

the spot where a dimly-outlined figure showed where the pilot kept his post, and when within a yard or two paused, and scrutinized every detail of the figure, every chance movement of head and hand, with alert but cautious eagerness. Then he strode back to where he had stood to listen to what Cloverley had said, and he cast another keen glance at the greyness shrouding them in. Three times did he repeat his eager, curious patrol of the deck, and alert scrutiny of the almost motionless figure at the wheel; then he turned with definite purpose in his face and manner, and made his way down to the captain's cabin.

'Come in,' shouted Captain Monsell, in response to the sharp rap of Mr. Sanderson's knuckles on the door.

'Ah, it's Sanderson. Sit down a bit, my boy. The fire and arm-chair are pretty comfortable when a man has had eight-and-forty hours of weather, eh?'

But the first mate stood erect, just within the door.

'I'm sorry to disturb you, captain; but I'm afraid all's not right above.'

The captain sat upright in his chair instantly, his eyes on the set, gloomy face of his first officer.

'What's gone wrong? Where's pilot?'

'Pilot is there,' Mr. Sanderson said; 'but the question comes in here—Is it any good for him to be there?'

Captain Monsell's face took on an expression of displeasure, almost anger.

'I am in no mood for jesting. I do not understand you, Mr. Sanderson.'

The first mate advanced a few steps, and laid his hand heavily on the table.

'I hate my business here, captain; but a man must do his duty at all risks. I have reason to fear that the pilot in charge is not fit for the responsibility he has undertaken.'

The displeasure and anger died from the captain's handsome face. He was alert, terribly alert, and in earnest.

'Explain your meaning, Mr. Sanderson.'

'It is easily done, sir. My suspicions were aroused by what Cloverley said.'

'Cloverley! What has Cloverley to do with the matter?'

'A great deal, as it happens, captain. It seems he mistrusted the pilot from the first, and resolved to watch him. There wasn't much trouble in doing it, as matters fell out, for before pilot had been aboard an hour—he had visited the buffet three times to get his flask supplied with whiskey. He had had enough when he was shipped; at least, so Cloverley said. And now it's rather more than likely that the fog is clouding his brain; not quite the same kind of fog as we've got outside, but a trifle more confusing in its character, sir. And it's going to be a nasty night.'

At first the captain had looked keenly anxious, but as the officer proceeded with his story he had slowly sank back into the depths of his cushioned chair again. His face still wore a shade of perplexed gravity, but the quick apprehension had passed.

'If anyone else had told you all this it might have shown a different coloring, Mr. Sanderson; but it is only what Cloverley has said—Cloverley.'

Mr. Sanderson, however, was not to be moved by the implication in the quiet, insignificant tone.

'After hearing what he had to say I took instant opportunity to judge this matter for myself, captain.'

'Oh, you did?' Captain Monsell sat erect again. 'Well, with what result?'

'That I believe Cloverley is right.'

The easy velvet slippers, with the pretty silken anchor devices, were suddenly tossed hastily aside, and the heavy sea-boots had taken their place, and the next instant Captain Monsell was struggling into his rough overcoat once more. Mr. Sanderson stepped forward, and gave an appreciative tug to the coat, which sent it with greater rapidity to its required position upon the captain's broad shoulders. Then the captain hastily pulled up the thick fur collar and opened the door. But with a sudden hesitation he paused.

'It's a miserable night, true enough, Sanderson. Help yourself,' and with a careless wave of the hand he indicated a spirit stand which stood on the table, temptingly displaying a selection of choice liqueurs. 'I think I'll take just a nip myself before going on deck.'

But the first mate drew back with a peculiar look of aversion.

'Not a drop for me, thank you all the same, captain,' he answered, hastily.

Captain Monsell's hand was already upon one of the silver-topped bottles, but Sanderson's words seemed to startle him. He let his hand rest where it was, but he turned his face towards Sanderson.

'Why, what's the matter with you?' he asked, sharply.

The first mate thrust his hands deep into his pockets, as he was in the habit of doing when thoughtful, and his gaze fell to the thick, soft rug which his feet were pressing somewhat ruthlessly.

'I want to see this business well through, Captain Monsell,' he said.

The captain relinquished his hold of the silver-topped bottle, and turned the key upon the cordials without taking his proposed 'nip.' He made no remark, but passing through the door, sprang up on deck with more agility than an indifferent person might have supposed possible. The first mate followed him more slowly, having seen that the cabin door was safely closed, and from a justifiable distance he watched him make for the pilot's side.

'Halloa, pilot!' and the captain's voice was sharp and ringing even through the muffling dampness of the cold penetrating fog. 'Is all square and hearty?'

The challenge was not responded to; the figure wrapped in oil clothes looked weird and disproportioned as seen through the thick, shrouding mist. Captain Monsell went closer, and spoke again; but the pilot did not answer.

'Mr. Sanderson.'

The first mate was beside the two instantly.

'See that the pilot is shown below.'

'Yes, captain.'

For the first time the figure moved, and turned towards the captain, speaking thickly and with slow indecision.

'I am in charge of the ship. What are you talking about? Leave me alone.'

'No, sir. I have taken over the charge again. You had better go below.'

Clear, metallic, peculiarly in contrast with the pilot's thick, imperfect enunciation, Captain Monsell's voice struck through the mist.

'I've got charge of the ship. Leave me alone, I say,' repeated the pilot.

Through the greyness Cloverley's bulky form loomed encouragingly near. Both the captain and the first mate saw it with satisfaction.

'Look you here,' the captain said authoritatively, and his tone proved he was accustomed to command, 'let's have no words. I'm not a hard man, but there are times when if I say a thing I mean it, and will stick to it to the death. Go below, pilot; it'll be better for you. I intend, anyway, to take over the charge of the ship again. D'ye hear?'

Probably he heard, but probably also the tradition of his calling was strong upon him, for he did not move. With a swift movement the captain put his fingers somewhere in the region where the pilot's coat collar was supposed to be, and gave them a dexterous twist.

'Here, you fellows! Mr. Sanderson!'

And Mr. Sanderson promptly obeyed, although his orders were not particularly explicit, and in an incredibly short time he and Cloverley had seen the pilot to more comfortable quarters below, and then the first mate returned to the deck.

'A bad look-out this, Mr. Sanderson. It's difficult to get a correct notion as to where we are, but we must do our level best tonight. It won't be ordinary work. It will be a fight with death, and about as hard a fight as ever I wish to have. But we'll hold on, Mr. Sanderson; we'll hold on to the last.'

'Ay, ay, captain,' replied the first mate, with equal resolution. And he pulled his cap more firmly over his bent brows.

It was a night to be remembered. The fog increased in density, until it seemed as if everything animate and inanimate were swallowed up in that appalling curtain of mystery which could not be thrust aside or rendered opaque. The ship's lights burned dimly, and could not be distinguished more than a few yards distant, and the sailors' voices sounded unfamiliar and indistinct as they responded to the captain's orders. As for Captain Monsell, he would not forsake his self-imposed charge, but with alert brain and taut nerve he kept his position where the pilot should have been, and with the precise accuracy of a keen and trained judgment made his constant and minute calculations as to the probable position of the 'Endora,' and her chances of escaping the hidden, but dreaded, dangers which were threatened her by nests of flint-like rocks, with jagged knife-shaped edges, that rendered that part of the coast line a terror to navigators. It was a night to furrow deep lines on a man's brow, which sunny days and years of ease could not eradicate. It was a night to make young men old, and death a realistic presence that seemed to jostle with its elbow all things that had life and breath. The hours dragged slowly by, but the fog rather grew denser than less. It was something to be felt, something that gripped a man's throat, and stifled his voice. It was a terrible night, truly.

In the early cold of the morning the captain summoned the first mate.

'Mr. Sanderson, we must drop an anchor. I daren't take the ship another knot.'

'The anchor won't hold, sir.'

'We must prove that.'

The anchor was cast, but as the young officer predicted the flinty rocks afforded no anchorage. The 'Endora' still held on her dangerous course.

'It was the first moment that I dared risk it,' said the captain; 'and now it's a dead failure. But we'll have another try shortly, Mr. Sanderson.'