

with the wind and sea on the beam; and the ship, though not pitching much, was rolling a good deal.

We had but few passengers on board, and of these four were solemnly playing a rubber, while the others were ill in their berths. There was evidently not much Christmas festivity to be expected in the saloon, so I came shivering off the deck, where I had been smoking a cigar in the moonlight, and seated myself in my accustomed place on the engine-room platform, enjoying the warm glow from the furnaces.

Angove had just lit a cigar which I gave him, when a slight escape of steam from one of the valve stuffing-boxes arrested his attention. The platform on which we had our seat was on a level with the tops of the cylinders, with a railing nearly breast-high between it and the engines: and to get at the stuffing-box in question it was necessary, in order to avoid being struck by the bars of the parallel motion, to wait until the engine took her down stroke, and then vault in over the rail to the top of the cylinder cover before she came up again. Taking a spanner, to screw down the gland, Angove awaited the proper moment, and vaulted over the rail; but at that instant the ship took a heavier roll than ordinary, his foot slipped on the greasy slopping surface of the false cover, and he had the narrowest escape possible from being precipitated headlong among the working parts of the machinery.

He saved himself just in time, by catching hold of the cylinder cross-head, but this cross-head worked up to within half an inch of one of the deck beams; and before he could withdraw his hand the two were nearly close together, the smallest conceivable space of time longer, and his hand would have been crushed between them. Such close work was it, indeed, that he actually felt the squeeze, and the skin was red with the pressure.

I know I was terribly frightened, and started up pale and horror-struck; but Angove finished his work coolly, vaulted out again over the rail, and seated himself at my side, a little pale, but perfectly calm and self-possessed, and smoked away at his cigar as if nothing had happened.

"My dear fellow," I cried, "what a narrow escape! I thought it was all over with you."

"Yes, indeed," he said, "it was close work; but, thank God, it is all right. A very small fraction of a second longer," looking at his hand, "and my power of using hammer and chisel wouldn't have been of much account."

We sat for some minutes without speaking, both, no doubt, meditating on what had occurred; and then, full of the subject, I said:

"It must be very dangerous work, going about the engines in really bad weather?"

"Yes, it is," he said, "especially in some engine-rooms; nearly as bad, I think, as it is for the sailors to go aloft. But I have always been very fortunate."

"Did you ever meet with an accident," I asked.

"No," he replied, "but I was very near one once—a worse one perhaps than even this would have been—and yet it was not exactly an accident either."

"What was it, then?" I asked.

"Well," he said, "it is a subject on which I don't much like to speak; and, indeed, I have never told the whole story to any one; but I think a sufficiently long time has now elapsed, and I may as well give it to