

"Forward there," sounded the command from the quarter deck, "let go the chain anchor."

Instantly the chain rattled through the hause-hole, and splash! sunk the heavy anchor into the water; at the same instant another discharge from one of the guns of the craft, broke upon the stillness, a rocket with its train of vivid fire rose hissing into the air, and then the broad blue field and red cross of Britain was sent flying to her mast head.

"Who is she—where from and what is her errand?" were questions repeated again and again by those ashore, but without eliciting the slightest satisfactory answer. None knew her name, her country, or errand. She was not a merchantman. She carried too many guns and was withal of too war-like an appearance for a peaceable trader. Yet she could not be of the navy. None were expected. These and similar other conjectures puzzled the brains of the curious spectators in vain. There lay the brig before them, and from the moment of the flight of the rocket, not the slightest appearance of life was witnessed by them. For a long time they remained upon the wharf, hoping some boat would put off from her that would solve the mystery with which she was enshrouded, but to no purpose, no boat came, and seeing that the entire night bid fair to be spent in fruitless suppositions, one by one of those who had been drawn thither through curiosity, left the wharf, and in a short time it was as deserted as it had been at the moment when the first gun of the stranger called the citizens forth.

It was just midnight, when a small boat, which was suspended at the stern of the vessel was lowered into the water, and instantly manned by four seamen. Shortly after, a person who seemed by the deference paid him, to be one in command, stepped upon the gunwale. He halted, and his eye glanced from his own vessel to the town and then to the brig of war, and from thence it wandered quickly from one object to the other in every direction.

"Give way, men," said he, in a low tone, seating himself in the stern sheets, apparently satisfied.

"Whither?"

"The Governor's landing," was the answer.

The boat shot out from the dark counter of the brig and gained the current. For an instant only the men poised their oars, and then with long and steady strokes swept toward the town.

"Lay upon your oars," said the leader, in the same cautious tones, as the boat struck her bow upon the stone steps, and he stepped ashore, "lay off, and be careful you get into no quarrels with these brawling Dutchmen—shove away!"

As the boat backed into the stream he raised his eyes and suffered them to rest upon the light hull and rigging of his own vessel, and then turning abruptly away, walked up the landing with hasty steps.

In one of the largest mansions of the town, in a room used for the purposes of a library, the Earl of Bellamont was striding impatiently to and fro. His arms were folded, his eyes fixed intently upon the ground and his whole manner argued but ill concealed discontent. Upon the table, scattered in negligent confusion, lay a number of papers, and conspicuous among the rest was a small package strongly tied and sealed with the arms of Bellamont.

"Twelve o'clock!" exclaimed the Earl, pausing in the middle of his steps, as the tones of the church clocks chiming the midnight hour, sounded through the room; "curses on his dilatory movements when so much is at stake—five hours have gone by and yet I have not seen him. I warrant he is now carousing in some tavern, perchance brawling in the streets, when he should be upon the sea. Strange, I may have been mistaken," he continued, advancing and throwing open a window that looked upon the harbour, "yet, no—it is the same—it must be the Vengeance. There glimmers the signal at the mast head and peak—and the rocket—why does he tarry?"