

of the engines. I leant on my elbow and listened. They were going much more slowly than usual, and there was a peculiar jerking style about their motion, which seemed as if they were working expansively with high steam, and the well-known rushing sound in the steam pipe, like the wind through a doorway when the door is ajar, showed me in a moment that they were closely 'throttled'—that is, that the valves in the pipes leading to the cylinders were partially closed, so as to check the flow of steam from the boilers to the engines. I saw, too, that there was a very bright glow from the furnaces, and that the fires were more than usually intense. I fancied, also, from the absence of the usual currents of air, except through the windsail and from the fore-hold, and the appearance of the lights and shadows, that the hatches over the crank gratings and the companion leading to the deck were closed—a thing that was very unusual except in bad weather.

"I was about to creep out of my lair, to see what was the meaning of all this, when I heard two persons in conversation in the passage between the engines, and almost close to where I was. By a slight movement I was able to see them. One was our chief engineer, who had never before been known to be in the engine-room at this hour of the night; he had his hand on the direction handles, and was regulating the supply of water to the diminished quantity of steam passing through the engines. The other, with his back turned towards me, was a person whom I did not know at all. He appeared a slight, gracefully-formed young man, of middle height, dressed in sailor's clothes of a fine texture, and with the voice of a youth, rather than of a man. I should have gone out at once to see what was doing, but the first words I distinguished arrested my attention in a moment. It was the youth, who said:

"How long before we shall leave the ship?"

"Not long now," replied the chief; "but we have nothing more to do except to start when it is time."

"Are you sure the third engineer is all right?"

"Yes. He sleeps in one of the wheel-houses, and I have turned the key upon him. Dick is at the wheel, the rest of the watch on deck, and these smutty fellows are disposed of. We have lowered the boat all safe, and all is ready for a start."

"Then, why not go now?"

"No, we might still be discovered in time to spoil all. Let us wait till the last moment, and we shall be sure that we have got rid of the infernal ship and all that could ever give us trouble. But, by G—d," he said, with a glance toward the gauges, "there isn't much time either. The steam mounts quicker than I thought; it is at twenty-five already; and the water is all out of the gauges. Just step on deck, and tell Dick we shall be off at once."

"The youth turned and ascended quickly on deck, and the chief went to the stokehole, opened the furnace-doors, looked at the fires, and threw in some coals and tallow.

"I should make a bad hand at describing my feelings, and all that sort of thing; but I think you may imagine that the unaccountable appearance of a stranger in the ship—the intelligence that the watch, both on deck and in the engine-room, were disposed of—the knowledge that the steam was at twenty-five pounds to the inch, our usual working pressure being fifteen, and rapidly rising, with the safety-valves of course fastened down or very heavily loaded—the engines throttled of