

if I stand by you for the boy? They'll be wanting him finished off, maybe."

Ben was about to say something bitter in reply, but checked himself as though second thoughts were best. Yet he could not entirely conceal his contempt in his tone as he replied:

"As you like. These two are what I want most this time. But, mind you, Evil-Eye, if any harm comes to either of them through your doing, your own blood shall pay for it, so sure as my name's Ben Harden." Then, turning to Eric, he said:

"Here, boy, you can call off your dog now."

Eric obeyed the directions at once. "Come here, Prince!" he commanded. "Come to me, sir!"

Prince wagged his tail to indicate that he heard the order, but was evidently in some doubt as to the wisdom of obeying it. According to his way of thinking, the best place for Evil-Eye was just where he had him, and he would like to keep him there a while longer, anyway.

But Eric insisted, and at length the dog obeyed, and came over to him, turning, however, to glance back at Evil-Eye, as though he was just itching to tumble him over again.

Looking very much out of humour, Evil-Eye pulled himself together, and put his hand to his throat in order to make sure that Prince's teeth had done him no injury. Fortunately for him, the high collar of the great-coat he wore had been turned up all around to keep out the rain, and it had done him still better service by keeping out the mastiff's teeth. So he was really none the worse for the encounter beyond feeling sulky at his discomfiture.

He now for the first time took a good look at Eric, who had also risen to his feet, the excitement of the encounter having made him forget his pain and weakness.

"Humph! rather a likely lad," he grunted. "But he may give us trouble some time. Have you thought of that, Ben?"

"No; but it doesn't matter," answered Ben. "I'll warrant for his not getting us into trouble. We can manage that all right when the time comes."

"Humph! maybe. But it's a risk, all the same," returned Evil-Eye. "But come, we must be off. We've lost too much time already."

The all-prevailing gloom of the day was already deepening into the early dark of late autumn as the three set off across the sands. The spray that the storm tore from the crests of the billows dashed in their faces as they advanced. Eric could not have gone far had not Ben thrown his brawny arm around him, and almost carried him along. Prince trotted quietly at his heels, having quite regained his composure, and resigned himself to the situation.

In this fashion they had gone some distance, and Evil-Eye, who had kept a little ahead, was about to turn off to the right toward the interior of the island, when Prince suddenly sniffed the air eagerly, threw up his head with a curious cry, half whine, half bark, and then bounded away in the direction of the direction of the water. Eric stopped to watch him, and following him closely with his eyes, saw that he ran up to a dark object that lay stretched out upon the sand, about fifty yards away. The dog touched it with his nose, and then, lifting his head, gave a long, weird howl, that so startled Eric as to make him forget his weariness. Breaking away from Ben, who, indeed, made no effort to detain him, he hastened over to see what Prince had found.

Darkness was coming on, but before he had got half-way to the object he could make out that it was a human body, and a few steps nearer made it plain that the body was that of Major Maunsell.

Horror-stricken, yet hoping that the major might still be living, Eric rushed forward, and throwing himself down beside the motionless form, cried passionately:

"Major Maunsell! What's the matter? Can't you look up? Oh, surely you're not dead!"

But the major made no response. Beyond all doubt his body was cold in death, and as Eric looked upon the white, set face he saw that his cries were useless, and that his dear, kind friend had gone from him forever. He felt as though his heart would break, and glancing around through his tears at the two strange, rough-looking men upon whose mercy the storm had cast him, his own fate seemed so dark and doubtful that he almost wished that, like the major, he too was lying upon the sands in the same quiet sleep.

The discovery of the major's death was a greater shock than the boy, in his exhausted condition, could stand, and when, at the approach of the men, he attempted to rise, faintness overcame him once more, and he fell back unconscious.

When his senses returned, he found himself in a sort of bunk in one corner of a large room containing a number of men, whose forms and faces were made visible by the light from an immense wood-fire that roared and crackled at the farther end of the room. There were at least a score of these men, and, so far as he could make out, they were all rough, shaggy, wild-looking fellows, like Ben and Evil-Eye. The latter he could see plainly, sitting beside a table with a bottle before him, from which he had just taken a deep draught.

The liquor apparently loosened his tongue, for glancing about him with his single eye, whose fitful glare was frightful as the firelight flashed upon it, he began talk vigorously to those who were sitting near him. At first Eric paid no attention to what he was saying, but when Evil-Eye held up something for the others to admire, he leaned forward curiously to see what it was. There was not sufficient light for him to do this, but Evil-Eye came to his assistance by saying, in an exultant tone:

"There's a ring for you, my hearties. It'll bring a pot of money, I wager you. And it ought to. I had trouble enough getting it."

"How was that?" inquired a man at his side.

"The thing wouldn't come off—stuck on tight. Had to chop off the finger before I could get it," replied the ruffian, turning the ring over so that the diamond which formed its centre might sparkle to the best advantage for the benefit of his companions, not one of whom but envied him his good luck in getting such a prize.

Eric now saw clearly enough what Evil-Eye was displaying. It was the costly ring which Major Maunsell always wore upon the third finger of his left hand, and whose beauty Eric had many a time admired, for it held a diamond of unusual size and of the purest water, which the major told him had been a sort of heirloom in the Maunsell family for many generations. Eric's blood boiled at the thought of this ring being in such a scoundrel's hands, and of the cruel way in which he had obtained it, and only his utter weakness prevented him from springing at Evil-Eye and snatching the ring out of his hands.

Happy he had not the strength to carry out so rash an impulse, and was forced to content himself with making a solemn resolve to get possession of that ring in some manner, that it might be returned to the major's family. Determination was one of the boy's most marked characteristics. Nothing short of the conviction that it was certainly unattainable could deter him from anything upon which he had once set his heart; and immense

as the odds against him in the matter of the ring might be, he vowed with all the vigour of his brave young heart that he would do his utmost to regain his dead friend's precious jewel.

For the present, however, nothing could be done. He was a captive no less than the ring, and, for aught he knew, equally in the power of that brute in human form, who was evidently a leading spirit in the group of ruffians that occupied the room. Clearly enough, his one hope lay in attracting as little attention as possible.

He looked anxiously about the room in search of Ben, but could see nothing of him. His good Prince, however, was stretched out upon the floor beside the bunk, sleeping as soundly as though he were in his own cosy quarters at Oakdene. The sight of him comforted Eric not a little. So lonely did he feel that he could not resist the temptation to awake his faithful companion, so he called softly:

"Prince, Prince, come here!"



"THERE'S A RING FOR YOU, MY HEARTIES!"

At first the mastiff did not hear him, but Eric repeating the call, he awoke, looked up inquiringly, and then, rising slowly to his feet—for he was very tired after the terrible passage through the surf—went over and laid his huge head upon his master's breast.

"Dear old dog!" murmured Eric, fondling him lovingly. "O Prince! what is to become of us? If we were only back in Oakdene again!" And then, as the awful thought rushed in upon his mind that perhaps neither he nor Prince would ever see Oakdene again, or find their way to Dr. Copeland at Halifax, the tears he had been bravely keeping back could no longer be restrained. Sobbing as though his heart would break, he clasped Prince's head tightly in his arms and gave himself up to his grief.

While poor Eric was thus giving way to his feelings, a number of men entered the room, one of them being Ben Harden. He went up to the weeping boy, and sitting down on the edge of the bunk, said in quite a kindly tone:

"What's the matter, my lad? Feeling homesick, eh? Well, I can't blame you. It's a poor place you've come to. But cheer up, and make the best of it. You'll feel better when you get rested."

With a great effort Eric gulped down his sobs and wiped away his fast-falling tears. He felt much relieved at seeing Ben again, and did his best to give him a smile of welcome as he said:

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come. Everything seems so strange here." A grim smile broke the habitual sternness of the big man's face.

"Strange! Yes; no doubt. It is a strange place. Perhaps you'll think it stranger before you leave it," said he—adding in an undertone to himself, so that Eric hardly caught the words, "that is, if you ever do leave it."

A large pot hung on a kind of wooden crane before the fire, and pointing to it Ben asked Eric if he wouldn't like something to eat. Then, without waiting for a reply, he went over to the table, and picking up a plate, proceeded to fill it from the pot, and having added a spoon, brought it back to Eric.

Now, trouble may take away the appetite of older people, but with a hearty, healthy boy hunger may always be trusted to insist upon being attended to. Eric had not tasted food since early morning, and it was now approaching midnight. Could anyone who knew anything about boys find it in his heart to criticise him if the plateful of savoury stew vanished rapidly before his dexterous wielding of the spoon?

Ben was highly pleased at his protégé's vigorous appetite.

"Well done, my hearty!" he exclaimed. "That's the best kind of physic for you. You'll soon be yourself again. Now, then, just you lie down and take a good snooze, and that'll finish the cure."

Eric was just about to throw himself back upon the pillow when he caught sight of Prince, who had been watching him with eager eyes while he satisfied his hunger.

"My poor Prince!" he cried. "I was forgetting all about you.—Please, can't he have some dinner too?"

"Sartin!" said Ben. "The brute must be hungry. I'll give him a good square meal." And filling a tin dish from the pot, he set it before the mastiff, who attacked it ravenously.

Eric felt decidedly better for his hearty meal. A luxurious sense of warmth and languor stole over him. He stretched himself out upon his comfortable couch, and in a few moments sank into a deep, dreamless sleep. Prince having licked the dish until it shone again, resumed his position beside the bunk, and fell asleep also.

(To be continued.)

Small boy (to grocer): If you please, Mr. Welby, my mother wants to know if you will give her an almanack? Grocer (leaning over the counter): But, my little man, your mother does not get her groceries here. Small boy: No, Mr. Welby; but we often borrow your wheelbarrow.