measure of justice had been constantly served out to both, it is but natural to suppose that slavers would now have been as scarce as pirates are, if not a good deal scarcer. How the wiseacres who legislate for the world can make a distinction between the two sorts of ruffians is beyond my logic to understand, and why a slaver should not be hanged as soon as caught is equally a puzzle to me.

In years past this might have been done, and the slave-trade crushed completely. It will be more difficult now, since the despot of France has put the stamp of his licence on the inhuman trade, and the slave-dealer is no longer an outlaw. It would be a very different affair to hang to the yard-arm some French ruffian, bearing his commission to buy souls and bodies, and under the signature of imperial majesty.

Alas, alas! the world goes back; civilisation recedes – humanity has lost its chance, and the slave-trade goes on as briskly as ever!

I was too young at the time of my first voyage to moralise in this philosophic manner; but for all that I had imbibed a thorough disgust for the slave-trade, as, indeed, most of my countrymen had done. The period of which I am speaking was that when, by the laudable efforts of Wilberforce and other great philanthropists, our country had just set before the world that noblest example on record – the payment of twenty millions of sterling pounds in the cause of humanity. All glory to those who took part in the generous subscription. Young as I was, I like

others, had heard much of the horrors and cruelties of the slave-trade, for at that time these were brought prominently before the public of England.

Fancy, then, the misery I experienced, at finding myself on board a ship actually engaged in this nefarious traffic – associating with the very men against whom I had conceived such antipathy and disgust – in fact myself forming one of the crew!

I cannot describe the wretchedness that came over me.

It is possible I should have been more shocked had I made the discovery all at once, but I did not. The knowledge came upon me by degrees, and I had long suspicions before I became certain. Moreover, harassed as I had been by personal ill-treatment and other cares, I did not so keenly feel the horror of my situation. Indeed, I had begun to fancy that I had got among real pirates, for these gentry were not uncommon at the time, and I am certain a gang of picaroons would not have been one whit more vulgar and brutal than were the crews of the *Pandora*. It was rather a relief, therefore, to know they were not pirates – not that their business was any better, – but I had the idea that it would be easier to get free from their companionship; which purpose I intended to carry out the very first opportunity that offered itself.

It was about the accomplishment of this design that I now set myself to thinking whenever I had a moment of leisure; and, verily, the prospect was an appalling one. It might be long months before I should have the slightest chance of escaping from that horrid ship, – months! ay, it might be years! It was no longer any

articles of indenture that I dreaded, for I now perceived that this had been all a sham, since I could not be legally bound to a service not lawful in itself. No, it was not anything of this sort I had to fear. My apprehensions were simply that for months – perhaps years – I might never find an opportunity of escaping from the control of the fiends into whose hands I had so unwittingly trusted myself.

Where was I to make my escape? The *Pandora* was going to the coast of Africa for slaves; I could not run away while there. There were no authorities to whom I could appeal, or who could hold me against the claims of the captain. Those with whom we should be in communication would be either the native kings, or the vile slave-factors, – both of whom would only deliver me up again, and glory in doing so to gratify my tyrant. Should I run off and seek shelter in the woods? There I must either perish from hunger, thirst, or be torn to pieces by beasts of prey – which are numerous on the slave-trading coasts. One or other of these would be my fate, or else I should be captured by the savage natives, perhaps murdered by them, – or worse, kept in horrid bondage for life, the slave of some brutal negro, – oh! it was a dread prospect!

Then in my thoughts I crossed the Atlantic, and considered the change of escape that might offer upon the other side. The *Pandora* would no doubt proceed with her cargo to Brazil, or some of the West India islands. What hope then? She would necessarily act in a clandestine manner while discharging her

freight. It would be done under cover of the night, on some desert coast far from a city or even a seaport, and, in fear of the cruisers, there would be great haste. A single night would suffice to land her smuggled cargo of human souls, and in the morning she would be off again – perhaps on a fresh trip of a similar kind. There might be no opportunity, whatever, for me to go ashore – in fact, it was not likely there would be – although I would not there have scrupled to take to the woods, trusting to God to preserve me.

The more I reflected the more was I convinced that my escape from what now appeared to me no better than a floating prison, would be an extremely difficult task, – almost hopeless. Oh! it was a dread prospect that lay before me.

Would that we might encounter some British cruiser! I heartily hoped that some one might see and pursue us. It would have given me joy to have heard the shot rattling through the spars and crashing into the sides of the *Pandora*!

Chapter Ten

Of course I did not give utterance to these sentiments before any of the *Pandora's* crew. That would have led me into worse trouble than ever. Even Brace could not have protected me had I given expression to the disgust with which my new associates had inspired me, and I acted only with the ordinary instinct of prudence when I held my tongue and pretended not to notice those matters that were queer. Withal, I could not altogether dissemble. My face might have told tales upon me; for more than once I was taken to task by my ruffian companions, who jeered me for my scruples, calling me "green-horn," "land-lubber," "son of a gun," "son of a sea-cook," and other like contemptuous appellations, of which, among sailors, there is an extensive vocabulary. Had they known the full measure of contempt in which I had held them, they would scarce have been satisfied by giving me nicknames only. I should have had blows along with them; but I took care to hide the dark thoughts that were passing in my bosom.

I was determined, however, to have an explanation with Brace and ask his advice. I knew that I could trust him, but it was a delicate point; and I resolved to approach him with caution. He might be angry with me; for he, too, was engaged in the same nefarious companionship. He might be sensitive and reproach me for a meddler.

And yet I fancied he would not. One or two expressions I had heard him drop casually, had led me to the belief that Brace was tired of the life he was leading – that he, too, was discontented with such a lot; and that some harsh fate had conducted him into it. I hoped that it was so; for I had grown greatly interested in this fine man. I had daily evidence that he was far different from his associates, – not hardened and wicked as they. Though under the influence of association men gradually assume the tone of the majority, yet Brace had a will and a way of his own, – there was a sort of moral idiosyncrasy about him that rendered him unlike the rest, and which he appeared to preserve, notwithstanding the constant contamination to which he was exposed by his companionship with such fellows. Observing this, I resolved to make known to him the cause of my wretchedness, and to obtain his advice as to how I should act.

An opportunity soon offered – a chance of conversing with him unheard by the rest of the crew.

There is a pleasant place out upon the bowsprit, particularly when the foretop-mast stay-sail is hauled down, and lying along the spar. There two or three persons may sit or recline upon the canvas, and talk over their secrets without much risk of being overheard. The wind is seldom dead ahead, but the contrary; and the voices are borne forward or far over the sea, instead of being carried back to the ears of the crew. A meditative sailor sometimes seeks this little solitude, and upon emigrant ships, some of the more daring of the deck-passengers often climb up

there – for it requires a little boldness to go so high aloft over the water – and pour into one another’s ears the intended programme of their trans-oceanic life.

Brace had a liking for this place; and often about twilight he used to steal up alone, and sit by himself, either to smoke his pipe or give way to meditation.

I wished to be his companion, but at first I did not venture to disturb him, lest he might deem it an intrusion. I took courage after a time, and joined him upon his perch. I saw that he was not dissatisfied – on the contrary, he seemed pleased with my companionship.

One evening I followed him up as usual, resolved to reveal to him the thoughts that were troubling me.

“Ben!” I said, in the familiar style in which all sailors address each other. “Ben!”

“Well, my lad; what be it?”

He saw I had something to communicate, and remained attentively listening.

“What is this ship?” I asked after a pause.

“She a’n’t a ship at all, my boy – she be a barque.”

“But what is she?”

“Why, a’n’t I told you she be a barque.”

“But what sort, I want to know?”

“Why, in course, a regular rigged barque – ye see if she were a ship the mizen-mast yonder ’ud be carryin’ squares’ls aloft, which she don’t do as ye see – therefore she’s a barque and not a ship.”

“But, Ben, I know all that, for you have already explained to me the difference between a ship and a barque. What I wish to ascertain is what kind of a vessel she is?”

“Oh! what kind; that’s what you’re after. Well, then, I should say a faster sailer never set figure-head to the sea; she’s got just one fault, she be a little too crank for my liking, and pitches too much in a swell. If she’s not kept in plenty o’ ballast, I won’t wonder to see them masts walk overboard one of these days.”

“You won’t be offended at me, Ben; all this you’ve told me before – it is not what I wish to know.”

“An what the old scratch do you want to know? Be hanged, my lad, if you don’t puzzle me.”

“Answer me, Ben; tell me the truth. Is she a merchant vessel.”

“Oho! that’s what you’re driving at! Well, that depends upon what you may call a merchant vessel. There be many sorts o’ goods that comes under the name o’ merchandise. Some ships carry one sort, and some another.”

“What sort does the *Pandora* carry?” asked I, interrupting him.

As I put the question, I laid my hand gently upon the arm of the sailor, and looked earnestly in his face as I awaited his reply.

He hesitated for a moment, until he saw that he could not well evade giving me an answer, and then answered with the simple word – “Niggers.”

“It ’ud be no use playin’ hide and seek about it, lad. You must ’a found it out in time – the *Pandora*’s no merchantman – she be

a trader – a regular slaver.”

“Oh, Ben,” I said, appealingly, “is it not a terrible life to lead?”

“Well, it’s not the life for you, my boy, and I’m sorry you’ve got into such hands. I saw you when you first comed aboard, and would have put a word in your ears, if I had got a chance; but the old shark nailed you afore I could get speaking to you. He wanted a boy and was determined to have you. When you comed the second time, I was below in my bunk, and in course you were brought off with us. No, little Will, it’s not the life for you, lad.”

“And for you, Ben?”

“Avast there, my youngster! Well, I won’t be angry with you, it’s but nat’ral you should think so. Maybe I’m not so bad as you think me.”

“I don’t think you bad, Ben; quite the contrary. It is for that reason I spoke as I did. I think you very different from the others. I – ”

“Maybe you’re right, boy; maybe not. I warn’t always bad. I was once like yourself and didn’t care for such as these; but there are tyrants in the world as makes men bad, and they’ve made me.”

Here the sailor paused and uttered a sigh, while an expression of extreme bitterness passed over his face; some harsh recollection was stirring within him.

“How, Ben?” I ventured to ask. “I cannot believe it. They may have made you unhappy, but not wicked. I know you are not.”

“You are kind, little Will, to say this to me. – You are very kind, my boy; you make me feel as I once did feel, and I’ll tell

you all. Listen! and I'll tell you all about it."

There was a tear in the sailor's eye, the first he had shed for many a long year. Upon his weather-bronzed face I observed a mingled expression of tenderness and sadness.

I placed myself to listen attentively.

"It's a short story," he continued, "and won't take many words. I warn't always what I am now. No, I was a man-o'-war's-man for many a year, and, though I say it myself, there warn't many in the service as knew their duty or did it better. But all that went for nothing. It was at Spithead – we were lying there with the fleet, and I chanced to run foul o' the master's-mate o' our ship. It was all about a bit o' lass that we met ashore, who was my sweetheart. He was a-makin' too free with her, and my blood got up. I couldn't help it, and I threatened him – only threatened him. There's what I got for it. Look there, little Will!"

As the sailor finished speaking, he pulled off his jacket, and raised his shirt over his shoulder. I perceived across his back, and up and down, and in every direction, a complete network of long scars – the scars of old weals – which the "cats" had made upon his flesh.

"Now, my lad, you know why I'm driven to a ship like this. In course I deserted the navy, and afterwards tried it in the merchant-sarvice, but go where I would, I carried the Cain-mark along with me, and somehow or other it always came out, and I couldn't stand it. Here I'm not the odd sheep in the flock. Among the fellows below there, there's many a back as well striped as

mine.”

Ben ceased speaking, and I, impressed with the brief history of his wrongs, remained for some time silent.

After awhile I again ventured to broach the subject that lay nearest my heart.

“But, Ben,” said I, “this is a horrid kind of life to lead; surely you do not intend to continue it?”

A shake of the head was all the answer I received.

“I could not endure it,” I continued; “I have resolved to make my escape whenever an opportunity offers. Surely you will aid me?”

“Both you and myself, lad.”

“Oh! I am so pleased.”

“Yes,” continued he, “I am tired of it, too. I have been thinking how I can leave it. This I’m determined shall be my last voyage – leastwise, in this trade. I’ve been thinking, my boy, of giving ’em the slip, and taking you along with me.”

“Oh, how glad I shall be – when may we go?”

“There lies the bother, my lad; you see there’s no place in all Africa where we could get off, or, if we did, it would only be to wander among these black savages, and likely enough get murdered by them. No; we can’t get clear of the *Pandora* this side the Atlantic. We must stick by her, and make the voyage; and on the far side we’ll manage it, I warrant you.”

“Tis a long time to suffer.”

“You ain’t a-going to suffer – I’ll take care o’ that; but keep

quiet, and don't show that you are not contented enough – not a word to anybody about what's been said this night, – not a word, my lad!”

I promised faithfully to observe the directions given, and, as Brace was now called to his watch upon deck, I went down along with him, feeling lighter at heart than I had done since I first set foot on board the *Pandora*.

Chapter Eleven

I need not detail the incidents that occurred during the remainder of our run to the African coast. There is not much variety in a journey upon the sea. A shoal of porpoises, – a whale or two, – some flying-fish, – a few species of sea-birds, – sharks and dolphins, – are nearly all the living creatures that are ever seen, even upon the longest voyages. Most of our course lay due southward, and directly across the northern tropic, and, of course, the weather was hot nearly all the time, – so hot that the pitch oozed out from the seams of the planking, and the soles of our shoes parted with a creaking noise every step we took over the deck.

We were in sight of several sail, – most of them were Indiamen, – some outward bound from England, and some on their way home from the East. A few smaller craft we saw, brigs and a barque or two, and, as they carried English colours, we concluded they were traders to the Cape, or Algoa Bay. None of them, – neither these nor the East Indiamen – seemed desirous of cultivating the *Pandora's* acquaintance; and all, in meeting or passing, allowed her a “wide berth.” Of course, the slaver was equally desirous of avoiding them; and, therefore, none of these vessels were “spoken.”

There was one ship, however, that did not appear to shun us. On the contrary, the moment the *Pandora* came in sight of her

the strange vessel changed from the course in which she had been steering, and with all sail set came running towards us. As we were now in the Gulf of Guinea, and about a hundred miles or so from the Gold-coast, the probability was that the vessel that had so boldly headed towards us was a cruiser, and consequently, the very sort of craft that the *Pandora's* people did not desire to fall in with. Indeed, this point was soon settled beyond dispute; for the behaviour of the strange vessel, and her peculiar rig – which was that of a cutter – combined with the fact of so small a craft sailing boldly towards a barque so large as the *Pandora*, all went to prove that she was either a war-cruiser in search of slave-ships, or a pirate, – in either case, a vessel much better manned and armed than the *Pandora*.

It was hardly probable that the cutter was a pirate; though, had it been upon a different part of the ocean it would have been probable enough, for at that time pirates were by no means as scarce as they are at present. But it was not a favourite locality with pirates. The merchant-craft that traded along this part of the coast were usually small vessels with insignificant cargoes, and, when outward bound, carried only such bulky articles as salt, iron, and rum, with toys and trinkets; which, though sufficiently attractive to the black savages of Dahomey and Ashantee, were not the sort of merchandise that pirates cared to pick up. They were sometimes more richly freighted in their homeward trip, with gold-dust and elephants' teeth, and pirates could find a market for these. There were still some of these freebooters

upon the African coast, for there they could find many a secure rendezvous, but they were never so numerous there as in the West Indies and elsewhere. Had the cutter been met with at an earlier period – that is, while we were further out on the Atlantic, and upon the track of the Cape traders and Indiamen – then the people of the *Pandora* might have taken her for a pirate, and very probably would have taken less trouble to get out of her way – for these gentry were far less afraid of a pirate than of an honest warship. They knew that the pirates looked upon traders of their kind as kindred spirits – almost birds of the same feather; and that, therefore, they would have but little to fear from their brother outlaws. They knew, moreover, that they had nothing to lose but a few casks of brandy and rum; the iron, salt, and toys which formed the remainder of the *Pandora's* cargo, being goods that a pirate would not be bothered with. The brandy and rum would be all he would be likely to rob them of, and of these there were only some half-dozen puncheons – for I had ascertained that most of the great casks in the hold were water-butts filled with water, and of course intended to supply the living cargo on their voyage across the Atlantic.

A pirate, therefore, reasoned the crew of the *Pandora*, would only rob them of their six puncheons of spirits, and that would be all. Perhaps he might take a fancy to the fine barque, and insist on pressing some of them into his service. That would be a misfortune to the owners; but, as for the crew themselves, I was under the belief that very few of them would have required

“pressing.” Most of them would have been willing enough to take a hand at buccaneering, or any other sort of villainy.

As the cutter drew near, however – for she was drawing near – it became evident she was no pirate. Indeed, she made no secret of what she was, for the British flag was run out to her peak, at once proclaiming her a British vessel of war. It is true a pirate might have used that signal for a decoy; but, considering the time and place, it was not likely, and the *Pandora’s* people did not entertain the thought of its being one. The cutter was a British cruiser beyond doubt. That was their full belief and conviction.

No flag could have been more unwelcome to the eyes of the slaver’s crew than the one now spread to the breeze from the peak of the cutter’s main-sail. Had it been the Portuguese ensign, or the Spanish, or even the French, they would have dreaded it less; for, notwithstanding the promises of these nations to aid in putting a stop to the slave-trade, it is well-known that they have acted with great lukewarmness in the matter. Indeed, worse than that – since the governors of their Transatlantic possessions – even the captains of their ships of war – have been known, not only to connive at the slave-traffic, but actually to assist in carrying it on! Had it been a ship of one of these nations the *Pandora* would have been less desirous of escaping from her. She would have been brought-to, perhaps; and after a slight examination – with a word or two of secret intelligence between her captain and the commander of the war-vessel – allowed to go about her business; and this would have ended the affair. But

no such an easy *congé* would be given by the commandant of a British cutter; for, to the honour of the British officers be it said, that in all such cases they have performed their duty, and carried out with energy the designs of their government.

The crew of the barque, therefore, on perceiving that it was in reality a British cruiser that was in the wake, were put into the greatest confusion and trouble. I say in the wake, for long since the *Pandora* had turned stern towards the strange vessel, and was making all sail to escape.

It was evident that the cutter was a fast sailer, and knew it – else she would have used more strategy in making her first approach. On the contrary, she had taken no pains whatever to conceal her character; but, setting her head right for the *Pandora*, had given chase at once. The barque had been equally prompt in showing her stern; and for some hours a regular tail-on-end run was kept up between the two vessels.

Chapter Twelve

For my part, I awaited the result with the deepest interest. I watched the two ships as they sped; and, with my eye, kept constantly measuring the sea between them. My heart was full of hope, and beat joyfully as I observed that the distance was gradually decreasing, and the cutter each minute seemed larger upon the waves.

There was but one drawback to the exultation which I felt – and that was a serious one. Brace had confessed to me that he was a deserter from the Royal Navy. If taken he might be recognised. The stripes upon his back would lead to suspicion – for there are brands almost peculiar to the navy – proofs of his desertion would be sought – perhaps easily obtained, and then I knew the terrible punishment he would have to undergo. For my own sake I wished the cutter to capture us. For the sake of my friend – the preserver of my life – I wanted the *Pandora* to escape. I wavered between two hopes – now my own horrid situation was before me – the disgust I felt for the life I was compelled to lead, the hopelessness of getting away from it; and when these thoughts came into my mind I looked with longing eyes towards the pursuer, and wished her nearer and nearer. Then my eyes would rest upon poor Brace, as he hurried over the decks – Using all his efforts to aid the *Pandora's* speed – my thoughts would undergo a complete revulsion, and my late hopes would suddenly

change into fears. For a long while I awaited the result, with this singular alternation of contradictory emotions.

During all this time there was a stiff breeze blowing, and this it was that gave the cutter the advantage. As already intimated to me by Brace the barque was a “crank” vessel, and carried sail badly under a wind; though, in fair weather, or with a light breeze, she was one of the fastest sailers on the sea. It was for this quality she had been chosen for the peculiar trade in which she was employed – for swiftness, not stowage, are the points of advantage in a slave-ship. The poor negro is usually packed as closely as any other species of merchandise, and a large cargo of them can be stowed in a small space – for it is rare that the slightest consideration of humanity enters the thoughts of their inhuman stevedore.

The barque then had been built for fast sailing – but more especially in light winds, such as those denominated “trade-winds,” and others that are usually encountered between the tropics and the “line.”

The cutter, also, sailed well in a light wind, but equally well in a stiff breeze – when under the stronger impetus of a gale – and as it had now freshened almost to a gale the latter vessel was having the advantage. Even under such a wind she still continued to carry most of her sail – her main and second jibs above being hauled down, along with her gaff-topsail while her storm, spitfire, and third jibs were still kept bent to the breeze.

The barque, on the other hand, had to haul down both royals

and topgallant-sails, and close-reef her topsails. She was thus far from going at her fastest, but it blew so freshly it would have been dangerous for her to have spread another inch of canvas, and her people well knew it.

Under these circumstances the cutter was evidently gaining upon her; and if the breeze should continue at the same rate for two hours more the *Pandora* must certainly be overhauled and captured.

As soon as her crew became convinced of this, they set to work to hide all the implements of their nefarious trade. The manacles and shackles were put into a cask and headed up. The hatch-gratings, which the carpenter had been so long in making, were broken up and disfigured – so that their purpose could not be recognised – and the muskets, pistols, and cutlasses were stowed away in some secret part of the hold. There was no intention of making use of these, and showing fight against such an adversary. Small as was the cutter in comparison with the barque, the crew of the latter knew very well that that of the former would far outnumber them, and that any attempt at resistance to such a well-armed, sharp-toothed little ship of war would only bring her guns upon them, and end the conflict in the loss of at least half their number. They entertained no hope, therefore – except to escape by fast sailing – and as this was now well-nigh given up, they set to work to prepare themselves for passing an examination. Several of the crew actually hid themselves in order to avoid the suspicion which their numbers

might create; for, as I had already observed, there were too many hands for a ship engaged in the ordinary way of commerce.

At a last measure the old skipper had got out his “ship’s papers,” which, of course, had been prepared for such an emergency, and which were to show that he was “all right.”

In this way the *Pandora* now awaited the nearer approach of her hostile pursuer.

The cutter had gained rapidly, and had at length got within less than a mile’s distance, when a gun was fired from her bow-ports that sent the shot ricocheting over the water, and close to the hull of the barque. A signal was also hoisted for the latter to “lay-to.”

My heart beat wildly within my breast. It seemed as if the hour of my deliverance had arrived; and yet I felt a contrary belief – a presentiment that it was not yet to be! Alas! that presentiment proved too true. With all the appearances in favour of our being captured it was not to be. The destiny of the *Pandora* was different.

Almost as if the firing of the gun had been a signal to the weather, and the wind suddenly began to lull, and at each moment grew lighter and lighter – till it was no longer a gale, but a soft and gentle breeze. The sun, that was now setting, no doubt had caused the change and in a few minutes’ time the sails became relaxed and fell flapping against the yards.

With a quick eye the change was observed by the crew of the *Pandora*, and the advantage understood. Instead, therefore, of

yielding obedience to the signal from the cutter, all hands rushed quickly aloft – the topsails were unreefed to their fullest spread – topgallants and royals were unfurled, and even the studding-sails bent, till the whole rigging of the barque was covered with canvas.

The effect was almost immediately perceptible. Although the cutter now fired her guns as fast as she could load them, I could perceive that she was every moment losing ground, and her shots now fell short of the barque.

In another hour she was miles in our wake; and ere the darkness of night closed over the sea, and hid the little vessel altogether from my sight, I saw, with a sad heart, that she had dwindled to a mere speck upon the edge of the horizon!

Chapter Thirteen

The chase, which had lasted for nearly the whole of a day, carried the *Pandora* a hundred miles out of her course before she had fairly distanced the cutter; but she had to run still fifty miles further to make sure that the latter had lost sight of her, and, of course, abandoned the pursuit. The last part of the run, however, was made in a direction diagonal to that in which she had been chased; and as the morning broke, and there were no signs of the cutter nor any other sail, the slaver once more headed in for the coast. She was now so far to the south of the line on which she had encountered the cruiser, that, whether the latter kept on in the pursuit, or returned as she had come, in either case she would be too distant from the barque to make her out. The darkness of the night had also favoured the slaver's escape, and, when morning came, her commander felt quite sure that the cutter was cruising far to the north of him, and beyond the range of the most powerful telescope.

The deviation which the *Pandora* had made from her course did not signify much to such a light sailer as she. She soon made up the loss; for next day the wind had veered round so as to answer for her course; and, as it blew but lightly, she was able to go under studding-sails, at the rate of ten and twelve knots an hour.

She was now heading directly for the African coast, and,

before the sun had set, my eyes rested on the land – that land so long famous, or rather infamous, for its commerce in human beings – for the hunt, and the barter, and sale of men, women, and children!

During the night the barque stood off and on at several miles' distance from the shore, and with the earliest light of morning ran close in.

There was no port nor town. Not even a house was in sight. The land was low, scarce rising above the sea-level, and appeared to be covered with a dense forest to the water's edge. There was neither buoy nor beacon to direct the course of the vessel, but, for all that, the captain knew very well where he was steering to. It was not his first slaving expedition to the coast of Africa nor yet to the very port he was now heading for. He knew well where he was going; and, although the country appeared to be quite wild and uninhabited, he knew that there were people who expected him not far off.

One might have fancied that the *Pandora* was about to be run ashore, for, until she was within a few cables' length of the beach, neither bay, nor landing-place presented itself to our view, and no orders had been given to drop anchor. It is true that most of her sails had been hauled down, and she was moving but slowly through the water, but still fast enough to strike with violence if permitted to approach much nearer.

Several of the crew, who were on their first voyage to this coast, began to express their surprise; but they were laughed at

by the older hands who had been there before.

All at once the surprise was over. A little wooded point was rounded, and the line of the beach – which but the moment before had appeared continuous – was now seen to be broken by a long, narrow reach of water, that ran far back into the land. It proved to be the mouth of a small but deep river; and, without reconnoissance or hesitation, the barque entered across its bar, and, standing up stream, came to anchor about a mile inland from the sea.

Opposite to where we had anchored I could perceive a strangely-built hut standing near the bank, and another and larger one further back, and partially screened by the trees. In front of the former, and close to the water's edge, was a group of dark-looking men, making some signals which were answered by the mate of the *Pandora*. Other men were down in a long canoe that was riding upon the water, and some were getting into it, as if about to be rowed out to us.

I saw the palms upon the bank – they were the first trees of this kind I had ever seen growing, but I easily recognised them by the pictures I had seen in books. There were other large trees, not less singular in their appearance, and differing altogether from the kinds I had been accustomed to look upon at home; but my attention was soon drawn from the trees by observing that the men in the canoe had parted from the shore and were paddling towards us.

The river was not over two hundred yards in width, and as the

barque was anchored about midway, of course the canoe had not far to come. In a few seconds it was alongside, and I had a fair and full view of its dusky rowers.

As I regarded them the reflection passed through my mind, that if these were a fair specimen of their countrymen, the less acquaintance with them the better; and I could now comprehend the remark of Brace, that to desert from the ship on the African coast would be sheer madness. "Bad," said he, "as are these fellows on board the *Pandy*, still they have white skins and something human about them; but as for the rascals we are to meet over yonder they are devils, both soul and body – you shall see 'em, my boy, and judge for yourself." These remarks my patron had made some days before, when we were talking of our intention to escape; and as I looked into that long canoe, and scanned the faces of the half-score of men that sat within it, I was forcibly struck with the truthfulness of the assertion. A more ferocious set of men I never looked upon – very devils did they appear!

There were eleven of them in all, and most of them were as black as shoe-leather, though there was a variety of colour, from jet-black to a bad tawny-yellow. It was evident they were not all of one race, for there is scarcely any part of the western coast of Africa where there is not an admixture of different races, – arising, no doubt, from the long-continued slave-traffic between the coast and the interior. If these eleven gentlemen differed slightly in colour, there were other points in which they

differed not at all. All of them had thick lips, beetle-brows, short kinky wool upon their heads, and the most ferocious and brutal expression upon their faces. Eight out of the eleven were naked as at the hour of their birth, with the exception of a narrow swathing of cotton cloth around their hips and thighs. These eight used the paddles, and I could perceive that they had spears and old muskets in the boat beside them. The other three were of superior class. Two of them were better clad than the eight rowers – but no better looking – while the third presented to the eye an aspect at once so hideously tierce, and yet so ludicrous, that it was difficult to determine whether you ought to laugh at or to fear him.

This man was a true negro, – black as gun powder, gross as a water-butt, and of enormous dimensions. His face was not so negrofied (if I may use the word) as some of his companions', but it had a still worse expression than that of the very thick-lipped kind, for it was not stupid like theirs. On the contrary, it exhibited a mixture of ferocity with a large share of cunning – a countenance, in fact, full of all wickedness. It resembled a good deal the faces I have afterwards observed in India, – among the fat despotic princes that are still permitted to misrule some portions of that unhappy land, – and a large black beard, whiskers, and moustache, added to the similitude.

It was not the face, nor the great size of the man that rendered him ridiculous. Quite the contrary. A glance at these had rather an opposite tendency. What was laughable about him was his costume; and if he had been done up for a farce upon the stage,

or a Christmas pantomime, he could not have been dressed in a more ludicrous manner. Upon his body was a uniform coat of bright-scarlet cloth, the cut and facings of which told that it had once done duty in the army of King George. It had been a sergeant's full-dress coat, for the *chevrons* were still upon the cuffs, – and a stout sergeant he must have been, – one of the stoutest in the army. The coat was a large one, yet, withal, it was a tight fit for its present wearer, and did not come within a foot of buttoning upon him. The sleeves, moreover, were too short by inches, and the huge black wrists of the negro appeared in strange contrast with the bright sheen of the scarlet. Behind, the skirts forked widely apart, showing the huge buttocks of the wearer, that were covered by the tails of a striped sailor's shirt reaching a little below; and below this again, the huge, thick, black thighs and lower limbs were naked to the toes.

An old cocked-hat with faded lace and feathers, that no doubt had once graced the head of some admiral or commodore, sat high upon the woolly crown of her new acquaintance, and completed the absurd *tout ensemble*. There was a long knife stuck in his belt, and a large crooked sabre dangling between his limbs.

It would have been laughable enough – such a singular apparition under other circumstances – but I perceived on the part of the *Pandora's* crew no disposition to laugh. A strict order from the captain had been issued against such behaviour; and enjoining all on board to receive “His Majesty King Dingo Bingo” with all courtesy and respect.

So, then he of the tight coat and cocked-hat was a king – King “Dingo Bingo!” The two that were partially clad were his councillors, and the eight black canoe-men a portion of his bodyguard.

I did not make all these observations while the new comers were in the canoe. There had been no time for that. The moment they approached the side of the barque, ropes had been thrown to them, and the canoe was hauled close up. A ladder had already been let over the gangway, and up this “His Majesty” climbed, and was received on board with all the honours.

Joyful salutes passed between him and his well-known acquaintance, the captain; and, without more ado, the latter led the way across the quarter-deck, and conducted his majesty to the cabin with apparent formality, but yet in a frank and jovial manner that proved the two to be old friends – the best friends in the world.

The mate did his best to entertain the two “Councillors of State,” while the men of the bodyguard remained below in the canoe. His majesty had no fear for his personal safety. He knew the slaver and her master. He had been expecting them, and therefore needed to ask no questions about country or character. The skipper and the king understood each other.

Chapter Fourteen

I could not tell what was said between these two worthies, but I knew what was to be done. His majesty had a crowd of poor negroes not far off – no doubt shut up in the large building which could be partially seen through the trees. These he had procured from some back country in the interior – partly by traffic with other king-monsters like himself, and partly by means of man-hunting expeditions, which he had made with his ferocious troops. It was highly probable, too, that among the victims about to be transported were many who had been his own subjects; for these African potentates do not scruple to make merchandise of their own people, when cash or “cowries” run short, and their enemies have been too strong to be captured.

Just such a crowd then had King Dingo Bingo got together; and the joyful smile that lighted up the jovial face of the skipper, as he reappeared upon deck, proved that it was a large crowd, and that he was sure of a full “cargo” without further trouble or delay. Often competition among the slave-vessels renders it difficult to obtain a full “freight;” and in such cases the white slave-dealers, who dwell upon the coast (for there are many such), and the native chiefs become terribly exacting. Then indeed, the first cost of the human merchandise forms an important item in the invoice, and the profits on the other side are proportionately diminished; but where there is no competition the price of the

black is considered a mere trifle; and, taken in “barter” as he is, a whole ship’s load of such “bales,” as they are jocularly called among slavers (by the Spaniards termed “bultos”), is not such an expensive investment. The purchase of the vessel, the wages and keep of the crew (necessarily a large one), are the main items of outlay in the books of a slaver. As for the food of the living cargo, that counts for little. It is of the simplest and coarsest kind that can be procured, and usually consists of two staple articles; the African millet – known more commonly as a species of sago – and palm-oil. Both are easily obtained on any part of the western coast where the slave-trade exists; for there both these articles form the common food of the country. The millet is a well-known grain; but there are many sorts of grain in different parts of the world which go under this name, and yet are obtained from plants that are very distinct in character. As for the palm-oil, it is at present one of the most important items of African commerce, and thousands of tons of it are annually imported into England and France, where it is used in the manufacture of yellow soap. It is extracted from the nut of a large palm-tree, whole forests of which may be seen in the western countries of tropical Africa, with the fallen nuts lying scattered over the ground as thick as pebbles; and, up to a late period, scarce cared for by the native inhabitants. The demand for palm-oil, however, has of late years stimulated even the indolent negroes to the manufacture of the article, and these immense palm-orchards are now carefully preserved, and their fruit gathered at the proper

season.

It is the pulpy covering of the nut that yields the oil, which becomes hard as soon as it cools – so hard that it requires to be cut with a knife, or scooped out by some sharp instrument. In this state it is used by the negroes just as we use butter, and forms a staple article of their daily diet.

Since both the millet-sago and the palm-butter can be purchased in Africa cheaper than any other food, of course these are shipped on board the slave-vessels for the consumption of the unfortunate captives, and beyond these no other food is thought of. Water alone is their drink, and to provide this, the hold of a slave-ship is usually crammed with large casks, as was the case with the *Pandora*. These casks serve as ballast on the return-trip, when the vessel is without her freight, and then they are kept full – generally with salt-water, as this in most ports is more conveniently got at; and on the coast of Africa, as the place of embarkation is usually a river, the salt-water is easily emptied out and fresh substituted. With these explanations I shall now return to our skipper and his royal guest.

It was plain that the former was in excellent humour. He had King Dingo Bingo all to himself, and was promised a full cargo. His majesty seemed not less pleased with the interview. He came forth out of the cabin staggering with partial intoxication, clutching in one hand a half-empty bottle of rum, while in the other he held various glittering trinkets and pieces of gaudy wearing apparel, which he had just received as presents from the

captain. He swaggered about the deck, once or twice tripping upon his long steel scabbard. He talked in loud praise of his warlike achievements, boasting of the many villages he had sacked, of the captives he had made, and ever reminding his host of the fine cargo he had collected for him. There were five hundred of them, “young and strong.” They were shut up safely in the “barracoon,” – such was the name of the large building – and to-morrow, that day, or whenever the captain was ready, he would deliver them over. So promised the king.

Of course the captain was not quite ready. His majesty’s “plunder” had to be got out of the hold, and boated ashore; the water casks had to be emptied – for it was sea-water they contained – and then refilled from the river; and these things done the barque would then take on board her five hundred “bultos.”

After a good deal more swaggering and swearing – for this African royalty could speak a little English, and knew most of its most blackguard phrases – his sable majesty once more betook himself to his boat, and was rowed back to the bank. The captain, taking his mate and some half-dozen of the sailors along with him, followed soon after in the gig to complete the debauch – for King Dingo Bingo had invited him to a royal entertainment in his timber palace upon the shore.

I looked after with longing eyes – not that I had any desire to be, of their company – far from it, indeed – but gazing upon the beautiful forms of vegetation that adorned the banks of

this savage river, listening to the sweet music that came from a thousand bright-plumed songsters amid the woods, I longed once more to set my feet upon the firm earth; I longed to be alone, to wander alone and free, away under the shadow of those majestic trees.

Chapter Fifteen

It is very probable I should have longed in vain – very probable I should not have been allowed to set foot upon the shore, but for my protector Brace. My work was still that of the swab and mop, and shoe-brush, and I was kept closely employed at such “chores” from morning to night. The others were permitted to go ashore almost at their pleasure – except during their working-hours, and then they were back and forward several times in the day, unloading the cargo of rum, and salt, and iron, that was forthwith delivered up to King Dingo Bingo.

I endeavoured several times to go with them in the boat, but was always repulsed by some one, usually by the mate or captain himself.

Every day as the sun rose over the glistening tree-tops, tinging their rich verdure with hues of gold, I sighed for liberty, and I would have given aught I possessed, to have been allowed to roam freely through those bright woods. Only one who has been for months cooped up within the confined boundaries of a ship, until tired to death of its monotonous life, can have any idea of the intense longings that I experienced. I was even worse off than one who may have been thus situated. I was not only cooped up but ill-treated. I was not only a prisoner, but a slave, harshly used, and thoroughly disgusted both with my master and associates. If but for a single hour, therefore, I would have made any sacrifice

to have been permitted to take a stroll in yonder wild woods, that on both sides of the river stretched away as far as the eye could reach, for I had viewed them from the royal-mast-head, and saw that they were interminable.

I cannot tell why the captain and mate were so opposed to my going ashore. It might be that they were suspicious of me, and feared I might run away from the ship. Knowing the harsh treatment to which they were in the habit of submitting me, it is not strange they should suspect me of such an intention. My position could hardly be worse, even among savages; and, therefore, it was natural enough they should have their fears of my leaving them.

They had no desire to part with me on such terms. I had proved of great service to them in the capacity of cabin-boy and attendant; and they found my services very convenient. Though they would have cared little for drowning me, or knocking me on the head, to gratify a whim of their own, they would have been sadly grieved had I succeeded in running away from them; and, evidently suspecting that I might harbour such an intention, they took care that I should not have the slightest opportunity of carrying it out. I was not permitted, therefore, to set my foot in any of the boats that were constantly going and coming between the ship and the shore.

There was one other of the *Pandora's* crew who was dealt with in a similar manner, and this was poor "Dutchy", as the sailors called him. They might well suspect him of a design to run away.

Bad as was the treatment I received, it was humane and civil when compared with the almost continuous cruelty practised upon the Dutchman; and instinct itself should have prompted him to flee from it at the very first opportunity that offered.

Unfortunately, instinct had this very effect; or rather, I might say, human flesh and blood could stand it no longer; and Dutchy determined to desert. I say unfortunately, for the attempt proved a failure, and had an awful termination. It ended in the death of this poor sailor – a death that was hideous and appalling.

I shall relate the incident in a few words: —

A few days after coming to anchor Dutchy had communicated to me his intention of deserting from the ship. He had made me his confidant, in hopes that I might join him in the enterprise – for the poor fellow knew there was not another on board who had ever spoken to him a word of sympathy. This I had done, and, consequently, had won his regard. He knew, moreover, that I, too was a persecuted victim; and, therefore, believed I might be as willing as himself to get away beyond the reach of the common tyrant. It is true I was so, but the advice of my patron Brace had rendered me content to wait for a better opportunity – to wait for our arrival upon the other side of the Atlantic. I had made up my mind to endure till then; knowing that a voyage from the west coast of Africa to the Brazils, the destination of the *Pandora*, would be but a few weeks in duration, and confident, from what Brace had promised me, that there I should part from the hated crew.

For these reasons I refused to accede to Dutchy's proposal, and endeavoured to dissuade him from his design; advising him also to wait for our arrival on the other side.

My counsels proved vain. Flesh and blood could stand it no longer. The poor fellow had been persecuted to the utmost limit of endurance, until he could endure no more; and, under the impulse of despair, he made his fatal attempt.

One night, when nearly all on board were asleep, a plunge was heard close by the side of the vessel, as of some one who had fallen or leaped into the water. The cry of "a man overboard!" was heard from the few who were awake on the watch; and echoed from mouth to mouth, till the sleepers – most of whom were on deck in their hammocks – were aroused.

The night was almost as clear as day – for there was a full round moon in the heavens; and up to this time there had been perfect stillness and silence. The men, wondering who had gone overboard, rushed to the side, and looked into the water. A small, black object above the surface indicated the head of a man. It was in motion, and a slight plashing noise, with the long ripple made upon the water, showed that some one was in the river and swimming with all his might for the shore.

Perhaps some one had seen poor Dutchy as he made this fatal plunge, for at that moment the cry was given out that it was he who was endeavouring to escape.

Both mate and captain were on the alert. On account of the heat they, too, had been sleeping in hammocks swung over the

quarter-deck, and in a moment they had sprung out upon their feet. Both ran to arm themselves; and before the deserter had made half-way to the bank his tyrants were leaning over the side, each grasping a loaded musket.

Either would have been in good time to have sent a bullet through the unfortunate victim; but though his blood was to be on their heads, it was not destined that he should die by their hands.

Before either had time to take aim, a second ripple was observed in the water – running diagonally to that made by the swimmer – and at the head of this ripple, and causing it, was seen a long dark, monster-like form.

“A crocodile! a crocodile!” shouted the men upon the barque.

Both captain and mate held their fire, and lowered their muskets. They saw that the work would be done as well without them; and I am positive that I perceived at that moment a grim smile of satisfaction on the faces of both!

“Poor Dutchy!” cried a voice, “he’ll never reach the bank! It’s all up with him – he’ll be swallowed whole, bones, body and all. See!”

It was almost literally as the man had predicted. As he uttered the final exclamation the dark monster – now within a few feet of its victim – made a rapid dash forward, its long, notched back rose high above the water; and seizing the swimmer between its strong, bony jaws, commenced dragging him under. A wild scream of agony pealed from the lips of the unfortunate man, that echoed afar into the surrounding woods; but before the echoes

had died away, the monster with its victim had sunk beneath the surface; and a few bloodstained bubbles were all that remained to mark the spot where the terrible incident had occurred.

“Served him right!” vociferated the captain, with a fearful oath; “served him right, the good-for-nothing lumber – he’s not much loss, we can spare him, I dare say.”

“Ay, ay!” assented the mate, also with the embellishment of an oath, and then added: —

“A lesson to all runaways! If the son of a sea-cook had stayed where he was he’d have missed that; but if the fool likes better to be in the belly of a crocodile than the fore-castle of a good ship, he’s had his choice. All I’ve got to say is, it’s a queer craft he’s chosen to ship aboard o’.”

The captain answered this sally with a horse laugh, in which he was joined by several of the unfeeling crew; and then both mate and captain, having restored their muskets to the rack, betook themselves once more to their hammocks and fell asleep. The sailors, grouping round the windlass, remained for awhile conversing upon the awful incidents that had transpired, but the tone of the conversation proved that the occurrence gave them but little concern. Some even laughed as they talked; and jests were uttered as to whether Dutchy had made a will, and who was to be heir to his “property.” As the poor fellow in reality possessed no property – his whole effects consisting of a few tattered rags of dress, a tin platter, with an old knife, fork, and spoon – the joke was all the more piquant, and the fellows

laughed heartily at it.

It was finally agreed upon that they should “raffle” for Dutchy’s “kit” in the morning; and this point being settled, one by one dropped off, some to sleep in their bunks in the forecastle, and others upon the deck or in hammock slung to the spars and rigging.

All were soon asleep, and silence once more brooded over the scene. I alone could not sleep, but stood looking over the side of the vessel, my eyes fixed on the spot where the unfortunate man had been last seen. There was nothing to guide the eye – not a trace of the short, sanguinary struggle. The crimsoned froth had long since floated away, and the dark wafer flowed on without even a ripple upon its surface; but for all that I could still see with the eye of my fancy – that horrid picture – the hideous monster, with its victim grasped transversely between its horrid jaws, and I could still hear the scream of agony echoing far off in the woods.

Of course it was but fancy. There was no sound stirring even of wind or water. Above and around reigned an impressive stillness, as if Nature herself, by that dread event, had been awed into silence!

Chapter Sixteen

I was glad when morning dawned, for I slept but little that night. The sad fate of the poor sailor lay heavily upon my spirits during the whole of the next day, and I could not help thinking that some such ending might happen to myself. It was the constant dread I was in of the brutal violence of mate and captain that produced these unpleasant forebodings; for I regarded these men as the real murderers of the unfortunate man. The crocodile only came in as an accessory, and had no such creature appeared upon the scene the Dutchman would, no doubt, have perished all the same by the bullets of their muskets. The monster had only forestalled them, and hastened the event by a few seconds of time; and it was evident that had they shot the man instead – these reckless ruffians – they would have been equally disregarding of consequences – equally without remorse or regret. No wonder I felt that my life was insecure – no wonder my mind was filled with forebodings.

During the whole of that day the death-scream of the poor sailor seemed to echo in my ears, in sad contrast with the coarse mirth and loud rude laughter that rang over the decks of the *Pandora*. On board it was a day of jubilee. King Dingo Bingo was entertained by the captain, and brought not only some of his chief men with him, but also his harem of black-skinned beauties, between whom and the rough men of the crew, love-

making, dancing, and carousing was kept up to a late hour in the night.

The paltry cargo of goods which the barque had carried was by this time taken on shore and delivered to his commercial majesty; who, in return, had counted out his captives and made them over as slaves to the skipper. Before they could be taken aboard, however, the vessel required some alterations. New gratings were to be made – instead of those destroyed during the chase – and bulkheads were to be strengthened and repaired, for it was intended to partition off the males from the females. It was not any idea of decency that prompted this arrangement, but simply convenience. Moreover, the water-butts had to be emptied of the salt-water which they contained, and fresh substituted in its stead, all which work would require a considerable time for its performance. The last thing would be the embarkation of the cargo. This would be the easiest of all, as each “bale” was able to transport itself from shore to ship, and take its place without giving the least trouble. The stowage of such a cargo was accounted handy. The slaves, therefore, remained in the barracoon, and the preparations for their embarkation went on.

I still yearned to visit the shore. My heart was sick of the scenes daily witnessed on board, and I believed that if I could only get a day’s excursion into the wild woods it would be a real happiness. I even fancied it would strengthen me to bear the voyage of the “middle way,” of the horrors of which I had heard something, and about which I felt forebodings and

apprehensions.

It was not even the prospect of my own sufferings that caused me this uneasiness. It was the thought of the tortures I should witness – the appalling spectacle of the crowded steerage – the endurance and misery of those hapless negroes, who were to be penned together with scarce room to sit down – not enough to lie down – who were to be kept thus for long, long weeks on scant food and drink – half famished – half dead with thirst – panting and fainting under tropic heat and foul air, many of them actually destined to perish from these causes! Such spectacles should I be called upon to witness – perhaps to take part in. It was this prospect that gave me pain, and no wonder it should.

My own life was wretched enough – full of regrets. It was not an absolute fondness for the profession of the sea that had lured me from home. It was rather an ardent desire to see foreign lands – in short, that longing for travel and adventure which every boy experiences to some degree, but which with me was a passion. I fancied that a sailor's life would enable me to indulge in this propensity; but, alas! here was I in Africa itself, in the midst of its wild and sublime scenery, and yet scarce allowed to look upon it! I was more like a prisoner gazing through the grating of his gaol upon the free world without – like a bird who sees through the wires of its cage the bright-green foliage, amidst which it would gladly disport itself.

But I was not without hopes of being able to gratify my longings. Brace had made me a promise, that as soon as he

himself should be allowed a day to go ashore, he would try hard to get permission for me to accompany him. This was my hope, and I was cheered at the prospect, though not without doubts that my patron's request might be denied by the unfeeling brutes.

Meanwhile I made the most of my situation, and endeavoured as best I could to vary its miserable monotony by observing whatever of Nature could be seen around. Even within the circumference of my vision from the *Pandora's* deck, there was much that was new to me and interesting. The country around was entirely without inhabitants. The houses upon the banks of the river were mere temporary dwellings. They constituted the "factory" of King Dingo Bingo – that is, his slave-mart; but his majesty did not reside there. His town and palace were farther up the river, where the country was higher and more healthy – for here, near the sea, the climate was rife with malaria, and all the diseases for which the west coast of Africa is so notorious. The king only visited this place at "intervals," sometimes only once a year, when the *Pandora* or some other vessel came for her cargo of slaves – the chief product of King Dingo Bingo's dominions. Then would he descend the river with his "crop," gathered from all parts – the produce of many a sanguinary conflict – many a bloodstained man-chase, in which he and his myrmidons had been engaged. He would bring with him his picked bodyguard, and his following of wives and women; for the visit to the slave-ship, with her cargo of strong waters, was the signal for a series of coarse festivities on the grandest scale.

At all other times of the year the factory would be deserted, its huts uninhabited by man, and its barracoon empty. Fierce beasts of prey would occupy the place where man had dwelt – scarce less ferocious than themselves – and Nature would be left to her silence and solitude.

For this reason the scene around had its charms for me. Its very wildness was charming, and, even within the circumscribed circle of my view, I saw much to gratify my curiosity and give me pleasure.

I saw the gigantic “river-horse,” wallowing through the flood, and dragging his clumsy body out upon the bank. Of these I observed two sorts – for it is a fact, though scarce known to naturalists, that there are two distinct kinds of the hippopotamus found in the rivers of Western Africa – the one least known being a much smaller animal than the hippopotamus of the Nile and the Hottentots. I saw daily, almost hourly, the huge crocodiles, lying like dead trees along the edge of the stream, or swimming rapidly through the river in pursuit of their finny prey; large porpoises, too, leaping high above the surface, sometimes passing the vessel so near that I could have struck them with a handspike. These were from the sea, making long excursions up the river in search of a favourite food that floated plenteously in the fresh-water. Other amphibious creatures I perceived at times – a large water-lizard that almost rivalled the crocodiles in bulk – and I once had a peep at the rare creature, the “red water-bog” of the Cameroons – for the little river we were anchored in was not far from the

same latitude as the Cameroons itself, and the same species inhabited both.

Land animals, too, occasionally made their appearance on the bank, within sight of the barque. A lion was observed skulking through the trees; and huge monkeys, both red and black ones, appeared through the branches, whose wild, sometimes human, voices could be heard at all times of the night, – moaning, screaming, and chattering. Beautiful birds, too – wood-pigeons, parrots, and strange kinds of water-birds – were constantly hovering over the river, flying from bank to bank, or perched on the tops of the trees, giving utterance to their varied notes.

In truth it was an animated scene, and had I been allowed time and leisure I could have regarded it for a long while without being wearied with its monotony. As it was, however, those voices and movements of the beasts and birds only increased my longings to visit their wild wood-haunts, and make nearer acquaintance with those of them that were innocent and beautiful. With what joy then did I learn from Brace that upon the morrow he was to have “his day,” and that he had succeeded in obtaining leave for me to accompany him!

The boon had been granted in a surly manner – not to me, but to Brace himself, who had represented that he wanted me to assist him. He was going upon a hunt – for, like most of his countrymen, Brace had a little of the sportsman in him – and he would need some one to carry his game. For this reason was I allowed to go along.

For my part, I cared not for the reason. I was too happy in the prospect to cavil about the motives; and I prepared to accompany my patron with a feeling of joyful anticipation, such as I had never experienced before at the prospect of any happiness in store for me.

Chapter Seventeen

Next morning, just after daybreak, Brace and I started upon our excursion. A couple of sailors, friends of my companion, rowed us ashore and then took back the boat I was not easy in my mind until I saw the boat return without us; for I was still apprehensive that my tyrants might repent of their generosity, hail the boat, and have me taken back. I was not happy until I had put some bushes between myself and the river's bank, that hid me from the view of the barque.

Then, indeed, did I feel happy – so much so that I danced over the ground and flung my arms wildly around me – until my companion began to think I had suddenly taking leave of my senses. If I felt happy at the prospect of this temporary freedom, how much more was I joyed by the reality? I cannot describe the peculiar sensations I experienced at that moment. My feet once more rested on the welcome earth, after having for two long months pressed only the slippery deck; once more I walked under the shadow of noble trees, and around and above me, instead of stiff spars and black tarred ropes, I beheld graceful boughs and bright-green leaves. Instead of the wind drumming upon the sails, or the storm screeching harshly through the taut rigging, I heard only a soft breeze, singing playfully through the twigs, and bearing upon its wings the melody of many a sweet songster. Far more than all – I was once more free – free to think, and speak,

and act – not one of which had I been free to do since the day I stepped on board the *Pandora*.

No longer were those frowning faces before my eyes; no longer rang in my ears those harsh voices – harsher from jests, ribald and blasphemous utterings. No; I saw only the jovial face of my companion; I heard only his cheerful voice – more cheerful because he too was in high spirits with the prospect of our day’s enjoyment.

We soon buried ourselves in the woods – far beyond hear and hail of the barque – and then conversing agreeably with one another, we took our time about it, and trudged leisurely along.

I have said that Ben was a bit of a sportsman. Of course then our excursion was a hunting one, and we carried the implements of the chase – though it would hardly be just to give this title to the weapons we carried. Ben shouldered a ship’s musket of very large dimensions – an old piece of Queen Anne, with a flintlock and heavy iron ramrod – the whole making a load that would have borne down a grenadier; but Ben was strong enough to have carried a small cannon, and thought nothing of the weight. For me he had provided a stout pistol – such as are used by dragoons, and by sailors when boarding an enemy’s ship – and these were our weapons. For the rest we had about a pound of small shot, which my companion carried in his tobacco-pouch, and a quantity of powder safely corked in a bottle that had once held that favourite English beverage “ginger beer,” and the identity of whose stout form and grey complexion could not

be mistaken even in the forests of Africa. For wadding, we had brought with us some oakum, well 'flaxed' out, and thus armed and equipped we were ready to do slaughter upon all birds and beasts that should chance to come in our way.

We walked a good distance without seeing either one or the other, though we met with many signs and traces of both. We were constantly within hearing of birds, that sang or chattered among the trees, both above our heads and around us. From the noises we knew we were within shot of them, but we could not see a feather to guide us in taking aim. The reason of this was, that the leaves were so thick upon the trees the birds were hidden by them. No doubt they saw us well enough and no doubt we might have seen them, had we known the exact spot in which to look; for it is a well-known fact, that Nature has given to her wild creatures such forms and colours as peculiarly adapt them to their several haunts; as the brown of the hare, resembling the withered gorse or fallow; the speckle of the partridge, to assimilate it to the stubble, and many other examples that might be adduced. In tropic climes this law of Nature is also carried out. The spotted leopard or panther, though of bright colours that strike the eye when the animal is viewed in its cage, are scarce discernible among the red and yellow leaves that strew the ground in a forest; the parrots that frequent the evergreen foliage are themselves of this colour; while others who haunt more upon rocks, or the grey and brown trunks of giant trees, are usually of more sombre hue – for there are rock-parrots both in Africa and America, as well

as those that dwell only among trees.

For this reason my companion and I went a long way without finding a feather. It was not destined, however, that we should be altogether unsuccessful in our day's sport. Our patience was at length rewarded by the sight of a large dark-coloured bird, which we observed sitting very quietly upon a tree that was dead and leafless, though still standing. The bird was upon one of the lower branches, and apparently buried in deep thought; for it sat without moving either head or neck, limb or wing.

I stopped a little behind, and Ben advanced to obtain a shot. He possessed some hunter craft; for, as he had told me, he had done a little poaching in his younger days, and this skill now stood him in stead. Keeping behind the trunks of the trees, and silently gliding from one to another, he at length arrived within shot of the one on which the bird was perched. The simple creature appeared to take no heed of him, although part of his body was several times within sight of it, and any English bird would have long before taken to flight. Ben crept very near, in order to make sure of the shot. He concluded that we were not likely to meet with many chances, and, as he was resolved not to go back empty-handed, he was determined to be on the safe side and not make a miss of it. But if the bird had been dead and stuffed it could not have awaited him more composedly, and Ben crept on until he was within about a cable's length from the dead tree. He then levelled his "Queen Anne" and fired, and, since it was almost impossible for him to have missed, the bird fell to the shot, as an Irishman

might say, "killed dead."

Of course we both ran forward and secured the prize; though neither of us knew what sort of game we had got. It was a very large bird – quite as big as a turkey – and bore considerable resemblance to one, being of a red colour about the head and neck, and upon these parts having no feathers.

Ben believed it was a turkey – a wild one, of course; but I could not agree with him in this point, for I remembered having read that wild turkeys are found only in America and Australia, and that there are none in Africa; though there are bustards and floricans, and several other kinds that bear considerable resemblance to turkeys, and hence are often called by the name. It might be one of these we concluded, and, therefore, just as good to eat as a turkey. So, with this idea, my companion tied the huge bird across his shoulders, and, once more loading his musket, we kept on.

We had not proceeded more than ten paces farther when we came upon the carcass of an animal, badly torn and partially devoured. It looked like it had been a deer, and Ben said that it was one; but, as I observed that its horns were without antlers, and as I had also read that there are no deer in Africa, except one species far north of where we were, I told Ben that I thought, the carcass must be that of an antelope; for these animals take the place of deer on the African continent, and sailors, who know no better, call them deer. Ben had never heard of an antelope, though he had of a gazelle; and if I had called it by this name he

might have agreed with me.

An “ant’lope,” however, he knew nothing about; and as his hunter-pride would have been offended by contradiction, I allowed him to persist in calling it a deer.

“Ay, ay! it be a deer, Will,” he said, emphatically, as we walked away from it – “nothin’ else, my boy. What a pity we can’t scare up a livin’ ’un – that ’ud be a nice cargo for our return-trip, w’udn’t, my lad?”

“Yes,” I answered, mechanically, without hearing what Ben said; for I was at that moment thinking of something else.

We had observed how the carcass of the antelope – for antelope it was – had been mangled and half eaten by some preying creature. Ben said it was wolves or jackals. Likely one or more of these had made a meal upon it; but there was one thing I had particularly noticed, and that was the eyes. I should rather say the places where the eyes had been; for the eyes themselves were quite gone, and the sockets cleaned out to the very bottom. Now, I reasoned that no quadruped could do this. The holes were too small even for a jackal to get his slender snout into. The work must have been done by the beak of a bird; and what sort of bird. Why, a vulture, of course!

Now, what kind of bird was Ben carrying upon his back? Beyond all doubt it was a vulture! The locality in which we had found it, with the carcass near at hand; its stupid behaviour in allowing the hunter to approach so near; its general appearance, with the naked head and neck; all these points confirmed my

suspicion. I had read that such is the habit of vultures; that they are so tame in some parts of the world, that one can get near enough to knock them over with a stick; and this is especially the case immediately after they have gorged themselves with carrion. Now, the appearance of the carcass indicated that this very bird had just finished its breakfast, and that would account for its tameness. Beyond a doubt our game was a vulture!

I had arrived at this conviction, but disliked to declare it to my companion, and walked on after him saying nothing. I thought I would leave him to find it out for himself.

I had not long to wait for this event. Before we had advanced a hundred paces, I saw Ben suddenly untie the cord by which the bird was fastened, and, lifting it over his shoulders, hold the body up nearer his nose – then, uttering a loud exclamation, he pitched the game as far from him as he could, at the same time crying out: —

“Turkey, i’deed – dang it, Will, ’tan’t no turkey. Shiver my timbers if ’tan’t a stinking vulture!”

Chapter Eighteen

I pretended to express surprise, though I was bursting with laughter, for I had become quite satisfied as to the species of the bird. Indeed, the horrid effluvium that came from the filthy creature, as my companion carried it in front of me, was quite as strong as that of the carrion itself; and it was this reaching Ben's nostrils that first led him to suspect the genuineness of the game. Ben would have known the bird had it been the Pondicherry vulture – for he had been to the East Indies, and had seen the latter – or the griffon vulture of yellowish colour, which he had seen at Gibraltar, and on the Nile; but this one was smaller than either, and was far more like a turkey than they. It was in reality a kind of vulture that is found in these parts of Africa, and is not known anywhere else; for since that time I have visited most parts of the world, and never saw another of the kind. No wonder, then, my companion was deceived – for he had never been at the place before, and had never seen the bird – but now that he had smelt it, there could be no longer any deception. No game could have emitted such an odour. It was nothing else than a stinking vulture.

The expression upon Ben's face, as he flung the creature from him, was ludicrous in the extreme, and I could have laughed at him with all my might, but that I did not wish to add to my companion's chagrin. I therefore approached the bird,

and examining it with a look of pretended surprise, gave an affirmative rejoinder to Ben's emphatic declaration. Leaving it where it had been thrown, we again faced forward, and jogged leisurely along in hopes of finding some sweeter game.

We had not gone much farther when we entered a forest of palm-trees, and one of the ardent longings of my youth here met with its full gratification. If there was anything in foreign lands I had longed particularly to behold, it was a forest of palm-trees. I had heard that such existed in South America, Africa, and in the Indian countries, and I had read some descriptions of them. But I now perceived that the most glowing description can impart but a very imperfect idea of the beautiful reality, for no work of Nature I have ever looked upon has given me more delight than this – the aspect of a palm-wood. There are many species of palms that do not grow in forests, but only as single individuals, or groups of two or three together, in the midst of other trees. Of course, too, there are many sorts of palms, more or less fine looking, since it is believed that there are at least one thousand species in existence. All are not equally beautiful to look upon, for some are stunted, others have crooked stems; still, others have short mis-shapen trunks; and not a few appear with their leaves on the surface of the ground, as if without stems altogether.

The sort of palm, however, that constituted the forest into which my companion and I had now penetrated, was one of the most magnificent of the whole tribe. I did not then know what species it was, but since I have learnt all about it. It was no

other than the oil-palm, called by the natives of Western Africa the "*Mava*," and by botanists "*Elais Guiniensis*," which, when translated into plain English, means the "oil-palm of Guinea."

It is a palm that somewhat resembles the beautiful cocoa, and by botanists is placed in the same family. The trunk is very tall, of less than a foot in diameter, and rising in a straight shaft to the height of nearly a hundred feet. On the top is a splendid head of leaves like gigantic ostrich plumes, that gracefully curve over on all sides, forming a shape like a parachute. Each leaf is full five yards in length, and of the kind called pinnate – that is divided into numerous leaflets, each of which is itself more than a foot and a half long, shaped like the blade of a rapier. Under the shadow of this graceful plumage the fruit is produced, just below the point where the leaves radiate from the stem. The fruit is a nut, about the size of a pigeon's egg, but of a regular oval form, and growing in large clusters, after the manner of grapes. Around the shell is a thick fleshy covering, very similar to that which encloses the common walnut, only more of an oily substance and glutinous texture, and it is from this very substance that the oil is manufactured. Oil can also be extracted from the kernel, and this last, though more difficult to be obtained, is of a superior quality than that taken from the pulp of the rind.

Nothing in the vegetable world can be more beautiful than a full-grown specimen of the oil-palm, with its cluster of ripe fruit, their bright-yellow colour contrasting finely with the deep-green of its long curling fronds, that seem intended, as it were, to

protect the rich bunches from the too powerful rays of a tropic sun. I say nothing in the vegetable world can be more beautiful than this, unless, indeed, it be a whole forest of such trees; just such a forest as my companion and I had now entered. Even the rude sailor was impressed by the grandeur of the spectacle that surrounded us, and we both stopped mechanically to gaze upon and admire it.

Far as the eye could reach rose a succession of straight trunks, that looked as if they had been shaped by mechanical skill and were only columns supporting the verdant canopy above, and this canopy from the curling of the fronds and the regular division of the leaflets, appeared to form grand arches, fretted and chased in the most elaborate manner. From the columns, near their tops, hung the rich-yellow clusters, like golden grapes, their brilliant colour adding to the general effect, while the ground underneath was strewn with thousands of the egg-like nuts, that had fallen from over-ripeness, and lay scattered over the surface. It looked like some grand temple of Ceres, some gigantic orchard of Nature's own planting!

I have thought – but long after that time – I have thought that if King Dingo Bingo had but set his poor captives, and his bloody myrmidons as well, to gather that golden crop, to press the oil from those pulpy pericarps, what a fortune he might have been honestly the master of, and what unhappiness he might have spared to thousands in whose misery alone he was now making traffic!

Chapter Nineteen

For more than a mile we walked through this wonderful wood, and, although we had admired it so much on first entering it, we were now very desirous of getting out of it. It was not that it was a gloomy forest: on the contrary, it was rather cheerful, for the light, pinnated leaves permitted the sun to shine through, and just screened his rays sufficiently to make it pleasant and cool. It was, therefore, rather cheerful than gloomy. The reason why we so soon grew tired of it was, that it was anything but agreeable under foot. The ground, as I have already remarked was strewn with the fallen fruits. The whole surface was literally covered with them, just like an apple-orchard after a stormy night, only that the palm-nuts lay thicker upon the ground than I had ever seen apples – so thick that there was no picking of steps among them, and in some places it was impossible to set down the foot without treading upon and crushing them. Now the pulpy outer part, when thus crushed, is almost as gummy and sticky as cobblers' wax, and the consequence was, that walking over the nuts was no easy matter – in short it was both difficult and disagreeable. Sometimes a whole cluster of them would adhere to the soles of our shoes, or, slipping from under our feet, would threaten us with a fall, and thus our advance was continuously impeded or interrupted. It was quite as difficult to make way as it would have been through deep snow or over ice, and it must

have taken us a full hour to get to the other side of the wood.

We reached it at length, and were very glad to see trees of another kind, which, although far less beautiful than the palms, and with far more gloomy shadows beneath them, grew upon ground that offered us good footing, and we were now able to proceed without the danger of falling at every step, or spraining our ankles.

Through this shadowy forest we kept on, but as no game of any kind was seen we soon became tired of it, as we had been of the palms. In fact, travelling through thick timber is very tiresome to persons who are not used to it – that is, to those who have not been reared in a forest-covered country, or used to a forest life. To such, the scene, however striking at first, however picturesque it may be, soon appears tame and monotonous. There is a great sameness in it – the trees are alike, the vistas that now and then open out all resemble one another; the ground, bare of grass or covered with withered leaves, presents but little attractions, either to the foot or the eye, and the traveller wearies of listening to his own tracks, oft repeated, and longs for a piece of open ground where he may look upon the blue sky above him, and press the green carpet of grass beneath his feet.

Just in this wise did my companion and myself long to get out of the deep wood and into some more open kind of country, where we might see to a good distance around us, and where Ben thought we should be far more likely to find game.

Our longings were gratified. We had advanced about a quarter

of a mile beyond the palm-wood, when the forest appeared to end in front of us. We saw the sun streaming through the trees, and a bit of blue sky as big as a main-sail, and from this we knew there was an opening in the timber.

We hastened forward with joyful anticipations; and a hundred yards farther on came out upon the edge of a beautiful plain, that stretched as far beyond as the eye could reach, with scarcely a tree to intercept the prospect. Here and there only stood single trees, or little clumps, just as if the plain was a great park and these had been planted; but there was no house within sight nor any sign of the presence of man.

We saw some animals, however, upon the plain which my companion believed to be deer; but I again differed with him about the kind, for I knew by their horns that they were antelopes.

No matter about that – we were both equally glad to see them – and whether they proved to be deer or antelopes we were desirous of having a shot at them.

We stopped for awhile, under cover of the bushes, to reconnoitre and plan how we might approach them. Of course there was no other way than to “stalk” them; and that could only be done by taking advantage of the little copses of trees that were interspersed over the plain. One of these, we noticed, was not very distant from the spot where the herd was browsing, and we had fine hopes of being able to get into it unobserved.

As soon as we had taken all the bearings we set out; and after gliding from clump to clump – sometimes on our feet, in

crouching attitude, and sometimes crawling upon our hands and knees – we at length got behind the particular grove, near which was the game.

We took great pains to worm our way through the copse, for it was a perfect thicket, and so full of thorny trees, such as acacias and aloes, that we got well scratched for our pains.

At length, however, we came near enough to the other side for our purpose; and, with quick beating pulses, we perceived that the antelopes had kept the ground, and were now within range of the “Queen Anne.” Of course I had no design of firing my pistol. That would only have been to waste powder and shot; and I had merely kept along with Ben to be near and enjoy the sport.

Ben was not slow about the work. He saw that there was no time to be lost, for the timid antelopes were seen to toss up their tiny snouts and snuff the gale, as if they suspected that some enemy was near.

My companion just then protruded the muzzle of “Queen Anne” through a bush, and, resting the long barrel upon a branch, took aim and blazed away.

And the herd ran away – every hoof and horn of them – so fast, that before the echoes of the huge musket had died among the trees of the forest, there was not an antelope in sight upon that wide plain, nor any other living creature except Ben Brace and myself!

Ben thought he must have hit the animal at which he had aimed; but no sportsman likes to acknowledge that he has missed

entirely: and if we were to believe the accounts of hunters, there must be an incredible number of wounded beasts and birds that contrive to make their escape.

The fact was, that Ben's shot was too small for such game; and if he had hit a hundred times with it, he could not have killed so large an animal as these antelopes were.

Chapter Twenty

Ben was now sorry he had not brought a bullet with him, or, at all events, some slugs. Larger shot he could not have brought, as there was none on board the barque. But, indeed, in starting out our ambition had not soared so high; neither my companion nor I had anticipated meeting such fine game as a herd of antelopes, and we had prepared ourselves just as we should have done for a day's fowling about the downs of Portsmouth. Birds we expected would be the principal game to be met with, and, therefore, birds, and small ones only, had anything to fear from us. It is not likely that Ben would have shot the vulture had he not crept so near; and then, even the small shot, projected so powerfully by the huge piece, had penetrated its body and killed it.

We therefore greatly regretted not having provided ourselves with "slugs," or a bullet or two, out of which we could easily have made them.

Regrets were to no purpose, however. We were too far from the barque to go back for them. It would be no joke walking so far in the great heat that there was – besides, by going directly back we should have to pass once more through the palm-wood, and this we had determined to avoid by going round it on our return. No; we could not think of taking the backtrack just then. We must do the best we could without the slugs, and, so resolving, Ben once more loaded "Queen Anne" with the snipe-shot, and

we marched on.

We had not gone very far when a singular sort of a tree drew our attention. It stood all alone, though there were others of a similar kind at no great distance. The others, however, were much smaller, and it was the largest that had drawn our attention. Indeed, though the smaller trees bore a general resemblance to this one – so that you could tell they were of the very same kind – yet they differed very considerably from it, both in form and aspect; and, but for the peculiarity of the leaves, one might have taken them for trees of altogether distinct species. The leaves of both, however, were exactly alike, and from this and other indications it was evident that both were trees of the same kind, only that a difference of age had created a difference in their aspect – as great as would be between a chubby, rosy-cheeked child and a wrinkled old man of eighty. The small trees, and consequently the younger ones, rose upon a straight, round stem, only a few feet in height. Each was about the height of a full-grown man, while the stem itself, or trunk as it should more properly be called, was full as thick as a stout man's body; and what was curious in a tree, it was even thicker at the top than at the base, as if it had been taken out of the ground and re-planted wrong end upwards! Upon this clumsy-looking trunk there was not a single branch – not even a twig, but just upon its top grew out a vast tuft of long, straight spikes that resembled broad-sword blades, only that they were of a green colour. They pointed in every direction, radiating from a common centre, so as to form

a large head somewhat roundish, or globe-shaped. Any one who has seen an aloe or a yucca-plant will be able to form some idea of the foliage of the singular tree upon which my companion and I stood gazing in wonderment. The leaves were more like those of the yucca than the aloe – indeed, so like the yucca was the whole tree, that, from what I afterwards saw of yucca-trees in Mexico and South America, I am convinced that these are very near the same kind – that is, they were of the same habit and family, though, as I also learned afterwards, esteemed different by botanists.

Then I had never seen a yucca, much less a tree of the kind we were gazing at; of course I could only guess at what they might be.

Ben thought they were palms; but Ben was wrong again, for he was no great discriminator of genus or species. His opinion was based upon the general aspect which the trees – that is, the smaller ones – presented. Certainly, with their single, regularly rounded stem, crowned by the radiating circle of leaves, they had something of the peculiar look of palm-trees, and a person entirely ignorant of botany, who had never seen one of the sort before, would, in all likelihood, have pronounced as my companion had done, and called them palms. In the eyes of a jolly-tar, all trees that have this radiating foliage, such as aloes, and yucca, and the zamias of South Africa, are palm-trees; therefore it was natural for Ben to call the trees in question by this name. Of course he saw they were different from the oil-palms

among which he had been wandering; but Ben knew there were several sorts of palm-trees, although he would not have believed it had he been told there were a thousand. I should have been compelled to agree with Ben, and believe these strange trees to be veritable palms – for I was no more of a botanist than he – but, odd as it may appear, I was able to tell that they were not palms; and, more than that, able to tell what sort of trees they actually were. This knowledge I derived from a somewhat singular circumstance, which I shall relate.

Among the small collection of my boy books there had been one that treated of the “Wonders of Nature.” It had been my favourite, and I had read it through and through and over and over again a dozen times, I am sure. Among these “wonders” figured a remarkable tree, which was said to grow in the Canary Islands, and was known as the “dragon-tree of Oritava.” It was described by the celebrated traveller, Humboldt, who measured it, and found its trunk to be forty-five feet in girth, and the tree itself about fifty in height. It was said to yield, when cut or tapped, a red juice resembling blood, and to which the name of “dragons’-blood” has been given; hence the tree itself is called the “dragon-tree,” or, sometimes the “dragons’-blood tree” – though it is to be observed, that several other kinds of trees that give out a red juice are also known by this name. The trunk of this tree, said the traveller, rose almost of equal thickness to the height of twenty feet, when it divided into a great number of short, thick branches, that separated from the main stem like the branches of

a candelabrum, and upon the end of each of these was a thick tuft of the stiff, sword-shaped leaves – the same as I have above described. Out of the midst of these leaves grew the pannicles, or flower-spikes, and the bunches of small, nut-like fruit.

Now the strangest part of Humboldt's account was, that this individual tree was known to the Spaniards on their first discovery of the Canary Islands – more than four centuries ago – and that from that time to the present it has increased scarcely perceptibly in dimensions. Hence the great traveller infers that it must be one of the oldest trees in the world – perhaps as old as the earth itself!

Now all this account except the last part of it – which of course is only a philosophic conjecture – I believe to be true, for I have myself visited the Canaries and looked upon this vegetable wonder, which is still standing near the town of Oritava, in the island of Teneriffe. Unfortunately, since Humboldt's visit, the tree, instead of increasing in dimensions, has become less. During a storm, in the month of July, 1819, one half of its enormous crown was broken off by the wind, but the tree still continues to grow; and, as it is a great favourite of the inhabitants, the wound has been plastered up, and the date of the misfortune inscribed over the spot.

No doubt the great care taken of this venerable vegetable will ensure its surviving for another century at least.

Now you will be wondering what all this after-knowledge about the dragon-tree of Oritava has to do with Ben Brace,

myself, or the trees that had fixed our attention on the plain. I shall tell you then what it has to do with us. In the book of which I have spoken there was a picture given of the Oritava tree. It was but a rude affair – a common woodcut – but for all that it gave a very good idea of the aspect of the great vegetable; and I well remember every leaf and branch of it – so well that, when I afterwards saw the tree itself, I recognised it at once. But what was still more singular: as soon as I set my eyes upon the large tree that had brought my companion and myself to a stand, the old picture came vividly before my mind, and I was convinced that it was a tree of the same sort as that described in my book. Yes; there was the thick, stout trunk, all gnarled and knotted with the marks of where the leaves had once grown – there were the short, clublike branches, separating from each other at the head – at the blunt ends of each were the fascicles of bayonet-shaped leaves, and the pannicles of greenish-white flowers – all exactly as in the picture! I was convinced that the venerable vegetable before us was no palm, but a true dragon-tree; perhaps as old as that of Oritava.

Chapter Twenty One

I communicated my convictions to Ben, who still persisted in calling the tree a palm. How should I know what sort of a tree it was, since I had never seen one before? I told Ben of the book and the picture but he was still incredulous.

“Well then,” said I, “I’ll tell you how we can prove whether I am right or no.”

“How?” demanded Ben.

“Why, if the tree bleeds it must be a dragon.”

“Bleeds?” echoed Ben, “why, my boy, ain’t you mad? who e’er heard o’ a tree bleedin’?”

“Run sap, I mean.”

“Oh that be hanged, lad! Sure you know that any sort o’ tree ’ll run sap; ’ceptin’ it be a dead ’un.”

“But not red sap!”

“What! you think yon ere tree ’ud run red sap, do ye?”

“I am almost sure of it – red as blood.”

“Well, if it do then I’ll believe ’ee, my lad; but it are precious easy to try. Let’s go up to it, and gie it a prod with the knife, and then we’ll see what sort o’ sap it’s got in its ugly veins – for dang it, it are about the ugliest piece o’ growin’ timber I e’er set eyes on; ne’er a mast nor spar to be had out o’ it, I reckon. It sartinly are ugly enough to make a gallows of. Come on, my lad!”

Ben started forward towards the tree, and I followed him.

We did not walk particularly fast, as there was no need to be in a hurry. The tree was not likely to run away from us like the birds and beasts. There were no signs of motion about it; and it would have taken a strong wind to have stirred, either its leaves or branches. It had a look of great firmness, and more resembled cast-iron than a vegetable substance; but as we drew nearer, its forbidding aspect was to some extent relieved by the appearance of its flowers, the strong fragrance of which reached our nostrils from a great distance off.

Immediately around the tree, and for several yards outwards, there was a bed of tall, sedge-looking grass. It was withered, and of a yellowish colour, not unlike a piece of standing wheat, but much taller. It appeared a little trampled and tossed, as if some heavy animal had been passing through it, and in one or two places had rolled in it. This might all very naturally be, in a country where large animals abound. The antelopes might have been there, resting themselves under the shade, and taking advantage of the fine grass to couch upon.

Neither my companion nor I took any heed of these signs, but walked boldly up to the tree; and Ben, without more ado, drew his great jack-knife, and struck the blade forcibly into the bark.

Whether there came out red juice or yellow juice, or any juice at all neither of us waited to see; for as if the stroke of the knife had been a signal, a huge animal leaped up out of the grass, not twenty feet from where we stood, and remained gazing at us. To our horror we saw that it was a lion! It needed no naturalist to

recognise this fellow. The dun-coloured body, with dark, shaggy mane – the broad, full face, and wrinkled jaws – the fierce, yellow eye, and bristled, cat-like snout, were not to be mistaken.

My companion and I had both seen lions in shows and menageries, as who has not? But even had we never looked on one before, it would have been all the same. A mere infant might recognise the terrible animal and point him out amidst all the beasts in the world.

Ben and I were horror-struck – perfectly paralysed by the unexpected apparition; and remained so for some seconds – in fact, so long as the lion stood his ground. To our great joy that was not a long while. The enormous beast gazed at us a few seconds – apparently more in wonderment than anger – and then, uttering a low growl to express some slight displeasure at having his rest disturbed, he dropped his tail and turned sulkily away. And thus do lions generally behave at the approach of man – especially if they are not hungry, and be not assailed by the intruder.

He moved off, however, but very slowly – at intervals crouching down and turning his head backward, as if “looking over his shoulder” to see whether we were following. We had no notion of such a thing. Not a foot did we intend to follow him, not even an inch. On the contrary, we had rather receded from our position, and placed the huge trunk of the tree between him and us. Of course this would have been no protection had he chosen to return and attack us, but, although he did not go as fast as we could have wished, he showed no signs of coming back and we

began to recover confidence.

We might have retreated upon the plain, but that would have been of no use, and very probably would have been the means of drawing the lion after us. We knew very well he could soon overtake us, and of course a blow apiece from his enormous paws would have knocked us into “smithereens,” or, as my companion more elegantly expressed it, “into the middle of next week.”

It is quite probable that had this lion been let alone, he would have gone entirely away without molesting us. But was he not let alone. My companion was a bold, rash man – too bold and too rash upon that occasion. It occurred to him that the enemy was moving off too slowly; and fancying, in his foolish way, that a shot from “Queen Anne” might intimidate the brute and quicken his pace, he rested the piece upon one of the old leaf-marks of the tree, and, taking steady aim, banged away.

Likely enough the shot hit the lion – for he was not yet fifty yards from the muzzle of the gun – but what effect could a load of snipe-shot produce upon the thick hide of an enormous brute like that?

In the lion’s mind, however, it produced the very opposite effect to what my companion anticipated, for it neither caused him to run away or even quicken his pace, nor yet frightened him any way. On the contrary, almost simultaneously with the report, he uttered a loud scream, and, turning in his track, came bounding towards the tree!

Chapter Twenty Two

No doubt in less than another minute Ben Brace and I would have ceased to live. I had made up my mind that both of us would be torn to pieces – and certainly this would have been the result had my companion not been a man of ready resources. But fortunately, he was so, and at that crisis conceived a means of escape from the danger that threatened us. Perhaps he had thought of it before. It is most probable he had, otherwise he would scarce have acted so imprudently as he had done – for nothing could have been more imprudent than firing at a lion upon an open plain with nothing but snipe-shot in the gun!

It is likely, however, that Ben had thought of his means of retreat before firing that shot, though what they were I could not imagine. We were upon the ground, with the thick trunk of a tree between us and the lion; but of course, that would be no protection since the beast saw us, and would soon come round to our side. How then were we to retreat? For my part I believed we should both be killed and devoured.

Ben was of a different opinion, and before I could do more than give utterance to an exclamation of terror, he had caught me by the legs and hoisted me high above his shoulders into the air!

“Now, lad,” shouted he, “lay hold of the branch and hoist yourself up. Quick! – quick! or the beast’ll be on us.”

I at once divined his intention; and, without waiting to make

reply, I seized one of the branches of the dragon-tree, and commenced drawing myself upward. The branch was just as high as I could reach with my hands – even when held up in the arms of the tall sailor – and it was no easy matter to raise my body up to it; but during the voyage I had learned to climb like a monkey, and, after some twisting and wriggling, I succeeded in gaining a lodgment among the limbs of the tree.

Meanwhile Ben was as busy as myself in making the ascent. He had resigned his hold of me, as soon as he perceived that I caught the branch; and was now using all his energies, and all his craft too, to get out of the way of the lion. Unfortunately the limbs of the tree were too high for him to lay hold of, and he was compelled to resort to a different mode of climbing. Of course, the trunk was by far too thick for him to get his arms around it and climb by hugging – he might as readily have hugged a wall. Fortunately, however, the bark was full of irregularities – little knots and notches, the scars of the old leaf-marks, that had long ago fallen off, with some larger holes, where, perhaps, whole branches had been broken off by the wind. The quick eye of the sailor at once perceived the advantage of these marks – which would serve him as steps – and kicking off his shoes, he clutched the trunk both with fingers and toes, and commenced climbing upward like a cat.

It was sharp work, and he was obliged to take a little time and make it sure. Had he lost balance and fallen back, he would not have had time to make a second attempt before the lion should

arrive upon the ground; and, well knowing this, he held on with “teeth and toe-nail.”

By good fortune I had now squared myself face downward upon the branch, and as the collar of Ben’s guernsey came within reach of my hand I was able to give him a help; so that the next moment he succeeded in getting hold of a limb, and swinging himself into the fork of the tree.

It was a close shave, however; for just as Ben drew his dangling feet among the branches the lion reached the ground, and, bounding upwards, struck his paw fiercely against the trunk, causing the bark to fly off in large pieces. There was not three inches between the tips of his claws and the soles of Ben’s feet as this stroke was given; and had he succeeded in grasping the ankle of my companion, it would have been the last bit of climbing poor Brace would ever have made; for the paw of the lion is like a hand, and he could easily have dragged his victim back to the ground again. It was a narrow escape, therefore, but as Ben afterwards remarked, “an inch of a miss was as good as a mile,” and the sequel in this case proved the justice of the adage, for we were now safe among the branches where the lion could not possibly reach us.

At the time, however, we were far from being satisfied upon this head, and for a long while entertained no very confident feeling of security. We both knew that lions cannot climb an ordinary tree. They have not the power of “hugging” with which some bears are gifted, and of course cannot ascend in that

manner. Neither can they climb as cats do; for although the lion is neither more nor less than a great cat – the biggest of all cats – and is furnished with retractile claws, such as cats have, yet these last are usually so worn and blunted, that the king of beasts can make but little use of them in attempting to climb a tree. For this reason, tree-climbing is altogether out of his line, and he does not make any pretensions to the art; notwithstanding all this, he can rush a long way up the trunk by the mere strength of his elastic muscles, and particularly where the bark is rough on the surface, and the trunk large and firm as was that of the dragon-tree.

No wonder, then, that our apprehensions continued; no wonder they increased when we saw the fierce brute crouch down at some paces distant from the trunk, and, spreading out his broad paws, deliberately set himself for a spring.

Next moment he rushed forward about two lengths of his body, and then, bounding in a diagonal line, launched himself aloft. He must have leaped over ten feet in an upward direction – for his fore-paws struck the tree just under the forking of the branches – but to our great relief he was not able to retain his hold, and his huge body fell back to the ground.

He was not discouraged by his failure; and, once more running outward, he turned and cowered for a second spring. This time he appeared more determined and certain of success. There was that expression in his hideous face, combined with the extreme of rage and fury. His lips were drawn back, and his white teeth and red frothy tongue were displayed in all their horrid nakedness; a

hideous sight to behold. We trembled as we looked upon it.

Another fierce growl – another rush forward – another bound – and before we had time to utter a word, we perceived the yellow paw of the lion spread over the limb of the tree with his grinning muzzle and gleaming teeth close to our feet! In another instant the brute would have swung his body up, but my companion's presence of mind did not forsake him at this crisis. Quick as thought was his action; and, before the lion had time to raise himself, the keen blade of the sailor's knife had passed twice through the great paw, – inflicting at each stab a deep and bloody gash. At the same instant I had drawn the pistol, which I still carried in my belt, and fired as fair as I could in the face of the monster.

Whether it was the knife or the pistol that produced the desired effect, I will not undertake to determine; but certainly an effect was produced by one or the other, or more likely both weapons deserve a share of the credit. Be this as it may, the effect was instantaneous; for the moment the shot was fired and the stabs were given, the lion dropped backward, and ran limping around the trunk of the tree, roaring and screaming in a voice that might have been heard at the distance of miles!

From the manner in which he limped, it was evident that the wounds given by the knife were painful to him, and we could perceive by the blood upon his "countenance" that the shot, small as it was, had torn him considerably about the face.

For a short time we were in hopes that after such a repulse

he might take himself off, but we soon perceived that our hopes were fallacious; neither the stabs nor the shot had seriously injured him. They had only served to render him more furious and vengeful; and after tumbling about for a while, and angrily biting at his own bleeding paw, he returned once more to the attack, as before, endeavouring to spring up to the branches of the tree. I had reloaded the pistol. Ben was again ready with his blade; and, fixing ourselves firmly on our perch, we awaited the onset.

Once more the lion bounded upward and launched himself against the trunk, but to our great joy we saw that he fell far short of his former leaps. Beyond a doubt his limb was disabled.

Again and again he repeated the attempt, each time falling short as before. If fury could have availed, he would have succeeded; for he was now at the height of his rage, and making such a hideous combination of noises, that we could not hear our own voices when we spoke to each other.

After several vain essays to reach us, the brute seemed to arrive at the conviction that the feat was beyond his powers, and he desisted from the attempt.

But he had no intention of leaving the ground. On the contrary, we saw that he was determined to make us stand siege, for, to our great chagrin, we observed him trot a few paces from the trunk of the tree and crouch down in the grass – evidently with the intention of remaining there till we should be compelled to come down.

Chapter Twenty Three

Of course my companion and I kept our places in the top of the tree; we could not do otherwise. Had we attempted to come down it would only have been to fling ourselves right into the jaws of the lion – who lay at just such a distance from the trunk that he could have reached us by a single bound, the moment we set foot upon the earth. There he lay or rather squatted, like a cat; though at intervals he rose and stretched his body into a crouching attitude, and lashed his sides with his tufted tail, and showed his teeth, and roared angrily. Then for some moments he would lie down again and lick his wounded paw – still growling while he did so, as though he was vowing revenge for the injury!

When he saw that he had ceased to attempt climbing the tree, we were in hopes he would get tired of the attack and go off altogether. But those hopes gradually forsook us, as we observed the pertinacity with which he still continued to watch us. If either of us made a motion among the branches, he would instantly spring to his feet – as though he fancied we were about to descend and was determined to intercept us. This, of itself, proved that he had not the slightest intention of moving off from the ground, and convinced us that the siege was not to be raised with the consent of the besieger.

We began to grow exceedingly apprehensive about our situation. Hitherto we had been terrified by the sudden attack

of the lion, but these moments of terror were short-lived, and, on account of the excitement which accompanied them, we had neither time to reflect nor suffer; we had not time to feel despair, and in fact had not despaired of safety, even while the lion was using all his efforts to reach us, for we had the belief that he could not get up.

Now, however, a new danger threatened us. Though we felt quite secure in our "roost" we could not remain there long. It was by no means comfortable, straddling the naked branch of a tree; but the comfort was a small consideration. We were both used to riding such a stock-horse, and as for Brace, he could have gone to sleep with only the flying-jib-boom between his legs, so that it was not the discomfort we cared about. There was something more serious than this to reflect upon, and that was the prospect of being afflicted by hunger and thirst. I need not say the prospect. As for hunger, we were not yet suffering for want of food; but already the sister appetite had begun to be felt, and keenly too. We had not tasted water since leaving the river, and any one who has ever made a march under the tropical sun of Africa knows that at every half-mile you feel the desire to drink. Both of us had been thirsty almost since the moment we parted with the boat, and I had been looking out for water ever since. We blamed ourselves for not having brought with us a canteen, or water-bottle, and we already paid for our negligence, or rather our ignorance – for it never entered into our minds that such a provision would be necessary, any more than if we had gone out

for a day's fowling into the fields about home.

We had already been suffering from thirst, but now that we sat upon those bare branches, with not a bit of shade to screen us from the fierce rays of a noon-day's sun – and a hot tropical sun at that – we began to feel the pangs of thirst in right earnest, and in a way I had never felt them before. Indeed, it was a most painful sensation, and I thought if it was to increase, or even continue much longer, it would kill me. My companion suffered also, though not so badly as I. He was more used to such extremities, and could better bear them.

Perhaps had we been actually engaged in some work we should not have felt this misery so keenly; but we had nothing to do but balance our bodies upon the branches and calmly reflect. So much the worse. We were able to comprehend our situation, and fully understand its perilous nature.

The prospect was far from cheering. Out of the tree we dared not go, else we should be eaten up by the lion. If we remained in the tree, we should become the victims either of thirst or hunger, or both.

How were we to be relieved from this terrible alternative? Would the lion grow wearied with watching us, and wander away? There was not the least likelihood he would do so. All his movements indicated an opposite intention; and for our consolation, I now remembered having read of the implacable nature of this fierce brute when wounded or provoked – so far different from the generous disposition usually ascribed to him,

and which certainly he often displays when not molested, or perhaps when not hungry.

Whether our lion was hungry or not, we had no means of judging; but we knew he had been molested, and roughly handled too; his revengeful feelings had been roused to their highest pitch, and, therefore, whatever of vengeance was in his nature would now be exhibited. Beyond a doubt his ire was not going to cool down in a hurry. We might wait a long while before he would feel inclined to forgiveness. We had no hope from his mercy. Perhaps the night might produce a change. On this alone we rested our hopes.

We never speculated on being rescued by any of our companions from the *Pandora*. Though Brace had friends among them, they were not the sort of friends to trouble themselves much about what became of him. They might make a show of search, but there were twenty ways they could go, without hitting on the right one; and to find any one among these limitless forests would be a mere act of chance. We had not much hope of being rescued by them.

What little hope we had from this source rested upon a singular belief. My companion suggested that the *Pandora's* people, on finding we did not return at night, might fancy we had deserted. In that case it was probable enough we might be searched for, and with sufficient zeal to ensure our being found!

This was a singular conjecture, and both of us wished it might prove a correct one. Under this contingency there was a better

prospect of our being relieved.

By this time our thirst had become oppressive. Our throats were parched as though we had swallowed red-pepper, and our tongues could not produce the slightest moisture. Even the natural saliva had ceased to flow.

While suffering thus, an idea occurred to my companion: I saw him with his knife make an incision in the bark of one of the branches. The point that had first led us to approach the great tree was now decided. Red sap flowed from the wound: – it was the “dragons’-blood!”

In hopes of getting relief from this source, we both moistened our lips with the crimson-juice, and swallowed it as fast as it oozed out. Had we been better acquainted with the medical botany we should have let this liquor alone, for the dragons’-blood is one of the most noted of astringents. Alas! we soon discovered its qualities by experiment. In five minutes after, our tongues felt as if vitriol had been poured upon them, and our thirst increased to a degree of violence and fierceness that could no longer be borne. Deeply did we now repent what we had done; deeply did we rue the tasting of that blood-like sap. We might have endured for days, had we not swallowed those crimson drops; but already were we suffering as if days had passed since we had tasted water!

Our thirst had suddenly increased, and still kept increasing, until the agony we endured was positively excruciating. I cannot describe it. Some idea may be had of its terrible nature when I

assert that we actually talked of descending from the tree, and risking our lives in a knife-conflict with the lion, rather than endure it longer!

Chapter Twenty Four

Yes; we actually talked of descending from the tree, and risking our lives in a knife-conflict with the lion!

It is true it was a forlorn hope; but it is probable we should have attempted it in preference to enduring the terrible agony much longer. Fortunately we were not driven to this desperate alternative. At this crisis a happy idea came into the mind of my companion, and drove the thought of the knife-combat out of our heads.

It will be remembered that we had with us a musket. The great “Queen Anne” must not be forgotten; though, for the time, it would seem as though we had forgotten it. That is not exactly the case. We remembered it well enough, for it was under our eyes, lying at the bottom of the tree – where Brace had thrown it in his eagerness to get out of the way of the lion; but it was out of our reach, and, moreover, being empty, we had never thought of its being of service to us. Even could we have regained possession of, and reloaded it, we knew that the snipe-shot would not kill the lion; and, therefore, we might load and fire till we had exhausted all our ammunition, without any other result than to render the brute more furious – if that could possibly be. For these reasons we had paid no attention to the “Queen Anne,” and there it lay right under us, apparently as useless as a bar of iron.

While plotting about the means of defence and attack we

might make use of in our intended final struggle, the “Queen Anne” once more came into our heads; and Brace hit upon a plan by which the great piece might serve us. In fact, there was a probability we might extricate ourselves by its aid, without the desperate conflict we had projected! and we only wondered the idea had not occurred to us before.

This plan was to get hold of the gun and reload her, then provoke the lion in some way, so that he would renew his attempts to ascend the tree, and, when thus near, place the muzzle of the musket close to his head and fire the contents right into him. Even snipe-shot might do the work, if delivered at such close quarters.

The first difficulty would be to get possession of the gun. She was lying under the tree, upon the same side where we had climbed up, and not three feet from the great trunk; but, though so near, it was evident that one or other of us must descend to the ground, before we could lay a finger upon her. Of course it would be impossible to do this without the risk – nay, the positive certainty – of being assailed by the lion. He lay only a dozen paces farther out, and, as already stated, continually kept his eyes upon us. A single bound would be enough, and there would be no chance of escaping him. How was the gun to be got at?

I have said that it was evident one or other of us would have to descend; and, as this would be going directly to destruction, the idea of doing so was not entertained for a moment.

Ben had fancied that he might “sling,” me down after the

manner of monkeys, and that by this means we might get hold of the gun; but after examining the branches and calculating the distance, we saw that the height was too great, and the thing would be impossible.

Just then another idea came to our aid – an idea of Ben’s conception – and that was to make a running noose on the end of a piece of cord, endeavour to get it round the gun, and then draw her up in the loop. This would be a safe plan, if we could only accomplish it.

We had the cord – a sailor is rarely found wanting one. It was the same piece upon which the vulture had dangled; for Ben had unloosed it before pitching away his bird. It was both long enough and strong enough for the purpose, and could not have suited better if it had been chosen at a rope-factory. Ben knew how to make a loop, and a loop was soon made to his liking; and then the cord was let down slowly and gently, so as not to close the noose before it reached the ground. Guided by the adroit hand of the sailor, the loop at length rested upon the earth, just before the muzzle of the musket; and was then drawn slowly and smoothly along the grass. Fortunately, the barrel did not lie close to the surface, and the cord passed easily underneath it; but Ben was not satisfied until he had worked his loop nearly to the middle of both barrel and stock, and quite over one of the swivels. He then tightened the noose by a jerk – such only as a sailor could give – and the taut cord showed it was fast and secured. In another half-minute my companion held “Queen Anne” in his grasp!

It was but the work of a few minutes to load her, but this was done with caution, as we feared to drop either the ammunition or the ramrod. Of course, had we lost either of these, the piece would have become useless. During all these proceedings, our antagonist had not remained silent. As he saw the musket ascending so mysteriously into the tree, he seemed to fancy that some conspiracy was meditated against him, and he had risen to his all-fours, and set up a loud growling.

Ben had now finished loading, and only waited for the lion to approach the tree; but the brute showed no signs of coming nearer. He continued to growl and lash his tail angrily, but kept his ground.

Perhaps a shot from the pistol might tempt him nearer; and my companion directed me to fire. I did so, aiming at the lion. Like enough the shot only tickled him; but it partially produced the desired effect; for, on receiving it, he made one bound forward and then stopped again – still continuing to roar, and strike his sides with his long, tufted tail.

He was now within less than ten paces of the muzzle of the piece, and he was not going nearer at that time. This was evident; for, after remaining awhile upon all-fours, he squatted down upon his hips just like a cat. His broad breast was right towards us, and presented a most lurking mark to aim at.

Ben was sorely tempted to level and pull trigger; but, still fearing that even at that close distance the snipe-shot would scatter and do no hurt, he held back.

He had directed me to reload the pistol and fire again, and I was busy in doing so, when, all at once, my companion whispered me to desist. I looked at him to see what he wanted. I saw that some new purpose was in his mind. I saw him cautiously draw the huge iron ramrod from the thimbles, and then twisting a piece of oakum round its head, insert it into the barrel, where the oakum held it fast. I next saw him lower the barrel, and lay the butt to his shoulder. I saw him take aim, and soon after came the loud bang and the cloud of smoke, which filled the whole top of the tree, hiding both the earth and the sky from my sight.

Though I could not for some time tell the effect of the shot – neither could Ben – on account of the thick smoke, our ears were gratified by the sounds that reached us from below. The voice of the lion seemed all at once to have changed its triumphant roaring to a tone that expressed agony and fear, and we were convinced that he was badly hurt. We could hear the whining, and snorting, and screaming, like that made by a cat in the agonies of death, but far hoarser and louder.

All this lasted only a few seconds – while the sulphurous vapour clung around the tree – and just as this was wafted aside, and we could see the ground below, the noises ceased, and to our great joy we beheld the enormous brute stretched upon his side motionless and dead!

We waited awhile, to be sure of this fact before descending from our safe perch; but as we watched the brute and saw that he stirred not, we at length felt assured, and leaped down to the

earth.

True enough, he was quite dead. The iron ramrod had done the business, and was still sticking half-buried in his breast – its point having penetrated to the heart.

A royal lion was game enough in one day. So thought Ben, and, as we had no desire to procure a second one in the same way, we agreed that this should be the termination of our hunt.

Ben, however, was not going to return without taking back some trophies of his hunter-skill; and, therefore, after we had obtained water to assuage our thirst, we returned to the spot, and under the shade of the great dragon-tree stripped the lion of his skin.

With this trophy borne upon Ben's shoulders, while I carried the "Queen Anne," we wended our way toward the *Pandora*.

Chapter Twenty Five

It was the intention of Ben and myself to return direct to the barque. We were quite satisfied with our day's hunting, and wanted no more game.

We set out therefore in a direction, that as we thought would bring us back to the river.

We had not gone far, however, when we began to fancy that we were going in the wrong course, and then we turned aside from it and took another.

This new one we followed for more than a mile, but, as no river appeared, we believed we were now certainly going the wrong way, and once more turned back.

After walking another mile or two, without coming to the river, we began to think we were lost. At all events we had certainly lost our way, and had not the slightest idea on what side of us lay the river, or the barque, or the barracoon of King Dingo Bingo.

After resting a bit – for we had got quite tired, fagging backward and forward through the woods – we took a fresh start, and this time walked on for three miles or more in a straight course. It was all guess-work, however, and a bad guess it turned out to be; for, instead of getting into the low bottom lands that lay along the banks of the river, we found ourselves coming out into a hilly country, which was open and thinly timbered. We

saw plenty of game on all sides – antelopes of several kinds – but we were now so anxious about our way, that we never thought of stopping to have a shot at them. At that moment we would rather have seen the royal-mast of the *Pandora* than the largest herd of antelopes in the world.

One of the hills in advance of us appeared to be higher than the rest; and as it also appeared the nearest, Ben proposed we should continue on to its top. By so doing we should gain a view of the surrounding country, and would be likely to see the river, and perhaps the barque herself.

Of course I made no objection – as I was entirely guided by my companion's advice – and we at once set out for the hill.

It appeared to be only a mile or two distant; but, to our great surprise, when we had walked a full mile it seemed no nearer than ever!

But this was not the worst of it, for when we had walked another mile, we still appeared no nearer to the hill than when we had first started for it; and then a third mile was passed over, and the distance that intervened between us and the eminence was, to all appearance, but slightly diminished!

Had it been left to me, I should have given up all hope of reaching that hill, and would have gone back as we had come; but my companion was a man of wonderful perseverance in anything he undertook, and now that he had started for the hill, he was determined that no halt should be made until we had got to the very summit of it – even though it should take us till sunset to

accomplish the journey. So on we trudged, keeping the top of the hill in view, and facing straight for it all the while.

It was a far longer journey than we had anticipated. It could not have been less than ten good English miles from the place where we had first observed it, to the highest part, though when starting for it, it looked only one! But such is the pureness of the atmosphere in some parts of the tropics, where there is no cloud in the sky and no mist over the earth, that any one accustomed to an English view is easily deceived.

It was within an hour of sunset when Ben and I reached the summit of the hill, after a tramp of ten miles at least; but we were rewarded for our trouble by the splendid view we obtained, and particularly by the sight of the river, which ran along one side, and which stretched away from our position, like a belt of shining silver, till it met the white sea in the distance. We could just make out the *Pandora* riding upon her anchor, and we thought we could distinguish the cabins and barracoons of King Dingo Bingo, peeping out from among the green trees. The barque looked no larger than a little boat, and although she appeared very near the river's mouth, that was also an ocular deception, for we knew that she was more than a mile up stream.

Of course the sight gave us joy – for we had really believed ourselves lost, and had been feeling very uneasy all the afternoon. Now, however, that we saw the bearings and course in which the river ran, we could easily make our way to it, and, by following its banks, would in time reach the place of our destination.

One thing, however, was unpleasant enough. We should not be able to get back to the *Pandora* that night. We might get as far as the bank of the river before the sun would be quite gone down; but we saw that the country on both sides of the stream was covered with thick woods; and unless a path could be found it would be slow travelling through the timber, and after twilight it would be impossible to proceed. It appeared plain enough that we could not reach the *Pandora* that night, and we should have to spend the night in the woods.

Since this was to be, Ben thought we might as well stay upon the hill, as go anywhere else. We might have gone down to the bank of the river – for it ran close to one side of the hill, perhaps not quite a mile from the bottom of the slope – and we at first thought of doing so; but upon reflection it seemed better for us to stay where we were. We should be in less danger from wild beasts by remaining upon the hill – upon which there was not much timber – than by going down into the thick woods. The banks of the river we knew to be the place where wild beasts most abounded, and the danger of being attacked by them would be much greater there. As to water, we could not be better off, for we had found a beautiful spring near the summit, and had already quenched our thirst at it. We did not need to go to the river, so far as that was concerned.

The only thing of which we really stood in need, was something to eat. We had not a morsel of either biscuit or meat, and we had both become as hungry as hawks. There was not the

slightest prospect of a supper, and we should have to go with empty stomachs until we could reach the barque – perhaps not before noon of the following day.

We had grown so hungry that my companion now wished he had brought along with him a piece of the lion's flesh, declaring he could have eaten a collop of it well enough. We had still with us the skin, but that was too tough for us, hungry as we were.

We sat down near the spring, and began to consider what preparations we should make for passing the night. We thought it would be best to gather a quantity of sticks and make a roaring fire – not that we were afraid of the cold, for there was no such thing as cold. On the contrary, although it was near sundown, the air was still quite hot and sultry. Our object in talking about a fire was, in order to frighten off any wild beasts that might approach our sleeping-place during the night.

While we talked we grew hungrier, and at length our stomachs became so craving that we could almost have eaten the grass! Fortune, however, proved kind to us, and saved us from becoming grass-eaters. Just as we were wondering what we could find to eat, we chanced to see a large bird stepping out of some trees into the open ground. It did not see us, for it was every moment coming nearer. It appeared to be browsing upon the grass, as it moved along; and thus busy seeking its own food, took no notice of anything else.

Ben had reloaded the “Queen Anne,” after killing the lion. The ramrod had been crooked badly, but we had managed to get it

straight again, so that it would serve; and in order to be prepared for anything, a fresh load had been rammed into the barrel.

Seeing the great bird coming so near, we quietly lay down, so as to hide our bodies in the grass – while Ben placed himself behind a small bush, through which he protruded the long barrel of the musket.

It seemed as if Providence had sent the bird for our supper; for the foolish creature walked straight on, until it was hardly a dozen yards from the muzzle of the “Queen Anne.” Just then Ben pulled the trigger; and, notwithstanding the smallness of the shot, the great bustard – for it proved to be a bustard – was rolled over on the grass, as dead as a nail in a door. So said Ben as he picked it up, and brought it into our camp.

We now set to work upon the bird; and, after plucking, and cleaning it, we kindled a fire, and placed it in the blaze to roast. We might not have cooked it in the most elegant manner, and perhaps it was a little smoked; but if so, we did not notice this while eating it, for we both ate heartily, and thought it the most delicious morsel we had ever tasted. Certainly after the salt meat, to which we had been so long accustomed, a fresh bustard – which is one of the richest flavoured of game birds – could not be otherwise than a delicacy; and so much did we relish it, that before going to sleep we made a fresh onset upon the bird, and very nearly finished it, large as it was.

We washed the supper down with a drink of cool water from the crystal spring; and then we began to consider where we should

stretch our bodies for the night.

Chapter Twenty Six

At first we were inclined to remain where we had cooked and eaten our supper. The water was convenient, and there was long bunch grass upon which we could rest very comfortably.

But although it was then warm enough, and we might have gone to sleep without feeling any cold, we knew it would be different towards the middle of the night. We knew this from the experience we had already had of this part of the country – for notwithstanding the great heat of the sun during the day, at night there were heavy dews, and the air was often foggy and chill. Some nights on board the barque we had found it cold enough for all the blankets we could get. Perhaps it was not absolutely so cold as we fancied it, for at this time I knew nothing about the thermometer. It is like enough that we felt the cold of the night more keenly, on account of its contrast with the great heat of the day; and as we were usually at hard work, and perspiring all day long, of course our blood was not prepared for the change.

That day had been a particularly hot one, and in walking over the palm-nuts, and toiling through thickets and other difficult places, we had been in a profuse perspiration all day long. As we had no blankets to cover us – nothing but our very lightest clothing – we would be likely to suffer during the night with the damp dew falling upon our bodies. True, we had the lion's hide with us, but this, being fresh and still raw, would not greatly

benefit us.

Under these circumstances it occurred to us that we might as well take shelter under some tree, which, if it failed to warm, would at least protect us from the falling dew.

We had already noticed a grove at some distance along the slope of the hill. It appeared to promise the very shelter we wanted, and taking up the gun, the lion-skin, what remained of the bustard, and some burning faggots to make a new fire out of, we proceeded in the direction of the grove.

This grove appeared of that kind usually termed a coppice or copse – such as may be often observed in English parks. It was of a circular form, and covered about half an acre of ground. None of the timber was tall – not over thirty or forty feet in height, but as we drew nearer we could perceive that it was all of one sort. This we could tell by the leaves, which were very large and of a shining green colour. They were oblong, and each leaf was divided into five leaflets, that were placed in relation to each other like the fingers of a hand. Even the leaflets were like large entire leaves, and out of each bunch of leaves we could see that there grew a large white flower hanging upon a long pendulous flower-stalk with its top downward. These flowers gave the grove a very beautiful appearance – their splendid white corollas contrasting elegantly with the deep-green of the leaves.

All these matters we noted as we drew nigh, for although the sun had gone down, there was still light enough to view objects at a considerable distance.

We noticed nothing else about this little copse that appeared peculiar, until we had advanced close to its edge. We only observed that it was nicely rounded, just as if it belonged to some fine park and had been kept neatly trimmed by the pruning knife of the park-keeper, or some landscape gardener. Of course this was a peculiarity – considering that the grove grew in a wild uninhabited country, where no human hand ever interfered with it, as we supposed. But I had heard that such regularly formed copses are often met with in wild regions, both on the table plains of Southern Africa and the prairies of America, therefore there was nothing remarkable that they should be found in Central Africa as well.

On this account we had scarce made any remark about the singularity of its shape, but approached it with no other intention than to obtain shelter under it. Its dense foliage, promising protection from dew, or even rain, if it should fall, appeared to invite us; and we were resolved to accept its proffered hospitality.

It was only when we got very close to it, that we perceived the true nature of this singular grove – and then we noticed a peculiarity that astonished us. Instead of a grove covering nearly an acre of ground, as we had conjectured, you may fancy our surprise on perceiving that the hole copse consisted of but one tree!

Sure enough there was only one tree, and it was the vast umbrageous head of leaves and flowers that we had mistaken for a whole grove!

But such a tree was that! If we had been astonished by the dragon-tree, our astonishment was now more than doubled, on beholding the gigantic monarch of trees, that now spread widely before our eyes. The dragon-tree sank into a shrub in comparison with it.

If I were to give the dimensions of this enormous vegetable, I should scarce be credited, but fortunately its giant proportions do not rest on my authority alone. Trees of a similar kind, and of the very same species, have been described by botanists, and therefore their vast size is well-known to the scientific world.

The one discovered by Brace and myself had a trunk of full a hundred feet girth. I cannot speak exactly, as I had no measuring string, and it would have taken a pretty long cord to have gone round it: but Ben measured it carefully with his arms, and pronounced it to be “twenty-five fadoms.” Now Ben’s “fadoms” were good fathoms, for he was a long armed man; and, therefore I conclude that the trunk was at least a hundred feet in circumference. At the height of about a dozen feet from the ground the trunk forked into a number of great branches, each of which was like a tree of itself; and, in fact, some of them were far thicker than most trees of the forest. These branches stretched out for many yards – at first horizontally, but as they tapered towards a point, they began gradually to curve downwards, until their extreme ends – the topmost twigs with their leaves – quite touched the earth. It was for this reason we had not been able to see the main trunk as we approached. The foliage of the outer

boughs concealed it from the view, and hence had we mistaken the single tree for a grove or coppice. It the more resembled this on account of its height; for, as already observed, its topmost branches did not exceed thirty or forty feet in clear altitude. It was therefore not the tallest tree in the world, though it was certainly one of the thickest.

Now it so chanced that I knew what kind of tree it was – even to its name; my “wonder book” had not omitted to describe the vegetable curiosity. It was the great *baobab*.

Chapter Twenty Seven

I knew that the tree had other names as well as baobab; that the negroes of Senegal call it the “monkey’s bread-tree,” the “sour gourd,” and “lalo plant,” and my book had been minute enough to give the botanical name, which is *Adansonia*— so called from a distinguished French botanist, of the name of Adanson, who, long ago, travelled through western Africa, and was the first to describe this wonderful tree. I even remembered Adanson’s description of it, and his statement, that he believed there were some baobab trees five thousand years old, or coeval with the creation of the world. He had himself measured some of them seventy-five feet in girth, and had heard of others that exceeded one hundred! This I could now believe. I remembered, moreover, that he had stated, that the fruit of the tree was a large oblong body, full nine inches long, of a dull greenish colour, and covered over the surface with a hoary down; that it was like a gourd, and when opened exhibited several cells, with hard shining seeds, immersed in a soft pulp; that out of this pulp, the natives, where the tree grew, manufactured an aciduous drink that was good for curing fevers; that the leaves when dried and bruised, were, by the same people, mixed with their food, to counteract too profuse perspiration; that moreover, the larger leaves are used for covering their huts, and out of the bark they manufactured a sort of cordage, and also a coarse kind of cloth, which the poorer

people wore around their thighs, forming a covering that reached from the waist to the knees. Vessels, also, were procured from the outside shell of the fruit, which served in the same manner as those obtained from the gourd or calabash-tree.

All these things did I remember at that moment, and intended to communicate them to my companion as soon as we had got fixed for the night; but as yet we had only arrived on the ground, and had learnt nothing more about the gigantic vegetable, than that it was all one single tree, for we could still make out the main trunk through the glimmer of the twilight. Of course the measurement made by Brace was an after performance, and was not done till long after we had arrived on the ground.

Well, we had arrived by this wonderful tree; and stooping down, and entering under its branches, we saw at a glance it was the very place for us to pass the night in. A house could hardly have served us better; and as for room there was enough to have accommodated the crew of a three-decker. It hardly mattered where we lay down – as under its wide-spread canopy there was ample choice, and nowhere was the dew likely to disturb our slumbers.

We were determined, however, to light a fire, for we were still in dread of the wild beasts. No wonder after such a day's adventures.

Though it was almost dark under the shadow of the tree, it was still twilight beyond, and there was yet light enough for us to collect fuel for our fire. So throwing down our lion-skin, and

other impediments, we proceeded to gather the logs. At a short distance off, we found a quantity of dead timber, that would serve admirably for fuel, and three or four double armfuls would be sufficient.

We were not slow in bringing them up; and, choosing a place under one of the great horizontal limbs, we built our camp fire. The limb was so thick and broad underneath, that it formed a roof of itself ample enough to shelter us from any rain that might fall, and the ground underneath was as dry as tinder, so that we had every prospect of getting a comfortable night's rest.

We built our fire at some distance from the main trunk; and as soon as it was fairly kindled, we gave over work, and sat down beside it.

Ben had his clay pipe in his pocket; and, filling this with the narcotic weed, he set to smoking with great contentment. I was myself very happy. After my experience on board the barque, this free forest life was positively charming, and I thought I should like to continue it for ever. Though I did not join my companion in a smoke, I sat down opposite to him, and we both indulged in the pleasure of unrestrained conversation.

I have said that, when we first entered under the shadow of the baobab, it was quite dark there – just as dark as night itself – and we could not see six feet beyond our noses in any direction but soon the fire blazing up, enabled us to note our new quarters more particularly. We could see above our heads the long egg-shaped fruit hanging down from among the large leaves, while

strewn over the ground were many that had fallen from over-ripeness, and the shells of others that had opened, and shed their seeds, and were now dry and empty.

All these things were noticed in a few seconds of time – just while the faggots were beginning to blaze; but our attention was called away from such observations, and concentrated upon a single object, which at once created within us an eager curiosity.

This object was an odd appearance that presented itself on the trunk of the tree. Directly beyond the fire, but – as already stated – at some distance from it, rose the main trunk, like a vast wall. The bark was of a brownish grey colour, wrinkled and gnarled, and with many knots and inequalities over its surface. But in spite of this unevenness, as soon as the flames brightened up, we noticed four regular lines, or cracks, upon the trunk, meeting each other at right angles. These lines formed a parallelogram about three feet in length by two in breadth. The bottom line was about two feet above the surface of the ground; and the parallelogram itself was outlined lengthwise against the tree.

As soon as we set eyes upon it, we saw that such a regularly formed figure could not have arisen from any natural cause – the bark could not have split itself into so perfect a shape. It was clear that the thing was artificial – that is, that it had been done by the hand of man. In fact, as we observed it more minutely, we could tell that this had been so; for the marks of a knife or some other cutting instrument were discernible in the wood – though the work had been done long ago, and the colour gave no

indication of when it had been done. The lines were of the same dull grey as the natural cracks on other parts of the tree.

Our curiosity being excited, my companion and I rose from the fire, and approached the great trunk to examine it. Had it been in an inhabited country we should have thought nothing of it – for then we should have fancied that some one had been cutting out figures in the bark of the tree for their amusement – perhaps some idle boys – as I have often done myself, and so had Ben, when he was an idle boy. But during all that day's ramble we had met with no human being, nor had we seen either sign or track of one; and we were pretty certain, from what we had been told, that this part of the country was altogether without inhabitants. Therefore it was, that the figure cut upon the bark of the baobab surprised us – for this was a sign that human beings had been there before us – though it may have been ever so long before.

We approached the trunk then to examine it more closely.

As we came near, we observed that the lines were very deep – as if they had been cut into the wood – but beyond this there was nothing remarkable. There was no other carving, as we had expected, – nothing but this oblong figure, which had something of the shape of a small window or door. In fact, as we stood gazing at it, it suggested to us the idea of a little door that opened into the side of the tree, for the crack all round its edge looked black, as if we could see into some dark cavity beyond it.

This idea occurred to me as I stood gazing at it, and Ben had a similar fancy.

“Dang it, Will’m!” said he, stepping nearer to it, “it be a door, I believe,” and then, leaning forward, and striking it with his fist, he exclaimed: “Shiver my timbers, if ’tan’t a door! Listen, lad! d’ye hear that? it sounds as hollow as a empty cask!”

Sure enough, the stroke of the sailor’s knuckles on the bark gave back a hollow report – quite unlike that which would have been made by striking the solid trunk of a tree. Moreover, we saw that the part which had been struck shook under the blow. Beyond a doubt the tree was hollow, and the part that had attracted us was neither more or less than a door cut in its side.

This point was at once settled; for Ben with another “shiver my timbers,” raised his foot, and bestowed a lusty kick upon the part that was loose. It instantly caved in, and exhibited to our astonished eyes a door in the side of the tree leading into a dark cavity beyond!

Ben immediately ran back to the fire; and taking up several of the blazing faggots – and placing them side by side, so as to form a torch – returned with them to the trunk. Holding the torch before the mouth of the cavity, we peeped in, when a sight met our eyes that produced something more than astonishment – something very near akin to terror. We both shared this feeling; and my companion, though a man, and a very brave man, was quite as much terrified as I. In fact, I saw that his frame shook all over, and his hands trembled in such a manner, that several of the faggots fell from his fingers, and he appeared for some seconds to hesitate whether he would not fling the torch away

and take to his heels!

It is hardly to be wondered at, when one considers the strange sight that was revealed to our eyes. It would have tried the nerves of the boldest mortal that ever lived, to have looked into that dark tree-cave, without a previous knowledge of what was contained therein; and no wonder that Ben Brace uttered a wild exclamation, and stood shivering in speechless terror.

Within the trunk of the tree was a chamber. It was of square form, about six or seven feet in length, breadth, and height. It was no natural cavity of decayed wood, but had evidently been hollowed out by the hands of men, not very exactly, but roughly hewn as if by an axe.

Along the back a portion of the wood had been left, resembling a bench or banquette, and upon this bench were the objects that excited our terror. Three human forms were seated upon it, with their faces turned towards the entrance. They were sitting – as men ordinarily do when resting themselves – with their backs leaning against the rearmost wall of the chamber, and their arms hanging loosely by their sides – their knees bent, and their limbs somewhat stretched out towards the centre of the floor.

There was no motion on the part of any of the three; for although they were human forms they were not living ones, nor yet were they dead bodies! No, they were neither living men nor dead men, and this added to our consternation on beholding them. Had they been alive, or only corpses, the sight would have

been natural; but they were neither one nor the other. In their time they had been both; but it must have been a long while ago, for now they resembled neither!

They were all three shrivelled dried up as mummies, but they were not mummies either. They more resembled skeletons encased in suits of black leather, that, although fitting tightly to their bodies, was nevertheless wrinkled and puckered around them. There was wool upon their crowns – they had evidently been negroes – and their eyes were still in their heads, though lustreless and dried up within the sockets like the rest of the flesh. One thing still preserved its lustre, and that was their teeth. The lips, shrivelled and drawn back, exposed these fully to view; and in the mouths of all three the double rows of teeth were shining like white ivory. These, contrasting with the sombre hue of their skins, and aided by the skeleton form of their heads, and the gaunt prominence of their jaws, produced an appearance that was hideous and unearthly in the extreme.

No wonder my companion shivered when he saw them.

Chapter Twenty Eight

You will be surprised to hear, that I was not far more frightened than he. It would have been natural that I should – being younger and less courageous, but in reality I was not. In fact, after a little terror which I experienced at the first shock, I was not frightened at all.

Of course such a wild, hideous spectacle – those three skeleton forms, with rigid limbs and bodies, and rows of white grinning teeth – was calculated to produce fear in any one, particularly when discovered in such a singular place, and seen, as we saw them, under the glaring light of a torch: and I will not deny, that at the first glance I was as badly terrified as my companion, and perhaps even worse.

But my terror was short-lived, for almost in the next moment I was quite free from it; and I stood regarding the skeleton bodies with no other feelings than those of a keen curiosity – just as if I had been looking at mummies in a museum.

I know you will be surprised at this exhibition of *sangfroid* on my part, and deem it extraordinary; but there is nothing extraordinary about it. It was easily explained, and I proceed to give the explanation.

My “wonder book” is again the key – it was to this I was indebted for ridding me of my fright, and once more giving me the advantage over my unlettered companion. In that book I

remembered having read – of course in the same chapter that treated of the baobab – how a curious practice existed among some tribes of negroes, of hollowing out the great trunks of these trees into vaults or chambers, and there depositing their dead. It was not those who died naturally who were thus disposed of, but malefactors – men who had been executed for some great crime; and whose bodies were denied the right of burial in the regular way; for these savage people have strong prejudices in such matters, just as we find among the most Christian and civilised nations.

Instead therefore of flinging the bodies, of those upon whom capital punishment has been inflicted, to the hyenas and jackals, and leaving them to be devoured by these voracious brutes, the negroes give them a species of sepulture; and that is as described, by closing them up in vaults hewn in trunks of the baobab – and in my opinion a very comfortable kind of tomb it is. The bodies thus deposited do not decompose or decay as those buried in the ordinary way; on the contrary, from some preservative quality in the wood, or the atmosphere of the place, they become desiccated, or dried up very much after the manner of mummies, and in this state remain for hundreds of years.

You may wonder why the negroes, for the sake of mere criminals, take so much trouble as to form these large vaults in the solid trunks of trees; and especially with such rude implements as they are used to make them with. But this wonder will cease when I inform you, that the hallowing out of a chamber

in the trunk of a baobab is a mere bagatelle, and costs but trifling labour. The wood of this great tree is remarkably soft and porous, and a cavity can be scooped out in it, almost as easily as in the side of a turnip – at all events with not greater difficulty than in a hard bank of clay or earth; and it is not uncommon for the negroes to hew out large chambers in the trunks of the baobab for other purposes besides the one above-mentioned.

Remembering to have read the account of all these matters, I had, therefore, quite the advantage of my companion, who had never read a word about them; and, when Ben turned round and perceived that I was regarding the scene with perfect coolness, while he himself was shaking in his shoes, he appeared quite astonished at my behaviour.

I soon explained to him the reason why I was so brave; on hearing which Ben grew brave himself; and, after replenishing our torch by fresh faggots from the fire, we both squeezed ourselves through the narrow entrance, and stood within the chamber of the dead. We were no longer afraid, even to lay our hands upon the skeletons – which we found perfectly dry and in no way decayed, either by being eaten with moths, ants, or destroying insects of any kind – all of which must have been kept away from them by the peculiar odour of the wood by which they were surrounded.

Like enough the hyenas and jackals would have regarded this but little, and would long since have dragged the bodies forth; but as already stated there was a door – and a strong one, which

had fitted exactly to the entrance of the chamber, and which was evidently the thick, bark of the tree, that had been carefully cut out, at the making of the chamber, and then replaced. This door fitting exactly had no doubt been firm enough to resist any attack of wild beasts – at the time the bodies had been first deposited within – but being now dry it had got loose, and easily yielded to the sturdy kick of the sailor.

We remained for some time inside this curious apartment and examined every corner of it minutely. It was evident to us that it had not been entered for years – as there was no sign of anything having been disturbed in it. Perhaps no human being had ever opened the door since the dead had been deposited within; and although there was no means of telling how long since that event might have taken place, the appearance of the dry withered bodies plainly pointed to a very ancient date for their interment. Perhaps it may have occurred at a time when the country around was thickly peopled with inhabitants; or at all events when some tribe dwelt in the neighbourhood, who had long ago perished by the hands of their enemies, or what is more likely had been made captive, sold into slavery, and carried across the Atlantic to the colonies of America.

Such reflections were passing through my mind as I stood within that singular chamber, and gazed upon the three strange creatures that had so long been its tenants. I think the reflections of my companion were of a different character. I suspect he was at that moment thinking, whether there might be some treasure

entombed along with them, for he was carrying his torch into every corner of the apartment, and eagerly searching every crack and cranny with his eyes, as if he expected something to turn up – perhaps a bag of gold-dust, or some of those precious stones that are often found in possession of the savages.

If he had any such expectations, however, he was doomed to disappointment; for, with the exception of the three skeletons themselves, not one article of any kind – neither of dress or ornament – was found in the place.

Having satisfied himself about this, and taken one more glance at the three silent denizens of the tree-chamber, Ben, in a serio-comic fashion, made a salaam to them, and wished them good-night.

We now returned to our fire with the intention of going to sleep; for although it was not yet late, we felt wearied after the day's wandering about and, stretching ourselves along the dry ground by the side of the blazing faggots, we composed ourselves for the night.

Chapter Twenty Nine

We both fell asleep almost instantaneously, but I am unable to say how long we continued to sleep. It did not seem more than five minutes, and then we were awakened by a noise, that was loud enough and disagreeable enough to have waked up the dead. It was one of the strangest noises I had ever heard in my life; and neither of us could make out what was causing it, though there could be no doubt it proceeded from some kind of animals.

At first we thought it was wolves, or rather hyenas and jackals – since these are the wolves of Africa – and some of the sounds resembled the voices of these creatures, with which we were already acquainted, from hearing them every night around the barracoons of King Dingo, and along the banks of the river. But there were other sounds of a different kind – shrill screams, and calls like the mewing of cats, and now and then a chattering and gibbering that bore a resemblance to the voices of human beings, or, more correctly, to the ravings of maniacs!

Evidently there were many creatures making these noises; but what sort of beings they were, neither my companion nor I could form any conjecture. The sounds were harsh and disagreeable – every tone of them calculated to produce terror in those who might listen to them, – and they terrified us as soon as we were awake to hear them.

Both of us sprang instantly up, and looked around in affright,

expecting every moment to be attacked; but although we could hear the noises on every side, we were as yet unable to see who or what was making them. Our fire glimmered faintly, and enabled us to see only to a very short distance around us; but in order to get a better view, Ben mechanically kicked up the half-burnt sticks; and then a bright blaze was produced, which lit up the whole space shadowed by the branches of the baobab.

As yet we could see nothing – for the noises proceeded out of the thick darkness beyond; but we could perceive that they came from all sides – from behind as well as before us. Whatever creatures they were that were uttering these horrid sounds were not all in one place; they were everywhere around the great tree; we were in fact surrounded by a large host of them – completely encompassed.

The sounds now appeared to grow louder and nearer; and as we stood gazing out into the darkness, we began to perceive certain bright spots, that scintillated and sparkled like jets of moving fire. These spots were round and a greenish lustre; and as we looked upon them we were soon able to tell what they were – they were eyes!

Yes, they were the eyes of some animals, though of what sort we could not guess. That they were fierce creatures, perhaps beasts of prey, we had every reason to believe. Their wild cries, and the manner of their approach proved this; for they were approaching – every moment drawing nearer and nearer.

In a very few seconds they had got so close, that we could see

them distinctly enough, and no longer conjectured about what kind of animals they were. I knew them as soon as the light enabled me to get a view of them. I knew them from having seen some of their kind in a menagerie, and my companion was even better acquainted with them – they were baboons.

The discovery did not in any way tend to allay the apprehensions which their voices had created. Quite the contrary was the effect produced. We both knew well enough the fierce disposition of these brutes – any one who has ever witnessed their behaviour in the cage must be acquainted with the fact, that they are the most spiteful and savage creatures that can be imagined, and exceedingly dangerous to be approached. And this, too, after being tamed and constantly receiving kindness from the hand of man! Still more dangerous when in their native haunts – so much so, that the woods which they inhabited are never traversed by the natives without great precaution, and only when several persons well-armed go together.

Now both my companion and I were well acquainted with these facts; and to say that we were scared, when we saw the baboons approaching our place of encampment, is only to declare the simple truth. We were scared and badly scared too – quite as much terrified as we had been by the sight of the lion.

We saw, moreover, that these baboons were of the largest, and most dangerous kind – for there are several different species of baboons in Africa. These were the hideous “mandrills,” as we could tell by their great swollen cheeks, of purple and scarlet

colour, that shone conspicuously under the light of our fire. We could distinguish their thick hog-like snouts, and yellow chin-beards as they advanced; and we had no doubt about what sort of enemy was before us.

Had there been only one or two of these hideous brutes, an attack from them would have been dangerous enough – far more so than an encounter with hyenas or fierce mastiff dogs, for the mandrill is more than a match for either. But what was our dismay on perceiving that the brutes were in great numbers – in fact a whole flock or tribe was on the ground, and advancing towards us from all sides. Turn which way we would, their eyes were gleaming upon us, and their painted faces shining under the blaze. From all sides came their cries of menace – so shrill and loud that we could not hear our own voices, as we spoke to one another!

About their design there could be no doubt: they were evidently advancing to attack us: and the reason why they did not rush forward at once may have been that they had some dread of approaching the fire; or perhaps they had not yet made up their minds as to what sort of enemies we were.

It was not likely, however, that the fire would keep them off for any long period of time. They would soon become accustomed to it; and, in fact, every moment they appeared to gain confidence and drew nearer and nearer.

What was to be done? Against such a host we could not defend ourselves, not for five minutes, had we been armed ever so well.

The powerful brutes would have pulled us down in the twinkling of an eye, and torn us to pieces with their strong hog-like tusks. Defence would be idle – there was no other mode of escape than to endeavour to get away from the ground.

But how? to climb up into the tree would not avail us, though it had saved us from the lion. These mandrills could climb better than we; they would soon overtake us, and tear us to pieces among the branches.

We next thought of running out into the open ground, and escaping by flight. Probably we should have made the attempt, but turn which way we might we saw that the baboons were in the way – a complete circle of them had formed around us, several ranks deep; and had we attempted to pass through them, it was plain they could have seized upon us and dragged us down. In short, we were surrounded, and our retreat cut off.

We were fairly at a stand, and could think of no means of escape. And yet to remain where we were, was to be attacked to a certainty; for every moment the threatening ranks were closing around us – still continuing to utter the same horrid cries – which, probably, were partly meant to terrify us, and partly to encourage each other in the outset. I am very sure that but for the fire – which was no doubt a strange sight to them – they would not have wasted time in the attack, but would have sprung forward upon us at once. But the fire, which they still appeared to regard with some degree of suspicion, held them back.

Perceiving this, my companion bethought him of a means

of farther putting them in fear; and, calling me to follow his example, he caught up one of the blazing faggots, and, rushing out towards the nearest, waved the brand in their faces. I did as I saw him, only going towards the opposite side of the circle of our assailants.

The manoeuvre was not without its effect. The baboons retreated before this odd species of assault, but not so precipitately, as to leave any hope of our being able to drive them off altogether. On the contrary, as soon as we stopped they stopped also; and when we returned towards the fire to exchange our brands for others, they followed us up and came as close as ever. They grew even more furious and noisy – for the fact that we had not injured any of them taught them to look upon our firebrands as harmless weapons, and no longer to be dreaded.

We repeated the manoeuvre more than once; but it soon ceased to inspire them with fear; and we had to wave the torches before their very snouts before we could cause them to turn tail and run from us.

“This way won’t do, Will’m,” said my companion, in a voice that told his alarm, “they won’t be run off, lad! I’ll try ’em with a shot from the old piece – maybe that’ll send ’em a bit.”

The “Queen Anne,” was loaded, as usual, with small shot; and we had thought of firing at them when they first came up; but we knew that the small shot would only sting them, without doing any real injury, and, consequently, render them more furious, and implacable. We had, therefore, abstained from firing the gun,

until we should try the effect of the firebrands.

Now, however, Ben was determined, that at least one of them should pay the forfeit; and I saw him pushing the ramrod into the gun – just as we had done when loading for the lion.

In a few seconds he had got ready; and then stepping forward till he stood near the line of the threatening mandrills, he pointed the piece at one of the largest and fired.

A scream of pain announced that he had aimed well; and the great brute was seen sprawling over the ground, and struggling in the agonies of death – while a crowd of its companions rushing from all sides gathered around it. At the same instant I had fired the pistol and wounded another of them, which also became the centre of a sympathising group, Ben and I, after firing, ran back to the fire. It was impossible to reload the gun – since the ramrod was now sticking in the body of the baboon – but, even had we been in possession of a dozen ramrods, we should not have found time to use them. The effect of our shots, fatal as they had been, was the very reverse of what might have been anticipated. Instead of intimidating our assailants, it had only increased their courage; and now, forsaking their fallen comrades, they returned to the attack with redoubled rage and with evident determination to close with us without more ado.

We saw that the crisis had come; I had seized one of the largest of the firebrands, and my companion held the musket clubbed and ready to deal blows around him. But what would these have availed against such numbers? we should soon be overpowered,

and dragged down – never more to regain our feet – but to be torn to fragments by those terrible teeth, gnashing and threatening all around us.

And this would most certainly have been our fate, had not that moment offered a means of escape from our perilous position.

A means did offer itself, and it was odd we had not thought of it before.

Just as we were at the height of despair – expecting every moment to be our last – our eyes chanced to turn on the dark doorway that opened into the side of the tree – the entrance to the chamber of the dead. It was still open – for we had not returned the bark slab to its place, and it was lying where we had thrown it on the ground outside. Both of us noticed the doorway at the same instant, and simultaneously recognised in it a means of escape – for both shouted as with one voice and rushed towards it together.

Narrow as was the entrance we passed quickly through. A rabbit could scarce have glided more rapidly into its burrow; and, before any of the pursuing mandrills could lay a tooth upon our skirts, we had got inside, and were once more in the company of the skeletons.

Chapter Thirty

Do not suppose that we considered ourselves safe. We were simply safe for the moment – as our disappearance into the hollow of the tree, being sudden and unexpected, had taken the mandrills by surprise, and they had not followed us inside. Nevertheless they had rushed after – the whole troop of them at our heels – and from their demonstrations, it was evident they would not delay long before jumping through the doorway, and assailing us within the chamber. They were already close to the entrance, and with loud gibbering menaced us from the outside. Another moment, and we might expect them to charge in upon us.

The entrance was yet open – the slab lay outside, and we dared not go back for it – we had nothing to use for a door – nothing by which we could shut the brutes out; and all we could think of was to stand by the entrance and defend it as we best might. Ben with the long musket, and I with a brand, which I still clutched, but which no longer blazed, and could only be used as a bludgeon. Should these weapons fail, we would have to take out our knives, and make the best fight we could; but we knew that if the baboons once got inside, so as to surround us, we should not have long to live.

The screaming brutes had all come up, and we could see them plainly under the blaze of the faggots. They covered the whole

space between the trunk of the tree and the fire; and as near as we could estimate their number, there were about three score of them. They danced madly about, uttering loud wails – as if lamenting their fallen comrades – and then breaking out into more clamorous cries, that expressed rage and the desire for vengeance. They had not yet made their rush for the entrance; but there was a large crowd of them standing, or rather leaping about in front of it, that seemingly only waited for some signal to spring forward.

We stood in anxious expectation – holding our weapons ready to dash them back. We knew we could do nothing more than “job” them; and we were apprehensive about the result. Despite all our efforts, some of them might get past us; and then we should be assailed in the rear, and of course vanquished and destroyed.

“If we only could get at the door?” said I, looking towards the slab, which could be seen where it lay outside.

“Tan’t possible,” answered Ben, “the filthy beasts are all around it – they’d pull us to pieces if we only showed nose outside. Dash my buttons. Will! if I han’t got a plan – we’ll do without the door – you keep ’em back while I stop the gap. Here take the gun – its better’n that stick – look sharp, lad! – knock ’em back – that’s the way!”

And in this manner Ben continued to direct me, long after he had delivered the musket into my hands. I noticed that he had glided behind me, but for what purpose I could not guess; but,

indeed, I had no time for guessing, as the baboons were now beyond all doubt resolved to force an entrance, and it required all my strength and activity to keep them back with the muzzle of the piece. One after another sprang up on the step of the narrow doorway, and one after another was sent rolling back again, by blows that I gave with all the force I could put into my arms; and these blows I was compelled to repeat as rapidly, as the strokes of a blacksmith's hammer in the shoeing of a horse.

I could not have continued the exercise long. I should soon have been tired down at it; and then the implacable crowd would have rushed in; but it was not necessary for me to work very long – for just then, I felt my companion pressing past me towards the entrance, which the next moment became darkened up. Only through some chinks, could I distinguish the blaze beyond, and only through these was the light admitted into the chamber!

What had caused the interruption? What was it that was stopping up the entrance? was it the body of my companion, who was thus exposing himself to the assaults of the infuriated crowd without?

Not a bit of it. Ben Brace knew better than to sacrifice his life in that idle way; and, on stretching forward his hand, and touching the dark mass that was now interposed between us and the danger, I perceived what it was. It was one of the malefactors!

Neither more nor less was it than one of the mummies, which Ben had seized hold of, and, after doubling it up, had crammed chuck into the entrance, which it nearly filled from bottom to top.

The barricade was not yet complete; and my companion after directing me to hold it in place, glided back to procure another of the same. This he soon brought forward, and after doubling it up as he had done the first, and bundling it into the proper size and shape – regardless of the snapping of bones and the crackling of joints – he pushed it in alongside the other, until the two wedged each other, and completely shut up the doorway!

Such a scene might have been comic enough – notwithstanding the sacred character of the place – but neither my companion nor I were in any humour for comedy. Matters were still too serious; and although the idea of this skeleton barricade was a good one, we were not yet assured of safety. It might only give us a temporary respite; for we feared that our ferocious assailants would attack the mummies with their teeth, and soon demolish the barrier that lay between us.

And this they certainly would have done, but for a contrivance which occurred to us; and that was to leave two small apertures through which we could still “job” them, and keep them off. Two chinks were found between the bodies of the malefactors, and these were soon worked to the proper size – so that the musket could be protruded through one, and the stick through the other – and by keeping these weapons in constant play, we were able to push back the brutes, whenever they approached near enough to seize hold of our skeleton barricade.

Fortunately the doorway sloped out from the chamber – after the manner of an embrasure in a fortress – and on this account

the bodies were wedged tightly against the cheeks on both sides; so that although it would have been easy to remove them from the inside, it would have required a strong pull to have drawn them outward. So long, therefore, as we could prevent the mandrills from tearing them to pieces, we should be safe enough.

For more than an hour we were kept at constant work, shoving our weapons backward and forward like a pair of sawyers. At length, however, the assaults of the enemy outside, became feebler, and more desultory. They began to perceive that they could not effect an entrance, and as most of them had by this time received a good punch in the head, or between the ribs, they were not so eager to try it again.

But, although they at length desisted from their attempts to break in upon us, we could still hear them as before. We could no longer see them – for the fire had gone out, and all was darkness, both outside and within.

Not a ray of light reached us from any quarter; and we passed the night in the midst of perfect darkness and gloom.

But not in silence: all night long the troop kept up its chorus of screams, and howlings and wailings; and although we listened attentively in the hopes that we might hear some signs of departure, our ears were not gratified by any such sounds.

It was certainly one of the most unpleasant nights that either my companion or I had ever passed. I need not say that neither of us slept, we had not a wink of sleep throughout the live-long night; nor would it have been possible for Morpheus himself

to have slept under the circumstances. We had heard of the implacable disposition which not only the mandrills, but other baboon-monkeys exhibit when they have been assailed by an enemy; we had heard that their resentment once kindled, cannot be again allayed until the object of it either becomes their victim, or else escapes altogether beyond their reach. With the monkey tribe it is not as with lions, buffaloes, rhinoceroses, or other dangerous beasts that maybe encountered in the forests of Africa. When the enemy is out of sight, all these animals seem to forget the assault that may have been made upon them, or, at all events, soon give over their hostile intentions. Not so with the baboons. These monstrous creatures possess an intelligence far superior to that of ordinary quadrupeds. In fact, they are capable of a certain amount of reasoning power, which although far inferior in degree to that of the human species, is nevertheless of precisely the same character.

There are some people who think it savouring of profanity to make an assertion of this kind; but there are people of very weak minds, who are afraid to look philosophy in the face, lest it should contradict some favourite dogma, in which they have long been accustomed to put faith. Such people will boldly give denial to the most positive facts, that may be observed both in the geological and zoological world; and do not scruple to give hard names to those who have the candour to acknowledge these facts. It is absurd to deny that monkeys are possessed of reasoning powers; no man could stand five minutes in front of a monkeys' cage in

any of our great zoological gardens, without being convinced of this fact.

With the baboons, the reasoning faculty is not so strongly developed as it is in some other species of the ape tribe, as the great ourang and the chimpanzee; but for all that, Ben Brace and I knew it was strong enough to enable them fully to understand the situation in which we were placed, and to know that we could not possibly escape from our tree-prison without passing before their eyes. We knew, too, that their passions were still stronger than their reasoning powers; that after such offence as we had given them, by killing one of their number – perhaps a venerated leader of the tribe – wounding another, and administering violent “punches” to nearly every individual in the gang, there was not the slightest probability that they would suffer us to escape without first trying the effect of a long siege upon us.

If this was to be the case, we could have no hope of escape. The mandrills might remain upon the ground as long as they pleased. Some might go off to obtain food and drink, while the others watched; and thus they could relieve one another. For that matter, drink was to be had near at hand – at the fine spring where we had eaten our supper – though, for any good it could do us, it might as well have been fifty miles off. Food too the monkeys could easily procure in the woods close by the base of the hill, or they might sustain themselves on the large fruit of the baobab, which was their favourite and peculiar food, and on this account called the monkeys’ bread-fruit. In fact, my companion

and I now suspected that the great tree was their habitual place of resort – their roost or dwelling-place – and that they had been just on their way home, from their day's rambling in the woods, when they first came upon us. This would account for the fierce and unprovoked attack which they had at once made upon our camp.

Under all these considerations then it was no wonder that neither of us thought of going to sleep, but on the contrary, sat up throughout the whole night, kept awake by a full apprehension of our peril. We had hopes – though we were far from being sanguine about it – that as soon as day broke, our besiegers might be tempted to follow their habitual routine, and might go off into the woods.

Alas! when morning came, we saw to our dismay that they had no such design; from their cries and gestures we were satisfied that the siege was to be sustained. They were all there – all that we had seen upon the preceding night – and it appeared as if there were many more. No doubt others had joined them from the woods; for there were not less than a hundred of them. The hideous brutes appeared all around – some squatted on the ground, some up in the branches of the baobab – and in the midst of a chattering group we could see the carcass of the one that had been killed while close by was the wounded individual, also surrounded by sympathising friends.

Now and again, a band would collect together; and apparently inspired by a fresh burst of rage, would crowd up to the entrance

of our asylum, and renew their attack upon the barricade. We, as before, would repel them, until they perceived that their attempts were futile, and then they would desist, and retire until something arising among themselves seemed to instigate them to a renewed assault.

This was their conduct throughout the whole of that day, and during all the time were we kept shut up in our gloomy cell. We had strengthened our barricade – by materials obtained from the third malefactor – and so far felt safe enough; but we now began to have fears of another enemy – one that was as terrible in its attack, and as powerful to destroy, as either the mandrills, or the strong lion himself. That enemy was not new to us; we had already had an encounter with it; we had met it among the branches of the dragon-tree, and we were now to meet it again beside the trunk of the baobab. It was thirst.

Yes, we already experienced its painful sensation. Every moment it was gaining ground upon us, and its pangs becoming keener and harder to endure. Should the siege continue much longer, we knew not how we could endure it.

Should the siege continue? It did continue throughout all that day, the fierce brutes remained by the tree throughout all the following night; and when the second morning dawned, we saw them around as numerous as ever, and apparently as implacable and determined on vengeance as they had been at their first onset!

What were we to do? Without rest, without sleep, without

food, but worst of all without water, we could exist no longer. To go out was to be destroyed – torn to atoms – devoured; to stay where we were was to die of thirst – a more lingering and painful death! what were we to do?

We were in deep despair – we had almost yielded up the hope of being saved – not almost, but altogether.

We could have had no hope, except that our assailants might become tired of the protracted siege and leave us. But, as already observed, these creatures possess intelligence that resembles that of human beings. They perfectly comprehended our situation, and knowing it, were not likely to give us any chance of escape; there was no hope.

In this belief had we continued for some time, sitting side by side in a state of extreme dejection. Neither of us said a word. We had nothing to say – no counsel to offer to each other.

We had several times talked over the possibility of fighting our way through the host of mandrills, and escaping by swiftness of foot. We knew that, once in the open ground, we could run faster than they; for although the baboons run well through thickets and woods – where they occasionally help themselves forward by grasping the boughs of the trees – and although upon open ground they progress faster than many other kinds of monkeys, yet a man can outrun them.

This we knew, and were now very regretful that we had not made a burst through their line, and gone off at first, as we should have done. Afterwards it became more difficult to do so,

as the crowd got greater, and hemmed us in more closely, and we had looked upon it as altogether impossible. Now, however, that the terrible thirst was impelling us, we had almost made up our minds to issue forth and run the gauntlet. Ben argued that it would be better to do so than perish by inches in that dark cavern, and I was in the mind to agree with him. We would be certain to have a terrible struggle, and be badly torn; in all probability one or both of us would fall: but the prospect appeared the less dreadful on account of the suffering we endured from thirst. I may add that we were hungry as well; but this was but a secondary consideration when compared with the pangs of the sister appetite.

Another cause of uneasiness now presented itself. The baboons, apparently becoming impatient at waiting so long for their vengeance, seemed to have been forming plans of their own, and began to make fresh attempts upon the skeleton barricade. In twos and threes they attacked it with their teeth; and at each assault portions of the dry skin and bones of the mummies were carried off. It was plain that if this should continue much longer the whole three malefactors would be demolished, and we could no longer defend the entrance. Of course after that there could be but one result – our destruction.

More than ever did we give way to despair; and, hardly deeming it worth while to exert ourselves, we remained passively awaiting the crisis.

All of a sudden I perceived my companion rouse himself from

his despondent attitude and commence fumbling about over the floor. What could he be after? I put the question.

“I’ve got an idea, Will!” was his reply, “shiver my timbers!” continued he, “if I don’t believe I can scatter them apes to the four points o’ the compass.”

“How?” I eagerly inquired.

“You’ll see, lad! where be the skin o’ the lion?”

“I’m sitting upon it,” said I, “do you want it?”

“Yes – quick! give it me, Will!”

It was by a mere chance that the lion’s hide had been brought inside the chamber. We had not used it as a cover – on account of its being still raw – and, previous to the appearance of the baboons, it had been rolled up, and laid in the entrance of the tree-cave as the fittest place that offered. In rushing inside, it had been kicked before us; and thus it was that we happened to be in possession of it.

Without losing a second of time, I pulled it from under me, and handed it to my companion. I already suspected the use he intended to make of it; and without further explanation, I went to work to assist him in his design.

In ten minutes after, the body of Ben Brace was completely enveloped in the skin of the lion; which was tied and corded around him in such a manner, that it would have required sharper eyes than those of a baboon to have discovered the counterfeit.

His design was to sally forth in this disguise and show himself to the baboons, with the hope that the appearance of their king

might terrify them into flight. If it did not produce this effect, Ben reasoned, that we could be no worse off than ever, as he could retreat back into the cave and we could barricade it as before.

There was certainly some probability that the plan might succeed. We knew that nearly all animals have a great dread of the lion, and that the baboons are no exception to the rule. Often the very sight of the forest-monarch will terrify other wild beasts to such an extent that they will run before him as from the presence of a human being. The ingenious plan, therefore, of counterfeiting the lion, which my companion had conceived, was not without good probability of success; and we were both cheered by the prospect.

To make sure that failure should not arise from haste or carelessness in the preparations, we proceeded with due care and caution, and took plenty of time to get everything complete. We sheathed Ben's arms in the skin that had covered the forelimbs of the lion, stretching it out till the paws concealed his knuckles. The legs were wrapped in the hide that had enveloped the posterior limbs of the great beast; and we had a good deal of trouble before the "pantaloons" could be made to fit. The head was easily adapted to the crown of the sailor; and the ample skin of the body met in front, and was there fastened by strings. Fortunately we had plenty of cord. That fine piece, that had already done such good service, was still in our possession, and we again made use of it to advantage.

At length the masquerading costume was deemed complete, and the lion was ready to play his part.

We were cautious, too, about the disposal of the mummies, so that, in case of need, they might serve us again: and, when all was arranged to our satisfaction, we pulled them back out of the entrance.

Our manoeuvres had now attracted the attention of the besiegers – who showed by their cries and movements that they were upon the alert.

Just at this crisis the lion sailed forth; and if ever there was a helter-skelter among a troop of monkeys worth witnessing, my companion and I saw it at that moment. There was screaming and yelling, and jabbering and gibbering, and a rushing in every direction – except that which would have conducted towards the counterfeit lion – which beast was all the while making the most violent demonstrations, and uttering loud noises, that in deepness of baritone almost equalled the roar of the forest-monarch himself!

What became of the baboons we could not tell – they seemed to vanish into the earth, or the air: at all events in less than two minutes, from the time the lion made his appearance outside the baobab, not one of them was to be seen; and the tawny quadruped, all at once ceasing to roar like a lion, could be heard emitting from his fierce jaws loud yells of human laughter!

We stayed not much longer under the shadow of the baobab. It was dangerous ground. The mandrills might discover the cheat

and come back; so, with this apprehension in our thoughts, we took a hasty leave of our aged friends the mummies, and hurried rapidly down the hill. We halted only to drink, and then pushed onward.

It was near noon of the third day, from the time of our starting on our expedition, before we astonished by our reappearance the crew of the *Pandora*.

Chapter Thirty One

The *Pandora* was now rapidly made ready for her voyage across the Atlantic. The carpenter had finished his bulkheads and hatch-gratings, and the men were daily engaged in emptying the salt-water out of the casks and refilling them with fresh – a somewhat slow and troublesome job.

While these preparations were going on, a messenger arrived at the factory of King Dingo Bingo, who brought with him a report that put his majesty into the most terrible state of uneasiness and alarm, and also produced a very similar effect upon the skipper of the *Pandora*.

The messenger, or messengers – for there were three of them – were negroes, of course. They were of the kind known as Kroomen; that is, a class of negroes found along most parts of the western coast of Africa, who are greatly addicted to the sea, and make excellent sailors when so employed. They are, in fact, the “boatmen” of the African coast, or “watermen,” if you prefer it, but not unfrequently they ship for a long voyage; and many vessels in the African trade are accustomed, when short of hands, to make up their crew from among these Kroomen.

Three of these Kroomen, then, had suddenly made their appearance in the river, with a report that spread consternation among the people of King Dingo Bingo and those of the *Pandora*.

What was this report?

It was that a British cruiser had called in at a station some fifty miles farther up the coast, and reported that she had been in chase of a large slave barque – that she had lost sight of the latter out at sea, but was still in search of her, and expected to find her to the south – that the cruiser only stopped at the above-mentioned port to take in water, and, as soon as that was accomplished, she should come down the coast and search every nook and inlet to find the slaver.

Most of this information had been given confidentially to the chief factor of the port, an Englishman, whose business lay in palm-oil, ground-nuts, ivory, and other African products, and who was not supposed to have any connection whatever with the slave-trade. On the contrary, he was one of those who lent his aid to its suppression: giving every assistance to the slave-cruisers, and being on terms of friendship and intimacy with their commanders.

But for all that, this comfortable John Bull was suspected – not by the aforesaid commanders, however – of having very amicable relations with his majesty King Dingo Bingo – so amicable that there were those who hinted at a sort of partnership existing between them!

Be that as it may, it is certain that the Englishman had sent the three Kroomen to warn King Dingo Bingo of his danger – for there was no secret made of this fact on board the *Pandora*. The Kroomen had ventured round the coast in a small sail-boat,

and entered by the mouth of the river, having performed most part of the dangerous voyage in the night.

Their report, as I have said, produced consternation on all hands. There could be no doubt that the cruiser was the cutter that had chased us; and knowing that the slaver had gone southward after giving her the slip, she would take that direction to look out for her, and would be certain to explore every inch of the coast in her cruise. Of course the river would not be likely to escape her observation, and if she should there find the *Pandora*, it would be all up with the slaver. Probably enough, the cruiser may have picked up a pilot, who knew all about King Dingo Bingo and his slave-factory. If so, it would not be long before she would be down upon us. She might be looked for every minute!

No wonder, then, that the report of the Kroomen carried consternation with it.

As for the “king,” he was far less terrified than the “captain.” His villainous majesty had far less to fear from a visit of the cruiser. He had already made his bargain; and although the slaves were still in the barracoon, they were no longer his, and it mattered not to him into whose hands they fell. He had received his full pay for them in the rum, salt, and muskets; these had been landed and handed over, and as soon as he could remove them beyond the reach of the cruiser, he would be perfectly safe and at his ease.

This precaution he took as soon as the Kroomen had delivered their report. His followers were set to work, and in a few hours

every article that had been landed from the barque was carried away from the “factory” and hidden far off in the woods. When the work of removal was over his majesty lit his pipe and filled his glass, and then sat him down as coolly and unconcernedly as if there was not a cruiser on all the African coast.

Very different, however, was the situation of the captain of the *Pandora*. It is true, he might also have hidden part of his property. He might have run off the slaves into the woods and there concealed them for a time; and it was amusing to see with what energy the “king” counselled him to his course. His majesty saw, that if this plan was adopted, and the cruiser should appear in the river, then the barque would be taken and the slaves left behind, and out of all this confusion there must be some advantage to himself; there would be a chance that the five hundred “bultos” would fall into his hands, and he would be able to sell them a second time. This was, indeed, a rich prospect, and, without hinting to any probable advantage to himself, the old rascal kept urging the skipper to adopt this plan with an anxiety and importunity that was quite ludicrous.

But the captain could not be brought to comply with the advice. He knew the danger of trusting the five hundred slaves in the woods. Most of them might take “leg-bail” for it, and, maybe, his “dear friend” King Dingo Bingo might not guard them from this so very carefully! Some of them might find their way to their own homes again, but a good many would be likely to stray back to King Dingo’s town, and it would be a hard matter to identify

goods that were so much like each other as negroes are.

Besides, if he could even succeed in hiding the cargo, he could not hope to hide the vessel. The cutter, if she came near the river at all, would be certain to find the barque, and equally certain to capture her. That done, what would become of the slaves? what would become of the captain himself, and his crew? They would have difficulty enough either to subsist, or find their way out of such an inhospitable land – for the skipper well knew that, his fine vessel once gone, his dear friend Dingo would behave towards him in quite a different manner. Yes, the skipper was an experienced man, and knew all that, and, knowing it, he lent a deaf ear to the counsels of the “king.”

As soon, therefore, as the report of the Kroomen reached him – for it did not reach him until some time after his majesty had received it – he at once formed a resolve as to how he should act, and that resolve was to embark his cargo as speedily as possible, and, without wasting a moment, stand out to sea.

This the wary skipper perceived to be his best plan; in fact, the only one by which he could hope to save his vessel. If the cruiser was actually coming down the coast – and there could be no doubt but that she was – his only chance would be to get out before she arrived opposite the mouth of the river. Should she once come there before he could put to sea, then the barque would be regularly in the trap, and an armed boat or two from the cutter would capture her without any difficulty, indeed, without resistance; for rough, and brutal, and bold, as were the crew of the

slaver, they knew very well that it would be idle to resist the well-organised attack of a ship of war, or half-a-dozen armed boats, such as the cutter could set afloat. The capture of the barque would, therefore, be a thing of course, and the only chance her owner had of saving her would be to put to sea at once.

The wind was light – it was blowing from the coast – both which circumstances were greatly in favour of the *Pandora's* escape. The contrary wind would be likely to hinder the cruiser from coming near, at all events it would delay her, and then, should the slaver succeed in getting out, a light breeze, as already seen, would be altogether in her favour, and against her antagonist.

Elated by these hopes, but still under terrible anxiety, the captain lost no time in getting his cargo aboard.

Chapter Thirty Two

All the slaver's boats were called into requisition, and the crew – every man of them – were as busy as bees.

Perhaps Brace and myself were the only ones among them who had no heart in the work; but, to keep up appearances, we were compelled to labour as the rest.

The embarkation was easy enough, and the stowage still more so. It was a different affair from taking on board a cargo of heavy barrels and boxes. The living “bales” moved of their own accord, or were forced to move, if they did not, and there was nothing further required than to march them from the barracoon to the bank, then row them to the vessel, hurry them over the side, and huddle them down the hatch to the “tweendecks” below. The males and females were put into different compartments, though this was not done out of any regard to decency, but merely for convenience. When “stowed” thus they would be easier managed upon the passage – such was the experience of the slave-traders. The bulk-head that separated them was very slight, and they could communicate through it with each other.

With the women were stowed all the younger slaves, both girls and boys, and there were many children, poor little “piccaninnies,” jet-black, and naked as when born. Indeed, most of the whole crowd were naked, both men and women. Some of the latter had a simple skirt of cotton, or plaited palm-leaves

hanging around them, and a few of the men had a piece of coarse cloth about their thighs, but many were without even this apology for a garment. Whatever they may have worn in their native place had been taken from them. No doubt the followers of King Dingo, when making them captives, had robbed them also of their scant wardrobe. The men were manacled together in twos, and sometimes three and four in a group. This was to prevent any attempt at escape, and was the work of his majesty. Only a few of the women wore chains; most likely they were those who possessed a stronger spirit than their wretched companions, and had proved refractory on their inland journey, or while kept in the barracoon. These manacles were not removed by the people of the *Pandora*, but just as the blacks had been delivered over, so were they crowded aboard, chains, fetters, and all.

King Dingo Bingo stood upon the bank by the place of landing and watched the embarkation, in which his bodyguard assisted. The skipper was by his side, and the two held conversation just in the same manner as if they superintended the lading of a cargo of ordinary merchandise! His majesty occasionally pointed out some one of the slaves, and made his remarks upon the qualities of the individual. He was either a good “bulto” – valuable article – or some refractory fellow that the captain was desired to watch well on the voyage. Many of the poor victims were evidently well-known to this hideous monster, and, indeed, as already hinted at, some of them were his own subjects! King Dingo Bingo thought nothing of that so long as he could sell them and get pay in return.

His relation to his people generally was that of complete master and owner; and he felt towards them as a farmer to his hogs, or a grazier to his cattle. He and the captain gaily chatted and joked and laughed, when any of the poor wretches passed them whose appearance was calculated to excite ridicule; while to me the whole scene was one of disgust and sorrow, and with sad, sad heart did I assist in the spectacle.

The embarkation was still going on, and most of the unfortunate creatures had been carried aboard, when the boat of the Kroomen was observed coming rapidly up stream. These had been sent down to the mouth of the river to reconnoitre, and keep watch until the slaver should be ready for sea. In case the cutter or any sail should come in sight, they had orders to row back as quickly as possible and give the alarm.

The fact of them coming back at all was proof that some sail had been made out; and the rapidity with which they were plying their oars not only confirmed this belief, but showed that they had something very important to tell.

Both Dingo Bingo and the skipper beheld their approach with consternation, which was not allayed in the least when the Kroomen rowed alongside and delivered their report.

A sail was in sight, sure enough, and not only in sight, but actually heading in for the coast! The Kroomen had no doubt about the sort of craft it was. They had seen the cutter before setting out from the English factory. They had noted her rig. It was she.

The captain at first exhibited some signs of dismay, but after looking up to the sky and around to the tree-tops, to note which way blew the wind, he appeared to recover his spirits a little, and ordered the embarkation to be hurried on.

Meanwhile the Kroomen were despatched back to the point of observation at the mouth of the river, with orders to report from time to time the progress which the cruiser was making. The captain saw that the wind was in his favour, and dead ahead for the cutter; it would be impossible for her to enter the river so long as the wind remained in that quarter, and as it was now within an hour of night, she would scarce attempt to venture near the shore, at all events not before morning. His hopes were that she would cast anchor a mile or two from land, and that in the darkness he would be able to run the gauntlet and get past her. He might catch a shot or two while doing so, but his cargo was worth the risk, and, besides, he had now no other chance of saving either cargo or vessel. Should he remain where he was, both would be captured before another night.

He had formed his resolution, therefore, to run the gauntlet as described, that is, provided the cutter came to anchor far enough out to sea to give him a chance. His trust was in the wind, which from this time forth he watched with the greatest anxiety.

Chapter Thirty Three

The living freight was at length all taken aboard and stowed away between decks, the grated hatches were fastened down, and a ruffian sentry with musket and bayonet stood by each, ready to use his weapon upon any of the poor wretches who might try to get on deck.

The captain only waited for the report of the Kroomen.

This came at length, and proved favourable, as the slaver had expected. The cutter had failed to beat in to the shore. She had given up, and cast anchor at about two miles' distance from the river's mouth, there to await a change in the wind, or the light of another day. It was the very course that the slave-captain had desired her to take, and which he had expected. From the position which the cutter occupied, and which had been faithfully described by the boatmen, he had no doubt of being able to get past her in the night. He was once more in high spirits, and sanguine of success. Both he and his majesty were in a big humour, and the rum-glass went merrily round.

This final carouse occurred upon shore, and in the quarters of his majesty, whose "treat" it was. The mate, with a boat, had gone down the river to have a good view of the anchored enemy and become perfectly acquainted with her position, with the object of making correct calculations about passing her.

Meanwhile, the captain remained on shore, to enjoy the

parting glass and talk over future prospects with King Dingo Bingo. Some of the crew were there as well, among whom were Brace and myself – our purpose being to man the captain's gig and row him aboard as soon as he should take leave of his majesty and suite.

It still wanted about half an hour of sunset when the mate returned from his reconnoissance and reported that the cutter was anchored just as the Kroomen had described; and as the wind was still in the same quarter, blowing directly from the shore, there was every probability that the *Pandora* would make her escape. Both mate and captain knew the coast well, and knew that they could run out by keeping well to the south of where the cutter lay. On that side the water was deep and open, and if the wind held fair their chances would be good. There was one thing, however, which both feared, and that was the cutter's boats entering the river before the *Pandora* should have time to weigh anchor and drop down to the sea. It was possible enough that the cruiser knew the slaver was in the river. If so, and finding that she could not beat near enough under the contrary wind, she might get out her boats and row them up to the river's mouth, so as to blockade it. The cruiser's people might do this very thing in anticipation of the trick which the slaver intended to serve them. If, on the contrary, they were not yet aware of the neighbourhood of the *Pandora*, they might not think of coming in before the morning. It is true they could not perceive the slaver's masts – these were not visible from the sea – the tall teak-trees and other

giants of the forest interposed their umbrageous tops between, and even the high truck of the barque could not be observed so far inland. But it was possible that the cruiser was acting upon information, and if so she would know well enough where the slaver was to be found, and might design to make the attack by means of her armed boats that very night.

All this was probable enough – the slaver captain knew it to be so, and hence his anxiety to be gone at the earliest moment.

As soon, therefore, as darkness should descend upon the earth it was his intention to take in his anchor, drop quietly down the river, and then make a bold dash to seaward.

His design was a sufficiently good one. Though it appeared rash, there was no rashness about it. It was his only chance of saving his vessel, and cargo too, for the one being captured he would be likely to lose the other, and if the *Pandora* but remained all night at anchor where she now lay, she would, in all probability, be a prize before the morning. Whether or not, her chances of escape in the daylight would be greatly diminished. The cutter would see her tall masts long before she could get out of the river, and, of course, would have time to manoeuvre and intercept her. Whereas, by dropping down in the night, she might be well out to sea before any one on board the cruiser should notice her at all.

It was finally resolved then by the *Pandora's* officers to sail the moment the darkness came down; and both were wishing, in their own blasphemous way, for a dark night.

It yet wanted a few minutes of sundown as the captain took his last embrace of King Dingo Bingo, and stepped out of the “palace.” His majesty came swaggering along to conduct his guest to the landing, while several of the sable courtiers followed in his train.

All stood upon the bank while the captain was getting into his gig. Brace and I, with the other men of the crew, had already seated ourselves in the boat, and were holding the oars balanced and ready, when all at once we were interrupted by a singular exclamation from the king.

On looking up I perceived that his eyes were fixed upon me, and the fat monster was gazing at me as if he desired to eat me up – while all the while he kept jabbering to the captain in a language which I could not comprehend.

Notwithstanding the time we had been at his factory, I had never attracted the attention of his majesty before. I don’t think he had ever seen me before – that is, to take particular notice of me. I had been, as already stated, all the time on board, with the exception of that very evening, and the day I had spent with Brace in the woods; and although the slave-king had been often aboard I had never come in his way, as he usually stayed about the quarter-deck, or in the cabin. It is likely enough, therefore, that this was the first time he had set eyes upon me to notice me.

But for what reason was he taking such particular notice of me now? Although I could not tell what he said – for the captain and he talked in a sort of bastard Portuguese (the best-known

language in these parts); yet I perceived by his countenance and the animated gestures which he made use of, that either myself, or something about me, greatly interested him.

Brace was sitting near me, and, without raising my voice above a whisper, I asked him to tell me what the fuss was all about – for it had now assumed something of this character – both the captain and the king talking hurriedly, earnestly and loudly, in their barbarous jargon.

Brace's reply was —

“The king ha' taken a fancy to you – he wants to buy you!”

Chapter Thirty Four

On hearing this explanation I at first felt inclined to laugh, but my mirthful inclinations were soon dissipated. The serious tone of my companion's voice, and, above all, the earnest manner of the skipper and king, as they talked the subject between them, at once proved that the thing was no joke.

The captain did not at first appear desirous of acceding to the request of the negro; but the latter appeared to press the point with so much solicitation and earnestness that the white ruffian, stimulated by feelings of cupidity, evidently began to yield. Five blacks were offered in exchange for me – so Brace said, and they were now squabbling about a sixth! The captain had, in fact, virtually consented to sell me – it was only a question of price!

I was perfectly horrified when I learned this much. Brace himself was greatly troubled – for he knew well that the brute in whose power I was would have no scruples in making such a bargain. The only reason he refused at first was because he had found me useful on board his barque, but if he could add six able-bodied blacks to his cargo – six that would fetch 200 pounds each on the Brazilian coast, that would be a consideration that would far outbalance any service of mine. Of course he felt no responsibility about the matter. To whom was he accountable? – a slaver! an outlaw! Where and when was I ever to report or punish him! Nowhere and never. He might have sold me into

slavery a dozen times – taken my life, if it had so pleased him, without the slightest danger of being called to account for it – and he well knew this.

No wonder then I became horrified. The idea of becoming the slave of that hideous and greasy savage – that cruel monster – a wholesale dealer in human lives – a trafficker in flesh and blood. Oh! it was revolting!

I can hardly describe the remainder of that trying scene. I was in such agony I knew not how to act, or what to say. I remember being told that the bargain was concluded, that the king had agreed to give six blacks for me, and the skipper had consented to take them; and to prove that this was really so, I saw the latter step out of the boat and return to the hut, arm in arm with the gross savage. They were gone, so said Brace, to conclude the bargain over a glass of rum.

I raved, and shouted, and threatened, and, perhaps at that moment, blasphemed. I was not master of my speech, nor yet of my actions. I was so appalled with the prospect before me that I could have thrown myself into the river. Oh! it seemed a horrible fate – thus to be sold into worse than captivity – a slavery worse than death, to live the slave of a barbarous monster, with no hope of deliverance, for whence could deliverance come? Oh! it seemed a horrible fate! and I was almost frantic.

My cries and gestures only drew laughter from the crowd of blacks that still lingered upon the bank, and some of them mocked and taunted me in their native gibberish. Even the men

in the boat did not care much about the matter.

Brace alone felt and sympathised with me, but what could he do? I saw from his manner that he felt powerless to protect me. They would have mastered and punished him, had he opposed their wishes.

I wondered, however, that he kept so cool and quiet. I fancied he might have shown more feeling; but I was wronging him. He felt keenly, and I soon learnt the cause of his being so silent. He had been busy all the while – busy with his thoughts – busy in maturing a plan for my escape.

As soon as the captain and king had gone back from the bank, my companion shifted a little nearer; and in a low, muttering voice that could not be heard by the rest, thus addressed me: —

“No help for’t, my lad – sold you for six blacks. Go along wi’ king – pretend to go willin’, or they’ll tie you. Don’t be obstropelous an’ get tied – be patient and keep sharp look out till ‘Pandy’ trips anchor, then gie ’em the slip – easy enough in the dark – keep down the bank o’ the river – near the mouth take to water – swim straight for barque – I’ll be on the look out and throw ye a rope’s end. Don’t fear to come on – old Mugs won’t mind your getting aboard – only too glad to get you back an’ play Dingo Bingo a trick. Mind an’ do as I’ve told you. Avast, hush – yonder they come.”

Delivered as this speech was, half in whisper, and half in interrupted mutterings, I comprehended its reasonable design, and had just time to promise obedience to its directions when I

perceived the captain returning to the boat.

He was not alone. The king was waddling by his side, and just behind them were six large negroes, chained two and two, and driven forward by as many armed myrmidons of their own colour.

It was for the first six I was to be “swopped,” or rather had already been, for the bargain was concluded and the blacks were being delivered over to form part of the slaver’s cargo.

These new “bultos” were not slaves – at least, they had not been such ten minutes before. They were some of the regular followers of the negro king; and, but a short while ago, carried muskets and formed part of his military array, ready to kill or capture his enemies at his nod, or even his friends if bidden. But fortune is fickle to such heroes, and their more favoured companions had just been directed to capture them and deliver them over to a life-long bondage.

In a few minutes more they were huddled unceremoniously into the boat, while I was pulled out of it with as little ceremony and handed over to my new master upon the bank.

No doubt the skipper was surprised that I made so little opposition, and the king seemed equally pleased – for he conducted me with a species of drunken politeness into the palace and insisted upon my drinking with him a glass of his best rum.

I looked through the apertures of the upright palms that formed the walls of the hut. I saw the gig cross over to the

anchored vessel, and those whom she carried mount over the gangway. The boat was then rowed astern, the tackle was let down from above, and in a few minutes she was hauled high out of water to her place under the poop.

No longer had I a chance to reach the barque without swimming for it, and for that was now to prepare myself.

Chapter Thirty Five

I remembered the advice of Brace, and submitted, with as good grace as I could, to the hospitalities of his black majesty. I drank a portion of his rum, and even appeared jolly! He seemed greatly pleased with my behaviour, and evidently esteemed me a good bargain; though the slave-captain had screwed him far above his original offer. His first bid had been a fair exchange – man for man, or man for boy – a black for a white, and he must have been strongly bent on the purchase to have given six to one!

What could he intend me for? – a slave to wait upon him? hand him his food when he should feel inclined to eat? his rum when he desired to drink? fan the mosquitoes off him when he was asleep? and amuse him when awake? Was this the sort of life for which he had designed me? or was he going to promote me to some higher employ? make me his private secretary or clerk? his prime minister, perhaps? marry me to one of his dark-skinned daughters? make a prince of me?

From the hospitable manner in which he began his treatment of me, I really had thought, that if I continued to please him, he would give me an easy life of it. I had heard of such cases, where white men had become the favourites of negro princes, and had been placed in offices of high trust; and, perhaps, such would have been my destiny, had I remained with King Dingo Bingo.

But even had I been assured of the best of treatment – even

had I been promised the highest office in his kingdom – the throne itself, with the handsomest of his daughters for my queen – I should have held on to my intention of running away from him all the same, and returning to the barque. It was certainly no Elysium to fly to – perhaps from the fire into the frying-pan; but still there was the hope that my life on board the *Pandora* would not be of long continuance, and even there, under the protection of Brace, they had of late treated me less cruelly.

As for King Dingo Bingo, I felt a loathing in his company that I cannot describe. I felt a presentiment of some terrible evil, and I was resolved, if I did not succeed in reaching the barque, to run away from him all the same and try my fortune in the woods. Yes; notwithstanding its lions and other fierce brutes, I was determined to escape to the forest and live as I best might, or die if I could not live.

There was a thought in my mind. I had heard them talk of the English factory farther up the coast – fifty miles farther. I might succeed in getting there. An Englishman was its chief.

True, they said he was a friend of King Dingo – a partner in fact – and from what had transpired I had reason to believe that this was but too true. Still he was an Englishman. Surely he would not give me up – surely he dared not. I thought, too, of the cruiser. She would protect, she would not give me up; but, on the contrary, would have blown his black majesty to the skies for making such a demand. If I could only make known my situation – but how was that to be done? Impossible! By the morrow's sun

she would be he longer on the coast. She would be gone in pursuit of the *Pandora*— perhaps within another hour!

I was loathing the presence of the negro king, who appeared trying, in his rude manner, to be agreeable. He plied me with rum, and I pretended to drink it. I could not understand his talk, though a few English words, and those of the most vulgar in our language, were familiar enough after my voyage in the *Pandora*. But his majesty was by this time so drunk that even his own people could with difficulty understand him; and every moment he was yielding more and more to the potent spirit.

I joyed at observing this – it would help my purpose. I joyed to see him stagger over the floor, and still more when he stumbled against a sort of couch-bed and fell heavily upon it.

The next moment he was sound asleep – a deep, drunken sleep. His snore was music to my ears – though it resembled the dying snort of a prize ox.

At this moment I heard across the river the clacking of the windlass, and the rough rasping of the anchor chain as it was drawn through the iron ring of the hawse-hole.

Most of the royal attendants were out upon the bank to witness the departure of the barque, just visible through the dim twilight.

I waited a few minutes longer, lest I should set forth too soon, and, therefore, be pursued and overtaken before I could get down to the mouth of the river. I knew that the barque would move but slowly – the stream was narrow and curved in several places, and therefore she could not use her sails. She would drop down by

the force of the current, and I could easily keep up with her.

The attendants of the king were in no way suspicious of my intentions. They observed that I appeared well pleased with my new situation. No doubt most of them envied me my good fortune, and it is probable I was looked upon as the “new favourite.” It was not likely I should run away from such splendid prospects – not likely indeed! Such an idea never entered the mind of one of the sable gentlemen who surrounded me; and as soon as his majesty fell asleep, I was left free to go about wherever I pleased. Just then it pleased me to skulk backward behind the great barracoon, and a little further still into the thick woods beyond. For this point I took a diagonal line that led me back to the river bank again – only at a considerable distance below the “factory” – and, having now got beyond earshot of the negro crew, and altogether out of their sight, I advanced as rapidly down the bank as the brushwood would permit me.

Chapter Thirty Six

I had observed before starting, that the barque had got up her anchor and was slowly gliding down stream. At intervals I turned a little out of my way and came close to the edge of the water, to make sure that she was not getting ahead of me; and then I would glide back into the path, which ran parallel with the stream, but at several yards' distance from the bank.

Guiding myself thus, I advanced at about the same rate as the vessel was going, and every now and then had her under my eye through the openings in the trees.

I had no difficulty in making her out, for, contrary to the wish of the slave-captain, the night was a bright one, with a clear moon coursing through a sky that was without a single cloud.

Slowly as sailed the barque, it was just as much as I could do to keep up with her. Had the path been open there would have been no difficulty – but there was in reality no path at all, only a track made by wild animals, which here and there was closed up above with trailing vines and creeping plants, that stretched from tree to tree and hindered my rapid advance. Though beasts could go under these natural bridges without impediment, a human being had to crouch under or climb over, and all this required time. There were so many of these obstructions that I was greatly delayed by them, and found it just as much as I could do to keep square with the vessel constantly moving onward. I knew that I

must get a good way ahead of her, so as to choose a place for taking to the water and swimming out to her as she passed down. As the river grew wider near its mouth I was likely to have a long swim for it.

Several times I was terrified by the appearance of wild beasts, whose forms I could just distinguish in the obscurity that reigned under the shadows of the trees. I saw several kinds, and some of immense size that went crashing through the underwood as I came suddenly upon them. These must have been either rhinoceroses or the large hippopotamus – I could not tell which under the shadows – but whichever they were, they ran off at my approach. I might have feared them more than I did, had it not been that a greater fear was upon me. I feared to hear the voices of King Dingo Bingo and his black guards behind me. I feared this more than anything; and at intervals I stopped upon the path and listened.

But indeed they would need to have been near for me to have heard them. The forest was filled with other sounds, and only a very loud noise could have been heard above the general chorus. There was the shrill chirrup of cicadas and tree-cricket, the hoarse croaking of toads and frogs – some of these as loud as the routing of a bull – there was screaming of cats, the barking of jackals, and the chattering and howling of monkeys. A perfect chorus of discordant sounds produced by the barque moving down the river, and no doubt partially by my own passage through the underwood. One kind set the other a-going, and the alarm

and consequent noises proceeding from it spread to a far distance through the forest.

I thought it less probable that I should be followed through the woods, than down the stream itself. When missed, a canoe was most likely to be brought into requisition – perhaps the royal galley itself, with his majesty to guide the pursuit. They would remember that I had disappeared just at the moment the barque weighed anchor, and would suspect that I had gone aboard at once. It was far more likely, therefore, the search would be made upon the water, and the pursuers would paddle their craft directly for the barque. Under this belief I gave uneasy glances up the river, whenever I could command a view of it. As yet no pursuers appeared.

Another consideration troubled me. The Kroomen had gone to the river's mouth to watch the movements of the cruiser and report whether she had launched any boats. Now these fellows were entirely in the interest of King Dingo. They might see me as I swam to the barque, and, taking me into their boat, carry me back to the factory. They had been present when the bargain was made, and knew all about it. I must, therefore, look out for their boat and avoid it.

With such thoughts and resolves passing through my mind, I once more marked the progress of the vessel and, diving into the underwood, kept on.

At length I reached a point where there was a bend in the river. It was not far from its mouth. Beyond this place the stream

widened into a sort of bay.

It would not do for me to go beyond. I should have too long a swim for it; besides, the barque was about being got under sail – her canvas was already loose; and once the sails were sheeted home, they would catch the wind and carry her rapidly through the water – so rapidly that I might not be able to get aboard.

I had gone far enough. I had reached the point where it was best for me to take to the water; and, flinging off my shoes and most of my clothing, I stepped down to the water's edge and plunged in.

Chapter Thirty Seven

The barque was not yet opposite me; but, by the rate at which she was moving, I calculated she would be so by the time I could arrive in midstream.

Brace had told me to swim for the bows – for he would be there with his rope; while, in case I should not be able to lay hold of it another would be ready at the gangway ports with a second rope. One or other would be sure to haul me in; but it would be better if I could get aboard at the bows, as then I might not be observed either by mate or skipper, and even should his majesty come after me I could be hidden away about the forecastle. The skipper, not knowing I was aboard, would, of course, deny me with a will. I was determined, therefore, to do all I could to get aboard by the bows.

I was an excellent swimmer – not surpassed by any of the *Pandora's* crew, except, perhaps, by Brace himself, who was one of the best in the world. I had practised a great deal in my schooldays in rivers, fresh-water lakes, and the sea itself; and I thought nothing of swimming a mile or more without rest. Crossing from the bank of the river to midstream – a distance of not over two hundred yards – was a mere bagatelle, and I had no apprehension of not being able to accomplish it at my ease.

But although I had no apprehension about my powers of swimming, I was keenly sensible of danger from another source.

I had not thought of it before that moment – for the excitement of escaping, and the difficulty of making my way through the underwood, had driven every thought of danger out of my head, except that of being pursued. The peril from behind had prevented me from dwelling upon dangers ahead; and, it was only after I had plunged into the stream, that I became the victim of a keen apprehension. Then, and not till then, did I remember the fate of the unfortunate Dutchman! – then, and not till then, did I think of the crocodiles!

A horrid sensation came over me – a dread feeling of fear. My blood ran cold – far colder than the water of the stream – perhaps at that moment I was within reach of a huge man-eating crocodile? at all events, within sight, for some of these hideous monsters were sure to be near, either by one bank or the other. Indeed, as I was about to plunge in I saw a long dark form by the shore, some twenty yards further down, which I had taken for a floating log. The noise made by my body striking the water had caused it to move. I thought then it was the current; but now, under my keen apprehensions, I thought differently. It was no dead log – it was the motion of a living creature – beyond doubt a huge crocodile!

This conjecture soon became a conviction. A floating log would scarce have settled there, against the sedgy bank, and where there was current enough to carry it onward; it was no log, it was the great lizard itself.

I could not restrain myself from half turning round, and

raising my body body high in the water to look back. The clear moonlight gave me every advantage, and I could perceive any object on the water almost as distinctly as by day.

One glance was sufficient to make me aware of my perilous position. Merciful heaven! my conjecture was too true! – the dead log was no log, but an enormous crocodile! – its hideous shape was plainly seen; its long cloven head and broad scaly back glittered high above the water, and its snout was elevated and turned towards me, as though it was just getting over a surprise, and coming to the knowledge of what sort of creature I was.

Its surprise, however, was soon over, and before I could stretch myself to swim on, I saw it lash the water into foam with its tail – as if to set itself in motion – and the next moment it parted from the bank and came rushing towards me!

Its body was now sunk below the surface, but its blunt, haggard head, and sharp snout were projected high above the water.

I saw all this as I turned round again; and with a feeling of cold horror upon me I swam on.

The barque was now near – her bows were not fifty yards distant, and the crocodile was still more than a hundred behind me. But I well knew that these amphibious monsters can far outswim a man. Through the water they make progress as an otter, and with like rapidity. I felt sure I should be overtaken, and then —

The cold horror continued – I screamed out for help – I continued my cries as I swam on!

I heard voices from the barque, in answer to my cries. I could see forms gliding about the head, and running out upon the bumpkin-shrouds, and along the bowsprit I could distinguish the deep voice of Brace uttering words of encouragement and direction.

I was under the bowsprit-end – I could see no rope – I looked in vain for a rope – none had been thrown to me. Oh, heavens! what was I to do?

Once more I raised myself in the water, and looked back. It was an appalling sight. The black head of the crocodile glittered within ten feet of me – I could see the jaws extended – the long, irregular tusks – the strong, scaly limbs, as they paddled the water.

In another instant I should have felt those terrible teeth; and, gripped between the hard jaws of the monster, as in a vice, would have been dragged to the bottom of the dark waters had it been my destiny.

But it was not so written in the book of fate. Just as I had given myself up for lost, I felt a strong hand clutching my garments by the waist, and the instant after I was lifted clear out of the river, and hoisted high into the air! The crocodile made a rush forward and leaped far above the surface; but I had been raised beyond his reach, and he fell back with a plunge, and for some moments continued lashing the water with his tail. Then, seeing that his victim had escaped him, he swam off, and disappeared round the side of the vessel.

I scarce knew how I had been so miraculously saved. Despair and terror had confused my senses; and it was only after I had passed above, and set upon my feet upon the firm deck, that I understood all.

Brace was my preserver. He had run out to the bowsprit-end, and from that had slipped down the dolphin-striker, and let himself still lower by means of a looped rope. By this means he had been enabled to swing himself down, so that he could reach the surface. Fortunately, it was at that moment that I had risen in the water to face the crocodile, and had thus given Brace the opportunity of gripping me firmly and jerking me aloft.

It was a very tight fit, however; and I vowed, that, unless forced to it, I would never again bathe my limbs in the waters of an African river.

Chapter Thirty Eight

I have no doubt that the skipper knew all about my coming aboard. Indeed, there had been such a noise made by the men while the crocodile was in pursuit of me, that it was impossible that either he or the mate could be ignorant of the cause of it. I was taken down to the forecastle, however, and heard not a word about being sent back. In truth, as Ben had already informed me in his mutterings, the skipper was rather pleased than otherwise, at being able to overreach King Dingo, and as he had found me useful to himself he had no desire to let me go. It was only the large profit he expected by the exchange that had tempted him to part with me; but so long as he had kept his bargain and regularly delivered me over, his conscience was satisfied, and he was in no way offended or displeased that I found my way back to the barque. Unless, therefore, the canoe came after us and demanded me to be given up, I would not have to go back to Dingo Bingo.

It was not until we were cleverly out of the river, and the *Pandora* had spread her wings to the breeze, and was standing towards the open sea, that I felt easy in my mind. Many an uneasy glance did I cast up the river as we floated slowly towards its mouth, noting every dark object and every ripple that appeared upon its current. It was not the crocodile that caused me to look tremblingly back; it was a still more hideous monster I dreaded – the long canoe with its row of sable rowers, and King Dingo

Bingo in the stern.

The thought of being taken back was dreadful in the extreme. I should no longer be treated with kindness; on the contrary, the spiteful monarch would punish me for my attempt to escape, would revenge himself for the deception I had practised upon him – would lead me a life of the greatest misery.

Yes, it would be a sad affair to be retaken; and not till the *Pandora* had swept out of the river's mouth – not till the Kroomen's boat had been passed, and we were scudding out into the wide sea did I get over my apprehension.

Then was I relieved from all uneasiness on the score of Dingo Bingo, and the moment after had ceased to think of him and his brutal myrmidons.

Yes – the moment after – for a new scene was upon the stage – a new spectacle was to be enacted of which I was to be a witness.

As soon as the the *Pandora* had passed the river-bar she was visible to the cutter, from the water-line to the truck, and so was the cutter to her. Both vessels had a full view of each other, or might have had, for the moon was shining so clear that a ship could be traced at a long distance off. The cutter's people, however, did not appear to notice the slaver, until the latter had got several hundred yards out to sea. Perhaps the shadowy background of the forest obscured her, or the watch may have been careless. Whether or no, it was some minutes before there was any movement on board the cruiser. Then a movement was observed which showed that she had discovered the barque. The

drum was heard sounding the alarm, and her sails were unfurled with all the rapidity which results from sufficient strength in a crew, combined with perfect discipline.

Notwithstanding the advantage which the slave-captain had obtained from the boldness of his attempt and the suddenness of his appearance, there was one circumstance that had turned against him. During the hour or two that had intervened since the cruiser had dropped anchor, the wind had veered round nearly a full quarter, and, instead of blowing direct from the land, its course was now nearly parallel with the shore.

Of course the experienced skipper had observed the change long ago – it required only a glance to perceive it – the cutter herself, now lying at anchor, beam-ends to the shore, indicated the change, for the Kroomen had reported, that when she first anchored her head was pointed directly for the land.

The slave-captain with chagrin observed this change in the wind, and with an apprehension he had not before felt. Had the wind continued in the same quarter as when the cruiser was first reported, he knew that he could easily run out past her. The breeze would have then been upon his own quarter, and in that way his crank-vessel sailed best; and by making good speed along the diagonal line, he had calculated on being able to get past, with only the risk from a long shot or two.

The change, however, was against him. The cruiser was directly out to sea – about two miles from the river's mouth. He could not sail to windward of her, as that would be too close

to the wind for his own vessel, unless he kept within range of shot; and it so happened that to leeward there was a shoal, or long sand-bank, that stretched almost from the shore to where the cutter was lying. There may have been a distance of half a mile between the cutter and the edge of this shoal, but this was not a sufficient width for running the gauntlet as the slave-captain had intended. The warship, running down the wind, would easily have intercepted the barque before she could have passed through, and given the latter such a broadside as would have crippled and brought her to at once.

I was standing near the skipper and his mate, and listening to their horrid execrations as they perceived the dilemma they were in. I was listening, because I was as much interested as they could have been in the result – though with hopes and wishes directly antagonistic to theirs – I was praying in my heart that we should be captured! Even at the risk of being killed by a broadside from one of my own country's ships, I could not help desiring this termination to the affair.

Even though I had been but a few minutes aboard, since the lading of the cargo, I was already impressed with the awful scene – I felt pity – keen compassion – blended with loathing. The horrid howling of the blacks, crowded to suffocation below – their cries of entreaty, and, at times, of menace – were a foretaste of what I should be compelled to listen to for weeks, perhaps months. Oh! it would be a fearful existence. In my heart I prayed that we should be captured.

Chapter Thirty Nine

I was beginning to draw hope from the behaviour of the slave-captain and his mate. Their apprehension increased as they saw the cutter expand her sails and commence moving through the water. So rapid was the manoeuvre, it was evident she had not waited to take up her anchor, but had cut the cable! So said the people of the *Pandora*.

The mate appeared to urge some desperate course upon his superior. His words were – as I heard them: —

“We can’t pass her – it’s no use, by – , the other’s our only chance – the tide’s well in – there’ll be no danger.”

“Try it, then!” was the captain’s reply; “we’ll be taken anyhow if we don’t, and, by – , I’d rather go to pieces on a reef than be taken by this bloody so-and-so.”

The blasphemous dialogue ended, and the mate hurried off to give some directions to the crew.

I knew not what they meant to do, but in a few moments after, I observed that the *Pandora* suddenly changed her course and steered direct for the cutter! One would have thought she was going to run right down upon the latter, as if to ride over her, or have a shot from her bow-ports; and no doubt the warship was astonished at the manoeuvre, as were many of the slaver’s own crew.

The mate, however, who had counselled this movement, had

a method in his madness. It was not his intention to rush upon destruction, so certain as that would have been; and before the *Pandora* had sailed three cables' length in its new direction, she was seen to tack round, till the wind lay upon her beam and her bowsprit once more pointed towards the land!

This manoeuvre was still a mystery to most of the slaver's crew, who, of course, acted only in obedience to orders. There were a few of them, however, in the confidence of their officers who knew the intention.

The cruiser evidently did not. No doubt the idea of her commander was that the barque was making back for the river, for towards that point was she now heading. Seeing that she could not escape out to sea, she was giving up the attempt, and her crew were now resolved in running the vessel either into the river again, or ashore anywhere, with the design of abandoning her and making their escape to the boats. Thus only could the cutter's commander interpret the strange manoeuvre of the barque. He never suspected a ruse, for there seemed no chance of affecting one. But the cutter's commander was mistaken. A ruse was intended, and, in less than twenty minutes after, was carried out before the commander's eyes, no doubt to his astonishment and chagrin. If the slave-captain and his assistant lacked humanity, they were not deficient in seamanship, and their superior knowledge of the coast now gave them the advantage.

As soon as it was perceived that the slaver had tacked and

was heading back towards the river, the cruiser also changed her course and followed after. Of course the latter made all speed, in full expectation of either capturing the barque at once, on chasing her into the river, where she would become an easy prey. The only fear now among the cutter's crew was, that the slaver's would either scuttle the barque, or set fire to her on leaving; and, with the thoughts of prize-money in their minds, this was their great source of apprehension. But they were determined to give no time either for scuttling or burning, and every hand on board the warship was exerting himself to produce speed.

I have stated that there was a reef to leeward: it should rather be called a shoal, since it was a sort of muddy sand-bank formed by the current of the river, and running diagonally into the sea for a long distance – a sort of low peninsula. Now this sand-bank, where it joined the land, was usually covered with water, and, during full tides, a good-sized ship might cross over the miniature isthmus, and get out to sea through the long reach of water between the sand-bank and the shore. It was only at high-tide that this could be done, with a vessel drawing any considerable depth of water.

For some ten minutes had the chase continued – one vessel following directly in the wake of the other. The barque was now close into the land, and as if about to enter the river's mouth, while the cutter was a half-mile astern, and just opposite the longitudinal edge of the shoal.

At this moment the slaver let slip her lee braces – her head

came round till the wind was right astern, and she stood right in behind the reef. It was a moment of anxiety among her crew. In another instant she would strike or go free. In another instant she would be bilging helplessly among the sands of Africa, or would be on her course free and unimpeded for the shores of America.

This time the triumph was for the wicked. The barque scraped the sand upon the bottom, but passed safely across. The crisis was over, and the hoarse huzza of that ruffian crew announced the victory!

Further pursuit was useless. The cutter was still climbing along the edge of the sandy shoal – slowly, for wind and tide were against her, while the barque, with all sail set, was scudding down the opposite side at the rate of twelve knots an hour!

Shots were fired from the cruiser's guns, but with little effect – a broken spar and a rope or two cut in the rigging were easily set to rights; and before the cutter could wear and get out to sea the slave-ship was far, far away towards the rim of the horizon!

Chapter Forty

Of the cutter we never saw more. When the sun rose there was no sail in sight, and the slaver alone upon the ocean, was standing upon her westward course, under a soft gentle breeze and a cloud of sail. No doubt the cutter had abandoned the chase near the coast – for her former experience had taught her, that under such a light wind she was no match for the barque. She saw that the later had escaped – that it would be useless to follow her out into the Atlantic – and she was constrained, therefore, to go in search of other slavers that might prove less fleet than the *Pandora*.

Under these circumstances the chase was abandoned, and the barque was now free to traverse the wide Atlantic ocean, and deliver her human cargo on the Brazilian shores. It would be a mere accident if she met with further interruption. Possibly, an English man-o'-war of the South American squadron might yet overhaul her; but far more likely she would find her way into some quiet little Brazilian harbour – or into Cuba if she preferred it – where she would be entirely welcome, and where her owner would find not the least difficulty in disposing of his five hundred “bales,” or ten times the number if he had had them.

This then was the probable destiny of the *Pandora*. Her voyage was to be a success; five hundred more unfortunate beings were to swell the ranks of slavery – her captain would be enriched – her crew would receive bounty and live for a time in riotous

debauchery – and all this at the expense of every right of humanity – every principle of morality.

What cared they for this, either captain or crew? They knew that governments winked at their transgressions – that some openly approved of them – some of these rough fellows were even intelligent enough to know, that the apparently earnest endeavours on the part of the government of Great Britain to suppress slavery and the slave-trade were only mock-earnest after all – a mere political pretence – a ruse against the republicanism of America. Yes; some of these rough fellows knew it, to be sham – knew, too, that the sums annually expended by Great Britain on the barbaric luxuries of an idle court would have been sufficient to have stopped slave-dealing over the whole world – but that, instead, this profuse waste only created slaves – white slaves, and a far greater number than all the blacks that ever crossed the Atlantic. Yes; many of these rough fellows had wit enough to understand such matters; and it is, therefore, less to be wondered at that they should fall into this life of reckless outlawry. Moreover, success once obtained there would be no outlaws on the further side. The rich skipper would take rank among merchant-princes there. He would go into the best company – and be well entertained. No matter that his hand was stained with blood and his brow stamped with guilt. Kings, princes, and emperors of our day are similarly branded, but for all that, the dainty white hand of woman is contented to grasp theirs in the cordial embrace of amity and approval. With such

high examples before the world no wonder there are slavers – no wonder there should be pirates. It is only singular there are not more of them.

Joyful and jolly were the crew of the *Pandora* when they beheld the cutter hull down upon the horizon, and saw that she abandoned the chase. Their labour would now be of the easiest kind, for a run across the Atlantic, from the Gulf of Guinea to the Brazils, is one of the easiest of voyages to the seaman. The trade-winds blow almost constantly in his favour. The trim vessel sweeps smoothly along, and the sails but rarely require shifting. It is more like floating with the current of some gentle stream, than making way across the broad billowy bosom of the Atlantic.

Alas! smoothly as we ran, it was far from being a pleasant period of existence to me. I was called upon to witness a scene of constant suffering, daily – ay, hourly – my heart was wrung with pain, for there was not an hour in which some agonising spectacle did not transpire among the wretched denizens of the “half-deck.”

I need not here describe the ordinary sufferings of the slave-ship. They are recorded in many books; and I believe the most heartrending tales that have been told are not a whit exaggerated. My own experience convinces me that most of them are within the boundaries of truth. On board the *Pandora* these poor wretches were treated as is usual on other slave-vessels. They were kept below, close packed and without any accommodation as to sleeping, or even for lying down. They were obliged to

huddle together and lie over one another! They had not even space enough to be all seated at one time; and the air which they were compelled to breathe was foul and exhausted of all healthy principle. They were fed and watered just as a farmer would provender his hogs or cattle; and in fact they were treated in all respects as cattle are, when transported across the sea – perhaps not quite so well as these. Even brutes would scarce have been used so cruelly. They were only permitted on deck four or five at a time, and only for a few minutes, after which they were forced without ceremony to plunge back into their loathsome quarters, and the merciless grating was shut down upon them.

Over this stood a sentry with loaded musket and bayonet – the latter of which was called into requisition in the most wanton and cruel manner. The object was to awe the poor wretches into such fear as would paralyse all efforts at conspiracy or mutiny, for these are sometimes dreaded on board the slaver.

Of course such treatment speedily produced its effect. In a few days a change was apparent upon both the faces and forms of the unfortunate victims. Their bodies became attenuated, their cheeks emaciated, and their eyes sunk far into their sockets. Their high cheek-bones rose higher, and gave to their features a gaunt, wolfish appearance that was hideous to behold; while the shining black departed from their complexions, and their skin assumed a whitish powdered appearance, as if they had been rolling in meal.

It was indeed an awful spectacle, this transformation of the image of God into what had more of the semblance of the Devil

– an awful spectacle; and hourly was my heart wrung with grief and pain.

Not so the crew of the *Pandora*. They ate and drank and were jolly all the way. They never even thought of the sufferings of the poor wretches below, whose groans often echoed their laughter. No, these blacks were but brutes, to be bought and sold, and as such did they in reality regard them.

Chapter Forty One

I shall spare the reader many details of this voyage of of the *Pandora*. There were but few incidents outside the vessel itself to break the monotony – not even one sail was seen for two weeks after leaving the Gulf of Guinea. But there were incidents enough on board, many horrid ones, of which I shall spare the reader the details.

One I must relate in all its particulars. It will be found to contain horrors enough for a thousand, which I would spare the reader if possible; but by doing so my narrative must come to a sudden termination, since in this incident lies the continuation of my story.

Incident is hardly the name for what I am about to relate. It was more than a mere occurrence; it was a dread and awful calamity; and in a retrospect of the events of my life, this is the one which rises upon my memory the saddest and darkest; indeed, at the time of its occurrence it made upon my mind an impression so appalling, that it was a long while before I could think of anything else. Even now, long years after the terrible drama, I was witness of, and partly an actor in, is often passed in review before the eye of memory; and its horrid scenes appear to me with all the painful vividness of reality.

Listen, then! and I shall make known the nature of this dread occurrence.

As already stated, we had been about two weeks out to sea, with a favouring wind nearly all the time, and had arrived in mid-Atlantic – that is, about half-way between Cape Palmas in Africa and the most easterly point of South America – of course, therefore, we were many hundreds of miles from either shore.

The breeze continued fair, for we were sailing under the southern trade-wind, and everything seemed to promise a quick passage to the coast of Brazil. I was myself gratified at our progress, for I looked upon every day as a week of misery, and every hour a day, not only to myself but to the poor creatures who lived only in torments, and by these torments daily died. Not daily, but hourly, I might almost say, were they dying; and the plunge of their bodies, as they were unceremoniously tumbled over the side, had become of as frequent occurrence as the ringing of the watch bells. Over the side were they pitched in all their ghastly nakedness – just as a dead dog would have been thrown – with not even a shot or a stone tied to them to sink their corpses below the surface of the water. On the contrary, many of their bodies, swollen in an unnatural manner after death, remained upon the surface of the sea, and could be seen in our wake bobbing up and down upon the waves that had been made by the keel of the vessel in her passage through the water! Never for a very long period was this awful spectacle before our eyes. Though oft repeated it was usually a short scene, and ended in an abrupt strife among the monsters of the deep, amid the foam and spray flung aloft by the violent strokes of their tails, until a cloud

seemed to rest over the spot, concealing the hideous struggle underneath. Then as this cloud slowly settled away, it could be seen that a human form was no longer there, but in its place might be observed some mangled remains, with the sail-like fin of the shark projected above the surface or gliding rapidly through the water.

This, at first, had been a painful spectacle to me, whilst, incredible to relate, it afforded only amusement to the crew of the *Pandora*. But in a short while, it had been so oft repeated that it ceased to interest them even as a momentary diversion; and I – my heart growing, not hardened, I hope, but only practised to bear the pain – was less every day touched with the hideous spectacle.

I had infinite opportunities of observing the habits of those sea-monsters, the sharks. Many of them, I have no doubt, had followed us all the way from the African coast, for there were several with whose aspect I had grown familiar, from having noticed them day after day. Indeed several of them were marked by the cicatrices of old wounds, which probably they had received in encounters with antagonists of their own species, or in battles with some other voracious monsters of the deep. By these scars was I enabled to distinguish more than one; and I am certain they had followed us all the way, for I had noticed some of the marked individuals as we sailed out of the Gulf. I had observed, too, that there were several kinds of them, though the sailors took little notice of the distinction, calling them all by their well-known

characteristic name of “sharks.” Indeed, my own observations of them were not very minute or scientific. I had too much upon my mind, as well as upon my hands, to direct any thoughts beyond the boundaries of the vessel; and it was only at intervals that I gave any attention to the sea or its finny inhabitants. One thing I could not help observing, and that was, that the number of the sharks had daily increased, and kept increasing; and now, at the end of two weeks, they could be seen around the barque in dozens – sometimes gliding across her course, and sometimes running in the same direction, like a shoal of porpoises! At other times they would be seen all around the vessel, looking up at her sides as though they would leap aboard, and glaring greedily with their eyes, like hungry dogs expecting a bone to be thrown them.

To one not accustomed to it, it would have been a fearful sight; but, along with the rest, I had grown so used to these demonstrations that I could look upon them without the slightest feeling of concern.

But to return to the relation of that fearful calamity I have promised to describe.

Chapter Forty Two

We were in the middle of the wide Atlantic, hundreds of miles from any land. Let this fact be remembered.

One morning I came upon deck rather later than usual. Most generally I was awakened out of my sleep, and at a very early hour, by the thundering voice of the mate, and usually either with an oath or a rough shaking – the latter always when the ruffian was near enough to administer it.

On this particular morning, for what reason I could not divine, I was permitted to lie still undisturbed; and taking advantage of the indulgence, and, indeed, overpowered by sleep, of which I never had enough, I lay still and slept on.

It was considerably after daylight when I awoke. The sun was shining down into the forecastle and lit up that little wooden chamber – which was at most times as dark as a dungeon – with unusual brilliancy; and I could see distinctly everything and every person in the place. Of the latter there were only two or three. The bright light gushing into my eyes told me that I had overslept myself, and that it was far past the hour at which I should have been on deck and at work. For this reason the first idea in my mind was, that I was in for a rope's-ending from the mate, which I might expect as soon as I made my appearance on the quarter-deck.

It was no use, however, to think of “dodging” it. I should be

certain to get it, sooner or later, and the sooner the better, thought I, since then the dread of it would be off my mind, and the thing would be over.

Indulging in this view of the case, I slipped on my jacket and shoes (these were the only portions of my dress I ever took off), and nerving myself for the expected punishment, I sprawled up the ladder, and, emerging, through the fore-castle-hatch, stood upon deck.

On reaching the deck I had an impression that something was wrong in the vessel; indeed, I had already some such impression before coming up. There were only two men below in the fore-castle – foreigners they were – and they were conversing in their own language, which I did not understand; but there was something in the expression of their faces that struck me forcibly. Both looked gloomy, though excited, and their gesticulations, as they talked with each other, led me to believe that they were discussing some serious event that had either happened, or was about to happen, to the *Pandora*.

“Perhaps,” thought I, catching hope with the thought, “perhaps there is a sail in sight – a man-of-war with a British flag? perhaps the slaver is being chased?”

I would have endeavoured to communicate with the men, and ask them what had happened, but they chanced to be a brace of morose fellows who had always shown ill-will towards me, and I refrained from putting any questions to them. I should find out by going on deck; and, my spirits somewhat lightened by the

conjecture I had formed, I sprang more cheerfully up the steps.

As soon as I reached the deck my impressions were confirmed, though not my conjectures; for almost the first thing that I did was to sweep the sea with my glance, turning all round as I looked. No sail was in sight. It was almost a perfect calm upon the water, and the sky was blue and cloudless. I could have seen the sail, had there been one, at the distance of many miles; but neither sail nor spar appeared between the barque and the horizon's verge. It was not that, then, that was creating the excitement aboard; for I now saw that there was an excitement, and of no ordinary kind.

Both mate and captain were upon the quarter-deck, storming and swearing, while sailors were hurrying to and fro, some plunging down the open hatchways, and some returning up them, with gloom and ghastly paleness upon their faces that indicated feelings of alarm and terror!

I noticed several water-butts upon the deck that had been brought freshly from the hold. Men were grouped around them – some knocking out the bungs, and others with tin dippers suspended upon strings, plunging them into the holes and apparently gauging the contents or trying the water.

One and all, however, appeared to take an interest in the operations, far above what they would have manifested in any ordinary labour of the vessel, and I could tell from their looks and gestures that something very serious was on the tapis. What it was I could not guess. I fancied, however, that it was something

connected with the water.

I became anxious to know the cause of this strange, sudden commotion. I looked for Brace, but could not see him. Most probably he was down below, in the hold where the water-butts were kept – for this seemed to be the point of interest. I, therefore, left the foredeck, and stepped forward to the main-hatchway.

I was now close to the mate. He saw me, but took no notice of me. This of itself was strange enough, and I now felt positively convinced that some serious event had arisen, or was going to arise.

What could it be that was thus to save me from the expected castigation? Something of great import – some dread danger!

I looked down the hatchway for Brace. I saw him below, far down in the bottom of the hold, busy among the great casks, rolling them over one another. There were others along with him – some standing by, and some helping him. Like those on deck, all wore gloomy looks, that bespoke feelings of doubt mingled with apprehension.

I could endure the suspense no longer. Only waiting till the mate turned away his head, I glided into the open hatchway, and descended first to the half-deck, and then down a ladder to the hold.

I scrambled over the casks until I was close to my friend. I took hold of him by the sleeve to draw his attention. He turned round as I did so.

“What is it, Ben?” I enquired.

“Ugly news, Will! ugly news!”

“What news?”

“The water be out!”

Chapter Forty Three

I was not so much affected by this laconic piece of intelligence, as I might have been had I known more of the sea; and perhaps I should have regarded it still less, but for the gloomy glances and apprehensive air of those around me. I was not stunned by it at the first announcement; but it was not long before I became sufficiently alive to the terrible meaning of those simple words – “The water be out.”

Puzzled by the ungrammatical construction of the phrase, you are probably inquiring what it meant. I shall tell you.

It meant that all the fresh-water on board the *Pandora* had been used – that the water casks were empty, and that we were in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, with not the slightest chance of obtaining a fresh supply – that it would be weeks before we could possibly reach land – that under the burning tropic sun that was shining constantly down upon us, one week would be enough for thirst to do its work; but if any should survive that period, then a second week would finish them – in short, within two weeks one and all of us were doomed to perish! Black slaves and white masters – tyrants and victims – the innocent and the guilty, must all succumb to the same fate – every living thing on board the *Pandora* must die!

This then was the meaning of the four short words that were muttered so despondingly by the sailor. Words of dread import

were they, a phrase of fatal meaning.

I say that at first I did not clearly feel the full significance of the information given me by Brace; but a very little reflection enabled me to comprehend it; and I soon became as apprehensive as an of the others, and took as earnest a part in the investigation that was going forward.

There was an investigation, and it was about this the crew of the *Pandora* were engaged. It was not yet clearly made out that the casks were empty. In fact they were not – not half of them were so; and if it had been a simple question of whether empty or full, it could have been decided at once. More than half of them were full – full to the very bung.

But what were they full? That was the serious question. Of fresh-water? No. The appalling discovery that had been made was, that the water within them was salt! in fact, water out of the sea itself, salt as brine!

This was indeed a fearful discovery; but it was easily explained. It was known from the beginning that these butts had been filled with salt-water – to serve as ballast on the out voyage from England; and the intention had been to empty them all into the African river and substitute fresh-water instead. It appeared now that this had only been partially done!

Various explanations were offered for the dangerous neglect. Neither captain nor mate had superintended the duty. Both had been too busy in bartering and carousing with King Dingo Bingo and his boon companions – and the irresponsible hands who

had been set about the work were half-drunk while executing it – many of the casks that had been emptied of the sea-water were found to have been only partially refilled; and it was also discovered that more than half of the others had never been emptied at all! Some of the crew alleged that others had told them that these already contained fresh-water – that it would be no use bothering about them – while the men who were named as having given this assurance now stoutly denied it. Mutual recriminations took place – the lie was given and returned – filthy language was used profusely; and, what with the quarrelling of the men, and the shouting and swearing of the officers, a scene was carried on that might have rivalled an Irish row in the infernal regions.

The principal reason why such a culpable error had been committed – and this all hands knew – had been the appearance of the cruiser. She had caught them at their work, and suddenly put a stop to it.

Had she not arrived, it is probably enough that the men – however idle and drunken – would have finished their work and provided water enough for the voyage, but the unexpected appearance of the warship had driven all ideas of the water casks out of their heads; and they had thought only of shipping the “freight” and getting out of the river as speedily as possible.

In reality the skipper was the man answerable for the whole misfortune. He had allowed no time to complete the filling of the casks; and, indeed, had he done so, he would never have set sail, but must have lost both his barque and his cargo in the river.

It is probable enough he had never thought of the other horn of the dilemma; indeed, it is certain he had not – else he would long before have discovered the shortness of his supply, and taken some means to remedy it. No means had been used either to provide more water, or to economise what there was. Neither crew nor cargo had been upon rations since the beginning of the voyage; water had been dealt out to all as freely and lavishly as if the ocean itself had been a fresh-water lake.

I watched the investigation with painful forebodings. I waited, as patiently as I could for the result.

The report was at length delivered in presence of the whole crew. Its effect was like that of an electric shock upon all of them. There were but two casks on board that contained fresh-water, and these were only half-full!

Chapter Forty Four

Yes – two half casks or one whole one – in all, about one hundred gallons of fresh-water to serve for a crew of forty white men and a cargo of five hundred black ones; to serve them for weeks! Why, it would not be a single day's allowance – far less, indeed – it would scarce give each of them a drink!

I have said, that the announcement, as to the quantity of water remaining, produced upon the crew a very marked effect. Up to this time they had been in a state of gloomy apprehension – still not without hope that among the many casks, whose weight proclaimed them full, they would find a few containing fresh-water. All had now been carefully examined. Every bung had been taken out, and the contents tasted; but in every case disappointment was the result. Nothing but the bitter brine of the sea was found inside.

Every one of them had been examined and tried by several of the crew – doubt and apprehension were at an end. The truth had now been reached, was known to a certainty by all – and the result was a general paroxysm of despair.

Rage, too, freely exhibited itself. Some, who considered themselves innocent of having brought about this dilemma, accused and incriminated those who were responsible for it; and some were bold enough openly to charge the captain and mate with the neglect. Mutinous language was freely used, threats

uttered aloud, and for awhile all discipline appeared to have departed from the ship.

After a long time spent in stormy altercation and the profuse exchange of oaths and menaces, the angry tone died away, and all parties began to assume a more pacific bearing towards each other. The common danger made them friends again, or at all events put a stop to their useless hostility; and at length, calming down to greater moderation, each proceeded to offer suggestions, or listen to them, about what measures should be adopted under the circumstances.

Of course, the first idea was, that the water should from this time forth be measured out: but the question was, how much at a time? and how often should the rations be issued? This required a nice calculation to be made; and in this calculation all had the greatest interest. If too large a quantity were to be allowed daily, then the stock might be exhausted before relief should be near, and they must perish all the same. How long would a hundred gallons last? and at what rate might they use it? These were the two questions of importance.

These calculations were easy enough. There were just forty of the crew – officers included – and these last were now to be put on equal rations with the rest; for, in this crisis of peril, the government of the *Pandora* had suddenly assumed the form of a republic. Both captain and mate had lost their authority, and hereafter everything was to be conducted on the commonwealth system – share and share alike.

There were forty then in all, and, as near as could be ascertained, about one hundred gallons of water.

After all, the prospects was not so bad – so thought they, as they hurriedly ran over the calculation. One hundred gallons to forty men would be two and a half gallons, or twenty pints to each man – which would give a pint a day for twenty days, and upon a pint a day they could subsist. In twenty days, and less time than that, they were confident of coming within sight of land. Even should they not reach a haven before the twenty days were expired – should they be delayed by calms, or contrary winds, they might reduce the ration still lower, and by so doing extend the time. Half a pint a day would enable them to exist; and even far less in case of extreme necessity. After all, their prospect was not so perilous as they had at first judged it to be, and they began to recover from the shock which they had received – for on the announcement that there was only one hundred gallons left the quantity had appeared as nothing to them, accustomed as they had been to drinking and wasting that much daily. The calculation, however, showed that, with this quantity they might make shift without any great deprivation, until land, or perhaps a ship, might appear in sight.

With regard to the latter contingency, they had already formed a purpose. If any ship came in view – excepting, of course, a ship of war – they had come to the determination to chase and board her; and if a supply of water was denied them they would take it from the vessel *nolens volens*. Perhaps, even more than water –

for both captain and crew were now so desperate that they would not have stuck at anything; very little provocation would have transformed the slaver into a pirate.

Such were the views of the *Pandora's* crew, and such their determinations in regard to the use of the water. Each man was to be allowed a pint *per diem*; and, in case of any obstruction that might prolong the voyage, the ration was to be reduced still lower – even to a single glass a day, if this should become necessary.

Chapter Forty Five

During all these deliberations not one word was said about the five hundred unfortunate wretches between decks! It is a question whether even a thought was spent upon them, except by myself, perhaps by Ben Brace, and most likely the captain of the *Pandora*. But if the skipper thought of them, it was from no motives of humanity. Profit and loss were the only considerations that had any interest for him, and if he was thinking of the poor creatures with regret, it was not any regret for the horrid fate they were likely to meet with, but solely on account of the pecuniary loss he would sustain by their destruction!

I feel certain that, up to the moment when their future plans had been fully discussed and agreed upon, not one of that reckless crew had given thought to the situation of the blacks. Had these human beings been so many head of cattle, they could not have entered less into the calculations that had been made; for they were not considered at all. Not one drop of water had been apportioned to their use. No suggestion of such a thing had been afforded – it would have been ridiculed as preposterous.

It was only after everything had been settled, that mention was made of them. Then a rough fellow cried out, in a tone of mock surprise, that smacked of a disgusting levity: —

“Thunder an’ ’oun’s! what’s to be done with the niggers!”

“Ay, ay,” shouted several, in a breath; “what is to be done with

'em? There's no water for them – that's sartin."

"Why, what can be done?" responded an inhuman monster. "Chuck 'em overboard!"

"Dunder an' blitz!" exclaimed a ferocious German, who appeared pleased with the idea; "dhat is de besht blan – wees not can do petter dhan to glear 'em out from de sheep."

"*Pe Gar!*" cried the Frenchman, Le Gros, "it be von great big drown – von grand splash in ze vater —*Sacr-r-r-é!*"

I cannot describe the feelings I had in listening to this conversation. These men were actually serious, and yet jesting. It is almost too horrid to be credible, and yet it is true!

But they were serious – I knew they were – and I expected every minute to hear that this horrible suggestion was adopted, and that the blacks were to be thrown overboard!

But the villains were not unanimous; and for a length of time they continued to discuss the question in the same half-serious, half-jocular way. It was awful to listen to that inhuman debate!

The slave-captain's wishes, however, were opposed to throwing his cargo overboard; and, notwithstanding the mutinous disposition of the men, he had still authority enough to carry the point. He was obliged however, to humiliate himself by resorting to argument. His speech was characteristic; and throughout the whole of it, there was not one word about humanity.

He alleged that the niggers could only die, anyhow, and a few days could make no difference to them. Neither could it signify to them (the crew) whether the blacks died of thirst or by drowning.

They could throw them overboard, after the breath was out of them, all the same. But some of them might live it out. He had known niggers to stand it a long while without water – they could hold out much longer than white men – for in this respect they resembled the ostriches, camels, and other animals of their own country, that could go for whole weeks without drinking! No doubt many of them would die, and therefore be lost to him; but they would not die if they could help it, and there were still the chances that a good many would stick it out (these were the captain's words) till they had made land, or overhauled some vessel; and though they might be pretty far gone (another phrase of the speaker), a drink of water would set their stomachs all right again. So ran the ruffian speech.

He further proceeded to point out to his audience the destitute condition that he and they would be in, should they reach the Brazilian coast without a cargo. There would be no bounty – no spending-money – nothing; whereas, if they could only get there with even a portion of the negroes alive – even one out of five (a hundred out of the whole lot) – there would still be a large sum realised; and he promised that he would be liberal to all hands.

It was absurd, therefore, to talk of flinging the cargo overboard. They could do no harm as they were; there could arise no danger, since they would keep the blacks securely under hatches; and, therefore, in every way it was better to let these hold out as long as they could, and take chance of bringing some of them to a market. Such was the skipper's speech; and I have

followed his phraseology as nearly as I remember it. It was an awful harangue, and my heart sickened within me as I listened to it.

Meanwhile, the ill-starred victims who were the subject of these deliberations were, happily for themselves, still ignorant of the horrid fate with which they were threatened. A few of them, whose gaunt faces looked up through the grating, may have noticed that something was amiss; but, ignorant both of the language and ways of their tyrant gaolers, they could not possibly have known the danger in which their lives were now placed.

Alas! alas! they would soon learn – too soon. Soon would they experience the agony of thirst; soon would they feel its horrid cravings.

Even at that moment was it drawing upon them; even then were they crying for water – for, in consequence of the discovery that had been made, their morning’s allowance had not yet been served to them; and water was always the thing they seemed most to covet and desire. Its scarcity was to them their greatest grief. Even at that moment, as I passed the hatchway, I could hear them calling for “water – water,” some in their native tongue, and others – in hopes of being better understood – in that language best-known along the African Coast – the Portuguese – repeating the word: —

“*Agoa—agoa!*”

Chapter Forty Six

Unhappy beings! I shuddered as I reflected on what was before them. They were to endure thirst in all its gradations – from the simple, scarce painful longing for water – which most of them already felt – to the extremest agony and torture which that appetite can inflict. But a few days before, I had myself experienced thirst; but what signified that compared to what they would be compelled to endure? Simply nothing – a mere foretaste, that enabled me to judge how terribly painful thirst may become. Yes; I shuddered as I reflected on what was before them!

Little did I dream how short was to be the period of their endurance. Little thought I, as I paced along the deck and listened to their cries for water, that their sufferings from thirst would soon be at an end.

It was not their destiny to die from the want of water. Alas! a far more horrible doom was in store for them – a doom that I almost shudder to recount.

As the day advanced, their cries for water – “agoa! agoa!” – became more frequent and plaintive. There were some who shouted in anger. Wondering why they had been denied their customary allowance, there were some who fancied it arose either from neglect on the part of their white tyrants – whom they saw moving about perfectly indifferent to their entreaties

– or else from some capricious cruelty to torture and punish them! It is hard to say what might have been their imaginings; but many of them exhibited symptoms of fury amounting almost to frenzy. They approached the grating with gestures of menace, and endeavoured by main strength to force the strong woodwork from off the hatch. Some gnashed their teeth and frothed at the lips; beating their breasts with clenched fists, and yelling their native war-cries, until their voices echoed far over the waters!

To all these demonstrations the crew of the *Pandora* paid no heed – except that two sentries instead of one were placed over the hatchway where the male portion of the slaves were confined. This precaution was taken, because it was now deemed possible that the negroes might make their way upon deck; and, should they succeed in doing so in their infuriated state, woe to the white men who had hitherto ruled them!

Both sticks and bayonets were used freely upon the frantic creatures, until the carpenter with ready tools had strengthened the grating and battened it down, beyond the possibility of its being raised up, or broken by those who were striving underneath.

What added to the sufferings of the slaves, as also to the apprehension of the *Pandora's* crew, was that the wind had suddenly ceased, and it had fallen to a dead calm.

The heat of the sun, no longer fanned by the slightest breeze, had grown intolerable. The pitch melted upon the ropes and in the seams of the deck; and every article, whether of hemp, wood,

or iron, was as hot as if taken out of a fire. We had arrived in that part of the Atlantic Ocean, known among Spanish seamen as the “horse latitudes,” because that there, during the early days of Spanish adventure, vessels often got becalmed, and their cargoes of horses, dying of the heat, were thrown overboard wholesale. This is one of the explanations given for the singular appellation – though others have been assigned.

Into the “horse latitudes,” then, had the *Pandora* found her way; and the complete calm into which the atmosphere had all at once fallen was not only a source of suffering to all on board – but to the sailors an object of new apprehension.

On first discovering the shortness of the supply of water, a calm sea was the very thing they had most dreaded. A storm they feared not to encounter. Through that – even though the wind were dead ahead – they could still make way; but in a calm they could do nothing but lie quiet upon the hot bosom of the sleeping ocean, wasting their days and hours – wasting what was now more precious than all – their scanty supply of water.

One and all were terrified at the prospect. They were all men who had made many a trip across the line, and had run the torrid zone both eastward and westward. They could read well the indications of the sky; and from its present appearance most of them foresaw, and were not slow to foretell, a long-continued calm. It might last a week, perhaps twice or three times as long. Sometimes there is a month of such windless weather in these latitudes. If it continued only for the shortest of these periods,

then, indeed, would they be in danger, and no wonder they were freshly apprehensive.

As the sun went down, his disc appeared red and fiery. There was not a cloud in the sky – not a curl upon the sea.

It was the last time that sun ever shone upon the *Pandora*– when morning came, that bad, but beautiful barque, was a wreck upon the sea – a field of floating fragments!

Chapter Forty Seven

You desire an explanation? You wish to know how the *Pandora* was destroyed?

In the closing passages of the preceding chapter, I ran ahead of my narrative. I shall now return to it.

The night came down still, but not silent; at least not silent on board the slave-ship. The cries of the ill-fated beings below still loaded the air – their voices growing hoarser and hoarser. The ruffians might cage their bodies, but they could not confine their tongues; and ever and anon rose that awful din, peeling along the decks, and echoing far out over the still bosom of the waters.

It seemed at length to grow unendurable, even to the men; and those, who had before advocated throwing the slaves overboard, once more proposed adopting this course. The unexpected obstruction from the calm now added force to their arguments. They alleged that there was no chance of the niggers holding out. They would all be dead in a couple of days – by suffocation as well as thirst – and why not settle the business at once? They had now to look out sharply for their own lives, and better they should not be bothered any longer with these squalling brutes. (This was literally the language of one of those who advocated the drowning of them.) It was enough to drive a man mad to hear them, and it would be only mercy to them (much the ruffian cared for mercy) to make short work of it, and then the poor

devils would have it over at once. This was the compassionate speech of one.

Another followed in a like strain, and said, interrogatively, "After all what did it amount to? The cargo was not such a great matter so long as the ship was safe? What signified all the niggers had cost? What they might fetch was another matter; but a man could not call that a loss which he had never had; and, therefore, all the loss the skipper should sustain would be the original outlay. It wasn't a million. He would soon repair the damage. Once they got the casks filled, they could return to Africa, and King Dingo was the man to find them a fresh cargo. Perhaps he would let them have it on credit, if they couldn't do better (at this improbability several laughed); but the skipper need not go a begging for credit. He was not so easily broken up as that came to. If he himself was short, he had friends in Brazil – ay, and in Portsmouth, too – who would soon find him the rhino."

The speech of this able logician turned the scale and settled the question; and, despite the protestations and entreaties of the slave-captain and one or two others, it was decided that the negroes should be thrown overboard!

A few minutes were now given to a discussion as to the mode of effecting this purpose; and it was finally agreed that the best way would be to remove a single bar from the grating – so that only one of the victims could come up at a time – and then, taking each aft out of sight of the hatchway – so that they might not be seen by the others – to seize one after another and cast them

into the sea, whence there would be no fear of their returning. Doubtless many of them could not swim a stroke, and those that could would not swim long, amidst that multitude of voracious sharks that were beating around the barque!

The ruse of thus successively destroying the wretched victims, without making known to their companions below, originated in no ideas of mercy – it was a thought that sprang from simple convenience. The monsters knew that if those below were to get wind of the fate that awaited them above, they would no longer come on deck; and to have gone down amongst them to bring them up would have given trouble, and might have been attended with danger.

It was heartbreaking to listen to the details of their plan, and know that I could neither obstruct nor prevent it. Had I put in my voice, either to appeal or protect the unfortunates, it is likely enough I should have been myself the first morsel given to the sharks. I could do nought but suffer in silence.

Indeed, I am not sure, had it been in my power at that moment to prevent them from carrying out their design, whether it would have been right to interfere. Clearly it would not have served the cause of humanity. A death of some kind was certainly in store for these ill-starred beings – either a slow, lingering death by the torture of thirst, or one more rapid and far less cruel, such as that they were about to undergo. It might have been humanity to leave the ruffians to carry out their intent, and shorten the sufferings of their black victims by the easier death of drowning.

I had such a reflection at the moment, but I had no time to dwell upon it, for just then a rush of men towards the slave-hatchway told me that the monsters were actually on the way to carry out their diabolical purpose!

They were on their way, and would have proceeded in their intent. The carpenter was there with his axe to strike off one of the bars of the grating – he had already given a blow on the batten, another would have been enough – and then the horrid scene would have begun; but at that moment a cry came from the after-part of the vessel that caused the carpenter to suspend his work, and look up in dismay. Those who surrounded him were startled as well as he, and all looked aft with terror painted in their faces. One and all were terrified by that cry, and no wonder they were – it was the cry, of “fire!” The ship was on fire!

Chapter Forty Eight

At this cry all hands rushed toward the after-part of the vessel. I ran with the rest.

On reaching the quarter-deck we found the black cook, “Snowball,” in the hands of the captain and mate, who were beating him with thick ropes, and causing him to “sing out” at the top of his voice. Both were excited and angry – swearing loudly as they struck the blows – and already the man’s back exhibited the keenness of their vengeance.

Some of the sailors – still apprehensive about the cry of fire which they had heard – demanded an explanation, which was immediately given. “Snowball” had gone down to the store-room under the main cabin – for the purpose of drawing brandy from a large cask of this spirit that was kept there. The only access to the store-room was through a small hatch in the floor of the cabin itself; and, as it was bulk-headed off from the rest of the hold, of course the place was quite dark. For this reason the cook had carried with him, as he always did on such occasions, a lighted candle.

It was not clearly explained how he had mismanaged – for the black as well as most of the crew of the *Pandora* were, ever since the discovery about the water, in a state of half-intoxication. Even at that moment it was evident that both mate and captain were nearly drunk, and gave but half-coherent replies to the eager

inquiries of the men – who were still under apprehensions from the cries of fire that summoned them aft.

The accident was afterwards explained by “Snowball” himself. It appeared that the brandy-cask was without a regular tap, or stopcock, and that the cook was in the habit of drawing the liquor through the bung-hole, by means of an ordinary dipper. Somehow or other – of course through the black’s drunken negligence – the burning candle had slipped from his fingers, and dropped right into the bung-hole; and, quick as a flash, the spirit had caught fire, and smoke and flame issued in volumes through the hole.

At first the cook, dreading chastisement, resolved not to make any alarm; but, coming on deck, provided himself as quickly as he could with a bucket of water. With this he returned, and, pouring the water into the cask, endeavoured by such means to stifle the flames. It was all to no purpose – the blue blaze flickered upward as before – each instant becoming stronger, as the brandy itself grew hotter and more of the spirit caught the fire.

It appeared that the cook had made several journeys back and forward from the store-room to the deck, before confessing to what had occurred, or warning any one of the peril in which the vessel was placed.

At length, however, his frequent passing to and fro with the water-bucket attracted the attention of the mate; and then the discovery was made that the brandy was on fire; for the black

was now forced to confess the truth.

Then it was that the cry of fire was raised which had called the crew away from their demon purpose.

From the behaviour of the captain and his mate, it might have been supposed that the fire had been extinguished; and, for a time, such was the belief. Surely, before setting on to belabour the culprit as they were doing, they had seen that the fire was out? Such would have been the natural conclusion, and so everyone judged. It soon came out that they judged wrongly. The two officers were half-mad with drink and rage; and, without attempting to get the fire under, they had set upon the black and were expending their anger in blows, while the latter kept howling at the top of his voice, mingling with his cries for mercy the more startling cry of "fire!" It was this that had so suddenly alarmed the crew.

Was the fire out? or was it still burning? These were the questions that passed from mouth to mouth in quick and apprehensive utterance.

As soon as it was ascertained where it had occurred, a rush was made into the cabin – the men crowding together through the entrance, and treading upon one another's heels in their haste to be assured of the truth and relieved of the terrible suspense – for there is no calamity on board a ship so much dreaded as fire.

The suspense of the *Pandora's* crew was not of long duration. It became certainty – a certainty that the fire was not yet extinguished! On entering the cabin, they saw this at a glance.

Thick sulphurous smoke was rising through the open hatchway, and the cabin was already filled with it. There must be fire to produce such a smoke, and fire still alive and active – for it was not the smoke of a fire that had been lately extinguished! No; it was still alive – still burning – still spreading and increasing! That was evident to all as soon as they entered the cabin, and saw the smoke issuing up through the hatchway.

But if there remained any doubt on the mind of any one it was soon removed; for, at that moment a loud explosion was heard in the store-room below – like a blank-shot or the bursting of a steam-boiler – and, almost simultaneous with the report, a gush of thick vapour, mingled with blue flame, came rushing up the hatchway.

Chapter Forty Nine

It needed no conjuror to explain that report. Every one knew what it meant. It was caused by the exploding of the strong iron-bound cask – burst open by the gas engendered by the fire within. Of course the spirit was now spilled over the floor of the store-room and everywhere on fire; so that every combustible article within reach – and of these there were many – would soon catch the flame. There were dry barrels of biscuits, and quantities of bacon, hams, with lard, oil, and butter. It was remembered that there was a barrel of pitch, too, close to where the brandy-cask had been kept. All these would catch freely and burn rapidly and readily – especially the barrel of pitch, the head of which was open. It was thought there was no gunpowder for, although there had been a large quantity of coarse blasting-powder aboard, it was part of the original freight, and had all been delivered to King Dingo Bingo in exchange for the slaves. So at least was it supposed at the time, and this hypothesis served a useful purpose – since it enabled the crew to act with more coolness than they would otherwise have done. There is no situation more calculated to destroy presence of mind than to be aboard a ship on fire, and to know that somewhere among the flames there is a barrel of powder.

Of course the crew of the *Pandora* did not stand idle or inactive. They ran in every direction in search of means to

extinguish the fire. Buckets were collected from all parts of the deck, and water was procured from pumps and over the sides. This was heaved down the hatchway of the store-room – bucketful after bucketful – but apparently without any good purpose. Still the flames raged and the water did not reach them, at all events, it failed to extinguish them.

Of course no one dared venture below. The smoke and fire forbade it – any attempt to go down would have been a rash sacrifice of life, and no one thought of making it.

For nearly ten minutes the men continued to draw water, and dash it in bucketsful down the hatchway; but all to no purpose. The fire gained strength. The smoke grew thicker and hotter, from the pitch and other combustible substances that had now evidently caught the flames. It poured up in vast volumes till the cabin became filled. It was no longer possible to approach the hatchway, no longer possible even to enter the cabin. One or two who ventured in were half-stifled before they had gone six feet inside, and came reeling back like men who were drunk!

The buckets were thrown aside. They could no longer be of service – as no one could get near the hatchway to pass water down it, and it was of no use throwing it elsewhere.

But the hour of despair had not yet arrived. Sailors are men who rarely yield to despair; at all events not while the slightest chance remains to beget hope; and, bad as may have been their moral character, the crew of the *Pandora* were not cowards. Linked with a thousand crimes they had the one virtue of courage

– though brute courage it may have been.

Not yet did they despair. Other resources were now thought of. A piece of hose was attached to the spout of the pump, and carried to the door of the cabin; and by means of this water was still poured in.

But this contrivance proved unavailing. The mouth of the hose could not be got into the hatch, as it was impossible any longer to enter the cabin, and the water was spilled on the floor. It so chanced that the stern of the vessel sat high. The casks that had been emptied were all in the after-hold, while the full ones containing the sea-water were stowed forward. Hence the barque was higher abaft than at the bows. For this reason the water thrown upon the cabin floor by means of the hose-pipe, instead of remaining there, came running back towards the gangways as fast as it was poured in.

This produced a new consternation; for the men had conceived hopes that, after deluging the cabin from the pumps, the water would run through the open hatch and then extinguish the fire below.

As soon as it was perceived that this purpose could not be accomplished, then, indeed, did symptoms of despair make their appearance upon the faces of the crew; and they began to turn their eyes upon one another with glances of interrogation and looks that proclaimed the knowledge that their plan had proved a failure. No one had the courage to say so, and the pumping went on – though it was evident, from the slowness of the motion and

the want of energy exhibited, that the men who were working the handle were exerting themselves, only with a sort of mechanical effort that would soon yield to despondency and despair.

And so it yielded. Without any one saying a word, all seemed tacitly to have arrived at the same conclusion – that their efforts were idle; and all at once the pumping was suspended, the handle was dropped, the hose-pipe lay flattened along the deck, and the water ceased to flow!

By this time the whole after-part of the vessel was shrouded in smoke that had been oozing out from the door and windows of the cabin, and which, in consequence of the stillness of the night, was not carried away. Slowly it ascended into the air, and so straight upwards that the edge of the cloud had not yet approached the main-deck – although the whole of the mizen-mast was enveloped by the thick smoke and invisible to its very peak. Most of the quarter-deck covered, and the cabin was now completely hidden from view by the vapoury volume that clustered above and around it. As yet there was no flames to be seen, but the hissing, crackling sound coming up from below, at intervals fell upon the ear, and told that the fierce element was still raging there, and would soon exhibit itself in all its red and terrific splendour.

No one waited to watch its progress. No longer did any one think of attempting to extinguish, or even to check the fierce destroyer. All hopes of saving the vessel were given up; the *Pandora* must be abandoned; and now was heard that heart-

thrilling summons to the sailor – that last despairing cry —
“To the boats! to the boats!”

Chapter Fifty

There were three boats belonging to the barque *Pandora*. They were the “long-boat,” the “pinnace,” and the “captain’s gig.” These would have been enough to have carried the whole crew – indeed the long-boat herself would have contained all hands, or nearly.

Thirty was reckoned her full complement, though, in a case of distress, forty persons might have found room in her, and she would have floated with that number, though not in a rough sea. She had been a good boat in her time, but was now old and worn, and there was a rotten plank or two among her timbers. She was not the boat originally made for the *Pandora*. This had been lost in a gale; and the one now aboard was an old weather and water-worn veteran, hurriedly obtained for the voyage. The pinnace would have carried some fifteen men, had she been fit to go into the water, which she was not. She had met with an accident while in the river, and had not yet been repaired. She was not slung at that moment, but lying in the scuppers along the main-deck, where the carpenter had for days past been repairing her. The repairs, however, were not completed, and the boat could not go to sea. The long-boat and gig then must take the whole crew; and it was agreed that twenty eight should get into the former, while the remaining twelve could be stowed in the gig.

Of course this agreement was made by a kind of rambling

general consent – for there was no deliberation about anything, the whole crew being now half-mad with haste and excitement.

A large number of the men had rushed at once towards the long-boat, and there I followed them. They soon swarmed up to the bulwarks, and set to work to poise the davits outward, and get the rigging in order for lowering the boats. I did not see Brace among them; and, fancying he might have gone with a party towards the gig, I started aft to find him – as it was my intention to go in whatever boat carried him. The gig was suspended at the stern, just under the taffrail; and to reach this point I had to pass through the smoke that enveloped the cabin. But although the atmosphere seemed perfectly stagnant, the cloud of smoke leant a little towards the larboard side, and on the opposite, or starboard side, the way was partially clear. I had observed one or more persons glide through towards the stern, and I followed them.

On arriving upon the poop, I saw that there were five or six persons there, engaged in launching the gig. They were working with all their might, and apparently hurried by some extreme apprehension of terror. Three of them I recognised as the captain, mate, and carpenter, and the others were men noted as their allies and firm friends. They had already lowered the boat nearly to the water; and just as I looked over the taffrail I heard the splash, as her keel dipped into the sea. I saw that there were some articles – the compass, with charts, and a few other things like boxes or barrels – already lying in the boat; but as yet none

of the men had got into her.

On glancing at those who were around, I perceived that my friend was not among them; and I was turning to go back towards the main-deck, when all at once the six men who had lowered the gig – I now saw there were but six – passed suddenly over the taffrail, and gliding down the davit-tackle, dropped into the boat.

Surely, thought I, they are not going to row off without their full complement of twelve? That was the understanding, and it was further agreed that all hands should help in lowering the long-boat before the gig should be launched; the latter, being small and light, could be got into the water in a few seconds of time, and half-a-dozen men would be enough; whereas, launching the great long-boat, getting her over the bulwarks, and then lowering her safely into the sea, was a work that required both time and the help of all hands.

That all were to assist in it had been specially arranged, in the hurried consultation which had been held after the cry had arisen, “To the boats!”

No doubt that those now engaged about the long-boat supposed that all hands were there; for in a crowd of forty men the absence of five or six is not readily noticed, and, as it was no longer daylight, the faces of none could be easily distinguished. The mate and captain would not have been missed more than any others. Their authority existed no longer, and their silly behaviour in belabouring the cook, when they should have been using the time to better advantage by endeavouring to stifle the fire, had

led to the belief that both were “half-seas over,” and, therefore, no attention had been afterwards paid to any orders from either of them.

It was they and the four men with them I had observed passing abaft as I was looking for Ben, and I thought at the time that they were skulking, as if they did not wish to be seen!

As I stood upon the poop, this conjecture was confirmed. The six were evidently about to steal the gig away, without waiting for the others she was to have carried.

I was irresolute how to act. I could not myself prevent them. Remonstrance from me would have been laughed at, and I had not the strength to stay them. To call out would have been of no use. The sound of the fire roaring and crackling below, the hoarse shouting of the men themselves, the yells and vociferations of the slaves forward, produced a medley of noises amidst which my cries would not have been heard, or, at all events, their object would not have been understood.

Another thing – it was too late to create any noise about it; for before I could make up my mind to do one thing or the other – either to cry out or run back – the gig was resting on the water, the six runaways had dropped into her, and the next moment had cut the davit-tackle and set the boat free!

They appeared to act with extreme haste – as if they apprehended being hindered from getting off, or were afraid that more would come up and leap in along with them so as to overload the boat.

I could not comprehend why they were in such a desperate hurry. There could be no danger of the gig being overloaded – as it was agreed she should only take twelve – and I knew that most of the crew would far prefer to go by the long-boat; moreover, there was as yet no danger from the fire, for, although smoke was oozing out by the binnacle, it would be a good while before this part could be ablaze. There was no one by the wheel. The perfect calm that had continued since near morning rendered a steersman superfluous, and the wheel stood idle and neglected. The compass was gone. It was it I had observed in the bottom of the boat.

I could not comprehend then why the captain and his five associates were in such a way to be off, and thus desert the rest of their comrades in misfortune. There was some mystery in it.

There was a mystery, which in another moment was cleared up, and by the dastardly skipper himself, I was still standing by the taffrail, when the davit-tackle was cut, and saw the gig-oars shoved out and ready to pull away. The skipper himself grasped an oar. At that moment he looked up and noticed me. He half rose from his seat, and in drunken accents hiccuped out —

“Ahoy, there! – you boy, Bill! – tell ’em t’ look sharp – hiccup – in getting out long b’t – sharp, d’y’ hear. – L’em be quick about it – quick, – hiccup – for by – hiccup – there’s a barrel of pow – hiccup – powder aboard!”

Chapter Fifty One

The astounding intelligence, conveyed by the final sentence of this staggering speech, deprived me for the moment of the power of motion.

“A barrel of powder aboard!” These were his very words, and I had no reason to doubt that they were true. On the contrary, his behaviour, and that of those who were with him, went far to prove their truth. On no other supposition could I account for their haste to be gone; but the hypothesis of the powder at once explained it. Beyond a doubt the speech was true. There was a barrel of powder aboard! Both he and the mate were aware of it.

The dastards had made a sort of compromise with their consciences in now declaring it. They had preserved silence about it until they were themselves safe. If they had divulged the secret sooner, the whole crew might have followed them into the gig – dreading to stay any longer on board – and, therefore, they might not have got off so snugly. Now, however, that they were themselves beyond danger, there could be no harm in letting the others know it, as it might quicken their efforts at escape. Of course they did not desire to see their old associates blown into the air – if it could be helped without any risk to themselves – but they had taken good care to remove the risk, before offering any hint about the probable catastrophe.

The skipper, as soon as he had given utterance to the appalling

speech, sank back upon his seat; and, pulling along with the rest, the gig moved rapidly away.

I say that the astounding intelligence deprived me of the power of motion, and equally so of speech. It occurred to me to ask for an explanation – an additional averment as confirmation of its truth; but, before I could recover myself, it was too late – the boat was almost beyond hail. It would be no use shouting after. They would not hear, or, if they did, would not heed me; and what mattered it, for I could not doubt but what the man had said was meant as serious truth. Though not sober, he would hardly have jested then, and in such a fashion. The time and the circumstances were too solemn for jest – even for him, unfeeling fiend that he was.

No; he had spoken but the truth – the simple truth. Beyond all hope of a doubt there was a barrel of powder on board the *Pandora*!

Where was it? In the store-room, now filled with fire? where else was it likely to be? on the half-deck, or in the hold? No – not probable – none of us had ever seen it there. There had been no powder observed in any part of the vessel to which the common sailors had access; none since the cargo was delivered to King Dingo. It must then be in the store-room, or in the captain's own state-room? in either case contiguous to the flames – in either case close to where I was standing!

The thought roused my senses from the state of stupefaction into which they had fallen. The idea of self-preservation gave me

new energies; and I lost no time in hastening away from the spot. It was a mere instinct to place myself as far from the danger as I could. I sprang from the poop and ran forward upon the main-deck.

I was now at a loss as to how I should act. My first impulse had been to rush forward among the men and proclaim the intelligence communicated by the captain. I was on the point of doing so, when some good angel seemed to whisper "prudence."

I was always considered a boy of "quick-parts," and the life I had been lately leading had wonderfully sharpened my intellect. Just then it occurred to me, if I divulged the terrible secret it could do no good, but on the contrary, might beget great mischief. I saw that the sailors were exerting all their strength to get out the boat, and were making what haste they could. No power on earth could have caused them to go faster. The dread of the flames, now beginning to flow through the cabin-windows, was stimulus enough. Any additional dread would only paralyse them. I determined, therefore, to keep the fearful knowledge within my own breast. I thought of imparting it only to Ben, and for him I now went in search.

I soon discovered him. He was among a crowd up over the davits, working with all his might. I could not get near him, and of course could not communicate with him without being overheard by the others. I therefore resolved to remain sole possessor of the dread secret till a better opportunity offered itself.

I set to work with the rest, heaving and hauling; but, amidst all

I had but one thought. I scarce knew what was going on, or what I was myself doing. I was every moment in expectation of that loud report – that horrible explosion that would fling us all into eternity! I worked mechanically and often wrong; once or twice I caught myself hauling the wrong way. Some of them noticed this and rudely kicked me aside. Oh! the keen apprehension!

The boat was at length cleared of the bulwarks and swung over the sea; and then the lowering commenced. This operation was not so difficult, and in a few minutes more she rested upon the water. The men gave a cheer at their success.

Many at once glided into the boat; while others remained above and on the sides, passing down some necessary articles – some bread and water – such things as could be most readily got at.

At this moment two men lifted between them a heavy barrel; and rolling it over the bulwarks, commenced lowering it downward. The size and shape of the barrel proclaimed its contents. It was a cask of rum, and its weight proved that it had never been broached, but was quite full of the potent spirit. No one objected to its being taken into the boat. There were no protesters in that crew, but several now offered to assist in lowering it down. A bight of rope was thrown around the cask, and the letting down commenced.

It had scarcely balanced over the copper sheathing of the bulwark, when the bight of rope – hurriedly cast around it – slipped off, and the heavy barrel fell with all its weight into the

bottom of the boat. Not exactly into the bottom but upon one side – a little below the water-line, as the boat lay.

A heavy crash was heard – not the firm concussion of the barrel striking on the elastic timbers of the boat; but more as if something had broken underneath where it fell. The barrel had fallen angularly and endways; and the sharp projecting end of the oaken staves had struck between two of the ribs of the boat, and fair upon the face of her outside planking. As if the hand of a demon had guided it, the rum cast in its descent had fallen upon one of the decayed planks; and the crash that had been heard was the sound of the plank springing out of its bed and breaking crossways at the same time!

A wild cry rose from out the boat, as those who were below saw the catastrophe that had happened. It was visible even from the deck above; for looking over I perceived a thick gush of water pouring through the side of the boat.

Some of the men leaped out of her and came climbing up again; while others remained endeavouring to staunch the hole, and with buckets that were now thrown to them, commenced baling out.

They did not continue long at this. It was clearly a hopeless task; the huge breach could not be mended, and the boat filled ten times faster than they could bale her out. They soon abandoned the attempt; and, dropping the buckets, followed their companions up the side.

In less than ten minutes after, the long-boat had gone to the

bottom of the sea.

“A raft! a raft!”

Chapter Fifty Two

“A raft! a raft!”

This was the cry that now echoed along the decks, while men were seen hurriedly seizing hold of spars, ropes, and axes.

But there was another cry and an angrier one. It arose from the few who had rushed towards the stern in hope of themselves appropriating the gig and whose disappointment at finding she was gone, found vent in oaths and shouts of vengeance.

They had no need to go aft of the burning cabin to make the discovery. Over the quarter the gig was seen – distinctly seen under the clear moonlight, several cable-lengths from the barque, and fast rowing away. Six forms were in the boat – six only – and the men at once knew that they were the captain, mate, and four of their favourites. No explanation was required. The behaviour of those in the gig told the tale of itself. They had deserted their companions in distress – had basely stolen away.

“Gig ahoy! gig ahoy!” was screeched after the departing boat, but to no purpose. Those in the gig paid no heed to the hail, but only appeared to row faster away. They seemed to dread being followed by the long-boat and overtaken; and well might they have a dread of it, for if the betrayed crew could have laid hands upon their *ci-devant* officers at that moment, they would have shown them but scant mercy.

As for the latter, they were apparently rowing with all their

might – as if they wanted not only to get beyond earshot of their old associates, but out of sight altogether. Belike the ears of both captain and mate were keenly bent, and their eyes too – unfeeling as the hearts of both were, they must have been stirred in the anticipation of that awful catastrophe, which both surely expected. They might have wished for a time to be deprived both of sight and hearing.

As I have said, there was a cry of vengeance along the deck. Some, who but the moment before were skulking aft with a similar purpose, were now loud in their denunciations of the dastardly conduct of the officers; and, goaded by the two passions of disappointment and rage, shouted after them the most opprobrious epithets and bitterest threats.

But the little boat was by this far off upon the water; and the necessity for immediate action soon called the men from these idle demonstrations.

All hands set to work at the formation of the raft.

The ability and despatch with which sailors can construct a raft, would be almost incredible to a landsman who had never seen the thing done. It is not from mere concert or organisation among themselves – though there is something in that. Not much, however, for well-drilled soldiers are as clumsy at such a work as farm-labourers.

Though the principal material of a raft be timber, the sailor with his rope will far sooner bind it together than the carpenter with his hammer and nails; and bind it far safer and surer. The

rope is the sailor's proper weapon, and its use he understands better than all others. He knows at a glance, or by a touch, whether it be the thing for the purpose intended – whether it be too long or too short, too weak or too stout – whether it will stretch or snap, or if it will hold securely. He knows, as if by instinct, what sort of knot should be used for this, and what sort for the other – whether a “reef-knot” or a “bowline,” a “diamond” or an “overend” – whether a “clove-hitch,” a “clinch,” or a “cat's paw” – all these modes of splicing and trying, with five times as many more, are secrets only known to the sailor.

And only he can rapidly cut down a mast, or detach a spar from its rigging, and get them overboard without delay. The aid of a landsman would be of little service in operations like these.

Like bees the men went to work – every one of the thirty and four. Some handled the saws and axes – some carried spare-yards and spars, some with their knives attacked the running gear and provided the ropes. All were equally busy – all equally interested in the result.

In a few minutes the main-mast came down with a crash, falling over the side, and grinding the bulwarks beneath it as if they had been hurdles of reeds; and in a few minutes more its rigging was all cut loose – both running and standing – its shrouds and stays – sheets, braces, and lifts.

The great mast, with its yards still attached, soon rested upon the water alongside the wreck – for the *Pandora* might now be called a wreck – and upon these, as a foundation, the raft was

speedily laid. The spare spars and yards, the gaffs and booms, were thrown upon top, and soon lashed firm by those who had descended to the water, and who now found footing upon the huge floating mass of timber. Empty casks were bunged and flung overboard, and these added essentially to the safety of the structure and its capability of carrying a greater weight. Sails, too, were thrown loosely over all, and then, last of all, the biscuit and water – such quantities of each as could be found amid the confusion.

At length the raft was deemed complete. It could not have exceeded fifteen minutes from the sinking of the long-boat, until the cheering fact was announced, that the raft was ready!

Chapter Fifty Three

But short as was the time it appeared an age to me. With that dread secret shut up in my breast, every minute seemed an hour; and I knew not the moment that was to be our last. When the long-boat went down, I had resigned all hope – not dreaming that a raft could be got ready before the explosion would take place.

It is metaphorical to say that every minute seemed an hour; but so tardy did the time appear that I began to wonder why the awful event was so long delayed. Perhaps, thought I, the powder may be far down, covered over with other things – such as boxes and bales – and the fire has not yet been able to get at it? I knew that a barrel of powder, even when thrown into the midst of a red-hot fire, takes a considerable time to explode. An intense heat must be generated in the wood before the powder inside will ignite; and, for this reason, the barrel must be a good while exposed to the fire. Perhaps the flames had not yet reached it? Was this the reason why the catastrophe was delayed?

Or was it that the powder was not in the store-room, or the cabin either, or in the after-part of the vessel at all? About its whereabouts the skipper had said nothing, and it was upon this point I had desired explanation as the gig rowed off. A knowledge of this might have been of the greatest importance; but the captain had not even thrown out a hint. What after all if there was no gun-power on board? What if the man had meant it as a

jest – ill-timed and unfeeling though it was?

What if he had intended it not as a piece of pleasantry, but an act of refined cruelty?

There were circumstances that favoured this last supposition. For the preceding twenty hours he had been at loggerheads with the crew. Ever since morning, since the commencement of the water trouble, the men had been sulky and mutinous, and both mate and captain had been slightly treated – their orders in most cases altogether disregarded. In fact, both had been bearded and threatened, and several angry altercations had occurred between them and the crew. It was natural they should feel spiteful and desirous of having revenge – natural for such men as they were – and might it not be to gratify this feeling, that the skipper had shouted back that gratuitous piece of intelligence, that there was gunpowder on board?

Fiendish as such conduct may appear, there was probability in the supposition. It would only be in keeping with the character of the man.

I really began to hope that such might be the case; and it again occurred to me to seek Ben and communicate the secret to him. He would be more likely to know whether the skipper had spoken truly or in cruel jest; and, if the former, perhaps he might be able to guess where the dangerous material was concealed, and might yet be in time to move it beyond the reach of the fire.

These reflections occupied me but a few seconds of time; and as soon as I had made them I hurried over the decks in search of

my friend, with the design of making the disclosure of my secret.

I found him among the rest, busy about the raft. He was wielding an axe, and cutting away some of the sheeting of the bulwarks, to help in its construction. I caught him by the sleeve, and with a gesture drew him a little to one side; and then in a whisper I made known to him the parting speech of the captain.

I saw that the announcement startled him. Brave man though he was, it was enough to bring the paleness to his cheeks, and cause him to stand for some moments speechless and irresolute.

“You’re sure he said that – sure o’ it, Willim?”

“Quite sure – they were his very words.”

“A barrel o’ powder aboard!”

“He said it just as they rowed off. I’ve been thinking he might have done it out of spite – to frighten us?”

“No, no, lad, it’s true – shiver my timbers! if it an’t. The powder – ’twas believed we’d turned it all over to King Dingo. Now I remember something. I thought I seed the skipper hide a barrel o’ it after it was counted out; he stole it from the nigger, for sartin. I thought so at the time, but warn’t sure. Now I be sure. There be a barrel aboard, sure as we’re livin’! Heaven o’ mercy – we’re lost, lad! – we’re lost!”

The momentary relief, which I had experienced from my late conjecture, was at an end; and my apprehensions were now as acute as ever. It was no jest then – the skipper had been in earnest. The gunpowder was on board – the stolen barrel – and for this theft we were now to be sacrificed while the thief himself had

escaped!

Brace stood for some seconds, as if paralysed with the intelligence I had given him. He seemed to watch and listen for the crisis, and so did I.

After a short while, however, my companion recovered his presence of mind and appeared busy thinking out some plan of deliverance.

But a few seconds only was he silent, and then, making a sign for me to go after him, he glided towards the bows of the vessel.

No one saw or followed us, and there was nobody forward beyond the windlass. At the moment all were busy amidships, in getting the great mast overboard, and cutting away the strong ropes of the rigging.

Brace continued on over the bow-bulwarks, until he had got between the bumpkin and bowsprit-shrouds, and close to the figure-head of the vessel. Here he stopped and beckoned me towards him. I crawled over, and stood by his side.

“Not a word, lad! – not a word of what you’ve heard! It can do no good, but only harm. If they get to know’t, they’ll knock off work – every one o’ ’em – and then we must all either roast or drown. Let ’em go on with the raft – maybe there’ll be time enough yet. Almighty grant that there may be, Willim! For all that, ’tan’t no harm to try and save ourselves if we can. The powder’s sure to be about the cabin, and we’ll stand a better chance here forrard. But we ’ant a-goin’ to stop here longer than we can help. Look sharp, now, and give me a hand! These two

planks 'll float us. You cut some rope, then, while I knock 'em off – there, cut clear the jib-sheets and downhauls – that'll do – quick, lad! quick!”

Thus directing me, Brace, who had brought the axe along with him commenced knocking off the great broad boards that stretched on both sides from the bulwarks to the figure-head, and upon which the name of the vessel was painted. With a few strokes of the axe the strong man was able to detach them; and, as soon as this was done, he slung them in the ropes I had already obtained, and lowered them down to the water.

Climbing out upon the bowsprit, he next detached the dolphin-striker, and it also was lowered down, while I made myself useful by cutting through the martingales, also the fore-topgallant and royal-stays, that fastened this spar in its place. Several other pieces of timber yielded to the axe; and all, having been thrown downward, floated together upon the motionless surface of water.

Brace, now perceiving that there was enough to make a raft to carry the two of us, flung the axe into the shrouds; and, gliding down a rope upon the floating timbers, called upon me to follow him. It was at this moment I heard the cry from the main-deck that the great raft was ready; and, looking back, I perceived that the men were hurrying over the side and descending upon it. If I remained but a moment longer I should be the last upon the burning wreck.

No! – not the last – far from it. There were nearly five hundred

more – five hundred human beings on board the *Pandora*! and though they were men with black skins, they had lives to lose – lives as precious to them as ours were to us.

A terrible spectacle was comprehended in that backward glance – a sight, the remembrance of which never fails to send a chill through my veins, and a shuddering through my frame.

Chapter Fifty Four

During all this time what was the behaviour of the unfortunate blacks? Where were they? what were they doing? What was being done for them? Were any steps being taken for their safety?

The two last of these questions may be answered by saying, that up to that moment, with the exception of myself, perhaps, not one on board had given a thought either to them or their fate! With regard to their whereabouts, they were still between decks, and under grated hatches; and as to what they were doing, it would have been hard to tell that – hard even to guess it. One thing they were doing; they were crying frantically, and screaming as if they had all gone mad – but this was no new thing, it had been their behaviour throughout that whole day.

In their hurrying to and fro, while launching the long-boat, and afterwards while gathering materials for the raft, the men passed frequently near them; and then the cries of the blacks would, for the moment, be uttered in a louder voice, and in more earnest tones, – sometimes of entreaty, but oftener of rage and menace.

As no notice was taken of them, and those to whom they appealed passed carelessly on, their voices would sink again into the deep continuous murmur of despair.

It is probable that up to this period – the moment when the raft was ready – the only agony which they had experienced was thirst; for I noticed, on last passing them, that their cries had

not changed. It was still *agoa! agoa!* – water! water! This, with the want of air and room, the desire to get upon deck, were the impulses that had been urging them to such furious and frantic demonstrations.

It is most probable, then, that up to the period I have mentioned they had no particular dread – at least, no dread of the awful doom that now threatened them so nearly.

The smoke of the burning cabin rather inclined aft than forward, and had not reached them, and the flames were not yet sufficiently bright to illumine the whole vessel with any unnatural light. Of course, from their position under the hatches, neither cabin nor deck was visible to them; and until either smoke or flame, or a brilliant light shining through the grating, should reveal the awful truth, they could not possibly be aware of their peril. No one had volunteered to announce it to them, because no one thought it worth while!

They may have observed that all was not right – they may have had suspicions that there was something amiss. The unusual movements of the crew – the noises heard upon deck – the hurried trampling of feet, and the gestures of the sailors, as these passed within sight, with the terrified expression of their countenances – which could scarce have been unnoticed – for it was still clear enough for that – all these matters must have excited the suspicions of the close kept crowd, that there was something amiss on board the barque. The crashing sound of axes, and then the shock and heavy lurching of the vessel, as the

mast came down, may have excited other apprehensions besides that of perishing by thirst; and, though they continued their cries for water, I observed that they conversed among themselves in hurried mutterings that bespoke alarm from some other cause.

But as none of them knew anything about a ship or her ways – the *Pandora* was the first they had ever looked upon – of course they could not arrive at any conclusion as to why the unusual movements were going forward. Guided only by what they heard, they could hardly guess what was being done. They could not imagine there was a danger of being wrecked – since there was neither wind nor storm – and after all it might be some manoeuvre in navigation which they did not comprehend. This probably would have been their belief had they not observed the odd look and gestures of such of the sailors as at intervals came near the grating. These were so wild as to convince them that something was wrong – that there was danger aboard.

The commotion had produced fears among them, but not proportioned to the peril. They knew not the nature of their danger, and their alarm had not yet reached its crisis: but they were not destined to remain much longer in doubt.

Just at this moment a jet of red flame shot upward through the smoke – it was followed by another, redder and more voluminous – then another, and another, until the blaze rose continuous, and stood several feet in the air.

The moon became eclipsed by the brighter light – the whole vessel was yellowed over, as if the sun had returned above the

ocean.

The crackling of the burning timber now sounded in their ears – the fire, having escaped from the embrace of its own smoke, seethed fiercer, and rose higher into the air, until the top of the ascending flames could be seen through the grating of the hatches.

But it needed not that the flames should be seen – their light, and the hissing, crackling noise that proceeded from them, proclaimed the dread nature of the catastrophe.

Then arose a cry – a wild, agonising cry – out of the bosom of that dark hold – out of the hearts of that ill-fated crowd – a cry that for some moments drowned the fierce seething of the flames, and the crashing, crackling sounds of the fire. I shall never forget that cry – none who heard it could fail to remember it till their last hour.

It was just at this crisis that I had turned to look back. Awful was the sight that met my eyes – awful the sounds that fell upon my ears. Under the bright gleam of the blazing ship, I saw the black faces and round woolly heads pressing against the bars of the grating. I saw glaring eyes, foaming lips, and teeth set in terror, glittering white under the corruscation of the flames. I saw smoke oozing up the grated hatch – the fire was fast creeping forward – its foul harbinger was already among them – oh! what an awful sight!

I could not bear it – I could not have borne it in a dream – it was too much for human eyes – too much for the heart of man.

My first impulse was to turn away, and glide down beside my companion – who was waiting patiently upon the raft below.

This was my first impulse, which suddenly gave way to another. My eye had fallen upon the axe – still lying across the bowsprit-shrouds, where Brace had thrown it.

The weapon suggested a purpose; and, eagerly seizing it, I faced once more towards the burning vessel. My purpose was to return on deck – strike off the batten – and set the grating free. I knew the risk – I had forgotten the presence of the powder – but if it were to be my death I could not restrain myself from acting as I did. I could not live to behold such a terrible *holocaust*– such a wholesale burning of human beings!

“At least,” thought I, “they shall not perish thus. Though their fate be sealed, they shall have a choice of death – they shall choose between burning and drowning – the latter will at least be easier to endure.”

It was this last reflection that had prompted me to my purpose.

Bending downward, I hurriedly communicated my design to my companion. I was gratified with his reply.

“All right, Willim! good work – do it! – do it – set ’em free, poor creetirs. I was thinking o’t myself – tho’ ’twas too late – haste ’ee, lad – look sharp!”

I waited not for the end of his speech; but springing back to the deck, rushed towards the hatch. I thought not of looking below – indeed, the smoke was now coming up so thickly that I could scarce see the terrified faces. The glimpse I had of them was

sufficient to satisfy me, that, in a few minutes more, those glaring eyes would have been blind, and those hoarse voices hushed in death.

I remembered where one batten had been removed, and where the other had been attacked by the axe. I renewed the attack – striking with all the strength and dexterity I could demand.

My efforts proved successful; and, after half-a-dozen blows, the spikes yielded, and the cleft of timber flew off.

I did not stay to raise the grating; I knew that would be done by the pressure from below; and, gliding back, I once more climbed over the bows.

One glance back, as I passed over the head, told me that my purpose had been fully accomplished. Instantly as I parted from it the grating was flung off, and I saw the stream of black forms pouring upwards and spreading itself over the deck!

I stayed to observe no more; but, sliding down a rope, was received in the arms of my companion.

Chapter Fifty Five

During my short absence, Brace had not been idle.

He had got his little raft compacted – its timbers tied together – and it now carried us both without even dipping under water. The two spars, the dolphin-striker, and half of the spritsail-yard were laid parallel to each other, and transversely to these were the broad pieces, that exhibited in large letters the name of the ill-fated barque. There were several other pieces of timber, a handspike or two, and an oar – which Brace had picked up as he glided towards the head – and over all was a piece of sail-cloth, or tarpaulin. The whole formed a raft just about large enough for two, and safe enough in calm weather, but under a gale, or even a strong wind, such a structure would have been overwhelmed at once.

But my companion had no intention of going to sea with such a craft. His idea had been that he might get it ready before the great raft could be finished, and the sooner escape from the dangerous proximity of the powder. Even if it had taken him quite as long to prepare it, there was still a greater chance of safety by our being so far forward upon the vessel. If the powder had exploded there would have been a chance of our not being blown to atoms. The after-part of the vessel might be shivered in pieces, and, of course, the rest would soon sink; but still, by keeping out by the head, there were many chances in our favour. It was from these

considerations that the sailor had hurried away from amidships, and set to making his raft at the bows. It was only intended as a temporary retreat – to enable us at the earliest moment to get beyond the circle of danger; and, should the men succeed in completing the larger structure, ours could afterward be brought alongside and joined on to it.

The large raft was completed as soon as our little one, and all hands had gone down upon it. As I returned on deck to strike up the hatch, I saw not a soul of the *Pandora's* crew. They had all gone out of the vessel, and betaken themselves to the raft. From the deck I could not see either them or the raft – as the latter was still close in under the beam-ends of the barque.

As soon as I had got fairly down, my companion pushed off, and the next moment the great raft came under our view. Both it, and those who were on it, were seen as distinctly as though it had been daylight – for the burning vessel was no longer a combination of flame and smoke. Her whole quarter-deck, from the taffrail to the main-hatch, was enveloped in a bright flame that illumined the surface of the sea to the distance of miles. Under this light, we perceived the raft and the men standing or crouching upon it.

They had pushed off some ten or twelve yards from the side of the vessel, in order to be clear of the flames. There was another reason that induced them to get some distance away, and that was the fear that there might be powder aboard. Although no positive alarm had been given to that effect, there existed a doubt

about the thing, and they were not without apprehensions. There were other men besides Brace who knew something, or had heard something, about the stolen keg, but who, not being certain about the matter, did not like to make known their suspicions. There might be powder yet; and it was, therefore, with a feeling of relief that all hands had sprung upon the raft, and got it out of the way of such dangerous contingency. No doubt it was this suspicion about the gunpowder that had influenced them all to exert themselves so strenuously in the work. So far as there was any danger from the flames, they might have continued on board a while longer – for it would still be many minutes, before the conflagration could extend forward and embrace the whole of the vessel.

The men had not stayed aboard a moment longer than was required for them to complete the necessary work; and, once on the water, they were seen to be working as anxiously as ever to push off the raft – as though they dreaded contact with the barque from some other cause than the danger of the fire.

This was in reality the case; for, now that the raft was fairly afloat, those who suspected the presence of gunpowder were heard freely declaring their suspicions; and all stood looking upon the conflagration with eyes of expectancy – expecting every moment to hear an explosion!

It was just at that moment that Brace and I, passing round the larboard-bow, came in sight of the crew; and, without a moment's hesitation, my companion using the oar, and I doing what I could

with a handspike, set our little raft in motion, directing it as well as we could towards the other – with which we supposed in a few seconds we should be able to come up.

In this, however, we were disappointed. Just then we observed a strange movement among the men on the raft, who, after standing for some seconds in attitudes that betokened surprise, and with voices and gestures that confirmed it, were seen hastily renewing their efforts to put themselves at a still greater distance from the wreck; and not only hastily, but in a manner that bespoke some degree of terror!

What could this mean? Surely the flames could not reach them now? Surely they were beyond all danger from an explosion of gunpowder – even had there been a hundred barrels instead of one? The blowing up of a whole magazine could not have harmed them at that distance off? Surely it was not this that was exciting them?

I first looked to Brace for explanation, but his actions, at the moment, were as mysterious as any. He was on the forward part of our little craft, kneeling upon the planks and using his oar in the manner of a paddle. I saw that he was endeavouring to direct our course towards the raft; so as I with the handspike; but my companion, instead of working leisurely and deliberately – as he had hitherto been doing – was now rowing with all the haste and strength he could put into his arms – as if he was in dread that the raft would get away from us, and was doing his utmost to overtake her!

He had said nothing as yet; but I could see his features distinctly under the brilliant light, and the expression upon them, as well as the earnest endeavours he was making to increase our speed, convinced me that he, too was under some feeling of terror.

Was it the fear of being left behind by those on the raft? No; it could not be that; for, though neither was going faster than a cat could swim we were evidently making better speed than they; and it was plain we were getting nearer them at every stroke of the paddle. The great raft, indeed, lay like what it was – a raft of logs; and, although the men had oars, it was only with great difficulty it could be pushed along, and moved slowly and heavily through the water. Why should Brace be at all uneasy about our overtaking it?

But it was not that that was urging him to such haste. The conjecture only held possession of my thoughts for an instant. In the next instant I perceived the cause of terror. I saw what alarmed both my companion and the crew upon the raft.

Chapter Fifty Six

Up to that instant I had not looked back towards the burning barque. I would rather not have done so. I dreaded to look back; moreover, I was so eagerly employed in helping to propel our floating plank that I had scarce time for looking around.

Now, however, I was constrained to raise my head and glance back upon that terrific spectacle. It explained at once why the crew of the *Pandora* were so eager to be gone from the spot.

The fire had burned forward to the stump of the main-mast, and, fed by the large quantities of black pitchy ropes – the shrouds, stays, and ratlines – was sending up strong bursts of smoky flame. Red tongues were shooting out forward, as if to grasp the rigging of the fore-mast that still stood untouched. But the most singular, or rather the most awful, part of the scene was that presented on the foredeck and the whole forward part of the ship. Upon the windlass, the bulwarks, the fore-mast shrouds, around the head, and out to the bowsprit-end, was a continuous swarm of human forms, so thickly clustered that scarce any part of the vessel could be seen, except the fore-mast, with its spars and rigging towering high above. Five hundred there were – perhaps not so many – as some of them, happily for themselves, had gone out of the world before that dread hour. But nearly five hundred there were, and of course they covered every part of the forward deck, and even the sides and bulwarks, from the

selvage of the approaching flames to the bowsprit-end. Some had gone out even farther, and could be seen swarming like bees and balancing their bodies on the jib-boom. In fact, but for its awful character, the scene suggested the hiving of bees that had crowded every leaf and twig upon the branch of a tree.

Both males and females were there – for both had succeeded in making their way on deck – but amid that thick swarm their sex could not be distinguished. Strange to say, they were no longer black! Not one of them looked black – on the contrary, they appeared red! Their faces, the skin of their naked bodies, even the woolly coverture of their crowns, showed blood-red under the glaring light of the blazing pitch; and this singular transformation added not a little to rendering the scene more terrific – for there was something supernatural in this altered complexion.

The whole scene might have been compared to the final of some grand theatrical spectacle – it had all the grandeur, the red light, and the scenic embellishment – but in two circumstances it widely differed from the fictitious imitation. There was not that variety of forms and colours in the tableaux, and, moreover, the characters were not as upon the stage – in poses and attitudes that betokened rest. On the contrary, all were in motion. Their arms were tossing wildly above their heads, while they themselves were leaping upward or dancing to and fro wherever they could find footing. They were shouting in tones of despair, screaming in agonised accents; while some, who had evidently gone mad, were gibbering and laughing in voices that bore a striking

resemblance to that of the hyena!

The strong light enabled me to trace everything minutely – alas, too minutely! I could see the white gleaming teeth, the frothing lips, the eyes glaring in madness or terror. We were still scarce a cable’s length from them. I could note every movement as if I had been in their midst, or within ten feet of them. They all stood fronting in the direction of the raft; and for this reason I could note their gestures, and even distinguish the expression upon their features.

Among other things I saw women – I knew they were women only from their being smaller than those around – I saw women lift up little dark forms as high as they could raise them, and hold them out in the direction of the raft. They were their children, their infant piccaninnies, and this was intended as a supplication to the white runaways to come back and save them. Others stretched forth their arms and stood in attitudes of entreaty; while men – the stronger and fiercer ones – shook their clenched fists in the air and hurled after us loud cries of menace.

Awe-inspiring as was the spectacle, it was neither the threats of the men nor the supplications of the women that was causing all commotion among the crew on the raft.

Part of the blaspheming and loud talk that could be heard there arose from anger that the blacks had been let out; and we could hear several voices inquiring, in harsh angry tones. “Who has done it? Who has done it?”

These questions were not asked simply thus, but with the

embellishments of horrid oaths and exclamations that cannot be repeated.

It was just as my companion and I were parting from the bows, that we heard these questions asked, and so earnest was the tone of the inquirers, that I at once saw that I had placed myself in a position of danger.

It appeared that I had committed an imprudence. My humanity had hurried me to an act that could be of no service in saving the lives of those I intended to benefit, but was likely to bring destruction upon all – myself among the rest.

I can scarce say that I repented of what I had done. I should have done the same deed again. I could have not restrained myself. I had followed the promptings of mercy. How could I have acted otherwise?

I had such reflections at the moment, or something like them. I cannot exactly describe my thoughts, for a tumult of strange emotions was passing through my mind.

I now perceived the danger which threatened the two rafts: I perceived it on looking back toward burning the vessel: the blacks were threatening to swim after, and seek refuge upon the rafts. Large numbers of them showed that they had formed this intention. It was apparent from their movements and attitudes. They were swarming over the bulwarks and down the sides. They had gathered along the beam-ends and seemed every moment on the eve of launching their bodies into the water!

Chapter Fifty Seven

No wonder the sailors were alarmed. Should the blacks carry out their intention, enough of them might reach the raft to sink her – enough of them, perhaps, to fling the white men into the sea and themselves take possession of that frail chance for life. Whatever might be the event, it was clear that if they came on, certain destruction must result to one or other, or most likely to all. As for my companion and myself, we appeared in a position of greater peril, even than those upon the raft, for we were between them and the threatened danger. But we had no fears from this source; we were certain that if no accident arose to our craft we could propel it faster than a man could swim – though so little faster that it would have been a tight race had we been pursued. However, having so many yards of start we had little to fear.

We kept on, intending to overtake the raft and fasten our floating planks alongside it; and this purpose, after a few minutes, we succeeded in effecting.

Brace had cautioned me as we came up to say nothing, of what I had done.

“For your life say nothing, for certainly,” said he, “they will throw you into the sea and me along with you. Say not a word,” whispered he, as a final caution – “not a word, even if they question you. I’ll answer them if they do.”

He was called upon to do so, and dexterously did he execute his design.

“Hilloa!” hailed several as we approached – “who are ye? Ho! Brace and that precious boy Bill. Was it you that let the niggers above board? Was it either of you?”

These questions were put with the usual vulgar embellishments.

“No!” responded Brace, in an indignant tone and of course telling the truth as far as he was concerned – “How could we? We were down by the bows, and couldn’t see ’em. I wonder how they did get loose? They must a broke through when ye knocked off the batten. I seed nothin’ of ’em till we were out in the water. I was under the head makin’ this bit o’ raft. I was affeerd there wouldn’t be room for all – lend a hand here one o’ ye, and hitch this thing on – it’ll help to keep a couple o’ us afloat anyhow.”

By this appeal for help my companion dexterously turned the conversation, so that no further questions were asked about who set free the blacks. Indeed, there was no opportunity to talk any more upon the matter, for at this crisis the attention of every one upon the raft had become earnestly fixed upon that dark, red cloud that clustered along the side of the vessel.

Strange to say the negroes had been for some minutes in this position – with every appearance of a purpose to leap outward into the water and swim towards the raft – and yet, not one of them had sprung forth! They seemed like men determined to do a thing, but who waited for a signal from some leader. Either

that, or some one to take the lead himself and set the example – just like a mob of soldiers crowded together on the field of battle – as soldiers always are at such times – prepared to charge forward and rush even upon death itself, if some bold spirit will only give the word and go forward in advance of them. So stood the crowd of blacks, threatening to plunge into the sea and yet hesitating to do so.

We wondered at their hesitation. What could they mean by holding back? The raft appeared the only chance for their lives – though a poor respite it would be. Nevertheless, men who are about to be burned or drowned will cling to a less hope than that. Why, then, did they not jump overboard and swim after, as all expected them to have done before this? Could they swim? or could they not? These were the questions that now passed rapidly from mouth to mouth on board the raft, and were answered with equal rapidity, though the answers were but guesses, and did not correspond. They were both negative and affirmative. Some alleged that they could not. If this were true, then the position of affairs could be explained at once: the hesitation of the blacks to take to the water would, upon this hypothesis, be easily understood. However, there were but few who held this opinion. It was quite improbable that it could be the true one – quite improbable that in all that crowd there was not any one who could swim – for even one would have taken to the sea in hopes of finding refuge upon the raft – forlorn as the hope may have been. No, the negative supposition was not to be entertained for

a moment. It is well-known that most of the natives of Africa not only swim but are most excellent swimmers. Their mode of life renders the art a necessity among them. Living on the banks of great rivers, by the shores of those immense lakes in which Central Africa abounds, often requiring to cross streams that are deep and rapid, and where no bridges exist, these people are compelled by their very wants to become experts swimmers. Besides, their hot climate renders the exercise a pleasant one, and many tribes of them spend half their time in the water.

It was highly improbable that they could not swim – all, or nearly all, of them. No, this was not the cause of their hesitancy.

And what was?

This question was answered by one of the sailors – though all of us at the same moment perceived the cause.

“Look yonder!” cried the man, pointing along the water; “look yonder; yon’s what caws ’em – the sharks!”

Chapter Fifty Eight

The stretch of water that lay between the raft and the burning vessel glittered under the yellow light like a sea of molten gold. On its calm surface the blazing barque was mirrored, as though another was on fire below; but the perfect image was broken by occasional rippling, as if some living creatures were stirring through the water. The very intensity of the light, dazzling our eyes, prevented us from scanning the surface with any degree of minuteness. It was like looking against the sun as the bright orb rises or sets over the sea. The strong light glancing along the water produced a sheen and a sparkle that half-blinded us; and, although we had observed an occasional eddy or rippling motion upon the surface, we had not thought of the cause until that moment.

Now, however, that our attention was called to this moving of the waters we had no difficulty in making out the cause. It was the sharks that were darting about – now rushing impatiently from point to point; now lying in wait, silent and watchful, like cats, ready to spring upon their prey. Here and there we could see their huge dorsal fins standing like gaff-topsails above the surface, now cleaving the water like huge blades of steel, anon dipping below to appear again at some point nearer to their expected prey.

From the number of these fins that we observed above water, we came to the conclusion that there must be hundreds of these

voracious creatures around the blazing barque. In fact there was a perfect “school” of them, like porpoises or minnows – for the longer we gazed the greater number of fins and rippling eddies were detected, until at times it appeared as if the whole surface was thickly covered with these preying fish!

Their numbers, too, seemed to be continually increasing. On looking out to sea others might be noticed swimming up, as if they had come from a distance. No doubt that red conflagration was a signal that summoned them from afar. Like enough the sight was not new to them – it was not the first time they had witnessed the burning of a ship and had been present at the spectacle; before now they had assisted at the dénouement, and were ever after ready to welcome such a catastrophe, and hasten towards it from afar.

I really could not help thinking that these monsters of the deep possessed some such intelligence, as they swam around the fated barque – casting towards it their ogreish expecting looks.

They came around the raft as well – indeed, they appeared to be thicker there than elsewhere – as though we who stood upon it were to be the prey that would first fall into their ravenous jaws. So thick were they, that two or three could be seen side by side, swimming together as though they were yoked; and at each moment they grew bolder and came nearer to the timbers. Some already swam so close to the raft, that they were within reach of a blow from the handspikes, but not any one attempted to touch them. On the contrary, the word was passed round for no one to

strike or assail them in any way. Just then they were doing good work; they were to be let alone!

Little as the sailors would have liked to see such shoals of these dreaded creatures at any other time – for between sailor and shark there is a constant antipathy – just then the sight was welcome to them. They knew that they themselves were out of reach of the hideous monsters; and at a glance they had comprehended the advantage they were deriving from their presence. They saw that they were the guardians of the raft – and that, but for them, the blacks would long since have taken to the water and followed it. The fear of the sharks alone restrained them; and no wonder it did, for the whole surface of the sea between the blazing vessel and the raft now seemed alive with these horrid creatures!

It was no longer wondered at that the negroes had not precipitated themselves into the water and swam after us. It would have been a bold leap for any of them to have taken – a leap, as it were, into the very jaws of death.

And, yet, death was behind them – death quick and sure, and, perhaps, of all others the most painful – death by fire. In setting the poor wretches free, I had been under the humane impression that I had given them the easier alternative of being drowned. I now saw that I was mistaken. No such alternative was in their power. There was no longer a choice between burning and drowning. It now lay between burning and being devoured by the sharks!

Chapter Fifty Nine

An awful alternative it was, and for a long while the ill-starred victims seemed to linger in their choice. Hard choice between two horrid forms of death! Little did it matter which, and the knowledge of this rendered them indifferent whether to spring forth or stand still. Death was before them as well as behind – turn which way they might, death stared them in the face – soon and certain – and on every side they saw its threatening arm – before, behind, above, and around them. The utter hopelessness of escape had numbed their energies – they were paralysed by despair.

But even in the hour of the most hopeless despair there arrives a crisis when men will still struggle for life – it is the last struggle – the final conflict as it were, with death itself. No one yields up life without this effort, though it be ever so idle. The drowning man does not voluntarily permit himself to sink below the surface. He still strives to keep afloat, though he may not have the slightest hope of being rescued. The effort is partly involuntary – it is the body that still continues to battle for life, after the mind has resigned all hope – the last stand that existence makes against annihilation. It may be a purely mechanical effort – perhaps it is so – but who ever saw a strong man compelled to part suddenly with life, that did not make such a struggle? Even the condemned criminal upon the gallows continues to strive till the breath has

parted from his body. Something like this last despairing effort aroused the energies of that hesitating crowd that clustered upon the burning barque. The crisis at length came.

The flames were fast rushing forward, and spreading over all the deck. Their red jets, spurting out beyond the selvage of smoke, began to touch the bodies of their victims, and pain them with the fierce sting of fire. It produced no augmentation in their cries of agony. These had long since reached the climax, and the voices of those who uttered them had been already raised to their highest pitch. But the close proximity of the flames, and the absolute certainty of being now destroyed by them, caused a general movement throughout the living mass; and, as if actuated by an universal impulse, or guided by one common instinct, all were seen making a sudden descent upon the water.

Those who had been hitherto standing along the side were not the first to leap. It was they who were farther back, and of course nearer to the flames, who first took to the water; and these, rushing over the bulwarks – and even stepping upon the shoulders of those who were clustered there – without further hesitation flung themselves headlong into the sea. But the impulse seemed to communicate itself to the others, and almost instantaneously – as if some one had proclaimed a way to safety and was leading them on to it – the whole crowd followed the foremost and went plunging into the water. In a few seconds not an individual could be seen – of all that dark swarm that had so lately crowded the fore-part of the vessel, not one was now visible on board.

Simultaneously had they deserted the burning wreck!

A wild scene was now presented in the water. The whole surface was thick with human forms, plunging and struggling together. Some were evidently unable to swim, and, with their bodies half erect, were tossing their arms about in vain efforts to keep above the surface. Here and there several clung together, until two or three – or in some instances larger groups – dragged one another below, and sank to the bottom together. Strong swimmers were observed separating from the rest, and forging out into the open water. Of these the heads only could be seen, and rapidly closing upon them the dark vertical fin that told the presence of the pursuing shark.

Then could be heard the wild, despairing cry – then could be seen the quick rush of the monster upon his prey – the water lashed by his tail – the foam thrown up, already tinged with the blood of the victim – and, after that, the surface returning to its level – the eddies and red frothing bubbles alone marking for a few moments the scene of each tragical crisis.

Oh! it was an awful spectacle to look upon – this wholesale ravaging of sharks – and even those who were upon the raft, with all their inhumanity and heartless cruelty of disposition could not behold it without emotion.

It was scarce an emotion of pity, however. Perhaps of all, Brace and I were the only ones who felt pity. Some were indifferent, but the majority of them – although a little awed by the tragical scene – were actually glad at beholding it! It

may be wrong of me to say they were glad – what I mean is, that they felt a secret satisfaction at what was going on – springing not from pure wanton cruelty of heart, but rather from an instinct of self-preservation. Hitherto, these men had been in great dread of the blacks overtaking the raft – they were not yet free from the fear – and, of course, with this in their minds, they regarded with satisfaction the wholesale ravage that the sharks were committing. By this their own danger was every moment diminished – hence it is that they were gratified at the hideous spectacle.

But numerous as were the sharks, there were not enough of them to make total destruction of that vast crowd of human beings. After the first general attack the ravenous brutes appeared to become scarcer and scarcer, until but one here and one there, could be seen rushing upon their prey. The greater number, having already secured a victim, were satisfied and perhaps had gone down to their haunts in the darker deep – while hundreds of human heads were still observable above the surface of the water.

The flames, still flaring brilliantly, illumined the sea as if the day was shining upon it; and it could be observed that the faces of the survivors were all turned in the direction of the raft, towards which they were swimming with all their strength.

Once more the sailors became inspired with apprehension – once more they dreaded that their last hour was come, and that they themselves might soon be struggling among the sharks.

Chapter Sixty

There was much shouting among the white men and many wild exclamations, but no time was lost in idle talk – for every one was doing his best to propel the raft. The shouts were only an accompaniment to their actions. Nearly every one wielded some implement, which had been grappled in the hurry of the moment. Some were provided with oars, others had only handspikes, and still others assisted in paddling with pieces of board that had been obtained from old coops, or the bulwarks broken by the falling mast. Those who could find nothing better stretched themselves along the edge of the raft and beat the water with their hands, in order to aid in producing a forward motion.

But the great masses of timber – not yet firmly lashed together – lay loose and loggish upon the water, and moved very slowly and irregularly under such ill-assorted propulsion: and, notwithstanding that the raft had obtained a hundred yards the start of the swimmers, its occupants began seriously to dread being overtaken.

They had reason to fear it. There could be no doubt that the pursuers were gaining upon us, and this soon became evident to all upon the raft. Nay, more, they were gaining rapidly; and, at the rate at which they were swimming, five minutes could not pass before they would overtake us.

Those upon the raft were now quite conscious that such would

be the event. Paddle and beat the water as they might they could not propel the heavy timbers beyond a certain rate of speed – not so fast as a man could swim. Notwithstanding their exertions, and the advantage of their long start, they saw they were going to be overtaken.

It could not be otherwise – there was nothing now to obstruct the pursuit – nothing to stay the pursuers. The sharks, having sated their appetites, had let most of the swimmers escape. Occasionally one was seen to go down with a shriek, but this was the exception – the rest swam freely on.

What was their motive in following us? was it vengeance, or a despairing hope of being saved? Perhaps both, – but no matter which, there were enough of them to overpower the white men by sheer strength; and, once they succeeded in reaching us, it was not likely they would fail to avenge themselves for the wrongs that had been put upon them.

Should they succeed in overtaking the raft they would easily climb upon it; a few might be kept back, but it would be impossible for thirty men to repulse hundreds; and the crowd would soon crawl over the edge, and, with their additional weight, sink the frail structure to the bottom of the sea.

Should they succeed in reaching the raft – there was no need of any supposition – they would be certain to overtake it – even at that moment there were some of them scarce ten yards off, and coming nearer at every fresh stroke of their arms. These, however, were the strongest swimmers, who were far ahead of

the rest. The main body were still twenty yards further off; but it was plain that the slowest of them swam faster than the raft was moving.

Most of the sailors began to give way to despair. The wicked deeds of an ill-spent life were rising before them. To all appearance their last hour had come.

And mine, too – at least, so believed I at that moment.

It was hard to die thus – by such horrid means, and in such company. Sound in health, the love of life was strong within me; and under this impulse I almost repented what I had done. It was I who had brought about this last terrible contingency, and my own life was now to be the forfeit. Yes; I had acted imprudently, rashly, and I will not deny that at that moment I came near repenting of what I had done.

It was not a time for reflection. The crisis had arrived. We must all yield up life. The sea would soon receive us within its ample embrace. Masters and slaves, tyrants and their victims, must all perish together!

Such were the thoughts that were rushing through my brain, as I saw the black swimmers approach. I no longer felt sympathy or pity for them. On the contrary, I viewed them as enemies – as dreaded monsters who were about to destroy and devour us – to engulf us all in one common destruction, and among the rest myself – their late benefactor. Really, at that moment, in the confusion of my thoughts, I was regarding these unfortunate creatures as though they were voluntary agents – as though they

were actuated by gratuitous cruelty and revenge, and not victims of despair struggling for the preservation of their own lives.

My senses had become confused; my reasoning faculties had forsaken me; and, in common with those around me, I regarded the pursuers as enemies!

Under this impression – false though it may have been – I was the less disposed to sympathise with them, when I saw the first who came near the raft beaten back by the oars and handspikes of the sailors; for to this it had now come.

It was a cruel scene that followed. I took no part in it. Though ever so desirous that my life should be saved, I could never have gone to such extremes to preserve it. I was but a looker-on.

I saw the foremost swimmers struck upon the head, or pushed away by violent “jabbing” from the oars and handspikes. I saw some disappear below the surface, as if they had gone to the bottom under the blow, while others, not injured, swam off, and then circled round as if to get ahead of us.

Though the fierce, angry shouts, and the still fiercer actions of the white men intimidated the foremost swimmers, these demonstrations did not drive them away. They only kept out of reach of the oars and handspikes, but still followed on. Indeed, they no longer followed; for the raft was no longer in motion; the rowers had enough to do without propelling it further, and it had now come to a stand still!

Chapter Sixty One

It soon became evident that the foremost swimmers, who had been for the moment repulsed, had no intention of turning back. Why should they? Behind them they had left no hope – not a plank to cling to – only a ship on fire blazing upward to the skies and now almost hid under the flames. Even she, before they could reach her, would be burned down to the water's edge. Why should they think of swimming back? No; the raft was the only thing upon the whole face of that wide sea upon which human foot might now find a resting-place. Though it would be but a straw among so many, at that straw had they determined to clutch, so long as life remained.

They had no design of leaving us, but now swam round and round the floating spars, evidently waiting until their main body could come up, so that all might rush forward together and get possession of the raft.

This was plainly their intention: and, knowing it, the white men were fast yielding to despair.

Not all of them. There were some of those rough men who still preserved their presence of mind; and in that perilous hour, when all hope appeared to have vanished, these men suddenly hit upon a plan to save the raft, and the lives of those upon it, from the apparently inevitable fate that threatened them.

I was, myself, in a state of half-stupor. I had watched the

movements of the poor wretches in the water till my head grew giddy, and I scarce knew what was going on around me. My face was turned towards the blazing ship, and I had not for a long while looked elsewhere. I heard the sailors ejaculating loudly, and shouting words of encouragement; but I supposed they were encouraging each other to repel the attack of the swimmers, who were now on all sides of the raft, forming a sort of irregular ring around it, of several feet in depth. I was expecting that we would soon be sinking into the sea! I was stupefied, and I thought I was dreaming.

All of a sudden I was aroused from my stupor by hearing a loud huzza. It came from the sailors behind me. I could not tell its meaning till I turned round, and then, to my surprise, I saw a piece of sail spread out transversely across the raft, and held by several men in a vertical position. There was one at each end and one in the middle, who, with their arms extended upward, held the sail as high as they could reach.

For what purpose were they doing this? I needed not ask the question. I saw that there was wind blowing against the canvas. I felt the breeze upon my cheeks.

I looked back to the water. I saw that the raft was moving rapidly through it. There was a rushing along the edge of the timbers – there was froth where the spars were cleaving the sea. I looked for the swimmers. I saw their round heads and grim faces, but no longer around the raft – they were already in its wake, every moment falling further away. Merciful heaven! at

least from that terrible fate were we saved.

I kept gazing behind. I still saw the dark heads above the water. I could no longer distinguish their faces. I thought they had turned them away. I thought they were swimming back toward the blazing barque.

They may have turned back, but with what hope? They could have had none; though despair may have driven them in that direction as well as any other.

It was a sad beacon to guide them; nor did it serve them long. They could not have got near it – not half-way – before that event, so dreaded by Brace and myself, came to pass. The crisis had at length arrived.

Wherever the powder had been kept, it was long before the fire had reached it – far longer than we had expected; but the searching flames found it at last, and the concussion came.

It was a terrific explosion, that resembled not the report of a cannon, but a hundred guns simultaneously fired. Bed masses were projected far up into the heavens, and still farther out to the sea, hurtling and hissing as they fell back into the water. A cloud of fiery sparks hung for some minutes over the spot; but these at length came quivering down, and, as soon as they reached the surface, were observed no more. These sparks were the last that was seen of the *Pandora*.

The crew at this moment were awed into silence. There was silence far over the sea; yet for nearly another hour that silence was at intervals broken by the death-shriek of some exhausted

swimmer or some victim of the ravening shark.

The breeze still continued to blow, the raft moved on, and long before morning the *Pandora's* crew were carried far away from the scene of the terrible tragedy.

Chapter Sixty Two

The breeze died away before the morning, and when day broke there was not a breath stirring. The calm had returned, and the raft lay upon the water as motionless as a log.

The men no longer tried to propel it; it could have served no purpose to make way – since, go in what direction we might, there would be hundreds of miles of the ocean to be crossed, and to sail a raft over that long distance was not to be thought of.

Had there been a stock of provisions and water, sufficient to have lasted for weeks, then such an idea would have been more feasible; but there was nothing of this, and the idea of sailing in search of land was not entertained for a moment. The only hope was that a sail might appear in sight, that some ship might be passing across the ocean, and come sufficiently near to see us and pick us up. One and all were agreed that this was our only chance of being saved.

A cheerless chance it appeared when examined in all its bearings; so cheerless, indeed, that only the most sanguine of the party drew any hope from it. Notwithstanding the hundreds of thousands of ships that are constantly ploughing the mighty deep, and sailing from port to port, you will meet with but a very few of them on any long voyage you may make. You may go from England to the Cape of Good Hope, without seeing more than one or two sail during the whole passage! and yet that would be

travelling upon one of the great highways of the ocean – in the track of all the ships sailing to the vast world of the East Indies, and also to those prosperous commercial colonies of Australia, whose mercantile marine almost rivals that of England herself. Again, you may cross the Atlantic upon another great water-way – that between Liverpool and New York – and yet between one port and the other, you may see less than half-a-dozen sail, and sometimes only two or three, during the whole of your voyage. Vast and wide are the highways of the great ocean.

With a knowledge of these facts, but few of the men indulged in any very strong expectation of our coming in sight of a sail. We were in that very part of the Atlantic where the chances of such an encounter were few and far between. We were out of the line of navigation between any two great commercial countries; and although formerly Spanish vessels had travelled a good deal near the track we were in – in their intercourse with their South American colonies – this intercourse had been greatly diminished by revolution, and most of the traffic with these countries was now carried on in vessels belonging to the United States, and these were not likely to sail so far to the eastward as we were. Portuguese ships still traded to the Brazils in considerable numbers, and upon these we built most of our hopes – these and the chances that some ship engaged in the same traffic as the *Pandora* might be crossing westward with slaves, or returning for a fresh cargo. There was yet other vessels that occasionally navigated this part of the Atlantic – cruisers on

their way from the African coast to the Brazils, or warships from Gibraltar, going round the Horn into the Pacific, or passing from the Cape of Good Hope to the West Indies.

All these chances were eagerly brought forward by the men, and discussed with every circumstance of minuteness. Every point was produced that seemed to promise a hope of deliverance; for most, if not all, of these outlaws were seamen of experience, and well knew the ways of the ocean. Some held the opinion that our chances of being picked up were not so bad after all. There was a sail that could be rigged, by means of oars and handspikes, and spread out so as to be visible from afar. Some ship would be certain to come along and see us, and then all would be right again.

So talked those of more sanguine temperament; but the wiser ones shook their heads and doubted. They reasoned in an opposite strain, and made use of arguments, the force of which could not be denied, and which produced great discouragement. There are some who seem always to prefer exhibiting the darker side of the picture – perhaps not from any pleasure that it gives them to do so, but, by accustoming themselves to the worst view of the case they may be the better able to endure it when it comes. Otherwise, in the event of success, that they may derive all the greater enjoyment from the reaction.

These last alleged that the chances of meeting with any vessel in that solitary part of the ocean were slight, very slight indeed; that even if there were ships – hundreds of them – how could

they approach the raft during a calm? Of course the ships would be becalmed as they themselves were, and would have to remain so as long as the calm continued. This would be likely to last for weeks, and how were they to exist for weeks? How long would their provisions keep them alive? Not weeks; a few days perhaps, not more?

These remarks led to an immediate examination of the stock of provisions that had been brought away from the wreck; and every article on the raft was now turned up and scrutinised. Strange to say the only thing of which there was a tolerable supply was water. The large cask that had hitherto stood on deck – and which was still nearly half-full – was now upon the raft. It had been bunged up and rolled overboard, and then safely deposited among the spars, where it floated of itself. What water may have been carried away in the gig no one knew, but certain it was that the cask was still nearly half-full.

This discovery produced a momentary cheerfulness – for, in such cases, water is usually the most important consideration, and oftentimes the very one that is neglected.

But the joy was of short continuance; when every article upon the raft was overhauled, and every portion of it carefully searched, the only food that could be found was a small bag of biscuits – not enough to give two biscuits to each of us – not enough for a single meal!

This astounded intelligence was received with cries of chagrin and looks of dismay. Some shouted in anger. One half

recriminated the other. Some had been entrusted specially to provide the food. These alleged that a barrel of pork had been put upon the raft. Where was it? Certainly there was a barrel; but, on breaking it open, to the dismay of all, it proved to be a barrel of pitch!

A scene now ensued that it would be impossible to describe. Oaths, exclamations, and angry words passed freely, and the men almost came to blows. The pitch was thrown into the sea, and those who had put it upon the raft were threatened with a similar fate. Their negligence would prove fatal to all. But for them there might still have been a chance; but now, what hope? With two biscuits apiece, how long could they exist? Not three days without suffering the extreme of hunger. Ere a week should pass, one and all must perish!

The probability, nay, the positive certainty, of such a doom produced a scene of despondence – mingled with angry excitement on the part of those who called themselves “betrayed” – that it would be difficult to paint. Harsh revilings were freely used; and threats of throwing the delinquents into the sea continued to be uttered at intervals during the whole night.

There was still another barrel upon the raft, that had been better left upon the burning wreck. But it was not likely that it should be forgotten. Its contents were of a nature too highly prized by the sailor who fears death by drowning, or any other sudden or violent means. It is supposed to make death easy, and, therefore, the despairing wretch clings to it as a friend. It is a sad

resource, an awful termination to human existence; but often is it appealed to in the last moments of misery. I need not say that this barrel contained rum.

Whether it was the same that had been lowered into the long-boat with such pernicious effect I cannot say. Perhaps it was. It may have floated and been picked up again; or it may have been still another one, for among the stores of the ill-fated barque there was a plentiful supply of this horrible liquor. It constituted the chief “tipple” of the dissipated crew – the main source of their indulgence and bestial enjoyment. A vile cheap stuff it was, freely served out to them, scarce kept under lock and key; and there was not an hour in which one or other of them might not have been seen refreshing himself at this odious fountain. If the barrel of pork had been forgotten and left behind, here was a substitute; and the sight of this reeking cask, strange to say, produced a cheering effect upon numbers of those savage men. Many were heard proclaiming, in a sort of jocular bravado, that if the rum wouldn't keep them alive it would help them to die!

Chapter Sixty Three

As soon as day dawned every eye was bent upon the horizon. Not a point of the whole circle that was not scanned with the minutest earnestness by one and all. Round and round they turned, sweeping the surface with anxious glances, and raising themselves as high as they could in order to command the most distant view.

But all ended in disappointment. No sail was in sight; nothing that had life or motion; not even fish or fowl broke the monotony of that vast surface of sleeping water.

There were no signs of the gig: she must have rowed off in some different direction; no signs either of the wreck, the breeze had carried us far from it; but even had we remained near, there might have been seen no traces of it. All had long since gone to the bottom of the sea.

The sun rose higher and higher, and at noon stood right over our heads. We had no protection from his beams – they were almost hot enough to blister us.

The calm continued – there was not enough motion in the air to have wafted a feather, and the raft lay as still as if it had been aground. It only moved, when those who were on it passed from place to place.

There was not much changing about. There was no great room for it. There were in all thirty-four of us, and the bodies of the

men – some sitting and others lying – covered nearly the whole space. There was no reason for moving about. Most were sullen and despondent, and kept the places, they had first taken, without the energy to stir out of them. Others were of lighter heart, or, under the influence of the rum which they drank freely, were more noisy. Now and then there was wrangling among them.

The sea was frequently scanned, round and round, to the very borders of the sky.

This duty was neither forgotten nor overlooked. There was always some one rising to his feet and gazing outward, but only to return to his former position, with that disheartening look that proclaimed how vain his reconnoissance had been. Indeed, silence itself was a sufficient reply. No one would have discovered a sail, without making instant announcement of it.

At noon we were all suffering from thirst; they who had been regaling themselves with rum worse than any – for this is the sure result.

Water was served out from the cask – in equal quantity to each. It was agreed that all should share alike, both of the water and the bread – and of the former it was resolved that each should receive a pint a day. In any other situation the allowance might have been sufficient, and existence might be supported upon it; but under that broiling sun, that seemed to dry up the very blood in our veins, our thirst became almost insupportable, and the pint of water could be gulped down without affording the slightest relief. I am certain that half a gallon would scarce have

sufficed to quench my thirst. What rendered the pint of water still more insufficient was, that it was no longer cool water. The sun, basking down upon the cask that lay only half covered, had heated the staves – and, consequently, the water within – to such a degree, that the latter tasted as if half-way towards boiling. It may have checked the progress of thirst, but it did not alleviate the pain.

The water might have been kept cooler, by throwing the idle sail over the cask; but even this trifling precaution was not adopted.

The men were gradually giving away to despair – the torpor of despondency was fast laying hold upon them, and under this influence no one seemed to possess energy enough for any precaution – however easy it might have been.

As to the serving out of the food, that occupied only one act. To be put upon daily allowance out of such a store was altogether out of the question. A simple partition was all that was required, and the bag of biscuit was emptied out and its contents equally divided around. There proved to be two biscuits apiece, with a small surplus, and for this last the crew held a “raffle” – each time a single biscuit forming the prize. For these prizes the men contended with as much eagerness, as if there had been large sums of money staked on the result; and, indeed, it would have been a large sum that would have purchased one of those precious morsels of bread.

The “raffling,” combined with the “rum” – which was now

also meted out – produced for some time a noisy excitement. But this was soon over; and the sullen silence of despondency again ruled.

Some, already ravenous with hunger and reckless of consequences, ate their two biscuits at once – while others, endowed with greater prudence or stronger powers of endurance, only gnawed a small portion, and kept the rest towards a future and more pressing necessity.

Thus passed the time till near sunset, with no event to cheer us – no new prospect to beget a hope.

When near sunset, however, a grand excitement was produced, and all the sweet joys of hope were again felt.

One of the men who had arisen to his feet, and was gazing over the sea, suddenly cried out: —

“A sail – a sail!”

It would be impossible to describe the wild joy that these words produced – men leaped to their feet, vociferating glad huzzas as they repeated the words “a sail, a sail.” Some pulled off their hats and waved them in the air – some leaped and danced about as though frantic, and even the most despairing behaved as if suddenly called to a new life.

I have said it would be impossible to picture that scene; but still more impossible to describe the contrast which, but the moment after, might have been witnessed upon the raft, when it was ascertained that the cry was a false alarm. No sail was in sight – there had been none – nothing could be seen of ship or

sail over the wide circle of the ocean – nothing moved upon the glass-like face of that vast mirror.

A false alarm, entirely without foundation. Why the man had uttered it was soon explained. The wild expressions that were pouring from his lips, with the grotesque gestures he was making with his arms proved that he was mad!

Chapter Sixty Four

Yes, the man was mad. The awful occurrences of the preceding night had deprived him of his reason, and he was now a raving maniac.

Some cried out to throw him into the sea. No one opposed this counsel. It would have been carried into execution – for several were prepared to lay hold of him when the maniac, apparently well aware of their intention, scrambled back into his former position; and, cowering down, remained silent and scared-like. It was not probable he would harm any one – he was left alone.

The excitement of this incident soon passed away, and the gloomy looks returned – if possible, gloomier than before, for it is ever so after hopes have been raised that terminate in disappointment.

So passed the evening and a portion of the night.

At the same hour as upon the preceding night – almost the same minute – the breeze again sprung up. It could be of little service – since there was no chance of our being carried by it to land – but it was cool and refreshing after the intense torrid heat we had been all day enduring.

Some were for spreading the sail; others saw no use in it. “What good can it do?” inquired these. “It may carry us a score of miles hence, or perhaps twice that. What then? It won’t bring us in sight of land – nor a ship neither. We’re as likely to see one

by lying still. What's the use of moving about? If we haven't the wherewith to eat and must make a die of it, we may as well die here as a score of knots farther to leeward. Set your sail if you will – we won't either hinder or help.”

Such language was used by the despairing part of the crew.

There were those who thought that by sailing, we should be more likely to fall in with a vessel. They thought they could not be worse, and might drift to a better place, where ships were more frequent – though they acknowledged that there were equal chances of their going away out of the track.

The truth is, that not one knew within hundreds of miles of where we were, and to sail in any course would have been mere guess-work.

By men in misery, however, motion is always preferred to rest; and the knowledge that you are going, and going forward, produces a soothing influence on the spirits. It begets a hope that you will come in sight of something that may aid you; and these hopes, however ill-founded, enable you to pass the time more lightly. On the contrary, by remaining in one fixed place, for a like period of time, you fret and chafe much more under the uncertainty.

With this feeling upon them, most of the men were in favour of bending the sail, and it was accordingly bent.

The night before it had been held aloft by several of the men – as the only object then had been to get the raft beyond reach of the swimmers. When that end was accomplished, the sail had

been allowed to drop, and the raft had drifted a good distance without it.

To-night, however, a mast was raised – or rather, a pair of them – consisting of oars and handspikes spliced together – and between the two the canvas was extended, without yard, gaff, or boom. There was no design to manoeuvre the sail. It was just spread like a blanket, transversely to the raft, and left for the breeze to blow upon it as it listed. When this was done the raft was left to its own guidance, and, of course, drifted to leeward as fast as it could make way – apparently at the rate of three or four knots an hour.

The men once more resumed their recumbent positions, and all remained silent. Some fell asleep, and snored as though they were happy! Others slept, but their dream-talking told of troubled visions – recalling, maybe, dark scenes of guilt. A few seemed to lie awake all the live-long night – at intervals tossing about, as though kept on the alert by thirst, hunger, or the apprehension of approaching death.

Brace and I sat close together. We still occupied the slight raft he had made – as there was but little room upon the other – and this one, now forming part of the whole structure, was as good a position as we could have chosen – in fact the best, as the sequel proved.

There was a sail upon it – the jib or flying jib, I know not which – and a piece of old tarpauling; and these, spread over the planks, kept them together, and gave us a softer bed to recline

upon.

We conversed together at times, though not often. Now and then the brave sailor had endeavoured to cheer me by holding out hopes – but so hopeless had our situation now become that he at length desisted. He felt that it would be only mockery to hold out the slightest prospect of our deliverance. He, too – the bravest of all that blind – was fast surrendering himself to despair.

The breeze died away before daybreak, just as on the previous night – and another morning came, but showed no sail on all that boundless sea.

Another hot sun rose and circled overhead through the same cloudless heaven, and set red and fiery as ever.

There passed another night, and once more the wind carried us through the water; and then several other days and nights – I ceased to count them – came and went with almost the same monotonous routine, varied only by bickerings among the men – sometimes most fiendish quarrels, in which knives were drawn and used almost with fatal effect.

Strange time for disagreement and deadly conflict!

Even wild animals – the fiercest beasts of prey – when under the influence of a common danger will yield up the ferocity of their nature. Not so these wicked men – their vile passions in this dread hour seemed only to become stronger and more malignant!

Their quarrels were about the merest trifles – the serving out of the water, the rum, the supposition of some one that he was not getting fair play in his allowance – but so frequent had they

become, that they themselves grew to be a monotony. Every hour a fierce brawl disturbed the deep repose and otherwise breathless silence that characterised the intervals between.

If these incidents had grown monotonous and no longer failed to interest me, there was one upon the eve of occurring that was well calculated to produce within me an interest of the most powerful kind – calculated to stir my soul to its very utmost emotion.

I have said that this incident was on the eve of occurring – it was a hideous purpose already matured, though kept secret from my companion and myself. Neither Brace nor I had the slightest suspicion of it until the hour in which it was openly declared.

Chapter Sixty Five

It was probably on the sixth day after parting from the wreck – though I am not certain about the day – that the horrid design reached its development. It had been hatching for a while before, and upon that day came to a crisis.

It was now several days since food had been tasted by any one – the two biscuits each had been long since eaten – most of them at the moment of being given out. Of course every one upon the raft was suffering the pangs of hunger, and had been enduring them until the appetite had reached the extremity of painfulness.

Some looked emaciated, with eyes deeply sunken, and cheeks bony and hollow. Others, strange to say, had a fat, bloated appearance; but this must have arisen from swelling, or some unnatural cause – it could not be that famine had given them flesh. All – one and all – had that peculiar expression about the eyes, and around the mouth, that may be noticed in the visage of a hungry dog, or still more perceptibly in a half-starved wolf.

About this period there seemed to be some secret intelligence among them – not all of them – but among those who acted as leaders – for even in their reduced condition, there were those of stronger body and more energetic spirit, who maintained a sort of leadership over the rest. What this intelligence was I could not tell, nor indeed, should I have taken notice of the indications of its existence, had it not been for what occurred afterwards. I

observed them now and then whispering to one another; as they did so casting side-glances towards Brace and myself. At other times I caught now one, and now another, gazing upon me, and with a wild wolfish look, that rendered me, though I could not tell why, singularly uneasy. I noticed that they appeared as if they did not like to be detected while thus looking at me; and ever as I returned their glances they suddenly lowered their eyes or averted their faces. They then appeared as men who have been detected in some mean or guilty action.

As it appeared to me that they looked in a similar manner at my companion, and at one another as well, I fancied that the strange expression that had struck me must be one characteristic of extreme hunger, and I thought no more about it.

On the following day, however, I observed that the whispering among them increased; and was accompanied with a greater variety of gesticulation and excitement.

Brace also noticed it, and guessed better than I what all this freemasonry meant – at least he was nearer the truth, for he was still ignorant of the full purpose of those ruffian conspirators.

He whispered to me what he supposed they were after – with the design of breaking the terrible truth to me as gently as possible. But I had now better than half divined it, and his communication did not startle me.

“Some one got to die, lad. I s’pose they’re talkin’ o’ castin’ lots who it’ll be – well, we must take our chance along with the rest.”

Just as Brace had finished his speech one of the men rose up

upon the raft; and, calling the attention of the others, begged to make a proposal to them.

The speech by which he introduced his proposal was brief, indeed, and to the point. In fact, he came to the proposition almost at once, which was simply – that one of the party must die to save the rest – that they had still water – but no food; and all must perish unless they could eat – that they could not eat unless —

But I cannot repeat the dread arguments which he made use of, brief though they were – for his speech was short, and, having delivered it, he sat down again.

There was a short pause, and then another rose and addressed the crowd. This man coincided in the views of him who had spoken, and added to the proposal a suggestion for carrying it out – that was, that the one who was to die should be chosen by lot. This, of course, both Brace and myself expected. It was not likely that any one was going to volunteer.

What was my terror, and the anger and alarm of my companion, when one of the strongest and most brutal of the whole crew – the ruffian Le Gros – rose up, and in a loud and serious tone, not only objected to drawing lots, but proposed me for the victim!

Brace sprang instantly to his feet, and uttered a cry of indignation. It was expected that this cry would have been echoed by the others; and with almost any other band of men upon the face of the earth or the face of the ocean, such would have been

the reception of the foul proposal.

But both my companion and I soon perceived, with dismay, that there came no such echo from that ruffian crew. On the contrary, several backed the proposal itself, and in such majority – I might almost say unanimity, that it was plain that most of the men who spoke had already predetermined the case. It was evident, from their prompt acquiescence, that they had been prepared for it; and this accounted for that mysterious whispering that had been carried on during the preceding day. Some few, evidently, had not been in the secret; but these were weak individuals, whose opposition would not have been regarded, and who, indeed, appeared ready enough to chime in with the majority.

The French bully went on to justify his proposition by argument. We were not all equal, he said – there were able seamen – and common sailors – and I was but a boy. Why should I have a chance like the rest? It was preposterous.

Brace opposed his arguments – appealed to the crew – to their sense of justice and fair play – let lots be cast, said he, and let him take his chance with the rest – that was the only fair and honest mode – the only way worthy of men.

Bah! these were not men. One and all were but too glad to grasp at any means that would deliver them from the perilous raffle. The sophistic arguments of Le Gros satisfied them. The infamous motion prevailed. It was decreed that I should die!

Chapter Sixty Six

Yes – it was decreed that I should die.

The time and the mode alone remained to be determined; but these points were soon settled. For the former it was to be then – instantly – and as to the mode, I was to be bled to death!

These resolves were made with a despatch that allowed no time for reflection – scarcely time for speech or protestation. The ferocious wolves were eager for their prey.

It was their determination to act promptly to the time; for, without further hesitation, half-a-dozen of the most forward in the business advanced towards me – evidently with the intent to put their design into execution!

And, beyond a doubt, they would have done it – had I been alone and unprotected – beyond a doubt they would have killed and eaten me! But I was not alone – I was not without a protector. As the fierce cannibals advanced, Brace sprang between them and me, and drawing his clasp-knife, threatened to cut down the first who should lay a finger upon me.

“Off!” cried he, “off, you cowardly swabs! Lay your hand upon the lad, and I’ll make mince-meat o’ ye. He may be the first to be eaten, but he arn’t the first that’ll die for it – there’s more than one o’ ye’ll have to kick the bucket afore he does. Blowed if thar arn’t! So now ye cowardly hounds! come on if you dare.”

The dastards, cowed by the intrepid bearing of Brace, halted

in their advance and hung back – though no one of them ventured a reply. They seemed to have been taken by surprise; for although they knew that Brace opposed the design, they had no idea he would attempt to struggle against the whole crew. Surprise, therefore, held them back, mingled with some little fear – for the determined attitude which Brace had taken, and the shining blade of his knife, promised death to some of them; and, as each feared it might be himself, no one desired to be the foremost.

I had thrown myself alongside my brave protector, resolving to do battle and die by his side – though not much could my puny arm have effected against the host of strong ferocious men who assailed us. Still it would be better to die thus, than to be butchered in cold blood; and under this belief I nerved myself for the encounter.

At this crisis a change appeared to take place in the attitude of my companion: some new thought had struck him; and, waving his hand in a peculiar manner – which signified to our antagonists that he had some proposal to make – he succeeded in obtaining silence. He then addressed them as follows: – “Comrades! arn’t it too bad there should be quarrelling atween us at such a time as this, when we’re all in trouble alike?”

Brace’s late tone of defiance had changed to one of half entreaty, and it was evident he was about to propose some compromise. Indeed, it would have been madness in him to have carried the conflict farther, as it could only have resulted in the death of us both.

“Comrades!” he continued, “it’s a dreadful thing to die, but I know that some one must be made a sacrifice for the rest, and that are better than we should all go. Ye must know then when this thing happens it be the usual way to draw lots about it.”

“We shan’t have it that way!” cried one, adding to his response the emphasis of an oath.

“Well, then,” continued Brace, without losing his pacific demeanour, “since you’re agreed that it shan’t be that way, and that the boy must be the first, and since you’re all agreed to it, it’s no use o’ me standin’ in the way. I agree to it wi’ the rest.”

I was startled at the words, and involuntarily turned my eyes upon the face of the speaker. Was he serious? was he really about to give me up? to surrender me into the hands of those ruthless men?

He took no notice of me; and his unflinching attitude, and glance still bent in the same direction, told me that he had not yet done speaking.

“But,” said he after pause, “with these conditions.”

“What conditions?” asked several, interrupting him.

“Why only this,” replied Brace, “that the boy be let live till the morning. I only ask for him till the sun rises; and then if there be no sail in sight, ye can do as ye please. It’s only fair the lad should have a chance for his life; and if you don’t agree to give him this chance,” continued the speaker, once more placing himself in a determined attitude, “if you don’t, then all I’ve got to say is, that I’ll fight for the lad as long as I can stand over him, and if he be

first ate he won't be first killed – that I can promise ye. Now?"

Brace's speech produced the desired effect. His auditory, though reluctantly, agreed to the proposal. Even those heartless fiends could not help acknowledging that it was no more than fair; but, perhaps, the determined and resolute bearing of my protector – as he stood, drawn up and ready, with that keen blade shining in his strong, firm grasp – had more influence upon their decision than any feeling of fair play.

Whether or not, the reprieve was granted; and those who had been menacing my life drew back – though still muttering their discontent – and shrunk once more into their places.

Chapter Sixty Seven

I can ill describe the emotions that agitated my bosom. Though delivered from the terror of immediate death, there was nothing in the respite to give me any feeling of joy. It would be only a short procrastination of my doom, for certainly in the morning I must die. The slender chances of our seeing a sail were scarce worth contemplating; and I derived no consolation by dwelling upon such a contingency.

My fate, therefore, I looked upon as sealed. My protector could not save me. He had done the utmost in his power, in procuring the reprieve that was to give me this slight chance for my life. If it failed, he would undoubtedly have to keep his word and surrender me up.

I felt as the condemned criminal whose hour of execution has been fixed, and who knows it – with perhaps, only the difference that I could look forward to the event with a clear conscience. I felt not as a criminal, but a victim – a martyr among ruffians.

Of course I thought not of sleep – all sleep was banished from my eyelids. With such a prospect before me how could I sleep? Sadly at that crisis did I think of home, of parents, and kindred. Bitterly did I repent that I ever ran away to sea!

Alas! like many others who have acted disobediently and rashly – my experience had been too dearly purchased – my repentance came too late.

To-morrow by sunrise must I die; and oh! such a dreadful doom! My fate would never be known; for, though I was made a sacrifice, it was not likely that my executioners would long survive me. The chances that any of them would ever reach land were slight indeed; and, even if they should, it was not likely they would ever divulge that secret. I should never more be heard of; neither friends or kindred would ever know my sad fate, and it would be better that they should not. Oh! it was a dreadful doom!

Suffering under such reflections, I lay stretched along the plank; my protector was still by my side – so near that our shoulders touched, and our heads were close together – I could have heard anything he might have said, though uttered only in a whisper; but for a long time he did not address a word to me. He appeared to be busied with his own thoughts – as if buried in some deep cogitation – and did not desire to be spoken to. Noticing this, I too remained silent.

The night came down and promised to be dark, most of the preceding nights had been very clear, as there had been moonlight and scarce a cloud in the sky for weeks before. On this day, however, and particularly towards the close of it, black clouds had shown themselves above the horizon, and although the sea was still under a calm, it appeared as if some change was at hand.

After the sun had set, these clouds rose higher and higher – until a black pall of them covered the whole firmament, completely shrouding the moon, and, not only hiding her from

our eyes, but hindering her beams from casting their light over the sea.

The surface of the water, instead of glittering around us, as it had done upon preceding nights, was now of a grey, gloomy complexion – for it reflected the colour of the clouds that hung over it. Both wore fit emblems of my own sad spirit.

Almost mechanically I remarked to my companion this change in the heavens, and spoke about the darkness of the night.

“So much the better, lad,” was his laconic reply, and he again relapsed in silence, as if he did not desire to be led into conversation.

I lay for awhile pondering upon his reply. How was it better? – what signified the darkness? – what advantage could be gained by that? A dark night could not bring ships upon the sea; nor could it save me from the doom that had been decreed. The sun would rise all the same; and at his rising I must die! The darkness could not avail me! What could he mean?

I pondered a long while upon his answer, but could not make out its signification. Had he intended it as a phrase of encouragement – something to hold out a hope to me – something to cheer me? for indefinitely it had this effect – or was the answer given mechanically and without thought?

The former I dared not hope. Since the moment in which my respite had been granted, he had not spoken nor offered a word of hope, for certain was I that he had none to offer. What then meant he by the words he had just uttered – “So much the better,

lad?"

I would at length have asked him; but, just as I had made up my mind to do so, I perceived that he was twisting himself about, and before I could speak to him, he had turned his head away – so that he could no longer have heard me in a whisper. Not desirous that others should overhear the question I was about to put to him, I remained silent and waited for a better opportunity.

Chapter Sixty Eight

It had now grown extremely dark – so much so that I could scarce distinguish the form of my companion, though he was close by me – and the great raft itself with the bodies reclining upon it, was only distinguishable as a shapeless black mass. I could perceive the spread sail better than anything else, as this was of a whitish colour and stood up outlined against the gloomy grey of the sky.

But, dark as it was, I noticed that Brace on turning away from me had his knife clasped in his hand, with the blade still open and ready for use! What could he intend with this?

All at once it occurred to me that he suspected something – that he was apprehensive that the ruffians might not desire to wait for the morning as agreed – but might attempt to carry out their purpose in the night; and under this suspicion he had placed himself between them and me – determined to keep guard over me. The position he had taken gave colour to this supposition, and the attitude he was in almost confirmed it.

As I have before stated, Brace and I still occupied the floating planks which we had bound together, and these were attached to the raft at what might be called its stern – that is, when the raft moved through the water by means of sail, our position was behind, and in the wake. Now, as my companion had turned himself, he lay with his head towards the raft, and, as I thought, in

a half-crouching attitude – though the pitchy darkness prevented me from being sure of this. At all events he was so placed, that any one attempting to approach me must first pass over his body; and, therefore, did I believe – seeing the knife in his grasp – that his object was to guard me.

I have said that it had now grown extremely dark; but in addition to this I perceived that the breeze had arisen – just about the same hour as on other nights. This night, however, it was much fresher than before – so fresh that the raft swept briskly along – making a rushing noise in the water, and leaving a foamy track behind her.

Lulled into a kind of stupor, I lay for some time listening to this noise; and was only aroused from my reverie by observing that the sound of the water became all at once less loud and distinct – as though the raft was moving more gently through the sea – then I ceased to hear it altogether!

Surely, thought I, the sail has come down, and the raft is no longer in motion.

I lay for a while listening attentively; to my surprise I could still distinguish the sound of rushing water; but it now appeared as if at some distance, and every moment getting further away!

I was about to spring up and seek an explanation of this strange phenomenon, when a wild cry came pealing across the water, followed by a confused noise of loud voices.

“We are saved!” thought I, “some ship is near!” and I actually shouted these words, as I sprang up from my recumbent attitude.

“Yes,” replied a voice, which I knew to be that of Brace, “we’re saved from them anyhow – yonder they go, the cowardly swabs! they don’t catch us, while this breeze lasts – that they don’t.”

To my astonishment I now perceived that Brace and I were alone; and, far in the shadowy darkness, I could just make out the white sail of the raft still scudding away before the breeze!

There was no mystery about it. Brace had cut the ropes that had bound our planks to the raft, and had silently permitted them to drop astern. That was what he had been doing with his knife!

Of course the wind, acting upon the sail, had soon carried the great raft far out of reach, and it was now several hundred yards to leeward of us. The darkness had prevented any of the crew from noting what was passing; but they had at length discovered our escape, as their wild shouts and angry vociferations testified. We could hear them calling us by name, at the same time uttering threats and cries of disappointed rage.

“Don’t fear them any more,” coolly remarked my companion, “can’t reach us with that slow craft – we can row faster than they can swim. But best make sure, however – the farther we’re from ’em the better – lay hold, lad! here’s an oar for you – pull with all your might!”

I took the oar as my companion directed, and commenced rowing. I saw that Brace had another oar – which he had managed to bring away from the raft – and under the two blades our little craft was propelled rapidly through the water. Of course we rowed right into the wind’s eye – for by so doing we took the

opposite direction to that in which the crew was carried.

For a long time we continued to hear their wild, hoarse cries behind us; but the voices grew fainter and fainter, as the raft drifted to leeward; and at length we could hear them no more.

We rowed on till morning light; and then resting from our toil, we stood up, and scanned the surface of the sea.

There was no sail in sight – no object of any kind.

The raft had disappeared behind the convex swell of the water; – we were alone upon the ocean!

Reader! I might describe other scenes of peril, through which my brave companion and I passed, before that joyful hour, when our eyes rested upon the white sails of a ship – a strong, fine ship that lifted us from the bosom of the ocean, and carried us once more to land – ay, even to our native land. I shall not weary you with the details. Suffice it to say, that we were rescued – else how could I be living to tell the tale?

Yes – I still live, and so does my companion – both of us still follow the sea, but no longer under the rule of an arbitrary tyrant such as the captain of the *Pandora*. No! we are both captains ourselves – I of an East Indiaman; and Ben the master – and part owner, too – of a fine barque in the African trade – a barque quite equal to the *Pandora*.

But not that African trade – no. My old friend is an honest dealer. His merchandise is not black men, but yellow gold-dust, white ivory, palm-oil, and ostrich plumes; and after each “trip” to the African coast, Ben – as I have been given to understand

– makes a “trip” to the Bank of England, and there deposits a very considerable sum of money. I rejoice in his prosperity, and I have no doubt that you, reader, will do the same.

We are not ignorant of the fate of the slaver’s crew. Not one of them, either those in the gig or on the raft, ever again saw the shore. They perished upon the face of the wide ocean – miserably perished, without hand to help or eye to weep over them. No eye beheld them but that of the Omnipotent – no hand but His was near; and it was near – for it was the hand of God that avenged their victims!

The End