

but checked himself as if second thoughts were best. Yet he could not altogether conceal his contempt in making answer :

"As you like. These two are all I want this time. But mind you, Evil-Eye, if any harm come to either through your doing, your own blood shall pay for it." Then turning to Eric he said, in his ordinary gruff tones :

"Here, boy ; call off your dog."

Eric obeyed without hesitation. "Come here, Prince," he commanded. "Come to me, sir."

Prince wagged his tail to indicate that he heard his master's orders, but he was evidently very reluctant to obey them. 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 for a while at all events.

But Eric persisted in calling to him, and at length he obeyed, turning to glance back at his discomfited foe when he had reached his master's side, as though he longed to have another tussle with him.

Looking very much out of humor, Evil-Eye rose to his feet, and put his hand to his throat to feel if Prince's fangs had done him any injury. Fortunately the deep collar of the thick coat he wore had been turned up all around to keep out the wet, and it had fulfilled a still more important service by keeping out the mastiff's teeth, so that no actual harm had been done.

Feeling somewhat more amiably inclined on ascertaining this, Evil-Eye now condescended to take a good look at Eric, who by this time had risen to his feet, the excitement of the past few minutes having caused him to forget his weakness and suffering.

"Humph—Rather a likely lad," he grunted. "But he may give us trouble some time yet. Have you thought of that?" addressing Ben.

"No—but it doesn't matter," answered Ben. "I'll be warrant for his not getting us into trouble."

"Let us be off then," said Evil-Eye. "We've lost enough time already."

The all-prevailing gloom of the day was already deepening into the early dark of late autumn as, led by Evil-Eye, the three set forth across the sands, the spray that the storm tore from the billows' crests dashing in their faces as they advanced. Eric could not have gone far only that Ben threw his brawny arm about him and almost carried him along. Prince trotted quietly at his heels, having quite regained his normal dignity of demeanor.

In this fashion they had gone about a hundred yards, and their leader was about to diverge to the right, towards the interior of the island, when Prince suddenly threw up his head, sniffed the air eagerly, and bounded off in the direction of the water. The men paused to watch him, and following him closely with his eyes, Eric saw that he had stopped beside a dark object that made a strange silhouette upon the glistening sand. He smelt it for a moment, and then lifting his head, gave utterance to a long weird howl that rose above the roar of the tempest, and sent an inexplicable thrill through those that heard it.

Obeying an impulse for which he could have given no reason beyond a vague sense of dread, Eric hastened as fast as he could to see what Prince had found. He had gone but half-way before he made out that it was a human form, and a few steps more revealed to him that the form was his mother's ! Forgetting all weariness and pain, he rushed forward, and threw himself down beside the body, lifting the cold pallid face out of the sand, and crying passionately :

"Mother !—mother ! look at me—speak to me !"

But his mother answered not, and as her head lay heavy and motionless in his hands, he realized that Ben had spoken truly. His mother was lost to him forever.

He was too stunned and bewildered to speak or cry. He felt powerless to do anything. His eyes wandered over his mother's form, and fell upon her left hand which was spread open, palm downward. Instantly he gave a start of horror, for he saw that the third finger on which she had always worn a ring of peculiar beauty and value, the gift of her husband, an heirloom in the Copeland family for generations past, was missing. It had been roughly hacked off close to the palm, evidently in order to obtain the ring, which, fitting very tightly, had refused to leave its place at the rough bidding of the reckless despoiler.

Oh ! the agony of that moment ! The poor boy's brain reeled, and it seemed as though his heart must burst. The most harrowing suspicions sprang up in his mind. Who were these wild, fierce-looking men amongst whom he had fallen, and what part had they in compassing his mother's death, and for aught he knew, his father's also ? The one that was called Ben, could surely have had no hand in deeds so foul, but Evil-Eye—the hideous ruffian who wore a gallows-face if ever man did—of what atrocity might he not be capable ?

Stung to fury by these thoughts, Eric, his grief submerged in a mad passion for revenge, leaped to his feet, and made as though he would rush upon Evil-Eye, who stood a little way off, regarding him with a cynical leer. Weaponless as he was, he could have done his foe no harm, and the ruffian, seeming fully to understand the boy's movement, never stirred nor checked his evil smile.

But Eric had miscalculated his strength. Before he got within striking distance of Evil-Eye a paralyzing weakness seized him, he staggered blindly, threw up his hands with a piteous cry, and fell forward in a dead faint, just as Ben rushed up to catch him in his arms.

When he came to himself he was lying in a sort of bunk, in a corner of a large room, containing a number of men, whose forms and faces were made visible by the light of an immense wood fire that roared and crackled at the farther end of the room. There was at least a score of the men, and so far as Eric could make out they were all shaggy, fierce and unprepossessing in appearance, like Ben and Evil-Eye. The latter he could see distinctly, sitting beside a table with a flagon before him, from which he had just taken a long deep draught.

The liquor apparently loosened his tongue for looking about him with his single eye, whose glare was simply diabolical as the fine light flashed upon it, he began to talk very vigorously to those who were sitting near him. At first Eric paid no heed to what he was saying, but when Evil-Eye held up something for the others to see, he leaned forward curiously to try and make out what it was. There was not sufficient light for him to accomplish this, and he would have turned his attention to something else, had not Evil-Eye called out in an exultant tone :

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

"How was that, Scar-Cheek ?" inquired a man at his side.

"The confounded thing wouldn't come off—stuck on so tight. Had to chop off the finger before I could get it," answered the scoundrel, turning the ring over so that its circle of diamonds

might scintillate for the benefit of his companions.

A thrill of horror went through Eric at these words. This, then, was the heartless monster who had not scrupled to mutilate his mother's body ere yet it was cold in death, if indeed he had not hastened the departure of her life. He grew faint and sick at heart, and looked anxiously about the room in search of Ben, the one ray of comfort in this awful gloom into which he had plunged. But Ben was not in sight. Prince was, however, stretched out upon the floor beside the bunk, and sleeping away as composedly as if he were in his own cosy quarters at Oakdene. The sight of him comforted Eric a little, and he called softly :

"Prince—Prince—come here."

The mastiff did not hear at first, but Eric repeating his call, he awoke, lifted his head to see what was wanted, and then got up, and coming over to the bunk, laid his huge head on his master's breast.

"Dear old dog," murmured Eric, fondling him lovingly. "Oh ! Prince, don't you wish we were back at Oakdene again ?" and then, as the thought of those happy days when the little family circle was all unbroken rushed in upon his mind, he burst into a passion of tears. The great fond creature at his side looked inquiringly into his face, licked his hands with his rough tongue, and in other ways sought to show his sympathy. But Eric was not to be consoled even by such genuine sympathy as this, and not until the first force of his grief had spent itself, could he control his feelings sufficiently to regain composure.

In the meantime some more men had entered the room, and among them Eric was glad to recognize Ben, who at once came over to him, and sitting down on the bunk, asked him in quite a kindly tone :

"Feeling any better, my lad ? You'll soon be all right again, won't you ?"

Eric wiped away his tears as he replied respectfully : "I feel a little better, sir."

"Well, just keep still, and I'll get you a bite of something. You must be nigh starving," said Ben.

There was a large pot hanging on a kind of crane beside the fire, and taking a tin dish from the table, Ben proceeded to fill it with the savoury stew which the pot contained. Adding a pewter spoon to the dish he brought it over to Eric.

Half distracted by disturbing fears and feelings as the boy was, he had eaten nothing since breakfast that morning, and the smoking stew was just what he needed. Grief may dull appetite in older people, but with hearty, healthy boys, hunger is paramount, and Eric surely was not blameworthy if he found temporary surcease of sorrow in the nourishing food his protector brought him.

Ben was evidently very well pleased at the vigor of his appetite.

"That's right, my lad," said he, approvingly : "That'll do you more good than doctor's trash. Now then, lie you down again, and I'll see that the dog has a good bellyfull, too."

Eric felt decidedly better for his hearty meal. A luxurious sense of warmth and languor stole over him. He sank back upon his rude but comfortable couch, and soon fell into the blessed oblivion of deep dreamless sleep, while Prince, having appeased his hunger, also resumed his position on the floor beside the bunk.

It was broad daylight when Eric awoke, and he felt greatly relieved on finding himself alone in the room, save for Ben, who sat by the table evidently waiting for him to awake. He had hardly opened his eyes before the latter noticed it, and coming over to the bunk, said to him in his gruff way :