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WRECKED OFF THE RIFF COAST.

I knew not whether the noise of the swell breaking into surf, deadened though it had been by the distance, had given the dreadful preliminary warning of the imminent dangers awaiting us. I had not spoken to him for the last hour or so. All I knew was that as Roper and myself were conversing last, that bit of surprise was dramatic enough in all conscience; and before we had all time to exchange an ejaculation, a cannon shot had run round the ship, followed by wailing and shrieking almost as loud and weird as that we had listened to when the squall caught us in the night-time. It call more for an athlete's nerve than veracity that he should imagine himself on the rack-way, an assurance that we were in no manner of peril. His watch speech was Sanscrit to the most of the mob, and if any one had listened to him they would have believed him. Instinctively I swept the seaboard northward to see if here was any assistance in sight. There was nothing visible, but one faint dark line of smoke. Gladly would I have given all I possessed in the world could we have been transhipped on board that invisible steamer.

"For heaven's sake, Esther—Miss Oakley, I mean—don't alarm yourself."

The voice was Roper's; and when I wheeled round upon him there was his beautiful ladylove half reclining in his arms. Don't believe that the fair dove had flown thither naturally, when she came fluttering up from the cabin at the sounds of lamentation on the deck. But a tall Berber, 'scrambling' like every one else, had sent her spinning aside with a shove from his square shoulder-blade, and that lucky Roper had been on the spot to receive her, and now he stood steadying and soothing her a considerably longer time than was in any way necessary. Most ungratefully her cadaverous truncle 1 glance at the unconscious Samaritan who had acted as the rough go-between of love. If Miss Oakley apparently found some consolation in having her ruffled plumage smoothed by that firm yet gentle hand, it would have been hard to blame her. The circumstances were excuse enough for abridging ceremony; and then she had known Jack so long as a devoted admirer, who had stooped from his higher position in society to make a fool of himself for her pretty face. There was assurance besides, as well as most delicious flattery, in seeing him not only cool but happy, when most people about him were in miserable panic. When the ground has been cleared for-hand, love-making naturally goes forward at a gallop to a supreme crisis of the kind; and to do him bare justice, Jack was the very man to profit by so fair an opportunity. Miss Oakley disengaged herself leisurely with a grateful smile and a murmur, which, of course, he had to stoop his head to hear. She let him support her to one of the benches aft, where he deposited her carefully out of the way of the general confusion. As for the father, he stuck by the pair, but made no objection. Jack's coolness had its influence on him too; apparently he began to regard the stalwart gunner as a life-buoy that it would be as well to keep within reach of the family—at all events, in the meantime.

For the more you looked at the situation the less you liked it. Our close vicinity to the land showed how fast the vessel must have drifted; and the set on the surface was still inshore, although it seemed as if some counter under-flow must be pulling the ir f off. It was a simple calculation, however, tho' if nothing could be done in any way for fat- we should know the best and the worst of it in an hour or so.

All this passed of course far more quickly than I have written it. I was on the point of going in search of the Captain, when he spared me the trouble by coming to accost me.

"A leal job, sir. I trust you and your friend will lend us a helping hand."

"You may count upon us, Captain; but what's bec- me of your crew?"

"The crew, sir—a wheen feckless, mutinous idiots. No, no; there's no a man we can reckon upon, forbye the mate and the engineer lad, who's a yankee; and maybe—ay, there's one dependable hand in the forecastle—that's Davison."

"It might be well to see to the boats in case of accidents, eh?"

"Accidents—it'll be nothing but an accident if anything save us; and that you may lay your account wi'," Boned, the sly boat I would trust to swim in siccan a sea as you, got a boom through her bottom the time o' the squall, when the forecast was blown out of the bell-ropes. And as you may see yourself, all the Moorish and Jewish riffraff are making a rush for them already; if they should get them launched, they'll droon the sooner; but it's no worth disputing it with them, one way or another."

I might have laughed at another time at the skipper's peculiar philanthropy; but now it was anything but a laughing matter. "What the deuce do you mean to do, then? is there no means of bringing us up with the anchor?"

"It's our best hope, and it might easily be better. I doubt the ground-tackle's some the worse for wear, though it did hold us in Tangiers Bay yestreen, and it's bad mooring ground here; and then gin once the cable rip on they reefs, it would snap like a tow in the flame of a candle. We'll do our endeavor anyhow; and that's what brought me here to speak to you."

"I'll tell my friend what you say, and you may depend on us."

"Ay," said the Captain, glancing over to where Roper was lounging about in contemplation of Esther Oakley. It may be bad for us; but it'll be worse maybe for some of the rest of us."

"Well, one good thing is, the coast seems quiet enough in the meantime—not a sign of life stirring anywhere."

"That's all you ken about it. Bay pardon, sir, but I'll be bound now that they cliffs are swarming with these Riff devils, if we could only see them. And it's like there will be one o' those dozens o' theirs, as they call their circles of villages, in the bit of a gully. There's grey good pasturing all-out the nooks on the hillside, for all that it looks gruesome and barren. But I've no time for clavers, for here comes the mate, and it's like he's found the powther barrel; we may as well be signaling with the bit brass gun we've got. There's the reek of a steamer there, and maybe they might hear us, though she be to windward. And, talking of powther, I wish you and Capt. Roper would get up your arms and ammunition. You may have wilder sport than you missed at Tangiers before all's said and done."

The ancient piece of brazen ordnance made more noise than I should have fancied possible; the reverberation went rolling about among the rocks in the amphitheatre of mountain. Whether our friends in the steamer heard it or not, it was very certain to give the alarm on the Riff coast. With that fearing strong upon me, I dived below to look after the arms. Roper was after me the next instant. "I say, old fellow, I think everything's going as swimmingly as possible."

"The devil it is," was my unsympathetic rejoinder.

"Yes, I know it on bit to be so time for philandering; but isn't she a beauty, and such pluck. What do you mean taking the guns out of their cases, when everything's still out of their cases, when everything's still dripping on the decks?"

"We may need them before the day's an hour older—that's to say, if you don't mend that we shall all be made peaceable prize of by those Riff savages."

A new light seemed to burst on Roper, and certainly I had no cause now to complain of his amorous distraction. He unpacked and overhauled our armory and ammunition with a close and eager attention that augured ill for somebody, should the weapons be brought into play. A second salvo from the brass gun, and another rattle among the Arabs echoes, greeted our return on the deck, each of us looked like Robinson Crusoe when he took the field against the cannibals. Esther Oakley gave a little scream, notwithstanding Jack's commendations of her courage. However, Jack's commendations of her courage. However, Jack's commendations of her courage. However,