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Full Book-Length Novels

The Man Who Was Thursday (A Nightmare) G. K. Chesterton 8

Deliberately he placed himself in a terrorists' grim game, to be the sport of the invisible, frightful master mind he knew as "Sunday." Could he find out the secret of the network of destruction in which both Law and Anarchy were pawns—and of the Seven Men whose hobby was Death?

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The Ghost Pirates William Hope Hodgson 88

"Strange as the glimmer of the ghostly light
That shines from some vast crest of wave at night."

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Features

The Readers' Viewpoint 6

In the Next Issue 119

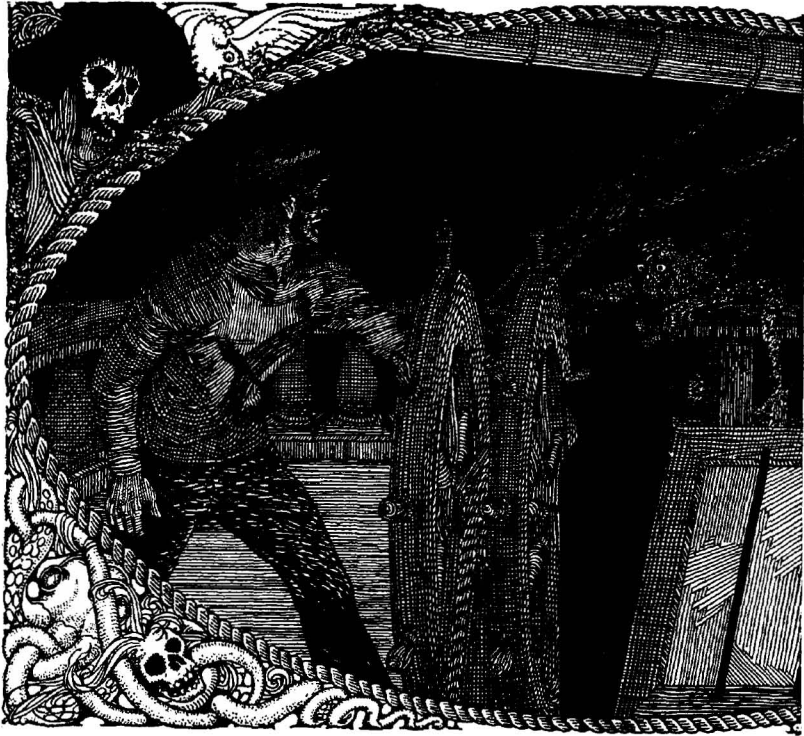
A. Merritt—A Tribute 86

The Second Finlay Portfolio 95

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*“Strange as the glimmer of the ghastly light
That shines from some vast crest of wave at
night.”*

CHAPTER I

THE FIGURE OUT OF THE SEA

HE BEGAN without any circumlocution.

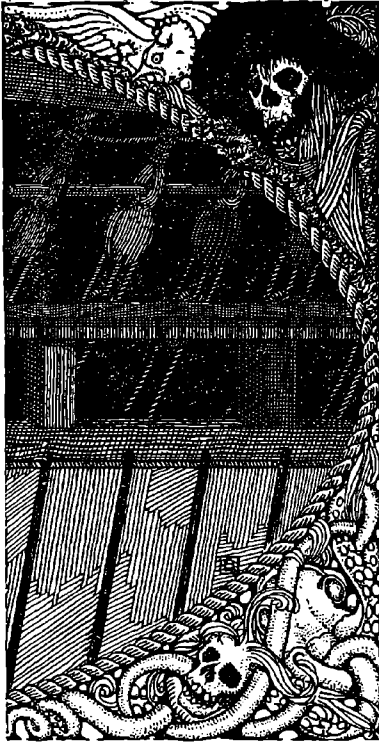
“I joined the *Mortzestus* in Frisco. I heard before I signed on, that there were some funny yarns floating round about her; but I was pretty nearly on the beach, and too jolly anxious to get away, to worry about trifles. Besides, by all accounts, she was right enough as far as grub and treatment went.

“When I asked fellows to give it a name, they generally could not. All they could tell me was that she was unlucky, and made thundering long passages, and

had more than a fair share of dirty weather.

“Also, that she had twice had the sticks blown out of her, and her cargo shifted. Besides all these, a heap of other things that might happen to any packet, and would not be comfortable to run into. Still, they were the ordinary things, and I was willing enough to risk them, to get home. All the same, if I had been given the chance, I should have shipped in some other vessel as a matter of preference.

“The first night I was in her, I found that it was common talk among the other fellows, that there was something queer about the ship. They spoke of her as if it were an accepted fact that she was



"The eyes peering at me over the taffrail reflected the binnacle light with a vile, tigerish gleam"

haunted; yet they all treated the matter as a joke; all, that is, except a young cockney — Williams — who, instead of laughing at their jests on the subject, seemed to take the whole matter seriously.

"This made me rather curious. I began to wonder whether there was, after all, some truth underlying the vague stories I had heard; and I took the first opportunity to ask him whether he had any reasons for believing that there was anything in the yarns about the ship.

"At first he was inclined to be a bit offish; but, presently, he came round, and told me that he did not know of any

THE GHOST PIRATES

by
William
Hope
Hodgson

particular incident which could be called unusual in the sense in which I meant. Yet that, at the same time, there were lots of little things which, if you put them together, made you think a bit. For instance, she always made long passages and had so much dirty weather—nothing but that and calms and head winds. Then, other things happened; sails that he knew, himself, had been properly stowed, were always blowing adrift *at night*. And then he said a thing that surprised me.

"There's too many bloomin' shadders about this 'ere packet; they gets onto yer nerves like nothin' as ever I seen before in me nat'ral."

"He blurted it all out in a heap, and I turned round and looked at him.

"Too many shadows!" I said. "What on earth do you mean?" But he refused to explain himself.

"We left 'Frisco next day, with a fine, fair wind, that seemed a bit like putting the stopper on the yarns I had heard about the ship's ill luck. And yet. . ."

He hesitated a moment, and then went on again.

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"For the first couple of weeks out, nothing unusual happened, and the wind still held fair. I began to feel that I had been rather lucky, after all, in the packet into which I had been shunted. Most of the other fellows gave her a good name, and there was a pretty general opinion growing among the crowd that it was all a silly yarn about her being haunted. And then, just when I was settling down to things, something happened that opened my eyes no end.

"IT WAS in the eight to twelve watch, and I was sitting on the steps, on the starboard side, leading up to the fo'cas'le head. The night was fine and there was a splendid moon. Away aft, I heard the timekeeper strike four bells, and the look-out, an old fellow named Jaskett, answered him. As he let go the bell lanyard, he caught sight of me, where I sat quietly, smoking. He leant over the rail, and looked down at me.

"That you, Jessop?" he asked.

"I believe it is," I replied.

"We'd 'ave our gran'mothers an' all the rest of our petticoated relash'ns comin' to sea, if 'twere always like this," he remarked, reflectively—indicating, with a sweep of his pipe and hand, the calmness of the sea and sky.

"I saw no reason for denying that, and he continued:

"'If this ole packet is 'aunted, as some of 'em seems to think, well, all as I can say it, let me 'ave the luck to tumble across another of the same sort. Good grub, an' duff fer Sundays, an' a decent crowd of 'em aft, an' everythin' comfortable. Sometimes—' At that moment, the relief, one of the ordinary seamen, went up the other ladder on to the fo'cas'le head, and the old chap turned to ask him 'Why the 'ell he'd not relieved him a bit smarter.' The ordinary made some reply; but what it was, I did not catch; for abruptly, away aft, my rather sleepy gaze had lighted on something altogether extraordinary and outrageous. It was nothing less than the form of a man stepping inboard over the starboard rail, a little abaft the main rigging. I stood up and caught at the handrail, and stared.

"What is it, mate?" the look-out asked, curiously, seeing my intent attitude.

"The thing, whatever it was, had disappeared into the shadows on the lee side of the deck.

"Nothing!" I replied, shortly; for I was too bewildered then, at what my eyes had just shown me, to say any more.

"My common sense told me I must have fancied it all. I walked over to the mainmast, and looked behind the pinrail that partly surrounded it, and down into the shadow of the pumps; but there was nothing. Then I went in under the break of the poop. It was darker under there than out on deck.

"I looked up both sides of the deck, and saw that they were bare of anything such as I looked for. The assurance was comforting. I glanced at the poop ladders, and remembered that nothing could have gone up there without the Second Mate or the Time-keeper seeing it. Then I leaned my back up against the bulks-head, and thought the whole matter over, rapidly, sucking at my pipe, and keeping my glance about the deck. I concluded my think, and said 'No!' out loud.

THEN something occurred to me, and I said 'Unless—' and went over to the starboard bulwarks, and looked over and down into the sea; but there was nothing but sea; and so I turned and made my way forrard. My common sense had triumphed, and I was convinced that my imagination had been playing tricks with me.

"I reached the door on the port side, leading into the fo'cas'le, and was about to enter, when something made me look behind. As I did so, I had a shaker. Away aft, a dim, shadowy form stood in the wake of a swaying belt of moonlight that swept the deck a bit abaft the mainmast.

"It was the same figure that I had just been attributing to my fancy. I will admit that I felt more than startled; I was quite a bit frightened. I was convinced now that it was no mere imaginary thing. It was a human figure. And yet, with the flicker of the moonlight and the shadows chasing over it, I was unable to say more than that.

"I began to pluck up courage. I accused myself of getting fanciful; otherwise I should have tumbled to it earlier. And then, in spite of all my reasoning, I was still afraid of going aft to discover who that was, standing on the lee side of the maindeck. Yet I felt that if I shirked it, I was only fit to be dumped overboard; and so I went, though not with any great speed, as you can imagine.

"I had gone half the distance, and still the figure remained there, motionless and

silent—the moonlight and the shadows playing over it with each roll of the ship. I think I tried to be surprised. If it were one of the fellows playing the fool, he must have heard me coming, and why didn't he scoot while he had the chance? And where could he have hidden himself, before? All these things, I asked myself, in a rush, with a queer mixture of doubt and belief; and, you know, in the meantime, I was drawing nearer. I had passed the house, and was not twelve paces distant; when, abruptly, the silent figure made three quick strides to the port rail, and *climbed over it into the sea.*

"I rushed to the side, and stared over; but nothing met my gaze, except the shadow of the ship, sweeping over the moon-lit sea.

"How long I stared down blankly into the water, it would be impossible to say; certainly for a good minute. I felt blank—just horribly blank. It was such a beastly confirmation of the *unnaturalness* of the thing I had concluded to be only a sort of brain fancy. I seemed, for that little time, deprived, you know, of the power of coherent thought. I suppose I was dazed—mentally stunned, in a way.

"As I have said, a minute or so must have gone, while I had been staring into the dark of the water under the ship's side. Then, I came suddenly to my ordinary self. The Second Mate was singing out: 'Lee fore brace.'

"I went to the braces, like a chap in a dream.

CHAPTER II

THE MAN UP' THE MAIN

THE next morning, in my watch below, I had a look at the places where that strange thing had come aboard, and left the ship; but I found nothing unusual, and no clue to help me understand the mystery of the strange man.

"For several days after that, all went quietly; though I prowled about the decks at night, trying to discover anything fresh that might tend to throw some light on to the matter. I was careful to say nothing to anyone about the thing I had seen. In any case, I felt sure I should only have been laughed at.

"Several nights passed away in this manner, and I was no nearer to an understanding of the affair. And then something happened.

"It occurred in the first watch, just after six bells. I was forrard, sitting on the fore-hatch. No one was about the maindeck. The night was exceedingly fine; and the wind had dropped away almost to nothing, so that the ship was very quiet.

"Suddenly, I heard the Second Mate's voice—

"'In the main-rigging, there! Who's that going aloft?'

"I sat up on the hatch, and listened. There succeeded an intense silence. Then the Second's voice came again. He was evidently getting wild.

"'Do you damn well hear me? What the hell are you doing up there? Come down!'

"I rose to my feet, and walked up to wind'ard. From there, I could see the break of the poop. The Second Mate was standing by the starboard ladder. He appeared to be looking up at something that was hidden from me by the topsails. As I stared, he broke out again:

"'Hell and damnation, you blasted sojer, come down when I tell you!'

"In the same moment there came the shrill blast of the Second's whistle; he was whistling for the watch, and I turned and ran to the fo'cas'le to rouse them out. Another minute, and I was hurrying aft with them to see what was wanted.

"His voice met us half-way:

"'Up the main, some of you, smartly now, and find out who that damned fool is up there. See what mischief he's up to.'

"'i, i, Sir,' several of the men sung out, and a couple jumped into the weather rigging. I joined them, and the rest were proceeding to follow; but the Second shouted for some to go up to leeward—case the fellow tried to get down that side.

"The first man to wind'ard had reached the futtock shrouds; his head was above the top, and he was taking a preliminary look, before venturing higher.

"'See anythin', Jock?' asked Plummer, the man next above me.

"'Na!' said Jock, tersely, and climbed over the top, and so disappeared from my sight.

"The fellow ahead of me followed. He reached the futtock rigging, and stopped to expectorate. I was close at his heels, and he looked down to me.

"'What's up, anyway?' he said. 'What's 'e seen? 'oo're we chasin' after?'

"I said I didn't know, and he swung

up into the topmast rigging. I followed on. The chaps on the lee side were about level with us. Under the foot of the top-sail, I could see Tammy and the other 'prentice down on the maindeck, looking upwards.

“THE fellows were a bit excited in a sort of subdued way; though I am inclined to think there was far more curiosity and, perhaps, a certain consciousness of the strangeness of it all. I know that, looking to leeward, there was a tendency to keep well together, in which I sympathised.

“‘Must be a bloomin' stowaway,’ one of the men suggested.

“I grabbed at the idea instantly. Perhaps. . . . And then, in a moment, I dismissed it. I remembered how that first thing had stepped over the rail *into the sea*. That matter could not be explained in such a manner. With regard to this, I was curious and anxious. I had seen nothing this time. What could the Second Mate have seen? I wondered. Were we chasing fancies, or was there really some one—something real, among the shadows above us? My thoughts returned to that thing Tammy and I had seen near the log-reel. I remembered how incapable the Second Mate had been of seeing anything then. I remembered how natural it had seemed that he should not be able to see. I caught the word ‘stowaway’ again. After all, that might explain away *this* affair. It would—

“My train of thought was broken suddenly. One of the men was shouting and gesticulating.

“‘I sees ‘im! I sees ‘im!’ He was pointing upwards over our heads.

“‘Where?’ said the man above me. ‘Where?’

“‘I was looking up, for all that I was worth. I was conscious of a certain sense of relief. ‘It is *real*, then,’ I said to myself. I screwed my head round, and looked along the yards above us. Yet, still I could see nothing; nothing except shadows and patches of light.

“Down on deck, I caught the Second Mate’s voice.

“‘Have you got him?’ he was shouting.

“‘Not yet, Zur,’ sung out the lowest man on the lee side.

“‘We sees ‘im, Sir,’ added Quoin.

“‘I don’t!’ I said.

“‘There ‘e is agen,’ he said.

“‘We had reached the t’gallant rigging, and he was pointing up to the royal yard.

“‘Ye’re a fule, Quoin. That’s what ye are.’

“The voice came from above. It was Jock’s, and there was a burst of laughter at Quoin’s expense.

“I could see Jock now. He was standing in the rigging, just below the yard. He had gone straight away up, while the rest of us were mooning over the top.

“‘Ye’re a fule, Quoin,’ he said again. ‘And I’m thinking the Second’s juist as daft.’

“He began to descend.

“‘Then there’s no one?’ I asked.

“‘Na,’ he said, briefly.

“As we reached the deck, the Second Mate ran down off the poop. He came towards us, with an expectant air.

“‘You’ve got him?’ he asked, confidently.

“‘There wasn’t any one,’ I said.

“‘What!’ he nearly shouted. ‘You’re hiding something!’ he continued angrily, and glancing from one to another. ‘Out with it. Who was it?’

“‘We’re hiding nothing,’ I replied, speaking for the lot. ‘There’s no one up there.’

“The Second looked round upon us.

“‘Am I a fool?’ he asked contemptuously.

“There was an assenting silence.

“‘I saw him myself,’ he continued. ‘Tammy, here, saw him. He wasn’t over the top when I first spotted him. There’s no mistake about it. It’s all damned rot saying he’s not there.’

“‘Well, he’s not, Sir,’ I answered. ‘Jock went right up to the royal yard.’

“The Second Mate said nothing in immediate reply; but went aft a few steps and looked up the main. Then he turned to the two ‘prentices.

“‘Sure you two boys didn’t see any one coming down from the main?’ he inquired, suspiciously.

“‘Yes, Sir,’ they answered together.

“‘Anyway,’ I heard him mutter to himself, ‘I’d have spotted him myself, if he had.’

“‘Have you any idea, Sir, who it was you saw?’ I asked, at this juncture.

“He looked at me, keenly.

“‘No!’ he said.

“He thought for a few moments, while we all stood about in silence, waiting for him to let us go.

“‘By the holy poker!’ he exclaimed, suddenly. ‘But I ought to have thought of that before.’

“He turned, and eyed us individually.

"You're all here?" he asked.

"Yes, Sir," we said in a chorus. I could see that he was counting us. Then he spoke again.

"All of you men stay here where you are. Tammy, you go into *your* place and see if the other fellows are in their bunks. Then come and tell me. Smartly now!"

"The boy went, and he turned to the other 'prentice.

"You get along foward to the fo'cas'le," he said. 'Count the other watch; then come aft and report to me.'

AS THE youngster disappeared along the deck to the fo'cas'le, Tammy returned from his visit to the Glory Hole, to tell the Second Mate that the other two 'prentices were sound asleep in their bunks. Whereupon, the Second bundled him off to the Carpenter's and Sailmaker's berth, to see whether they were turned-in.

"While he was gone, the other boy came aft, and reported that all the men were in their bunks and asleep.

"Sure?" the Second asked him.

"Quite, Sir," he answered.

"The Second Mate made a quick gesture.

"Go and see if the Steward is in his berth," he said, abruptly. It was plain to me that he was tremendously puzzled.

"You've something to learn yet, Mr. Second Mate," I thought to myself. Then I fell to wondering to what conclusions he would come.

"A few seconds later, Tammy returned to say that the Carpenter, Sailmaker and 'Doctor' were all turned-in.

"The Second Mate muttered something, and told him to go down into the saloon to see whether the First and Third Mates, by any chance, were not in their berths.

"Tammy started off; then halted.

"Shall I have a look into the Old Man's place, Sir, while I'm down there?" he inquired.

"No!" said the Second Mate. 'Do what I told you, and then come and tell me. If any one's to go into the Captain's cabin, it's got to be me.'

"Tammy said 'i, i, Sir,' and skipped away, up on to the poop.

"While he was gone, the other 'prentice came up to say that the Steward was in his berth, and that he wanted to know what the hell he was fooling around his part of the ship for.

"The Second Mate said nothing, for nearly a minute. Then he turned to us,

and told us we might all go foward.

"As we moved off in a body, talking in undertones, Tammy came down from the poop, and went up to the Second Mate. I heard him say that the two Mates were in their berths, asleep. Then he added, as if it were an afterthought—

"So's the Old man."

"I thought I told you—" the Second Mate began.

"I didn't, Sir," Tammy said. 'His cabin door was open.'

"The Second Mate started to go aft. I caught a fragment of a remark he was making to Tammy.

"I accounted for the whole crew. I'm . . ."

"He went up on to the poop. I did not catch the rest.

"I had loitered a moment; now, however, I hurried after the others. As we neared the fo'cas'le, one bell went, and we roused out the other watch, and told them what jinks we had been up to.

"Might 'ave been a stowaway, yer know," I heard Quoin, the one who had suggested it before, remark to one of the A.B.'s, named Stubbins. A short, rather surly-looking chap.

"Might have been hell!" returned Stubbins. 'Stowaways hain't such fools as all that.'

"I dunno," said the first. 'I wish I 'ad arsked the Second what 'e thought about it.'

"I don't think it was a stowaway, somehow," I said, chipping in. 'What would a stowaway want aloft? I guess he'd be trying more for the Steward's pantry.'

"You bet he would, hevry time," said Stubbins. He lit his pipe, and sucked at it, slowly.

"I don't hunderstand it, all ther same," he remarked, after a moment's silence.

"Neither do I," I said. And after that I was quiet for a while, listening to the run of conversation on the subject.

"Presently, my glance fell upon Williams, the man who had spoken to me about 'shadders.' He was sitting in his bunk, smoking, and making no effort to join in the talk.

"I went across to him.

"What do you think of it, Williams?" I asked. 'Do you think the Second Mate really saw anything?'

"He looked at me, with a sort of gloomy suspicion; but said nothing.

"I felt a trifle annoyed by his silence. After a few moments, I went on.

"Do you know, Williams, I'm beginning to understand what you meant that night, when you said there were too many shadows."

"Wot yer mean?" he said, pulling his pipe from out of his mouth, and fairly surprised into answering.

"What I say, of course," I said. "There are too many shadows."

"He sat up, and leant forward out from his bunk, extending his hand and pipe. His eyes plainly showed his excitement.

"Ave your seen . . ." he hesitated, and looked at me, struggling inwardly to express himself.

"Well?" I prompted.

"For perhaps a minute he tried to say something. Then his expression altered suddenly from doubt, and something else more indefinite, to a pretty grim look of determination.

"He spoke.

"I'm blimed," he said, 'ef I don't tike er piy-diy out of 'er, shadders or no shadders."

"I looked at him, with astonishment.

"What's it got to do with your getting a pay-day out of her?" I asked.

"He nodded his head, with a sort of stolid resolution.

"Look 'ere," he said.

"I waited.

"Ther crowd cleared," he indicated with his hand and pipe towards the stern.

"You mean in 'Frisco?" I said.

"Yus," he replied; "an withart er cent of ther piy. I styed."

"I comprehended him suddenly.

"You think they saw," I hesitated; then I said "shadows?"

"He nodded; but said nothing.

"And so they all bunked?"

"He nodded again, and began tapping out his pipe on the edge of his bunk-board.

"And the officers and the Skipper?" I asked.

"Fresh uns," he said, and got out of his bunk; for eight bells was just then striking.

dreamed of. Yet, all the same, I know he had to keep his guesses and half-formed opinions pretty well to himself; for the Old Man and the First Mate chaffed him unmercifully about this 'bogy.' This, I got from Tammy, who had heard them both ragging him during the second dog-watch the following day. There was another thing Tammy told me, that showed how the Second Mate bothered about his inability to understand the mysterious appearance and disappearance of the man he had seen go aloft. He had made Tammy give him every detail he could remember about the figure we had seen by the log-reel. What is more, the Second had not even affected to treat the matter lightly, nor as a thing to be sneered at; but had listened seriously, and asked a great many questions. It is very evident to me that he was reaching out towards the only possible conclusion. Though, goodness knows, it was one that was impossible and improbable enough.

"It was on the Wednesday night, after the five days of talk I have mentioned, that there came, to me and to those who *knew*, another element of fear. And yet, I can quite understand that, at *that* time, those who had seen nothing, would find little to be afraid of, in all that I am going to tell you. For, when all is said and done, it was nothing more than the blowing adrift of one of the sails; yet accompanied by what were really significant details—significant, that is, in the light of that which I and the Second Mate knew.

"Seven bells, and then one, had gone in the first watch, and our side was being roused out to relieve the Mate's. Most of the men were already out of their bunks, and sitting about on their sea-chests, getting their togs on.

"Suddenly, one of the 'prentices in the other watch put his head in through the doorway on the port side.

"The Mate wants to know," he said, "which of you chaps made fast the fore royal, last watch."

"Wot's 'e want to know that for?" inquired one of the men.

"The lee side's blowing adrift," said the 'prentice. "And he says that the chap who made it fast is to go up and see to it as soon as the watch is relieved."

"Oh! does 'e? Well, 'twasn't me, any-ow," replied the man. "You'd better arsk sum of 'others."

"Ask what?" inquired Plummer, getting out of his bunk, sleepily.

CHAPTER III

THE FOOLING WITH THE SAIL

"AS FOR the Second Mate, I have very little doubt *now*, but that he was beginning to realise there was something deeper and less understandable than he had at first

"The 'prentice repeated his message. "The man yawned and stretched himself.

"'Let me see,' he muttered, and scratched his head with one hand, while he fumbled for his trousers with the others. 'oo made ther fore ryal fast?' He got into his trousers, and stood up. 'Why, ther Or'nary, er course; 'oo else do yer suppose?'

"'That's all I wanted to know!' said the 'prentice, and went away.

"'Hi! Tom!' Stubbins sang out to the Ordinary. 'Wake up, you lazy young devil. Ther Mate's just sent to hinqire who it was made the fore royal fast. It's all blowin' adrift, and he says you're to get along up as soon as eight bells goes, and make it fast again.'

"Tom jumped out of his bunk, and began to dress, quickly.

"'Blowin' adrift!' he said. 'There ain't all that much wind; and I tucked the ends of the gaskets well in under the other turns.'

"'Praps one of ther gaskets is rotten, and given way,' suggested Stubbins. 'Anyway, you'd better hurry up, it's just on eight bells.'

"'I, I, Sir,' said Tom, and followed the rest of us forrard. Reaching the fore rigging, he climbed into it, and began to make his way lelsurely aloft. I could see him with a fair amount of distinctness, as the moon was very clear and bright, though getting old.

"I WENT over to the weather pin-rail, and leaned against it, watching him, while I filled my pipe. The other men, both the watch on deck and the watch below, had gone into the fo'cas'le, so that I imagined I was the only one about the maindeck. Yet, a minute later, I discovered that I was mistaken; for, as I proceeded to light up, I saw Williams, the young cockney, come out from under the lee of the house, and turn and look up at the Ordinary as he went steadily upwards.

"I remembered that he had said sails were always blowing adrift *at night*. I remembered the, then, unaccountable emphasis he had laid on those two words; and remembering that, I felt suddenly afraid. For, all at once, the absurdity had struck me of a sail—even a badly stowed one—blowing adrift in such fine and calm weather as we were then having. I wondered I had not seen before that there was something queer and unlikely about

the affair. Sails don't blow adrift in fine weather, with the sea calm and the ship as steady as a rock. I moved away from the rail and went towards Williams.

"Williams turned towards me, and spoke.

"'Gawd!' he said, 'it's started agen!'

"'What?' I said. Though I knew what he meant.

"'Them syles,' he answered, and made a gesture towards the fore royal.

"I glanced up, briefly. All the lee side of the sail was adrift, from the bunt gasket outwards. Lower, I saw Tom; he was just hoisting himself into the t'gal-lant rigging.

"Williams spoke again.

"'We lost two on 'em just slme way, comin' art.'

"'Two of the men!' I exclaimed.

"'Yus!' he said tersely.

"I stood irresolute. I was positively stumped what to do for the best. That there was danger aloft, I was convinced; though if I had been asked my reasons for supposing this, they would have been hard to find. Yet of its existence, I was as certain as though my eyes already saw it. I wondered whether, being so ignorant of the form it would assume, I could stop it by joining Tom on the yard? This thought came as I stared up at the royal. Tom had reached the sail, and was standing on the foot-rope, close in to the bunt. He was bending over the yard, and reaching down for the slack of the sail. And then, as I looked, I saw the belly of the royal tossed up and down abruptly, as though a sudden heavy gust of wind had caught it.

"'I'm blimed. . .!' Williams began, with a sort of excited expectation. And then he stopped as abruptly as he had begun. For, in a moment, the sail had thrashed right over the after side of the yard, apparently knocking Tom clean from off the foot-rope.

"'My God!' I shouted out loud. 'He's gone!'

"For an instant there was a blur over my eyes, and Williams was singing out something that I could not catch. Then, just as quickly, it went, and I could see again, clearly.

"Williams was pointing, and I saw something black, swinging below the yard. Williams called out something fresh, and made a run for the fore rigging. I caught the last part—

"'. . . ther garskit.'

"Straightway, I knew that Tom had

managed to grab the gasket as he fell, and I bolted after Williams to give him a hand in getting the youngster into safety.

"Down on deck, I caught the sound of running feet, and then the Second Mate's voice. He was asking what the devil was up; but I did not trouble to answer him then. I wanted all my breath to help me aloft. I knew very well that some of the gaskets were little better than old shakins; and, unless Tom got hold of something on the t'gallant yard below him, he might come down with a run any moment. I reached the top, and lifted myself over it in quick time. Williams was some distance above me. In less than half a minute, I reached the t'gallant yard. Williams had gone up to the royal. I slid out on to the t'gallant foot-rope until I was just below Tom; then I sung out to him to let himself down to me, and I would catch him. He made no answer, and I saw that he was hanging in a curiously limp fashion, and by one hand.

"Williams' voice came down to me from the royal yard. He was singing out to me to go up and give him a hand to pull Tom up on to the yard. When I reached him, he told me that the gasket had hitched itself round the lad's wrist. I bent beside the yard, and peered down. It was as Williams had said, and I realised how near a thing it had been. Strangely enough, even at that moment, the thought came to me how little wind there was. I remembered the wild way in which the sail had lashed at the boy.

“ALL this time, I was busily working, unreeving the port buntline. I took the end, made a running bowline with it round the gasket, and let the loop slide down over the boy's head and shoulders. Then I took a strain on it and tightened it under his arms. A minute later we had him safely on the yard between us. In the uncertain moonlight, I could just make out the mark of a great lump on his forehead, where the foot of the sail must have caught him when it knocked him over.

"I screwed round a bit, holding the jackstay with one hand, and steadying the insensible Ordinary with the other. In this way I could look below. At first, I could see nothing. Then the Second Mate's voice came up to me again.

"Who the hell are you? What are you doing?"

"I saw him now. He was standing at

the foot of the weather t'gallant rigging, his face was turned upwards, peering round the after side of the mast. It showed to me only as a blurred, pale-coloured oval in the moonlight.

"He repeated his question.

"It's Williams and I, Sir," I said. "Tom here, has had an accident."

"I stopped. He began to come higher up towards us. From the rigging to leeward there came suddenly a buzz of men talking.

"The Second Mate reached us.

"Well, what's up, anyway?" he inquired, suspiciously. "What's happened?"

"He had bent forward, and was peering at Tom. I started to explain; but he cut me short with:

"Is he dead?"

"No, Sir," I said. "I don't think so; but the poor beggar's had a bad fall. He was hanging by the gasket when we got to him. The sail knocked him off the yard."

"What?" he said, sharply.

"The wind caught the sail, and it lashed back over the yard. . . ."

"What wind?" he interrupted. "There's no wind to do such a thing; you're talking nonsense!"

"It seemed to me that there was as much of bewilderment as anything else in his voice; yet I could tell that he was suspicious—though, of what, I doubted whether he himself could have told.

"He glanced at Williams, and seemed about to say something. Then, seeming to change his mind, he turned, and sung out to one of the men who had followed him aloft, to go down and pass out a coil of new, three-inch manilla, and a tall-block.

"Smartly now!" he concluded.

"i, i, Sir," said the man, and went down swiftly.

"The Second Mate turned to me.

"When you've got Tom below, I shall want a better explanation of all this, than the one you've given me. It won't wash."

"Very well, Sir," I answered. "But you won't get any other."

"There's something too damned funny about it all. I shall have to report the matter to the Captain. I can't tell him that yarn—" He broke off abruptly.

"It's not the only damned funny thing that's happened aboard this old hooker," I answered. "You ought to know that, Sir."

"What do you mean?" he asked, quickly.

"Well, Sir," I said, "to be straight, what

about that chap you sent us hunting after up the main the other night? That was a funny enough affair, wasn't it? 'This one isn't half so funny.'

"That will do, Jessop!" he said, angrily. 'I won't have any back talk.' Yet there was something about his tone that told me I had got one in on my own. He seemed all at once less able to appear confident that I was telling him a fairy tale.

"After that, for perhaps half a minute, he said nothing. I guessed he was doing some hard thinking. When he spoke again it was on the matter of getting the Ordinary down on deck.

"One of you'll have to go down the lee side and steady him down," he concluded.

"He turned and looked downwards.

"Are you bringing that gantline?" he sung out.

"Yes, Sir," I hear one of the men answer.

"A moment later, I saw the man's head appear over the top. He had the tail-block slung round his neck, and the end of the gantline over his shoulder.

VERY soon we had the gantline rigged, and Tom down on deck. Then we took him into the fo'c's'le and put him in his bunk. The Second Mate had sent for some brandy, and now he started to dose him well with it. At the same time a couple of the men chafed his hands and feet. In a little, he began to show signs of coming around. Presently, after a sudden fit of coughing, he opened his eyes, with a surprised, bewildered stare. Then he caught at the edge of his bunk-board, and sat up giddily. One of the men steadied him, while the Second Mate stood back and eyed him critically. The boy rocked as he sat, and put up his hand to his head.

"Here," said the Second Mate, "take another drink."

"Tom caught his breath and choked a little; then he spoke.

"By gum!" he said, "my head does ache."

"He put up his hand again, and felt at the lump on his forehead. Then he bent forward and stared round at the men grouped about his bunk.

"What's up?" he inquired, in a confused sort of way, and seeming as if he could not see us clearly.

"What's up?" he asked again.

"That's just what I want to know!" said the Second Mate.

"I ain't been snoozin' while there's been a job on?" Tom inquired, anxiously. "He looked round at the men appealingly.

"It's knocked 'im dotty, strikes me," said one of the men, audibly.

"No," I said, answering Tom's question. "You've had—"

"Shut that, Jessop!" said the Second Mate quickly, interrupting me. "I want to hear what the boy's got to say for himself."

"He turned again to Tom.

"You were up at the fore royal," he prompted.

"I can't say I was, Sir," said Tom, doubtfully.

I could see that he had not gripped the Second Mate's meaning.

"But you were!" said the Second, with some impatience. "It was blowing adrift, and I sent you up to shove a gasket round it."

"Blowin' adrift, Sir?" said Tom, dully.

"Yes! blowing adrift. Don't I speak plainly?"

"The dullness went from Tom's face, suddenly.

"So it was, Sir!" he said, his memory returning. "The bloomin' sail got chock full of wind. It caught me bang in the face."

"He paused a moment.

"I believe . . ." he began, and then stopped once more.

"Go on!" said the Second Mate. "Spit it out!"

"I don't know, Sir," Tom said. "I don't understand . . ."

"He hesitated again.

"That's all I can remember," he muttered, and put his hand up to the bruise on his forehead, as though trying to remember something.

"In the momentary silence that succeeded, I caught the voice of Stubbins.

"There hain't hardly no wind," he was saying, in a puzzled tone.

"There was a low murmur of assent from the surrounding men.

"The Second Mate said nothing, and I glanced at him curiously. Was he beginning to see, I wondered, how useless it was to try to find any sensible explanation of the affair?"

"Even now I am rather puzzled by his attitude to us aloft. Sometimes I have thought that he must have suspected us of trying to play off some trick on him—perhaps, at the time, he still half suspected one of us of being in some way

connected with the other business. Or, again, he may have been trying to fight against the conviction that was being forced upon him, that there was really something impossible and beastly about the old packet. Of course, these are only superstitions.

"And then, close upon this, there were further developments.

CHAPTER IV

THE END OF WILLIAMS

"AS I have said, there was a lot of talk, among the crowd of us forrard, about Tom's strange accident. None of the men knew that Williams and I had seen it happen. Stubbins gave it as his opinion that Tom had been sleepy, and missed the foot-ropes. Tom, of course, would not have this by any means. Yet, he had no one to appeal to; for at that time he was just as ignorant as the rest that we had seen the sail flap up over the yard.

"Stubbins insisted that it stood to reason it couldn't be the wind. There wasn't any, he said; and the rest of the men agreed with him.

"Well,' I said, 'I don't know about all that. I'm a bit inclined to think Tom's yarn is the truth.'

"How do you make that hout?' Stubbins asked, unbelievably. 'There hain't nothin' like enough wind.'

"What about the place on his forehead?' I inquired, in turn. 'How are you going to explain that?'

"I 'spect he knocked himself there when he slipped,' he answered.

"Likely 'nuff,' agreed old Jaskett, who was sitting smoking on a chest near by.

"Well, you're both a damn long way out of it!' Tom chipped in, pretty warm. 'I wasn't asleep; an' the sail did bloom in well hit me.'

"Don't you be impudent, young feller,' said Jaskett.

"I joined in again.

"There's another thing, Stubbins,' I said. "The gasket Tom was hanging by was on the after side of the yard. That looks as if the sail might have flapped it over? If there were wind enough to do the one, it seems to me that it might have done the other.'

"Do you mean that it was hunder ther yard, or hover ther top?' he asked.

"Over the top, of course. What's more, the foot of the sail was hanging way over

the after part of the yard, in a bight.'

"Stubbins was plainly surprised at that, and before he was ready with his next objection, Plummer spoke.

"'Oo saw it?' he asked.

"I saw it!' I said a bit sharply. 'So did Williams; so—for that matter—did the Second Mate.'

"Plummer relapsed into silence, and smoked.

"The three following nights passed quietly; and then, on the fourth, all those curious signs and hints culminated suddenly in something extraordinarily grim.

"I remember that fourth night well. It was a clear, star-lit, moonless sort of night; at least, I think there was no moon; or, at any rate, the moon could have been little more than a thin crescent, for it was near the dark-time.

"The wind had breezed up a bit; but still remained steady. We were slipping along at about six or seven knots an hour. It was our middle watch on deck, and the ship was full of the blow and hum of the wind aloft. Williams and I were the only ones about the maindeck. He was leaning over the weather pin-rail, smoking; while I was pacing up and down, between him and the fore-hatch. Stubbins was on the look-out.

"Two bells had gone some minutes, and I was wishing to goodness that it was eight, and time to turn-in. Suddenly, overhead, there sounded a sharp crack, like the report of a rifle shot. It was followed instantly by the rattle and crash of sailcloth thrashing in the wind.

"Williams jumped away from the rail, and ran aft a few steps. I followed him, and, together, we stared upwards to see what had gone. Indistinctly, I made out that the weather sheet of the fore t'galant had carried away, and the clew of the sail was whirling and banging about in the air, and, every few moments, hitting the steel yard a blow, like the thump of a great sledge hammer.

"It's the shackle, or one of the links that's gone, I think,' I shouted to Williams, above the noise of the sail. 'That's the spectacle that's hitting the yard.'

"Yus!' he shouted back, and went to get hold of the clewline. I ran to give him a hand. At the same moment, I caught the Second Mate's voice away aft, shouting. Then came the noise of running feet, and the rest of the watch, and the Second Mate, were with us almost at the same moment. In a few minutes we had the yard lowered and the sail clewed

up. Then Williams and I went aloft to see where the sheet had gone. It was much as I had supposed; the spectacle was all right, but the pin had gone out of the shackle, and the shackle itself was jammed into the sheavehole in the yard arm.

“WILLIAMS sent me down for another pin, while he unbent the clewline, and overhauled it down to the sheet. When I returned with the fresh pin, I screwed it into the shackle, clipped on the clewline, and sung out to the men to take a pull on the rope. This they did, and at the second heave the shackle came away. When it was high enough, I went up on to the t'gallant yard, and held the chain, while Williams shackled it into the spectacle. Then he bent on the clewline afresh, and sung out to the Second Mate that we were ready to hoist away.

“Yer'd better go down an' give 'em a 'aul,' he said. 'I'll sty an' light up ther syle.’

“Right ho, Williams, I said, getting into the rigging. ‘Don't let the ship's boggy run away with you.’

“This remark I made in a moment of lightheartedness, such as will come to any one aloft, at times. I was exhilarated for the time being, and quite free from the sense of fear that had been with me so much of late. I suppose this was due to the freshness of the wind.

“There's more'n one!’ he said, in that curiously short way of his.

“I was suddenly serious. The *reality* of all the impossible details of the past weeks came back to me, vivid, and beastly.

“‘What do you mean, Williams?’ I asked him.

“But he had shut up, and would say nothing.

“‘What do you know—how much do you know?’ I went on, quickly. ‘Why did you never tell me that you—’

“The Second Mate's voice interrupted me, abruptly:

“‘Now then, up there! Are you going to keep us waiting all night? One of you come down and give us a pull with the ha'lyards. The other stay up and light up the gear.’

“‘I, I, Sir,’ I shouted back.

“Then I turned to Williams, hurriedly.

“Look here, Williams,’ I said. ‘If you think there is *really* a danger in your being alone up here . . .’ I hesitated for

words to express what I meant. Then I went on. ‘Well, I'll jolly well stay up with you.’

“The Second Mate's voice came again.

“‘Come on now, one of you! Make a move! What the hell are you doing?’

“‘Shall I stay?’ I asked definitely.

“‘Garn!’ he said. ‘Don't yer fret yourself. I'll tike 'er bloomin' piy-diy out of 'er. Blarst 'em. I ain't funky of 'em.’

“I went. That was the last word Williams spoke to any one living.

“I reached the decks, and tailed on to the haulyards.

“We had nearly mast-headed the yard, and the Second Mate was looking up at the dark outline of the sail, ready to sing out ‘Belay’; when, all at once, there came a queer sort of muffled shout from Williams.

“‘Vast hauling, you men,’ shouted the Second Mate.

“We stood silent, and listened.

“‘What's that, Williams?’ he sung out. ‘Are you all clear?’

“For nearly half a minute we stood, listening; but there came no reply. Some of the men said afterwards that they noticed a curious rattling and vibrating noise aloft, that sounded faintly above the hum and swirl of the wind. Like the sound of loose ropes being shaken and slatted together, you know. Whether this noise was really heard, or whether it was something that had no existence outside of their imaginations, I cannot say. I heard nothing of it; but then I was at the tail end of the rope, and furthest from the fore rigging; while those who heard it were on the fore part of the haulyards, and close up to the shrouds.

“The Second Mate put his hands to his mouth.

“‘Are you all clear there?’ he shouted again.

“The answer came, unintelligible and unexpected. It ran like this—

“‘Blarst yer . . . I've styed . . . Did yer think . . . drive . . . damned piy-diy.’ And then there was a sudden silence.

“I stared up at the dim sail, astonished.

“‘He's dotty!’ said Stubbins, who had been told to come off the look-out and give us a pull.

“‘‘e's as mad as a bloomin' 'atter,’ said Quoin, who was standing foreside of me. ‘‘e's been queer all along.’

“‘Silence there!’ shouted the Second Mate. Then:

“‘Williams!’

“No answer.

"'Williams!' more-loudly.

"Still no answer.

"Then:

"'Damn you, you jumped-up cockney crocodile! Can't you hear? Are you blooming well deaf?'

"There was no answer, and the Second Mate turned to me.

"'Jump aloft, smartly now, Jessop, and see what's wrong!'

"'I, i, Sir,' I said, and made a run for the rigging. I felt a bit queer. Had Williams gone mad? He certainly always had been a bit funny. Or—and the thought came with a jump—had he seen. . . . I did not finish. Suddenly, up aloft, there sounded a frightful scream. I stopped, with my hand on the sheerpole. The next instant, something fell out of the darkness—a heavy body, that struck the deck near the waiting men, with a tremendous crash and a loud, ringing, wheezy sound that sickened me. Then, for the space of several seconds, there was a dead silence among the crowd; and it seemed to me that the wind had in it a strange moaning note.

IT WAS Williams right enough. The Second Mate told a couple of the men to lift him and straighten him out on the hatch. Then he went aft to call the Skipper. He returned in a couple of minutes with an old Ensign which he spread over the poor beggar. Almost directly, the Captain came hurrying forward along the decks. He pulled back one end of the Ensign, and looked; then he put it back quietly, and the Second Mate explained all that we knew, in a few words.

"'Would you leave him where he is, Sir?' he asked.

"'The night's fine,' said the Captain. 'You may as well leave the poor devil there.'

"He turned and went aft, slowly. The man who was holding the light, swept it round so that it showed the place where Williams had struck the deck.

"The Second Mate spoke abruptly.

"'Get a broom and a couple of buckets, some of you.'

"We went into the fo'cas'le. Every one was moody and frightened. For a little while, we sat about in our bunks and on the chests, and no one said a word. The watch below were all asleep, and not one of them knew what had happened.

"All at once, Plummer, whose wheel it was, stepped over the starboard washboard, into the fo'cas'le.

"'What's up, anyway?' he asked. 'Is Williams much 'urt?'

"'He fell from the t'gallant rigging!' I said.

"'Where is 'e?' he repeated.

"'Smashed up,' I said. 'He's lying on the hatch.'

"'Dead?' he asked.

"I nodded.

"After a moment's silence, Plummer spoke again.

"'I 'eard 'im screech, when I was at ther wheel. 'e must 'ave got 'urt up aloft.'

"Stubbins struck a match and proceeded to relight his pipe.

"'How d'yer mean?' he asked, speaking for the first time.

"'ow do I mean? Well, I can't say. Maybe 'e jammed 'is fingers between ther parrel an' ther mast.'

"'What about 'is swearin' at ther Second Mate? Was that 'cause 'e'd jammed 'is fingers?' put in Quoin.

"'I never 'eard about that,' said Plummer. 'oo 'eard 'im?'

"'I should think heverybody in ther bloomin' ship heard him,' Stubbins answered. 'All ther same, I hain't sure he was swearin' at ther Second Mate. I thought at first he'd gone dotty an' was cussin' him; but somehow it don't seem likely, now I come to think. It don't stand to reason he should go to cuss ther man. There was nothin' to go cussin' about. What's more, he didn't seem ter be talkin' down to us on deck—what I could make hout. 'sides, what would he want ter go talkin' to ther Second about his payday?'

"He looked across to where I was sitting. Jock, who was smoking, quietly, on the chest next to me, took his pipe slowly out from between his teeth.

"'Ye're no far oot, Stubbins, I'm thinkin'. Ye're no far oot,' he said, nodding his head.

"Stubbins still continued to gaze fixedly at me.

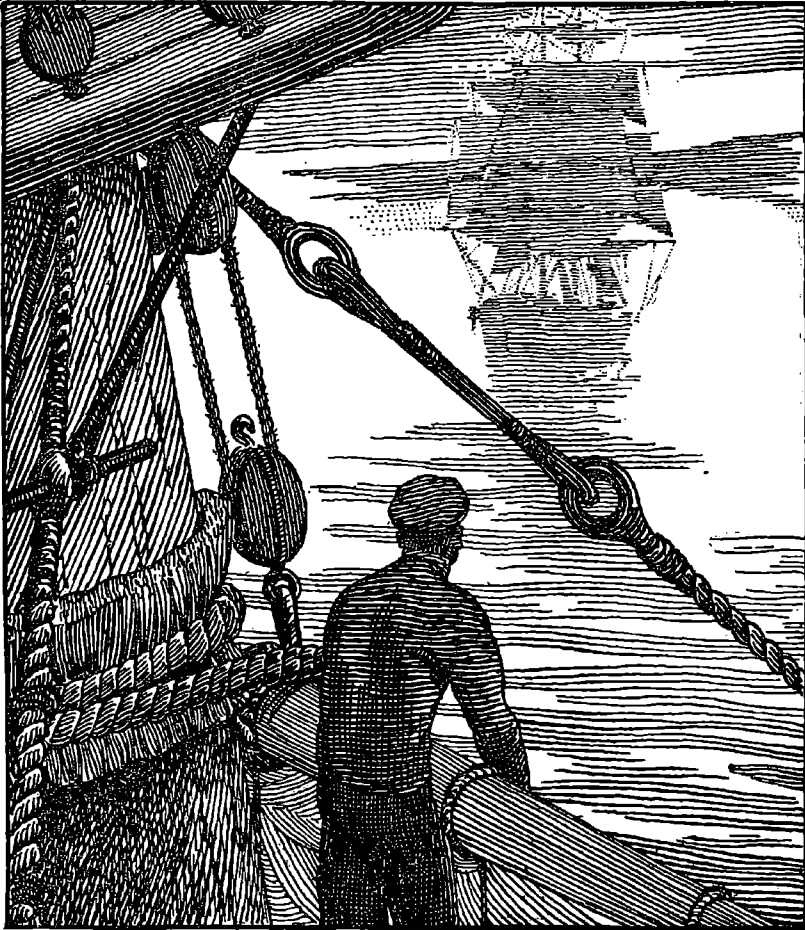
"'What's your idee?' he said, abruptly.

"'It may have been my fancy; but it seemed to me that there was something deeper than the mere sense the question conveyed.

"I glanced at him. I couldn't have said myself just what my idea was.

"'I don't know!' I answered, a little adrift. 'He didn't strike me as cursing at the Second Mate. That is, I should say, after the first minute.'

"'Just what I say,' he replied. 'Another thing—don't it strike you as bein' bloom-



"As the great ship came closer, it grew less distinct!"

in' queer about Tom nearly comin' down by ther run, an' then *this*?'

"I nodded.

"'It would have been all hup with Tom, if it hadn't been for ther gasket.'

"He paused. After a moment, he went on again.

"'That was honly three or four nights ago!'

"'Well,' said Plummer. 'What are yer drivin' at?'

"'Nothin',' answered Stubbins. 'Honly it's damned queer. Looks as though ther ship might be unlucky, after all.'

"'Well,' agreed Plummer. 'Things 'as been a bit funny lately; and then there's what's 'appened ter-night. I shall 'ang on pretty tight ther next time I go aloft.'

"Old Jaskett took his pipe from his mouth, and sighed.

"'Things is going wrong 'most every night,' he said, almost pathetically. 'It's

as diff'rent as chalk 'n' cheese ter what it were w'en we started this 'ere trip. I thought it were all 'ellish rot about 'er bein' 'aunted; but it's not, seem'ly.'

"He stopped and expectorated.

"'She hain't haunted,' said Stubbins. 'Leastways, not like you mean. . . .'

"He paused, as though trying to grasp some elusive thought.

"'Eh?' said Jaskett, in the interval.

"Stubbins continued, without noticing the query. He appeared to be answering some half-formed thought in his own brain, rather than Jaskett:

"'Things is queer—an' it's been a bad job tonight. I don't savvy one bit what Williams was sayin' of hup aloft. I've thought sometimes he'd somethin' on 'is mind. . . .'

"Then, after a pause of about half a minute, he said this:

"'Who was he sayin' that to?'

"'Eh?' said Jaskett, again, with a puzzled expression.

"'I was thinkin',' said Stubbins, knocking out his pipe on the edge of the chest. 'P'raps you're right, hafter all.'

CHAPTER V

ANOTHER MAN TO THE WHEEL

"THE conversation had slacked off. We were all moody and shaken, and I know I, for one, was thinking some rather troublesome thoughts.

"Suddenly, I heard the sound of the Second's whistle. Then his voice came along the deck:

"'Another man to the wheel!'

"'e's singin' out for some one to go aft an' relieve ther wheel,' said Quoin, who had gone to the door to listen. 'Yer'd better 'urry up, Plummer.'

"'What's ther time?' asked Plummer, standing up and knocking out his pipe. Must be close on'ter four bells. 'oo's next wheel is it?'

"'It's all right, Plummer,' I said, getting up from the chest on which I had been sitting. 'I'll go along. It's my wheel, and it only wants a couple of minutes to four bells.'

"Plummer sat down again, and I went out of the fo'c's'le. Reaching the poop, I met Tammy on the lee side, pacing up and down.

"'Who's at the wheel?' I asked him, in astonishment.

"'The Second Mate,' he said, in a

shaky sort of voice. 'He's waiting to be relieved. I'll tell you all about it as soon as I get a chance.'

"I went on aft to the wheel.

"'Who's that?' the Second inquired.

"'It's Jessop, Sir,' I answered.

"He gave me the course, and then, without another word, went forrard along the poop. On the break, I heard him call Tammy's name, and then for some minutes he was talking to him; though what he was saying, I could not possibly hear. For my part, I was tremendously curious to know why the Second Mate had taken the wheel. I knew that if it were just a matter of bad steering on Tammy's part, he would not have dreamt of doing such a thing.

"Presently, the Second Mate left Tammy, and commenced to walk the weather side of the deck. Once he came right aft, and, stooping down, peered under the wheel-box; but never addressed a word to me. Sometime later, he went down the weather ladder on to the maindeck. Directly afterwards, Tammy came running up to the lee side of the wheel-box.

"'I've seen it again!' he said, gasping with sheer nervousness.

"'What?' I said.

"'That *thing*,' he answered. Then he leant across the wheel-box, and lowered his voice.

"'It came over the lee rail—*up out of the sea*,' he added, with an air of telling something unbelievable.

"I turned more towards him; but it was too dark to see his face with any distinctness. I felt suddenly husky. 'My God!' I thought. And then I made a silly effort to protest; but he cut me short with a certain impatient hopelessness.

"'For God's sake, Jessop,' he said, 'do stow all that! It's no good. I must have some one to talk to, or I shall go dotty.'

"'Well, I'd been here about ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour, and I was feeling rotten about Williams, and trying to forget it all and keep the ship on her course, and all that; when, all at once, I happened to glance to loo'ard, and there I saw it climbing over the rail. My God! I didn't know what to do. The Second Mate was standing forrard on the break of the poop, and I was here all by myself. I felt as if I were frozen stiff.

"WHEN it came towards me, I let go of the wheel, and yelled and bunked forrard to the Second Mate. He caught hold of me and shook me; but I

was so jolly frightened, I couldn't say a word. I could only keep on pointing. The Second kept asking me "Where?" And then, all at once, I found I couldn't see the thing. I don't know whether he saw it. I'm not at all certain he did. He just told me to damn well get back to the wheel, and stop making a damned fool of myself.

"I said out straight I wouldn't go. So he blew his whistle, and sung out for some one to come aft and take it. Then he ran and got hold of the wheel himself. You know the rest."

"I'm sure I don't know what it all means, Tammy," I answered. "I'm just as much in the dark, there, as you are. And I don't know whether they're real—that is, not as we consider things real in our world."

"We were silent for a couple of moments.

"Then he spoke again:

"Is the ship haunted?"

"No," I said, at length. "I don't think she is. I mean, not in that way."

"Go on!" he said, with an impatient, nervous movement. I had never seen him so frightened.

"About that thing you saw to-night," I went on. "You say it came over the lee-rail, up on to the poop?"

"Yes," he answered.

"Well, the thing I saw, *came up out of the sea, and went back into the sea.*"

"Jove!" he said; and then: "Yes, go on!"

"MY IDEA is, that this ship is open to be boarded by those things," I explained. "What they are, of course I don't know. They look like men—in lots of ways. But—well, the Lord knows what's in the sea. I don't know a bit whether they're flesh and blood, or whether they're what we should call ghosts—"

"They can't be flesh and blood," Tammy interrupted. "Where do they come from?"

"Out of the sea," I told him. "You saw for yourself!"

"Then why don't other vessels have them coming aboard?" he said. "How do you account for that?"

"Why, I believe that this ship is open, as I've told you—exposed, unprotected, or whatever you like to call it. I should say it's reasonable to think that all the things of the material world are barred, as it were, from the immaterial; but that in some cases the barrier may be broken down. That's what may have happened to this ship."

"Suppose the earth were inhabited by two kinds of life. We're one, and *they're* the other."

"Go on!" he said.

"Well," I said. "The earth may be just as real to them, as to us."

"Yes," he said. "Go on!"

"Well, if we were in what I might call a healthy atmosphere, they would be quite beyond our power to see or feel, or

anything. And the same with them; but the more we're like *this*, the more *real* and actual they could grow to us:—See? That is, the more we should become able to appreciate their form of materialness. That's all. I can't make it any clearer.'

"Then, after all, you *really* think they're ghosts, or something of that sort?" Tammy said.

"I suppose it does come to that," I answered. "I mean that, anyway, I don't think they're our ideas of flesh and blood. But, of course, it's silly to say much; and, after all, you must remember that I may be all wrong."

"I think you ought to tell the Second Mate all this," he said. "If it's really as you say, the ship ought to be put into the nearest port, and jolly well burnt."

"The Second Mate couldn't do anything," I replied. "Even if he believed it all; which we're not certain he would."

"Perhaps not," Tammy answered. "But if you could get him to believe it, he might explain the whole business to the Skipper, and then something might be done. It's not safe as it is."

"He'd only get jeered at again," I said, rather hopelessly.

"No," said Tammy. "Not after what's happened to-night."

"Perhaps not," I replied, doubtfully. And just then the Second Mate came back on to the poop, and Tammy cleared away from the wheelbox, leaving me with a worrying feeling that I ought to do something.

CHAPTER VI

THE COMING OF THE MIST

"WE BURIED Williams at mid-day. Poor beggar! It had been so sudden. All day the men were awed and gloomy, and there was a lot of talk about there being a Jonah aboard. If they'd only know what Tammy and I, and perhaps the Second Mate, knew!

"And then the next thing came—the mist.

"It was broad daylight when the thing came.

"The wind had died away to a light breeze, and I was working at the main rigging, along with Plummer, putting on seizings.

"Looks as if 'twere middlin' 'ot," he remarked.

"It's gettin' quite 'azy.'

"I glanced up, quickly. At first, I could see nothing. Then, I saw what he meant. The air had a wavy, strange, unnatural appearance; something like the heated air over the top of an engine's funnel, that you can often see when no smoke is coming out.

"Must be the heat," I said. "Though I don't remember ever seeing anything just like it before."

"Nor me," Plummer agreed.

"It could not have been a minute later when I looked up again, and was astonished to find that the whole ship was surrounded by a thinnish haze that quite hid the horizon.

"By Jove! Plummer," I said. "How queer!"

"Yes," he said, looking round. "I never seen anythin' like it before—not in these parts."

"Heat wouldn't do that!" I said.

"N-no," he said, doubtfully.

"We went on with our work again—occasionally exchanging an odd word or two. Presently, after a little time of silence, I bent forward and asked him to pass me up the spike. He stooped and picked it up from the deck, where it had tumbled. As he held it out to me, I saw the stolid expression on his face change suddenly to a look of complete surprise. He opened his mouth.

"By gum!" he said. "It's gone."

"I turned quickly, and looked. And so it had—the whole sea showing clear and bright, right away to the horizon.

"During the rest of the watch, and indeed all day, there was no further sign of anything unusual. Only, when the evening came (in the second dog-watch it was) I saw the mist rise faintly—the setting sun shining through it, dim and unreal.

"I knew then, as a certainty, that it was not caused by heat.

"And that was the beginning of it.

"The next day, I kept a pretty close watch, during all my time on deck; but the atmosphere remained clear. Yet, I heard from one of the chaps in the Mate's watch, that it had been hazy during part of the time he was at the wheel.

"Comin' an' goin', like," he described it to me, when I questioned him about it. He thought it might be heat.

"Then, on the following day, something happened that set me wondering more than ever, and showed me how right I had been in feeling the mist to be something unnatural. It was in this way.

"Five bells, in the eight to twelve morning watch, had gone. I was at the wheel. The sky was perfectly clear—not a cloud to be seen, even on the horizon. It was hot, standing at the wheel; for there was scarcely any wind, and I was feeling drowsy. The Second Mate was down on the maindeck with the men, seeing about some job he wanted done; so that I was on the poop alone.

“PRESENTLY, with the heat, and the sun beating right down on me, I grew thirsty; and, for want of something better, I pulled out a bit of plug I had on me, and bit off a chew; though, as a rule, it is not a habit of mine. After a little, naturally enough, I glanced around for the spittoon; but discovered that it was not there. Probably it had been taken forrard when the decks were washed, to give it a scrub. So, as there was no one on the poop, I left the wheel, and stepped aft to the taffrail. It was thus that I came to see something altogether unthought of—a full-rigged ship, close-hauled on the port tack, a few hundred yards on our starboard quarter. Her sails were scarcely filled by the light breeze, and flapped as she lifted to the swell of the sea. She appeared to have very little way through the water, certainly not more than a knot an hour. Away aft, hanging from the gaff-end, was a string of flags. Evidently, she was signalling to us. All this, I saw in a flash, and I just stood and stared, astonished. I was astonished because I had not seen her earlier. In that light breeze, I knew that she must have been in sight for at least a couple of hours. Yet I could think of nothing rational to satisfy my wonder. There she was—of that much, I was certain. And yet, how had she come there without my seeing her, before?

"All at once, as I stood, staring, I heard the wheel behind me, spin rapidly. Instinctively, I jumped to get hold of the spokes; for I did not want the steering gear jammed. Then I turned again to have another look at the other ship; but, to my utter bewilderment, *there was no sign of her*—nothing but the calm ocean, spreading away to the distant horizon. I blinked my eyelids a bit, and pushed the hair off my forehead. Then, I stared again; but there was no vestige of her—and absolutely nothing unusual, except a faint, tremulous quiver in the air. And the blank surface of the sea, reaching everywhere to the empty horizon.

"Had she foundered? I asked myself, naturally enough; and, for the moment, I really wondered.

"I searched round the sea for wreckage; but there was nothing, not even an odd hencoop, or a piece of deck furniture; and so I threw away that idea, as impossible.

"Then, as I stood, I got another thought, or, perhaps, an intuition, and I asked myself, seriously, whether this disappearing ship might not be in some way connected with the other queer things. It occurred to me then, that the vessel I had seen was nothing real, and, perhaps, did not exist outside of my brain. I considered the idea gravely. It helped to explain the thing and I could think of nothing else that would. Had she been real, I felt sure that others aboard us would have been bound to have seen her long before I had. . . . I got a bit muddled there, with trying to think it out; and then, abruptly, the reality of the other ship came back to me—every rope and sail and spar, you know. And I remembered how she had lifted to the heave of the sea, and how the sails had flapped in the light breeze. And the string of flags! She had been signalling us.

"And then a fresh thought came to me. How long had we been like that? I puzzled for a few moments. It was now that I recollected that we had sighted several vessels on the morning of the day when the mist appeared; and since then, we had seen nothing. This, to say the least, should have struck me as queer; for some of the other packets were homeward bound along with us, and steering the same course. Consequently, with the weather being fine, and the wind next to nothing, they should have been in sight all the time. This reasoning, seemed to me to show, unmistakably, some connection between the coming of the mist, and our inability to see. So that it is possible we had been in that extraordinary state of blindness for nearly three days.

“IN MY mind, the last glimpse of that ship on the quarter came back to me. And, I remember, a curious thought got me, that I had looked at her from out of some other dimension. For a while, you know, I really believe the mystery of the idea, and that it might be the actual truth, took me; instead of my realizing just all that it might mean. It seemed so exactly to express all the half-

defined thoughts that had come since seeing that other packet on the quarter.

"Suddenly, behind me, there came a rustle and rattle of the sails; and, in the same instant, I heard the Skipper saying:

"Where the devil have you got her to, Jessop?"

"I whirled round to the wheel.

"I don't know—Sir," I faltered.

"I had forgotten even that I was at the wheel.

"Don't know!" he shouted. "I should damned well think you don't. Starboard your helm, you fool. You'll have us all aback!"

"I, I, Sir," I answered, and hove the wheel over. I did it almost mechanically; for I was still dazed, and had not yet had time to collect my senses.

"During the following half-minute, I was only conscious, in a confused sort of way, that the Old Man was rating at me. This feeling of bewilderment passed off, and I found that I was peering blankly into the binnacle, at the compass-card; yet, until then, entirely without being aware of the fact. Now, however, I saw that the ship was coming back on to her course. Goodness knows how much she had been off!

"He shouted, angrily, 'What's the matter with you? What have you been doing with the ship? Answer me now!'

"I was looking at that ship away on the starboard quarter, Sir," I blurted out. "She's been signalling—"

"What!" he cut me short with. "What ship?"

"He turned, quickly, and looked over the quarter. Then he wheeled round to me again.

"There's no ship! What do you mean by trying to spin up a cuffer like that?"

"There is, Sir," I answered. "It's out there—" I pointed.

He came a step towards me, and stared into my face. I believe the old ass thought I was a bit mad; anyway, without a word, he went to the break of the poop.

"Mr. Tulipson," he sung out.

"Yes, Sir," I heard the Second Mate reply.

"Send another man to the wheel."

"Very good, Sir," the Second answered.

"A couple of minutes later, old Jaskett came up to relieve me. I gave him the course, and he repeated it.

"What's up, mate?" he asked me, as I stepped off the grating.

"Nothing much," I said, and went for-

ward to where the Skipper was standing on the break of the poop. I gave him the course; but the crabby old devil took no notice of me, whatever. When I got down on to the maindeck, I went up to the Second, and gave it to him. He answered me civilly enough, and then asked me what I had been doing to put the Old Man's back up.

"I told him there's a ship on the starboard quarter, signalling us," I said.

"There's no ship out there, Jessop," the Second Mate replied, looking at me with a queer, inscrutable expression.

"There is, Sir," I began. "I—"

"That will do, Jessop!" he said. "Go forrard and have a smoke. I shall want you then to give a hand with these footropes. You'd better bring a serving-mallet aft with you when you come."

"I hesitated a moment, partly in anger; but more I think, in doubt.

"I, I, Sir," I muttered, at length, and went forrard.

CHAPTER VII

AFTER THE COMING OF THE MIST

"AFTER the coming of the mist, things seemed to develop pretty quickly. In the following two or three days a good deal happened.

"On the night of the day on which the Skipper had sent me away from the wheel, it was our watch on the deck from eight o'clock to twelve, and my look-out from ten to twelve.

"As I paced slowly to and fro across the fo'c's'le head, I was thinking about the affair of the morning. At first, my thoughts were about the Old Man. I cursed him thoroughly to myself, for being a pig-headed fool, until it occurred to me that if I had been in his place, and come on deck to find the ship almost aback, and the fellow at the wheel staring out across the sea, instead of attending to his business, I should most certainly have kicked up a thundering row. And then, I had been an ass to tell him about the ship. I should never have done such a thing, if I had not been a bit adrift. Most likely the old chap thought I was cracked.

"Abruptly, as I walked backwards and forwards, taking occasional glances over the sea (which was almost calm), my eye caught the glow of a light out in the darkness. I stool still, and stared. I wondered whether it was the light of a ves-

sel. In that case we were no longer enveloped in that extraordinary atmosphere. I bent forward, and gave the thing my more immediate attention. I saw then that it was undoubtedly the green light of a vessel on our port bow. It was plain that she was bent on crossing our bows. What was more, she was dangerously near. Instantly, I turned and, putting my hands up to my mouth, hailed the Second Mate:

"Light on the port bow, Sir."

"The next moment his hail came back:

"Whereabouts?"

"He must be blind," I said to myself.

"About two points on the bow, Sir," I sung out.

I waited, pretty anxiously, watching and listening. Then all at once, I heard steps coming along the deck, forward, and the prentice, whose time-keeping it was, came up on to the fo'cas'le head.

"The Second Mate says he can't see any light, Jessop," he said, coming over to where I stood. "Whereabouts is it?"

"I don't know," I answered. "I've lost sight of it myself. It was a green light, about a couple of points on the port bow. It seemed fairly close."

"All right, keep your rag in," he said, and went aft to report to the Second Mate.

FIVE minutes later, it might have been, I saw the light again. It was broad on the bow, and told me plain-

ly enough that she had up with her helm to escape being run down. I did not wait a moment; but sung out to the Second Mate that there was a green light about four points on the port bow. By Jove! it must have been a close shave. The light did not *seem* to be more than about a hundred yards away.

"Even as the thought came into my head, the light faded and vanished; and I caught the Second Mate's voice.

"Whereaway?" he was singing out anxiously.

"It's gone again, Sir," I answered.

"A minute later, I heard him coming along the deck.

"He reached the foot of the starboard ladder.

"Where are you, Jessop?" he inquired.

"Here, Sir," I said, and went to the top of the weather ladder.

"He came up slowly on to the fo'cas'le head.

"All at once, he faced round on me with a sudden question:

"Where's she gone to? If she's shifted her bearing as quickly as all that, she must be precious close. We should be able to see her spars and sails!"

"It's queer, Sir," I assented. My voice shook a little.

"Damned queer," he said. "So damned queer that I'm inclined to think you've made a mistake."

"No, Sir. I'm dead certain it was a light."

"Where's the ship, then?" he asked.

"I can't say, Sir. That's what's been puzzling me."

"You go along forrard and turn in," he said, not altogether unkindly. "You know, you're getting to fancy things too much!"

"I'm sure I'm not, Sir! I'm perfectly well. I—"

"That will do!" he interrupted, sharply. "You go and have a sleep."

"I GAVE a short curse, under my breath and went slowly forrard. I was getting maddened with being treated as if I were quite insane.

"By God!" I said to myself. "Wait till the fools know what I know— Just wait!"

"I entered the fo'cassle, through the port doorway, and went across to my chest, and sat down. I felt angry and tired and miserable.

"Quoin and Plummer were sitting close by, playing cards and smoking. Stubbins lay in his bunk, watching them, and also smoking. As I sat down, he put his head forward over the bunkboard, and regarded me in a curious, meditative way.

"What's hup with ther Second officer?" he asked, after a short stare.

"I looked at him, and the other two men looked up at me. I felt I should go off with a bang, if I did not say something, and I let out pretty stiffly, telling them the whole business. Yet, I had seen enough to know that it was no good trying to explain things; so I just told them the plain, bald facts, and left the explanations as much alone as possible.

"Three times, you say?" said Stubbins when I had finished.

"Yes," I assented.

"An' ther Old Man sent yer from ther wheel this mornin', 'cause yer 'appened ter see a ship 'e couldn't," Plummer added in a reflective tone.

"Yes," I said again.

"I thought I saw him look at Quoin significantly; but Stubbins, I noticed, looked only at me.

"I reckon ther Second thinks you're a bit hoff colour," he remarked, after a short pause.

"The Second Mate's a fool," I said, with some bitterness. "A confounded fool!"

"I hain't so sure about that," he replied. "It's bound ter seem queer ter him. I don't hunderstand it myself. . . ."

"He lapsed into silence, and smoked.

"I carn't understand 'ow it is ther

Second Mate didn't 'appen to spot it," Quoin said, in a puzzled voice.

"It seemed to me that Plummer nudged him to be quiet. It looked as if Plummer shared the Second Mate's opinion, and the idea made me savage. But Stubbins's next remark drew my attention.

"Why didn't you bloomin' well harsk him if he wern't doin' ther imaginin' trick when he sent us chasin' hup ther main, hafter that bogymen of his?"

"I never thought of it," I told him.

"Well, yer ought ter have."

"He paused, and sat up in his bunk, and asked for a match.

"As I passed him my box, Quoin looked up from his game.

"It might 'ave been a stowaway, yer know. Yer carn't say as it's ever been proved as it wasn't."

"Stubbins passed the box back to me, and went on without noticing Quoin's remark:

"Told you to go an' have a snooze, did he? I don't hunderstand what he's bluffin' at."

"How do you mean, bluffing?" I asked.

"He nodded his head, sagely.

"It's my hidea he knows you saw that light, just as bloomin' well as I do."

"Plummer looked up from his game at this speech, but said nothing.

"Then you don't doubt that I really saw it?" I asked, with a certain surprise.

"Not me," he remarked, with assurance. "You hain't likely ter make that kind of mistake three times runnin'."

"No," I said. "I know I saw the light, right enough; but—I hesitated a moment—it's blessed queer."

"It is blessed queer!" he agreed. "It's damned queer! An' there's a lot of other damn queer things happenin' aboard this packet lately."

"He was silent for a few seconds. Then he spoke suddenly:

"It's not nat'ral, I'm damned sure of that much."

"I TOOK a couple of draws at his pipe, and in the momentary silence, I caught Jaskett's voice, above us. He was hailing the poop.

"Red light on the starboard quarter, Sir," I heard him sing out.

"There you are," I said, with a jerk of my head. "That's about where that packet ought to be by now. She couldn't cross our bows, so she up helm and let us pass, and now she's hauled up again and gone under our stern."

"I got up from the chest, and went to the door, the other three following. As we stepped out on deck, I heard the Second Mate shouting out, away aft, to know the whereabouts of the light.

"By Jove! Stubbins,' I said. 'I believe the blessed thing's gone again.'

"We ran to the starboard side, in a body, and looked over; but there was no sign of a light in the darkness astern.

"I can't say as I see any light,' said Quoin.

"Plummer said nothing.

"I looked up at the fo'cas'le head. There, I could faintly distinguish the outlines of Jaskett. He was standing by the starboard rail, with his hands up, shading his eyes, evidently staring towards the place where he had last seen the light.

"Where's she got to, Jaskett?' I called out.

"I can't say, mate,' he answered. 'It's the most 'ellishly funny thing ever I've comed across. She were there as plain as me 'att one minnit, an' ther next she were gone—clean gone.'

"I turned to Plummer.

"What do you think about it *now*?' I asked him.

"Well,' he said. 'I'll admit I thought at first 'twere somethin' an' nothin'. I thought yer was mistaken; but it seems yer did see somethin'.'

"Away aft, we heard the sound of steps, along the deck.

"Ther Second's comin' forrard for a hexplanation, Jaskett,' Stubbins sung out. 'You'd better go down an' change yer breeks.'

"The Second Mate passed us and went up the starboard ladder.

"What's up now, Jaskett?' he said quickly. 'Where is this light? Neither the 'prentice nor I can see it!'

"Ther damn thing's clean gone, Sir,' Jaskett replied.

"Gone!' the Second Mate said. 'Gone! What do you mean?'

"She were there one minnit, Sir, as plain as me 'att, an' ther next,' she'd gone.'

"You're an old fool, Jaskett,' the Second said, sharply. 'And that idiot Jessop has been putting things into your silly old head.'

"We 'aven't—' Jaskett started to say; but the Second silenced him.

"Stow it!' he said, and turned and went down the ladder, passing us quickly, without a word.

"Doesn't look to me, Stubbins,' I said, 'as though the Second did believe we've seen the light.'

"I hain't so sure,' he answered. 'He's a puzzler.'

"The rest of the watch passed away quietly; and at eight bells I made haste to turn in, for I was tremendously tired.

"When we were called again for the four to eight watch on deck, I learnt that one of the men in the Mate's watch had seen a light, soon after we had gone below, and had reported it, only for it to disappear immediately. This, I found, had happened twice, and the Mate had got so wild (being under the impression that the man was playing the fool) that he had nearly come to blows with him—finally ordering him off the look-out, and sending another man up in his place. If this last man saw the light, he took good care not to let the Mate know; so that the matter had ended there.

"And then, on the following night, before we had ceased to talk about the matter of the vanishing lights, something else occurred that temporarily drove from my mind all memory of the mist, and the extraordinary, blind atmosphere it had seemed to usher.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MAN WHO CRIED FOR HELP

"IT WAS, as I have said, on the following night that something further happened. And it brought home pretty vividly to me, if not to any of the others, the sense of a personal danger aboard.

"At a quarter to twelve, when we were called for our twelve to four watch on deck, I could tell at once, by the sound, that there was a fresh breeze blowing; at the same time, I heard the voices of the men in the other watch, singing out as they hauled on the ropes.

"Tom (who, as usual, had only turned out of his bunk at the last minute) came aft to answer his name. When, at last, he did come, the Second and the Mate joined in giving him a good dressing down for a lazy sojer; so that several minutes passed before we were on our way forrard again. This was a small enough matter in itself, and yet really terrible in its consequences to one of our number; for, just as we reached the fore rigging, there was a shout aloft, loud above the noise of the wind, and the next

moment, something crashed down into our midst, with a great, slogging thud—something bulky and weighty, that struck full upon Jock, so that he went down with a loud, horrible, ringing 'ugg,' and never said a word. From the whole crowd of us there went up a yell of fear, and then, with one accord, there was a run for the lighted fo'cas'le. I am not ashamed to say that I ran with the rest. A blind, unreasoning fright had seized me, and I did not stop to think.

"Once in the fo'cas'le and the light, there was a reaction. We all stood and looked blankly at one another for a few moments. Then some one asked a question, and there was a general murmur of denial. We all felt ashamed, and some one reached up, and unhooked the lantern on the port side. I did the same with the starboard one; and there was a quick movement towards the doors. As we screamed out on deck, I caught the sound of the Mates' voices. They had evidently come down from off the poop to find out what had happened; but it was too dark to see their whereabouts.

"The Second Mate ran into the circle of light thrown by our lanterns, and stopped dead—eyeing us doubtfully.

"There's been an awful accident, Sir. Something's fallen from aloft, right on to Jock—"

"I stopped suddenly; for there was a loud crying aloft.

"Help! help! help!" some one was shouting, and then it rose from a shout into a scream.

"My God, Sir!" I shouted. "That's one of the men up at the fore royall!"

"Listen!" ordered the Second Mate. "Listen!"

"Even as he spoke, it came again—broken and, as it were, in gasps.

"Help! . . . Oh! God! . . . Oh! Help! H—e—l—p!"

"Abruptly, Stubbins's voice struck in.

"Hup with us, lads! By God! hup with us!" and he made a spring into the fore rigging. I shoved the handle of the lantern between my teeth, and followed. Plummer was coming, but the Second Mate pulled him back.

"That's sufficient," he said. "I'm going," and he came up after me.

"We went over the foretop, racing like fiends. We cleared the crossrees, and climbed into the t'gallant rigging. The wind was fairly fresh up there, and overhead, there sounded the flap, flap of sailcloth flying in the wind; but since

we had left the deck, there had been no other sound from above.

"Now, abruptly, there came again a wild crying from the darkness over us. A strange, wild medley it was of screams for help, mixed up with violent, breathless curses.

"Beneath the royal yard, Stubbins halted, and looked down to me.

"Hurry hup . . . with the . . . lantern . . . Jessop!" he shouted, catching his breath between the words. "There'll be murder done hin a minute!"

"I REACHED him, and held the light up for him to catch. He stooped, and took it from me. Then, holding it above his head, he went a few ratlines higher. In this manner, he reached to a level with the royal yard. From my position, a little below him, the lantern seemed but to throw a few straggling, flickering rays along the spar; yet they showed me something. My first glance had been to wind'ard, and I had seen at once, that there was nothing on the weather yard arm. From there my gaze went to leeward. Indistinctly, I saw something upon the yard, that clung, struggling. Stubbins bent towards it with the light; thus I saw it more clearly. It was Jacobs, the Ordinary Seaman. He had his right arm tightly round the yard; with the other, he appeared to be fending himself from something on the other side of him, and further out upon the yard. At times, moans and gasps came from him, and sometimes curses. Once, as he appeared to be dragged partly from his hold, he screamed like a woman.

"It seems impossible to convey truly to you, the strange scene on the royal yard. You may be able to picture it to yourselves. The Second Mate standing upon spar, holding the lantern; his body swaying with each roll of the ship, and his head craned forward as he peered along the yard. On our left, Jacobs, mad, fighting, cursing, praying, gasping; and outside of him, shadows and the night.

"The Second Mate spoke, abruptly.

"Hold on a moment!" he said. Then: "Jacobs!" he shouted. "Jacobs, do you hear me?"

"There was no reply, only the continual gasping and cursing.

"Go on," the Second Mate said to us. "But be careful. Keep a tight hold!"

"He held the lantern higher, and we went out cautiously.

"Stubbins reached the Ordinary, and

put his hand on his shoulder, with a soothing gesture.

"'Steady hon now, Jacobs,' he said. 'Steady hon.'

"At his touch, as though by magic, the young fellow calmed down, and Stubbins—reaching round him—grasped the Jackstay on the other side.

"'Get a hold of him your side, Jessop,' he sung out. 'I'll get this side.'

"'This I did, and Stubbins climbed round him.

"'There hain't no one here,' Stubbins called to me; but his voice expressed no surprise.

"'What!' sung out the Second Mate. 'No one there! Where's Svensen, then?'

"I did not catch Stubbins's reply; for suddenly, it seemed to me that I saw something shadowy at the extreme end of the yard, out by the lift. I stared. It rose up, upon the yard, and I saw that it was the figure of a man. It grasped at the lift, and commenced to swarm up, quickly. It passed diagonally above Stubbins's head, and reached down a vague hand and arm.

"'Look out! Stubbins!' I shouted. 'Look out!'

"'What's hup now?' he called, in a startled voice. At the same instant, his cap went whirling away to leeward.

"Then, all at once, Jacobs, who had only been giving an occasional moan, commenced to shriek and struggle.

"'Hold fast hon ter her!' Stubbins yelled. 'He'll be throwin' hisself hoff ther yard.'

I put my left arm round the Ordinary's body—getting hold of the Jackstay on the other side.

"'Go along, young feller,' Stubbins put in. 'You're right now. We'll take care of you.' And we started to guide him along the yard.

"He went willingly enough; though without saying a word. He seemed like a child. Once or twice he shivered; but said nothing.

"We got him in to the lee rigging. Then, one going beside him, and the other keeping below, we made our way slowly down on deck. We got him into his bunk. We covered him up with his blankets, for he was pretty shivery. Then we came out. During the whole time, he had not spoken a word.

"WE REACHED the other men, and they opened out, and allowed us to get near the door. Several of them asked

in low tones, whether Jacobs was all right, and I told them Yes, not saying anything then about his condition.

"I got close up to the doorway, and looked into the berth. The lamp was lit, and I could see plainly. There were two bunks in the place, and a man had been laid in each. The Skipper was there, leaning up against a bulkhead. He looked worried; but was silent—seeming to be mooting in his own thoughts. The Second Mate was busy with a couple of flags, which he was spreading over the bodies. The First Mate was talking, evidently telling him something; but his tone was so low that I caught his words only with difficulty. It struck me that he seemed pretty subdued. I got parts of his sentences in patches, as it were.

"'. . . broken,' I heard him say. 'And the Dutchman. . .'

"'I've seen him,' the Second Mate said, shortly.

"'Two, straight off the reel,' said the Mate. '... three in. . .'

"The Second made no reply.

"'Of course, yer know accident.' The First Mate went on.

"'Is it!' the Second said, in a queer voice.

"I saw the Mate glance at him, in a doubtful sort of way; but the Second was covering poor old Jock's dead face, and did not appear to notice his look.

"'It—it . . . ' the Mate said, and stopped.

"After a moment's hesitation, he said something further, that I could not catch; but there seemed a lot of funk in his voice.

"The Second Mate appeared not to have heard him; at any rate, he made no reply; but bent, and straightened out a corner of the flag over the rigid figure in the lower bunk. There was a certain niceness in his action which made me warm towards him.

"'He's white!' I thought to myself.

"Out loud, I said:

"'We've put Jacobs into his bunk, Sir.'

"The Mate jumped, then whizzed round, and stared at me as though I had been a ghost. The Second Mate turned also, but before he could speak, the Skipper took a step towards me.

"'Is he all right?' he asked.

"'Well, Sir,' I said. 'He's a bit queer; but I think it's possible he may be better after a sleep.'

"'I hope so, too,' he replied, and stepped out on deck. He went towards the starboard poop ladder, walking slow-

ly. The Second went and stood by the lamp, and the Mate, after a quick glance at him, came out and followed the Skipper up on to the poop. It occurred to me then, like a flash, that the man had stumbled upon a portion of the truth.

"Ah! Mr. Bully-Mate," I thought to myself. "You're in for a bad time if you've begun to understand."

"Abruptly, my thoughts jumped to the vague future before us.

"God help us!" I muttered.

"The Second Mate, after a look round, turned down the wick of the lamp, and came out, closing the door after him.

"Now, you men," he said to the Mate's watch, "get forrard; we can't do anything more. You'd better go and get some sleep."

"I, I, Sir," they said, in a chorus.

"Then, as we all turned to go forward, he asked if any one had relieved the lookout.

"No, Sir," answered Quoin.

"Is it yours?" the Second asked.

"Yes, Sir," he replied.

"Hurry up and relieve him then," the Second said.

"As he spoke, several spots of rain fell, and I glanced up at the sky. It had become thickly clouded.

"The men in the other watch seemed to have no immediate intention of turning in, but sat in their bunks, and around on the chests. There was a general lighting of pipes, in the midst of which Stubbins jumped up from his seachest.

"The Second Mate's whistlin'!" he said. "Come hon," and he ran out on deck.

"Plummer, Jaskett and I followed quickly. Outside, it had started to rain pretty heavily. As we went, the Second Mate's voice came to us through the darkness.

"Stand by the main royal clewlines and buntlines," I heard him shout, and the next instant came the hollow thutter of the sail as he started to lower away.

"In a few minutes we had hauled it up.

"Up and furl it, a couple of you," he sung out.

"I WENT towards the starboard rigging; then I hesitated. No one else had moved.

"The Second Mate came among us.

"Come on now, lads," he said. "Make a move. It's got to be done."

"Still, no one stirred,

"I'll go," I said, "if some one else will come."

"Tammy came across to me.

"I'll come," he volunteered, in a nervous voice.

"No, by God, no!" said the Second Mate, abruptly. He jumped into the main rigging himself. "Come along, Jessop!" he shouted.

"I followed him; but I was astonished. I had fully expected him to get on to the other fellows' tracks like a ton of bricks. It had not occurred to me that he was making allowances. I was simply puzzled then; but afterwards it dawned upon me.

"No sooner had I followed the Second Mate, than, straightway, Stubbins, Plummer, and Jaskett came up after us at a run.

"About halfway to the maintop, the Second Mate stopped, and looked down warily.

"Who's that coming up below you, Jessop?" he asked.

"Before I could speak, Stubbins answered:

"It's me, Sir, an' Plummer an' Jaskett."

"Who the devil told you to come now? Go straight down, the lot of you!"

"We're comin' hup ter keep you company, Sir," was his reply.

"At that, I was confident of a burst of temper from the Second; and yet, for the second time within a couple of minutes I was wrong. Instead of cursing Stubbins, he, after a moment's pause, went on up the rigging, without another word, and the rest of us followed. We reached the royal, and made short work of it; indeed, there were sufficient of us to have eaten it. When we had finished, I noticed that the Second Mate remained on the yard until we were all in the rigging. Evidently, he had determined to take a full share of any risk there might be; but I took care to keep pretty close to him; so as to be on hand if anything happened; yet we reached the deck again, without anything having occurred. I have said, without anything having occurred; but I am not really correct in this; for, as the Second Mate came down over the crosstrees, he gave a short, abrupt cry.

"Anything wrong, Sir?" I asked.

"No—o!" he said. "Nothing! I banged my knee."

"And yet now, I believe he was lying. For that same watch, I was to hear men

giving just such cries; but, God knows, they had reason enough.

CHAPTER IX

HANDS THAT PLUCKED

"DIRECTLY we reached the deck, the Second Mate gave the order:

"'Mizzen t'gallant clewlines and buntlines,' and led the way up on to the poop. He went and stood by the halyards, ready to lower away. As I walked across to the starboard clewline I saw that the Old Man was on deck, and as I took hold of the rope, I heard him sing out to the Second Mate.

"'Call all hands to shorten sail, Mr. Tulipson.'

"'Very good, Sir,' the Second Mate replied. Then he raised his voice:

"'Go forrard, you, Jessop, and call all hands to shorten sail. You'd better give them a call in the bosun's place, as you go.'

"'I, Sir,' I sung out, and hurried off.

"As I went, I heard him tell Tammy to go down and call the Mate.

"Reaching the fo'cas'le, I put my head in through the starboard doorway, and found some of the men beginning to turn in.

"'It's all hands on deck, shorten sail,' I sung out.

"'I stepped inside.

"'Just wot I said,' grumbled one of the men.

"'They don't dam well think we're goin' aloft to-night, after what's happened?' asked another.

"'Well,' I replied, 'we've got to get the sail off her, or there'll be a mess. The glass is falling.'

"'Come erlong, boys. We've got ter du it,' said one of the older men, rising from the chest, at this point. 'What's it du'n' outside, mate?'

"'Raining,' I said. 'You'll want your oil-skins.'

"I stepped out on deck, and ran aft again to give them a hand with the sail. We got it hauled up, and then went forward to the fore t'gallant. And, a minute later, the other watch were out, and, with the Mate, were busy at the main.

"By the time the main was ready for making fast, we had the fore hauled up, so that now all three t'gallants were in the ropes, and ready for stowing. Then came the order:



"I was going swiftly down into the darkness!"

"Up aloft and furl!"

"Up with you, lads," the Second Mate said. "Don't let's have any hanging back this time."

"Away aft by the main, the men in the Mate's watch seemed to be standing in a clump by the mast; but it was too dark to see clearly. I heard the Mate start to curse; then there came a growl and he shut up.

"Be handy, men! be handy!" the Second Mate sung out.

"At that, Stubbins jumped into the rigging.

"Come hon!" he shouted. "We'll have ther bloomin' sail fast, an' down hon the deck again before they're started."

"Plummer followed; then Jaskett, I, and Quoin who had been called down off the look-out to give a hand.

"That's the style, lads!" the Second sung out, encouragingly. Then he ran aft to the Mate's crowd. I heard him and the Mate talking to the men, and presently, when we were going over the fore-top, I made out that they were beginning to get into the rigging.

"I found out, afterwards, that as soon as the Second Mate had seen them off the deck, he went up to the mizzen t'gallant, along with the four 'prentices.

"On our part, we made our way slowly aloft, keeping one hand for ourselves and the other for the ship, as you can fancy. In this manner we had gone as far as the crosstrees, at least, Stubbins, who was first, had; when, all at once, he gave out just another such cry as had the Second Mate a little earlier, only that in his case he followed it by turning round and blasting Plummer.

"'You might have blarsted well sent me flyin' down hon deck,' he shouted. 'If you think it's a joke, try it hon some one else. . . .'

"'It wasn't me!' interrupted Plummer. 'I 'aven't touched yer. 'oo the 'ell are yer swearin' at?'

"'At you. . . I heard him reply; but what more he may have said, was lost in a loud shout from Plummer.

"'What's up, Plummer?' I sung out. 'For God's sake, you two, don't get fighting, up aloft!'

"Yet he only cried out the more. And then, abruptly, I caught the sound of a frightened clamour of men's voices, away down somewhere about the maintop—curses, cries of fear, even shrieks, and above it all, some one shouting to go down on deck:

"'Get down! get down! down; down! Blarst—'

"'The rest was drowned in a fresh outburst of hoarse crying in the night.

"I TRIED to get past old Jaskett; but he was clinging to the rigging, sprawled on to it, is the best way to describe his attitude, so much of it as I could see in the darkness. Up above him, Stubbins and Plummer still shouted and cursed, and the shrouds quivered and shook, as though the two were fighting desperately.

"Stubbins seemed to be shouting something definite; but whatever it was, I could not catch.

"At my helplessness, I grew angry, and shook and prodded Jaskett, to make him move.

"'Damn you, Jaskett!' I roared. 'Damn you for a funky old fool! Let me get past! Let me get past, will you!'

"In the same instant a sentence from Stubbins floated down to me, with a strange distinctness:

"'For God's sake tell 'em ter get down hon deck!' he was shouting.

"Even as the words came to me, something in the darkness gripped my waist. I made a desperate clutch at the rigging with my disengaged hand, and it was well for me that I secured the hold so quickly; for the same instant, I was wrenched at with a brutal ferocity that appalled me. I said nothing, but lashed out into the night with my left foot. It is queer, but I cannot say with certainty that I struck anything; I was too downright desperate with funk, to be sure; and yet it seemed to me that my foot encountered something soft, that gave under the blow. It must have been nothing more than an imagined sensation, yet I am inclined to think otherwise; for, instantly, the hold about my waist was released; and I commenced to scramble down, clutching the shrouds pretty desperately.

"I have only a very uncertain remembrance of that which followed. Whether I slid over Jaskett, or whether he gave way to me, I cannot tell. I know only that I reached the deck, in a blind whirl of fear and excitement, and the next thing I remember, I was among a crowd of shouting, half-mad sailor-men.

"In a confused way, I was conscious that the Skipper and the Mates were down among us, trying to get us into some state of calmness. Eventually they

succeeded, and we were told to go aft to the Saloon door, which we did in a body. Here, the Skipper himself served out a large tot of rum to each of us. Then, at his orders, the Second Mate called the roll.

"He called over the Mate's watch first, and every one answered. Then he came to ours, and he must have been much agitated; for the first name he sung out was Jock's.

"Among us there came a moment of dead silence, and I noticed the wall and moan of the wind aloft, and the flap, flap of the three unfurled t'gallan'sls.

"The Second Mate called the next name, hurriedly:

"'Jaskett,' he sung out.

"'Sir,' Jaskett answered.

"'Quoin.'

"'Yes, Sir.'

"'Jessop.'

"'Sir,' I replied.

"'Stubbins.'

"'There was no answer.

"'Stubbins,' again called the Second Mate.

"'Again there was no reply.

"'Is Stubbins here?—any one!' The Second's voice sounded sharp and anxious.

"There was a moment's pause. Then one of the men spoke:

"'He's not here, Sir.'

"He was standing a few ratlines up the t'gallant rigging, and he bent his body outwards to get a better look.

"I was just at the Old Man's heels.

"Suddenly, he shouted out:

"'There he is! . . . Stubbins! Stubbins!'

"'Where, Sir?' asked the Second, eagerly. 'I can't see him!'

"'There! there!' replied the Skipper, pointing.

“I LOOKED up in the direction his finger indicated. At first, I could see nothing; then, slowly, you know, there grew upon my sight a dim figure crouching upon the bunt of the royal, and partly hidden by the mast. I stared, and gradually it came to me that there was a couple of them, and further out upon the yard, a hump that might have been anything, and was only visible indistinctly amid the flutter of the canvas.

"'Stubbins!' the Skipper sung out. 'Stubbins, come down out of that! Do you hear me?'

"But no one came, and there was no answer.

"'There's two. . . ' I began; but he was shouting again:

"'Come down out of that! Do you damned well hear me?'

"'Still there was no reply.

"'I'm hanged if I can-see him at all, Sir!' the Second Mate called out.

"'Can't see him!' said the Old Man, now thoroughly angry. 'I'll soon let you see him!'

"He pulled off the cap of the light.

"'There's two of 'em, Sir,' I called again to him.

"'What?' he said in a loud voice, and at the same instant he rubbed the end of the light across the cap, and it burst into fire.

"He held it up so that it lit the royal yard like day, and straightway, a couple of shapes dropped silently from the royal on to the t'gallant yard. At the same moment, the humped something, midway out upon the yard, rose up. It ran in to the mast, and I lost sight of it.

"'God!' I heard the skipper gasp, and he fumbled in his side pocket.

"I saw the two figures which had dropped on to the t'gallant, run swiftly along the yard—one to the starboard and the other to the port yard arms.

"The Second Mate's pistol cracked out twice, sharply. Then, from over my head the Skipper fired twice, and then again; but with what effect, I could not tell. Abruptly, as he fired his last shot, I was aware of an indistinct Something, gliding down full upon Plummer.

"'Look out above you, Plummer!' I almost shrieked.

"'What? where?' he called, and waved his flare, excitedly.

"Pistol in hand, the Skipper was glancing about, uneasily.

"'Hold up that light, Jessop,' he said. 'I can't see!'

"All at once, there rose a loud outcry on deck, and then came the sound of a man screaming.

"'Get out of my way, Jessop!' the Skipper roared.

"I had caught a momentary glimpse of a man running from the doorway on the port side of the fo'cas'le. In less than half a minute we were upon the deck, and among a crowd of the men who were grouped round something. Yet, strangely enough, they were not looking at the thing among them; but away aft at something in the darkness.

"'It's on the rail!' cried several voices.

"'Overboard!' called somebody, in an

excited voice. 'It's jumped over the side!'

"There wer'nt nothin'!" said a man in the crowd.

"Silence!" shouted the Old Man. "Where's the Mate? What's happened?"

"Here, Sir," called the First Mate, shakily, from near the centre of the group. 'It's Jacobs, Sir. He—he . . .'

"What!" said the Skipper. "What!"

"He—he's—he's dead—I think!" said the First Mate, in jerks.

"Let me see," said the Old Man, in a quieter tone.

"The men had stood to one side to give him room, and he knelt beside the man upon the deck.

"Pass the lantern here, Jessop," he said.

"I stood by him, and held the light. The man was lying face downwards on the deck. Under the light from the lantern, the Skipper turned him over and looked at him.

"Yes," he said, after a short examination. "He's dead."

"He stood up and regarded the body a moment, in silence. Then he turned to the Second Mate, who had been standing by, during the last couple of minutes.

"Three!" he said, in a grim undertone.

"The Second Mate nodded.

"He seemed on the point of saying something; then he turned and looked at Jacobs, and said nothing.

"Three," repeated the Old Man. 'Since eight bells!'

"He stooped and looked again at Jacobs.

"Poor devil! poor devil!" he muttered.

"The Second Mate grunted some of the huskiness out of his throat, and spoke.

"Where must we take him?" he asked, quietly. "The two bunks are full."

"You'll have to put him down on the deck, by the lower bunk," replied the Skipper.

"As they carried him away, I heard the Old Man make a sound that was almost a groan.

"My God! O, my God!" he muttered, and began to walk slowly aft.

CHAPTER X

THE COUNCIL

"A FEW minutes later, the Second Mate came forrard again. I was still standing near the rigging, holding the lantern, in an aimless sort of way.

"That you, Plummer?" he asked.

"No, Sir," I said. "It's Jessop."

"Where's Plummer, then?" he inquired testily.

"I don't know, Sir," I answered. "I expect he's gone forrard. Shall I go and tell him you want him?"

"No, there's no need," he said. "Tie your lamp up in the rigging—on the sherpole there."

"Then go and get his, and shove it up on the starboard side. After that you'd better go aft and give the two 'prentices a hand in the lamp locker."

"I, i, Sir," I replied, and proceeded to do as he directed. After I had got the light from Plummer, and lashed it up to the starboard sherpole, I hurried aft. I found Tammy and the other 'prentice in our watch, busy in the locker, lighting lamps.

"What are we doing?" I asked. I was pretty jumpy.

"The Old Man's given orders to lash all the spare lamps we can find, in the rigging, so as to have the decks light," said Tammy. "And a damned good job, too!"

"He handed me a couple of the lamps, and took two himself.

"Come on," he said, and stepped out on deck. "We'll fix these in the main rigging, and then I want to talk to you."

"We shoved the lamps up on the sherpoles—two on each side. Then he came across to me.

"Look here, Jessop!" he said, without any hesitation. "You'll have to jolly well tell the Skipper and the Second Mate all you know about all this."

"What could they do, anyway?" I said, despondently. "As things are going, we'll all be dead before another week is over, at this rate."

"You've forgotten, Tammy," I said, "Even if I could get the Old Man to believe I'd got at the truth of the matter, he couldn't do anything. Don't you see, if I'm right, we couldn't even see the land, if we made it. We're like blind men. . . ."

"What on earth do you mean?" he interrupted. "How do you make out we're like blind men? Of course we could see the land. . . ."

"Wait a minute! wait a minute!" I said. "You don't understand. Didn't I tell you?"

"Tell what?" he asked.

"About the ship I spotted," I said. "I thought you knew!"

"And then I told him the whole truth

of the affair. After I had done that, I explained my idea about it, to him.

"He stopped in his walk, and looked round.

"'Wait a minute,' he said, and ran aft a few steps.

I saw him look up at the break of the poop; then he came back.

"'Come along now,' he said. 'The Old Man's up on the poop, talking to the Second Mate. You'll never get a better chance.'

"I WENT up the ladder, and walked across to where the Skipper and the Second Mate stood talking earnestly, by the rail. The Second Mate asked what I wanted.

"'I want to speak to you and the Old M—Captain, Sir,' I answered.

"The Skipper had turned to the Second Mate. Then the Old Man turned to me again.

"'Look here, Jessop,' he said. 'I'm going to talk straight to you. You strike me as being a cut above the ordinary shellback, and I think you've sense enough to hold your tongue.'

"'I've got my mate's ticket, Sir,' I said.

"The Skipper nodded.

"'You've seen things come out of the sea you say?' he questioned. 'Now just tell me all you can remember, from the very beginning.'

"I stuck well to solid facts; and now and then he and the Second Mate would look at one another, and nod.

"Now that I knew he was willing to listen to me in a serious manner, all my funk of telling him had gone, and I went ahead and told him my ideas about the mist, and the thing it seemed to have ushered, you know.

I finished up, by telling him how Tammy had worried me to come and tell what I knew.

"'He thought then, Sir,' I went on, 'that you might wish to put into the nearest port; but I told him that I didn't think you could, even if you wanted to.'

"'How's that?' he asked, profoundly interested.

"'Well, Sir,' I replied. 'If we're unable to see other vessels, we shouldn't be able to see the land. You'd be piling the ship up, without ever seeing where you were putting her.'

"This view of the matter affected the

Old Man in an extraordinary manner; as it did, I believe, the Second Mate. And neither spoke for a moment. Then the Skipper burst out.

"By Gad! Jessop," he said. "If you're right, the Lord have mercy on us."

"He thought for a couple of seconds. Then he spoke again, and I could see that he was pretty well twisted up:

"My God! . . . if you're right!"

"THE Second Mate spoke.

"The men mustn't know, Sir," he warned him. "It'd be a mess if they did!"

"Yes," said the Old Man.

"He spoke to me.

"Remember that, Jessop," he said. "Whatever you do, don't go yarning about this forrard."

"No, Sir," I replied.

"And you too, boy," said the Skipper. "Keep your tongue between your teeth. We're in a bad enough mess, without your making it worse. Do you hear?"

"Yes, Sir," answered Tammy.

"The Old Man turned to me again.

"These things, or creatures that you say come out of the sea," he said. "You've never seen them, except after nightfall?" he asked.

"No, Sir," I replied. "Never."

"He turned to the Second Mate.

"So far as I can make out, Mr. Tulipson," he remarked, "the danger seems to be only at night."

"It's always been at night, Sir," the Second answered.

"The Old Man nodded.

"Have you anything to propose, Mr. Tulipson?" he asked.

"Well, Sir," replied the Second Mate. "I think you ought to have her snugged down every night, before dark!"

"He spoke with considerable emphasis. Then he glanced aloft, and jerked his head in the direction of the unfurled t'gallants.

"It's a damned good thing, Sir," he said, "that it didn't come on to blow any harder."

"The Old Man nodded again.

"Yes," he remarked. "We shall have to do it; but God knows when we'll get home!"

"Better late than not at all," I heard the Second mutter, under his breath.

"Out loud, he said:

"And the lights, Sir?"

"Yes," said the Old Man. "I will have lamps in the rigging every night, after dark."

"Very good, Sir," assented the Second. Then he turned to us.

"It's getting daylight, Jessop," he remarked, with a glance at the sky. "You'd better take Tammy with you, and shove those lamps back again into the locker."

"I, I, Sir," I said, and went down off the poop with Tammy.

CHAPTER XI

THE SHADOW IN THE SEA

WHEN eight bells went, at four o'clock, and the other watch came on deck to relieve us, it had been broad daylight for some time. Before we went below, the Second Mate had the three t'gallants set; and now that it was light, we were pretty curious to have a look aloft, especially up the fore; and Tom, who had been up to overhaul the gear, was questioned a lot, when he came down, as to whether there were any signs of anything queer up there. But he told us there was nothing unusual to be seen.

"At eight o'clock, when we came on deck for the eight to twelve watch, I saw the Sailmaker coming forrard along the deck, from the Second Mate's old berth. He had his rule in his hand, and I knew he had been measuring the poor beggars in there for their burial outfit. From breakfast time until near noon, he worked, shaping out three canvas wrappers from some old sail-cloth. Then, with the aid of the Second Mate and one of the hands, he brought out the three dead chaps on to the after hatch, and there sewed them up, with a few lumps of holy stone at their feet. He was just finishing, when eight bells went, and I heard the Old Man tell the Second Mate to call all hands aft for the burial. This was done, and one of the gangways unshipped.

"We had no decent grating big enough, so they had to get off one of the hatches, and use it instead. The wind had died away during the morning, and the sea was almost a calm—the ship lifting ever so slightly to an occasional glassy heave. The only sounds that struck on the ear were the soft, slow rustle and occasional shiver of the sails, and the continuous and monotonous creak, creak of the spars and gear at the gentle movement of the vessel. And it was in this solemn half-quietness that the Skipper read the burial service.

"They had put the Dutchman first

upon the hatch (I could tell him by his stumpiness), and when at last the Old Man gave the signal, the Second Mate tilted his end, and he slid off, and down into the dark.

"'Poor old Dutchie,' I heard one of the men say, and I fancy we all felt a bit like that.

"Then they lifted Jacobs on to the hatch, and when he had gone, Jock. When Jock was lifted, a sort of sudden shiver ran through the crowd. He had been a favourite in a quiet way, and I know I felt, all at once, just a bit queer. I was standing by the rail, upon the after bollard, and Tammy was next to me; while Plummer stood a little behind. As the Second Mate tilted the hatch for the last time, a little, hoarse chorus broke from the men:—

"'S'long, Jock! So long, Jock!'

"And then, at the sudden plunge, they rushed to the side to see the last of him as he went downwards. Even the Second Mate was not able to resist this universal feeling, and he, too, peered over. From where I had been standing, I had been able to see the body take the water, and now, for a brief couple of seconds, I saw the white of the canvas, blurred by the blue of the water, dwindle and dwindle in the extreme depth. Abruptly, as I stared, it disappeared—too abruptly, it seemed to me.

"'GONE!' I heard several voices say, and then our watch began to go slowly forrard, while one of two of the other, started to replace the hatch.

"Tammy pointed, and nudged me.

"'See, Jessop,' he said. 'What is it?'

"'What?' I asked.

"'That queer shadow,' he replied. 'Look!'

"And then I saw what he meant. It was something big and shadowy, that appeared to be growing clear. It occupied the exact place—so it seemed to me—in which Jock had disappeared.

"'Look at it!' said Tammy, again. 'It's getting bigger!'

"He was pretty excited, and so was I.

"I was peering down. The thing seemed to be rising out of the depths. It was taking shape. As I realised what the shape was, a queer, cold funk took me.

"'See,' said Tammy. 'It's just like the shadow of a ship!'

"And it was. The shadow of a ship rising out of the unexplored immensity beneath our keel.

"A little way from me, the Second Mate was staring down into the water. I turned, and spoke to him.

"'What do you make it out to be, Sir?'

I asked.

"'God knows!' he said, with a quick glance round to see whether any of the men were about.

"He got down from the rail, and turned to go up on to the poop. At the top of the ladder, he leant over the break.

"'You may as well ship that gangway, you two,' he told us. 'And mind, Jessop, keep your mouth shut about this.'

"'I, I, Sir,' I answered.

"As I stowed away my grub, I took no notice of the chatter of the others. I was too stuffed with my own thoughts. That shadow of a vessel rising, you know, out of the profound deeps, had impressed me tremendously. It had not been imagination. Three of us had seen it—really four; for Plummer distinctly saw it; though he failed to recognise it as anything extraordinary.

"As you can understand, I thought a lot about this shadow of a vessel. But, I am sure, for a time, my ideas must just have gone in an everlasting, blind circle. And then I got another thought; for I got thinking of the figures I had seen aloft in the early morning; and I began to imagine fresh things. You see, that first thing that had come up over the side, had come out of the sea. And it had gone back. And now there was this shadow vessel-thing—ghost-ship I called it. It was a damned good name, too. And the dark, noiseless men. . . I thought a lot on these lines. Unconsciously, I put a question to myself, aloud:—

"'Were they the crew?'

"'Eh?' said Jeskett, who was on the next chest.

"I took hold of myself, as it were, and glanced at him, in an apparently careless manner.

"'Did I speak?' I asked.

"'Yes, mate,' he replied, eyeing me, curiously.

"'I must have been dreaming,' I said; and rose up to put away my plate.

CHAPTER XII

THE GHOST SHIPS

"AT four o'clock, when again we went on deck, the Second Mate told me to go on with a paunch mat I was making; while Tammy, he sent

to get out his sinnet. I had the mat slung on the fore side of the mainmast, between it and the after end of the house; and, in a few minutes, Tammy brought his sinnet and yarns to the mast, and made fast to one of the pins.

"What do you think it was, Jessop?" he asked, abruptly, after a short silence. "I looked up at him.

"What do you think?" I replied.

"I don't know what to think," he said. "But I've a feeling that it's something to do with all the rest," and he indicated aloft, with his head.

"I've been thinking, too," I remarked.

"That it is?" he inquired.

"Yes," I answered, and told him how the idea had come to me at my dinner, that the strange men-shadows which came aboard, might come from that indistinct vessel we had seen down in the sea.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, as he got my meaning.

"And then for a little, he stood and thought.

"That's where they live, you mean?" he said, at last, and paused again.

"Well," I replied. "It can't be the sort of existence we should call life."

"He nodded, doubtfully.

"No," he said, and was silent again.

"Presently, he put out an idea that had come to him.

"You *think*, then, that that—vessel has been with us for some time, if we'd only known?" he asked.

"All along," I replied. "I mean ever since these things started."

"Supposing there are others," he said, suddenly.

"I looked at him.

"If there are," I said. "You can pray to God that they won't stumble across us. It strikes me that whether they're ghosts or not ghosts, they're blood-gutted pirates."

"It seems horrible," he said, solemnly, "to be talking seriously like this, about—you know, about such things."

"I've tried to stop thinking that way," I told him. "I've felt I should go cracked if I didn't. There's damned queer things happen at sea, I know; but this isn't one of them."

"It seems so strange and unreal, one moment, doesn't it?" he said. "And the next, you *know* it's really true, and you can't understand why you didn't always know. And yet they'd never believe, if you told them ashore about it."

"They'd believe, if they'd been in this packet in the middle watch this morning," I said.

"Besides," I went on. "They don't understand. We didn't. . . . I shall always feel different now, when I read that some packet hasn't been heard of."

"Tammy stared at me. His face was dead white.

"I've heard some of the old shellbacks talking about things," he said. "But I never took them really seriously."

"Well," I said. "I guess we'll have to take this seriously. I wish to God we were home!"

"My God! so do I," he said.

"For a good while after that, we both worked on in silence; but, presently, he went off on another tack.

"Do you really think we'll shorten her down every night before it gets dark?" he asked.

"Certainly," I replied. "They'll never get the men to go aloft at night, after what's happened."

"But, but—supposing they *ordered* us aloft—" he began.

"Would you go?" I interrupted.

"No!" he said, emphatically. "I'd jolly well be put in irons first!"

"That settles it, then," I replied. "You wouldn't go, nor would any one else."

"At this moment the Second Mate came along.

"Shove that mat and that sinnet away, you two," he said. "Then get your brooms and clear up."

"I, i, Sir," we said, and he went on forrard.

"Jump on the house, Tammy," I said. "And let go the other end of this rope, will you?"

"Right," he said, and did as I had asked him.

When he came back, I got him to give me a hand to roll up the mat, which was a very large one.

"I'll finish stopping it," I said, "You go and put your sinnet away."

"Wait a minute," he replied, and gathered up a double handful of shakins from the deck, under where I had been working.

Then he ran to the side.

"Here!" I said. "Don't go dumping those. They'll only float, and the Second Mate or the Skipper will be sure to spot them."

"Come here, Jessop!" he interrupted, in a low voice, and taking no notice of what I had been saying.

"I GOT up off the hatch, where I was kneeling. He was staring over the side.

"What's up?' I asked.

"For God's sake, hurry!' he said, and I ran, and jumped on to the spar, alongside of him.

"Look!' he said, and pointed with a handful of shakins, right down, directly beneath us.

"Some of the shakins dropped from his hand, and blurred the water, momentarily, so that I could not see. Then, as the ripples cleared away, I saw what he meant.

"Two of them!' he said, in a voice that was scarcely above a whisper. 'And there's another out there,' and he pointed again with a handful of shakins.

"There's another a little further aft,' I muttered.

"Where?—where?' he asked.

"There,' I said, and pointed.

"That's four,' he whispered. 'Four' of them!

"I said nothing; but continued to stare. They appeared to me to be a great way down in the sea, and quite motionless. Yet, though their outlines were somewhat blurred and indistinct, there was no mistaking that they were very like exact, though shadowy, representations of vessels.

"For some minutes, we watched them, without speaking.

"Away forrard, I hear the Second Mate returning aft.

"What's up now, you two?' he called, sharply. 'This isn't clearing up!'

"I put out my hand to warn him not to shout, and draw the attention of the men.

"He took several steps towards me.

"What is it? what is it?' he said, in a lower voice.

"You'd better take a look over the side, Sir,' I replied.

"My tone must have given him an inkling that we had discovered something fresh; for, at my words, he made one spring, and stood on the spar, alongside of me.

"Look, Sir,' said Tammy. 'There's four of them.'

"The Second Mate bent forward.

"My God!' I heard him mutter, under his breath.

"After that, for some half-minute, he stared, without a word.

"IT was while we were up at the fore-sail, that the sun went over the edge of the horizon. We had finished stowing the sail, out upon the yard, and I was waiting for the others to clear in, and let me get off the foot-rope. Thus it happened that having nothing to do for nearly a minute. I stood watching the sun set, and so saw something that otherwise I should, most probably, have missed. The sun had dipped nearly half-way below the horizon, and was showing like a great, red dome of dull fire. Abruptly, far away on the starboard bow, a faint mist drove up out of the sea. It spread across the face of the sun, so that its light shone now as though it came through a dim haze of smoke. Quickly, this mist or haze grew thicker; but, at the same time, separating and taking strange shapes, so that the red of the sun struck through ruddily between them. Then, as I watched, the weird mistiness collected and shaped and rose into three towers. These became more definite, and there was something elongated beneath them. The shaping and forming continued, and almost suddenly I saw that the thing had taken on the shape of a great ship. It had been broadside on to the sun. Now it was swinging. The bows came round with a stately movement, until the three masts bore in a line. It was heading directly towards us. It grew larger; but yet less distinct. Astern of it, I saw now that the sun had sunk to a mere line of light. Then, in the gathering dusk it seemed to me that the ship was sinking back into the ocean. The sun went beneath the sea, and the thing I had seen, became merged, as it were, into night.

"A voice came to me from the rigging.

It was the Second Mate's. He had been up to give us a hand.

'Now then, Jessop,' he was saying. 'Come along! Get up on the poop.'

'I turned quickly, and realised that the fellows were nearly all off the yard.

"You—" the Second Mate turned to me. 'Take the wheel.'

"I, I, Sir,' I muttered, and slid along the foot-rope. I felt fresh dazed and frightened.

"A minute of some confusion followed; and then came the click of pawls. I could tell that they had taken the haul-yards to the after castpan. Odd words floated up to me.

"... all this water?' I heard in the Old Man's voice. He appeared to be asking a question.

"Can't say, Sir,' came the Second Mate's.

"There was a period of time, filled only by the clicking of the pawls and the sounds of the creaking parrel and the running gear. Then the Second Mate's voice came again.

"Seems all right, Sir,' I heard him say.

"I never heard the Old Man's reply; for in the same moment, there came to me a chill of cold breath at my back. I turned sharply, and saw something peering over the taffrail. It had eyes that reflected the binnacle light, weirdly, with a frightful, tigerish gleam; but beyond that, I could see nothing with any distinctness. For the moment, I just stared. I seemed frozen. It was so close. Then movement came to me, and I jumped to the binnacle and snatched out the lamp. I twitched round, and shone the light towards it. The thing, whatever it was, had come more forward over the rail; but now, before the light, it recoiled with a queer, horrible liteness. It slid back, and down, and so out of sight. I have only a confused notion of a wet, glistening something, and two vile eyes. Then I was running, crazy, towards the break of the poop. I sprang down the ladder, and missed my footing, and landed on my stern, at the bottom.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GREAT GHOST SHIP

"WHEN we were called at a quarter to four, the man who roused us out, had some queer information.

"'Toppin's gone—clean vanished!' he told us, as we began to turn out. 'I never was in such a damned, hair-raisin' hooker as this here. It ain't safe to go about the bloomin' decks.'

"'oo's gone?' asked Plummer, sitting up suddenly and throwing his legs over his bunk-board.

"'Toppin, one of the 'prentices,' replied the man. 'We've been huntin' all over the bloomin' show. We're still at it. . . . But they'll never find him,' he ended, with a sort of gloomy assurance.

"'Oh, I dunno,' said Quoin. 'P'raps 'e's snoozin' somewheres 'bout.'

"'Not him,' replied the man. 'I tell you we've turned everythin' upside down. He's not aboard the bloomin' ship.'

"'Where was he when they last saw him?' I asked. 'Some one must know something, you know!'

"'Keepin' time up on the poop,' he replied. 'The Old Man's nearly shook the life out of the Mate and the chap at the wheel. And they say they don't know nothin'.'

"'How do you mean?' I inquired. 'How do you mean, nothing?'

"'Well,' he answered. 'The youngster was there one minute, and then the next thing they knew, he'd gone. They're both sworn black an' blue that there wasn't a whisper. He's just disappeared off of the face of the bloomin' earth.'

"I got down on to my chest, and reached for my boots.

"'Before I could speak again, the man was saying something fresh.

"'See here, mates,' he went on. 'If things is goin' on like this, I'd like to know where you an' me'll be befor' long!'

"'We'll be in 'ell,' said Plummer harshly.

"'I dunno as I like to think about it,' said Quoin.

"'We'll have to think about it!' replied the man. 'We've got to think a bloomin' lot about it. I've talked to our side, an' they're game.'

"'Game for what?' I asked.

"'To go an' talk straight to the bloomin' Captin,' he said, wagging his finger at me. 'It's make tracks for the nearest bloomin' port, an' don't you make no bloomin' mistake.'

"I opened my mouth to tell him that the probability was we should not be able to make it, even if he could get the Old Man to see the matter from his point of view. Then I remembered that the chap had no idea of the things I had

seen, and *thought out*; so, instead, I said:

"Supposing he won't?"

"Then we'll have to bloomin' well make him," he replied.

"And when you got there," I said. "What then? You'd be jolly well locked up for mutiny."

"I'd sooner be locked up," he said. "It don't kill you!"

"There was a murmur of agreement from the others, and then a moment of silence, in which, I know, the men were thinking.

"Jaskett's voice broke into it.

"I never thought at first as she was aunted—" he commenced; but Plummer cut in across his speech.

"We mustn't 'urt any one, yer know," he said. "That'd mean 'angin', an' they ain't been er bad crowd.

"No," assented every one, including the chap who had come to call us.

"All the same," he added. "It's got to be up hellum, an' shove her into the nearest bloomin' port."

"Yes," said every one, and then eight bells went, and we cleared out on deck.

"PRESENTLY, after roll-call — in which there had come a queer, awkward little pause at Toppin's name— Tammy came over to me.

"I was leaning over the port rail, by the fore brace-block, staring down into the sea, when Tammy came. For perhaps a minute he said nothing. When at last he spoke, it was to say that the shadow vessels had not been there since daylight.

"What?" I said, in some surprise. "How do you know?"

"I woke up when they were search for Toppin," he replied. "I've not been asleep since. I came here, right away." He began to say something further; but stopped short.

"Yes," I said encouragingly.

"I don't know . . ." he began, and broke off. He caught my arm. "Oh, Jessop!" he exclaimed. "What's going to be the end of it all? Surely something can be done?"

"I said nothing, I had a desperate feeling that there was very little we could do to help ourselves.

"Can't we do something?" he asked,

and shook my arm. "Anything's better than *this!* We're being murdered!"

"Still, I said nothing; but stared moodily down into the water. I could plan nothing; though I would get mad, feverish fits of thinking.

"Do you hear?" he said. He was almost crying.

"Yes, Tammy," I replied. "But I don't know! I don't know!"

"You don't know!" he exclaimed. "You don't know! Do you mean we're just to give in, and be murdered, one after another?"

"We've done all we can," I replied. "I don't know what else we can do, unless we go below and lock ourselves in, every night."

"That would be better than this," he said. "There'll be no one to go below, or anything else, soon!"

"But what if it came on to blow?" I asked. "We'd be having the sticks blown out of her."

"What if it came on to blow *now*?" he returned. "No one would go aloft, if it were dark, you said, yourself! Besides, we could shorten her *right* down, first. I tell you, in a few days there won't be a chap alive aboard this packet, unless they jolly well do something!"

"Don't shout," I warned him. "You'll have the Old Man hearing you."

"He started on a fresh tack. He was almost out of his mind.

"Why don't the men do something?" he began. "They ought to damn well make the Old Man put us into port! They ought."

"For goodness' sake, shut up, you little fool!" I said. "What's the good of talking a lot of damned rot like that? You'll be getting yourself into trouble."

"I don't care," he replied. "I'm not going to be murdered!"

"Look here," I said. "I told you before, that we shouldn't be able to see the land, even if we made it."

"You've no proof," he answered. "It's only your idea."

"Well, I replied. "Proof, or no proof, the Skipper would only pile her up, if he tried to make the land, with things as they are now."

"Let him pile her up," he answered. "Let him jolly well pile her up! That would be better than staying out here to

be pulled overboard, or chucked down from aloft!

"Look here, Tammy—" I began; but just then the Second Mate sung out for him, and he had to go. When he came back, I had started to walk to and from, across the fore side of the mainmast. He joined me, and after a minute, he started his wild talk again.

"Look here, Tammy," I said, once more. 'It's no use your talking like you've been doing. Things are as they are, and it's no one's fault, and nobody can help it. If you want to talk sensibly, I'll listen; if not, then go and gas to some one else.'

"With that, I returned to the port side, and got upon the spar, again, intending to sit on the pinrail, and have a bit of a talk with him. Before sitting down, I glanced over, into the sea. The action had been almost mechanical; yet, after a few instants, I was in a state of the most intense excitement, and without withdrawing my gaze, I reached out and caught Tammy's arm, to attract his attention.

"My God!" I muttered. 'Look!'

"What is it?" he asked, and bent over the rail, beside me. And this is what we saw:—A little distance below the surface there lay a pale-coloured, slightly-domed disk. It seemed only a few feet down. Below it, we saw quite clearly, after a few moments' staring, the shadow of a royal-yard, and, deeper, the gear and standing-rigging of a great mast. Far down among the shadows, I thought, presently, that I could make out the immense, indefinite stretch of vast decks.

"My God!" whispered Tammy, and shut up. But presently, he gave out a short exclamation, as though an idea had come to him; and got down off the spar, and ran forrard on to the fo'cas'le head. He came running back, after a short look into the sea, to tell me that there was the truck of another great mast coming up there, a bit off the bow, to within a few feet of the surface of the sea.

IN the meantime, you know, I had been staring like mad down through the water at the huge, shadowy mast just below me. I had traced out bit by bit, until now, I could clearly see the jackstay, running along the top of the royal-yard; and, you know, the royal itself was set.

"But, you know, what was getting at me more than anything, was a feeling

that there was movement down in the water there, among the rigging. I *thought* I could actually see, at times, things moving and glinting faintly and rapidly to and fro in the gear. And once, I was practically certain that something was on the royal-yard, moving in to the mast; as though, you know, it might have come up the leech of the sail. And this way, I got a beastly feeling that there were things swarming down there.

"Unconsciously, I must have leant further and further out over the side, staring; and suddenly—good Lord! how I yelled—I over-balanced, I made a sweeping grab, and caught the fore brace, and with that, I was back in a moment upon the spar. In the same second, almost, it seemed to me that the surface of the water above the submerged truck was broken, and I am sure *now*, I saw something a moment in the air against the ship's side—a sort of shadow in the air; though I did not realise it at the time. Anyway, the next instant, Tammy gave out an awful scream, and was head downwards over the rail, in a second. I had an idea *then* that he was jumping overboard. I collared him by the waist of his britches, and one knee, and then I had him down on the deck, and sat plump on him; for he was struggling and shouting all the time, and I was so breathless and shaken and gone to mush, I could not have trusted my hands to hold him. You see, I never thought *then* it was anything but some influence at work on him; and that he was trying to get loose to go over the side. But I know *now* that I saw the shadow-man that had him. Only, at the time, I was so mixed up, and with the one idea in my head, I was not really able to notice anything, properly. But, afterwards, I comprehended a bit (you can understand, can't you?) what I had seen at the time without taking in.

"And even now looking back, I know that the shadow was only like a faint-seen greyness in the daylight, against the whiteness of the decks, clinging against Tammy.

"And there was I, all breathless and sweating, and quivery with my own tumble, sitting on the little screeching beggar, and he fighting like a mad thing; so that I thought I should never hold him.

"And then I heard the Second Mate shouting, and there came running feet along the deck. Then many hands were

pulling and hauling, to get me off him.

"'Damn coward!' sung out some one.

"'Hold him! Hold him!' I shouted. 'He'll be overboard!'

"At that, they seemed to understand that I was not ill-treating the youngster; for they stopped manhandling me, and allowed me to rise; while two of them took hold of Tammy, and kept him safe.

"'What's the matter with him?' the Second Mate was singing out. 'What's happened?'

"'He's gone off his head, I think,' I said.

"'What?' asked the Second Mate. But before I could answer him, Tammy ceased suddenly to struggle, and flopped down upon the deck.

"'e's fainted,' said Plummer, with some sympathy. He looked at me, with a puzzled, suspicious air. 'What's 'appened? What's 'e been doin?'

"'Take him aft into the berth' ordered the Second Mate, a bit abruptly. It struck me that he wished to prevent questions. He must have tumbled to the fact that we had seen something, about which it would be better not to tell the crowd.

"Plummer stooped to lift the boy.

"'No,' said the Second Mate. 'Not you, Plummer. Jessop, you take him.' He turned to the rest of the men. 'That will do,' he told them, and they went forrard, muttering a little.

"I lifted the boy, and carried him aft. 'No need to take him into the berth,' said the Second Mate. 'Put him down on the after hatch. I've sent the other lad for some brandy.'

"When the brandy came, we dosed Tammy and soon brought him round. He sat up, with a somewhat dazed air. Otherwise, he seemed quiet and sane enough.

"'What's up?' he asked. He caught sight of the Second Mate. 'Have I been ill, Sir?' he exclaimed.

"'You're right enough now, youngster,' said the Second Mate. 'You've been a bit off. You'd better go and lie down.'

"'I'm all right now, Sir,' replied Tammy. 'I don't think—'

"'You do as you're told!' interrupted the Second. 'Don't always have to be told twice! If I want you, I'll send for you.'

TAMMY stood up, and made his way, in rather an unsteady fashion, into the berth. I fancy he was glad enough to lie down.

"'Now then, Jessop,' exclaimed the Second Mate, turning to me. 'What's been the cause of all this? Out with it now, smart!'

"I commenced to tell him; but, almost directly, he put up his hand.

"'Hold on a minute,' he said. 'There's the breeze!'

"He jumped up the port ladder, and sung out to the chap at the wheel. Then down again.

"'Starboard fore brace,' he sung out. He turned to me.

"'You'll have to finish telling me afterwards,' he said.

"'I, I, Sir,' I replied, and went to join the other chaps at the braces.

"As soon as we were braced sharp up on the port tack, he sent some of the watch up to loose the sails. Then he sung out for me.

"'Go on with your yarn now, Jessop,' he said.

"I told him about the great shadow vessel, and I said something about Tammy. . . . I mean about my not being sure now whether he *had* tried to jump overboard. Because, you see, I began to realise that I had seen the shadow; and I remembered the stirring of the water above the submerged truck. But the Second did not wait, of course, for any theories; but was away, like a shot, to see for himself. He ran to the side, and looked down. I followed, and stood beside him; yet, now that the surface of the water was blurred by the wind, we could see nothing.

"'It's no good,' he remarked, after a minute. 'You'd better get away from the rail before any of the others see you. Just be taking those halyards aft to the capstan.'

"From then, until eight bells, we were hard at work getting the sail upon her, and when at last eight bells went, I made haste to swallow my breakfast, and get a sleep.

"At midday, when we went on deck for the afternoon watch, I ran to the side; but there was no sign of the great shadow ship. All that watch, the Second Mate kept me working at my paunch mat, and Tammy he put on to his sinnet, telling me to keep an eye on the youngster. But the boy was right enough; as I scarcely doubted now, you know; though—a most unusual thing—he hardly opened his lips the whole afternoon. Then at four o'clock, we went below for tea.

"At four bells, when we came back on

deck again, I found that the light breeze, which had kept us going during the day, had dropped, and we were only just moving. The sun was low down, and the sky clear. Once or twice, as I glanced across to the horizon, it seemed to me that I caught again that odd quiver in the air that had preceded the coming of the mist; and, indeed, on two separate occasions, I saw a thin wisp of haze drive up, apparently out of the sea. This was at some little distance on our port beam; otherwise, all was quiet and peaceful; and though I stared into the water, I could make out no vestige of that great shadow ship, down in the sea.

"It was some little time after six bells, that the order came for all hands to shorten sail for the night. We took in the royals and t'gallants, and then the three courses. It was shortly after this, that a rumour went round the ship that there was to be no look-out that night after eight o'clock. This naturally created a good deal of talk among the men; especially as the yarn went, that the fo'cas'le doors were to be shut and fastened as soon as it was dark, and that no one was to be allowed on deck.

"'oo's goin' ter take ther wheels?' I heard Plummer ask.

"'I s'pose they'll 'ave us take 'em as usual,' replied one of the men. 'One of ther officers is bound ter be on ther poop; so we'll 'ave company.'

"Apart from these remarks, there was a general opinion that—if it were true—it was a sensible act on the part of the Skipper. As one of the men said:

"'It ain't likely as there'll be any of us missin' in ther mornin', if we 'stays in our bunks all ther blessed night.'

"And soon after this, eight bells went.

CHAPTER XIV

THE GHOST PIRATES

"**A**T the moment when eight bells actually went, I was in the fo'cas'le, talking to four of the other watch. Suddenly, away aft, I heard shouting, and then on the deck overhead, came the loud thudding of some one pomping with a capstan-bar. Straightway, I turned and made a run for the port doorway, along with the four other men. We rushed out through the doorway on to the deck. It was getting dusk; but that did not hide from me a terrible and extraordinary sight. All along

the port rail there was a queer, undulating greyness, that moved downwards in-board, and spread over the decks. As I looked, I found that I saw more clearly, in a most extraordinary way. And, suddenly, all the moving greyness resolved into hundreds of strange men. In the half-light, they looked unreal and impossible, as though there had come upon us the inhabitants of some fantastic dream-world. My God! I thought I was mad. They swarmed in upon us in a great wave of murderous, living shadows. From some of the men who must have been going aft for roll-call, there rose into the evening air a loud, awful shouting.

"'Aloft!' yelled some one; but, as I looked aloft, I saw that the horrible things were swarming there in scores and scores.

"My glance dropped from aloft, to find two of the men who had come out from the fo'cas'le with me, rolling upon the deck. They were two indistinguishable masses that writhed here and there across the planks. The brutes fairly covered them. From them, came muffled little shrieks and gasps; and there I stood, and with me were the other two men. A man darted past us into the fo'cas'le, with two grey men on his back, and I heard them kill him. The two men by me, ran suddenly across the fore hatch, and up the starboard ladder on to the fo'cas'le head. Yet, almost in the same instant, I saw several of the grey men disappear up the other ladder. From the fo'cas'le head above, I heard the two men commence to shout, and this died away into a loud scuffling. At that, I turned to see whether I could get away. I stared round, hopelessly; and then with two jumps, I was on the pigsty, and from there upon the top of the deckhouse. I threw myself flat, and waited, breathlessly.

"All at once, it seemed to me that it was darker than it had been the previous moment, and I raised my head, very cautiously. I saw that the ship was enveloped in great billows of mist, and then, not six feet from me, I made out some one lying, face downwards. It was Tammy. I felt safer now that we were hidden by the mist, and I crawled to him. He gave a quick gasp of terror when I touched him; but when he saw who it was, he started to sob like a little kid.

"'Hush!' I said. 'For God's sake be quiet!' But I need not have troubled; for

the shrieks of the men being killed, down on the decks all around us, drowned every other sound.

"I knelt up, and glanced round and then aloft. Overhead, I could make out dimly the spars and sails, and now as I looked, I saw that the t'gallants and royals had been unloosed and were hanging in the buntlines. Almost in the same moment, the terrible crying of the poor beggars about the decks, ceased; and there succeeded an awful silence, in which I could distinctly hear Tammy sobbing. I reached out, and shook him.

"Be quiet! Be quiet!" I whispered, intensely. "THEY'LL hear us!"

"At my touch and whisper, he struggled to become silent; and then, overhead, I saw the six yards being swiftly mast-headed. Scarcely were the sails set, when I heard the swish and flick of gaskets being cast adrift on the lower yards, and realised that ghostly things were at work there.

"FOR a minute or so there was silence, and I made my way cautiously to the after end of the house, and peered over. Yet, because of the mist, I could see nothing. Then, abruptly, from behind me, came a single wail of sudden pain and terror from Tammy. It ended instantly in a sort of choke. I stood up in the mist and ran back to where I had left the kid; but he had gone. I stood dazed. I felt like shrieking out loud. Above me, I heard the flaps of the courses being tumbled off the yards. Down upon the decks, there were the noises of a multitude working in a weird, inhuman silence. Then came the squeal and rattle of blocks and braces aloft. They were squaring the yards.

I remained standing. I watched the yards squared, and then I saw the sails fill suddenly. An instant later, the deck of the house upon which I stood, became canted forrard. The slope increased, so that I could scarcely stand, and I grabbed at one of the wire-winchies. I wondered, in a stunned sort of way, what was happening. Almost directly afterwards, from the deck on the port side of the house, there came a sudden, loud, human scream; and immediately, from different parts of the decks there rose, afresh, some most horrible shouts of agony from odd men. This grew into an intense screaming that shook my heart up; and there came again a noise of desperate, brief fighting. Then a breath of

cold wind seemed to play in the mist, and I could see down the slope of the deck. I looked below me, toward the bows. The jibboom was plunged right into the water, and, as I stared, the bows disappeared into the sea. The deck of the house became a wall to me, and I was swinging from the winch, which was now above my head. I watched the ocean lip over the edge of the fo'cas'le head, and rush down on to the maindeck, roaring into the empty fo'cas'le. And still all around me came the crying of the lost sailormen. I heard something strike the corner of the house above me, with a dull thud, and then I saw Plummer plunge down into the flood beneath. I remembered that he had been at the wheel. The next instant, the water had leapt to my feet; there came a drear chorus of bubbling screams, a roar of waters, and I was going swiftly down into the darkness. I let go of the winch, and struck out madly, trying to hold my breath. There was a loud singing in my ears. It grew louder. I opened my mouth. I felt I was dying. And then, thank God! I was at the surface, breathing. For the moment, I was blinded with the water, and my agony of breathlessness. Then, growing easier, I brushed the water from my eyes, and so, not three hundred yards away, I made out a large ship, floating almost motionless. At first, I could scarcely believe I saw aright. Then, as I realised that indeed there was yet a chance of living, I started to swim towards you.

"You know the rest. . ."

APPENDIX

THE SILENT SHIP

I'M THE Third Mate of the *Sangier*, the vessel that picked up Jessop, you know; and he's asked us to write a short note of what we saw from our side, and sign it. The Old Man's set me on to the job, as he says I can put it better than he can.

Well, it was in the first dog-watch that we came up with her, the *Mortzestus* I mean; but it was in the second dog-watch that it happened. The Mate and I were on the poop watching her. You see, we'd signalled her, and she'd not taken any notice, and that seemed queer, as we couldn't have been more than three or four hundred yards off her port beam, and it was a fine evening; so that we could almost have had a tea-fight, if

they'd seemed a pleasant crowd. As it was, we called them a set of sulky swine, and left it at that.

All the same, you know, we watched her a lot; and I remember, even then I thought it queer how quiet she was. We couldn't hear even her bell go, and I spoke to the Mate about it.

Then, about six bells, they shortened her right down to topsails; and I can tell you that made us stare more than ever, as any one can imagine. And I remember we noticed then, especially, that we couldn't hear a single sound from her, even when the haulyards were let go; and, you know, without the glass, I saw their Old Man singing out something; but we didn't get a sound of it, and we *should* have been able to hear every word.

Then, just after eight bells, the thing Jessop's told us about, happened. Both the Mate and the Old Man said they could see men going up her side, a bit indistinct, you know, because it was getting dusk; but the Second Mate and I half thought we did, and half thought we didn't; but there was something queer; we all knew that; and it looked like a sort of movey mist along her side. I know I felt pretty funny; but it wasn't the sort of thing, of course, to be too sure and serious about until you *were* sure.

After the Mate and the Captain had said they saw the men boarding her, we began to hear sounds from her; very queer at first, and rather like a phonograph makes when it's getting up speed. Then the sounds came properly from her, and we heard them shouting and yelling; and, you know, I don't know even now just what I really thought.

The next thing I remember, there was a thick mist round the ship; and then all the noise was shut off, as if it were all the other side of a door. But we could still see her masts and spars and sails above the misty stuff; and both the Captain and the Mate said they could see men aloft; and I thought I could; but the Second Mate wasn't sure. All the same, though, the sails were all loosed in about a minute, it seemed, and the yards mastheaded. We couldn't see the courses above the mist; but Jessop says they were loosed too, and sheeted home, along with the upper sails. Then we saw the yards squared, and I saw the sails fill bang up with wind; and yet, you know, ours were slatting.

The next thing was the one that hit me more than anything. Her masts took a cant forrard, and then I saw her stern come up out of the mist that was round her. Then, all in an instant, we could hear sounds from the vessel again. And I tell you, the men didn't seem to be shouting, but screaming. Her stern went higher. It was most extraordinary to look at; and then she went plunk down, head foremost, right bang into the mist-stuff.

It's all right what Jessop says, and when we saw him swimming (I was the one who spotted him) we got out a boat quicker than a windjammer ever got out a boat before, I should think.

The Captain and the Mate and the Second and I are all going to sign this.

(Signed) WILLIAM NAWSTON, *Master*.
J. E. G. ADAMS, *First Mate*.
ED. BROWN, *Second Mate*.
JACK T. EVAN, *Third Mate*.

