

devoted little vessel. The crew bent their gaze eagerly over her side, to witness the havoc they expected to ensue among their enemies. To their surprise and mortification there was no report. The advancing boats gave three deriding cheers.

"D—n my eyes, if I didn't say she would miss fire, from having her breech unknived last night," shouted the man who held the match, and who was no other than Tom Fluke. "Quick, here, give us a picker."

A picker was handed to him by one, who also held the powder horn for priming. "It's no use," he pursued, throwing away the wire, and springing to the deck. "She's a spike in the touch-hole, and the devil himself wouldn't get it out now."

"A spike!—what mean you?" eagerly demanded Gerald.

"It's too true, Mr. Grantham," said the boatswain, who had flown to examine the touch-hole, "there is a great piece of steel in it, and for all the world like a woman's bodkin, or some such sort of thing."

"Ah! it all comes o' that wench that was here on deck last night," muttered the helmsman, who had succeeded Sambo on duty the preceding night. "I thought I see her fiddlin' about the gun, when the chase was made after the Yankee, although I didn't think to say nothing about it, when you axed Tom Fluke about Sal's apron."

Whatever conjecture might have arisen with others, there was no time to think of, much less to discuss it—the boats were already within a few yards of the vessel.

"Steady, men—silence," commanded Gerald in a low tone, "Since Sal has failed us, we must depend upon ourselves. Down beneath the bulwarks, and move not one of you until they begin to board—then let each man single his enemy and fire; the cutlass must do the rest."

The order was obeyed. Each moment brought the crisis of action nearer: the rowers had discontinued their oar, but the bows of the several boats could be heard obeying the impetus already given them, and dividing the water close to the vessel.

"Now, then, Sambo," whispered the officer. At that moment a torch was raised high over the head of the negro and his master. Its rays fell upon the first of the three boats, the crews of which were seen standing up with arms outstretched to grapple with the schooner. Another instant and they would have touched.

Gerald pulled the trigger of his blunderbuss, aimed into the very centre of the boat. Shrieks, curses and plashing, as of bodies falling in the water succeeded; and in the confusion occasioned by the murderous fire, the first boat evidently fell off.

"Again, Sambo," whispered the officer. A second time the torch streamed suddenly in air, and the contents of the yet undischarged blunderbuss spread confusion, dismay and death, into the second boat.

"Old Sal herself couldn't have done better: pity he hadn't a hundred of them," growled Tom Fluke, who although concealed behind the bulwarks, had availed himself of a crevice near him, to watch the effect produced by the formidable weapons.

There was a momentary indecision among the enemy, after the second destructive fire; it was but momentary. Again they advanced, and closing with the vessel, evinced a determination of purpose, that left little doubt as to the result. A few sprang into the chains and rigging, while others sought to enter by her bows, but the main effort seemed to be made at her gangway, at which Gerald had stationed himself with ten of his best men, the rest being detached to make the best defence they could, against those who sought to enter in the manner above described.

Notwithstanding the great disparity of numbers, the little crew of the schooner had for some time a considerable advantage over their enemies. At the first onset of these latter, their pistols had been discharged, but in so random a manner as to have done no injury—whereas the assailed, scrupulously obeying the order of their Commander, fired not a shot until they found themselves face to face with an enemy; the consequence of which was, that every pistol ball killed an American, or otherwise placed him *hors de combat*.

Still, in despite of their loss, the latter were more than adequate to the capture, unless a miracle should interpose to prevent it, and exasperated as they were by the fall of their comrades, their efforts became at each moment more resolute and successful. A deadly contest had been maintained in the gangway, from which, however, Gerald was compelled to retire, although bravely supported by his handful of followers.

Step by step he had retreated, until at length he found his back against the main-mast, and his enemies pressing him on every side. Five of his men lay dead in the space between the gangway and the position he now occupied, and Sambo, who had not quitted his side for an instant, was also senseless at his feet, felled by a tremendous blow from a cutlass upon the head. His force now consisted merely of the five men remaining of his own party, and three of those who had been detached, who, all that were left alive, had been compelled to fall back, upon their Commander. How long he would have continued the hopeless and desperate struggle, in this manner is doubtful, had not a fresh enemy appeared in his rear.

These were the crews of two other boats, who, having boarded without difficulty, now came up to the assistance of their comrades. So completely taken by surprise was Gerald in this quarter, that the first intimation he had of his danger was, in the violent seizure of his sword arm from behind, and a general rush upon, and disarming of the remainder of his followers. On turning to behold his enemy, he saw with concern the triumphant face of Desborough.

"Every dog has his day, I guess," huskily chuckled the settler, as by the glare of several torches which had been suddenly lighted, he was now seen casting looks of savage vengeance, and holding his formidable knife threateningly over the head of the officer whom he had grappled. "I reckon as how I told you it would be Jeremiah Desborough's turn next."

"Silence fellow, loose your hold," shouted one whose authoritative voice and manner, announced him for an officer, apparently the leader of the boarding party.

Awed by the tone in which he was addressed, the settler quitted his grasp, and retired muttering into the crowd behind him.

"I regret much, sir," pursued the American Commander seriously, and turning to Gerald, "that your obstinate defence should have been carried to the length it has. We were given to understand that ours