

Kentish! Sam Kentish! the name, long forgotten, had once been very familiar to me, and the mention of it brought back the confused memories of things, and persons, and places in the dim past.

'You ain't forgotten me?' rejoined the old fellow in a tone of reproach. 'I taught you to row, and to steer, and to reef a sail when half a cupfull was blowin', fresh in from south-west-by-west, off the Needles yonder, aboard his honour's yacht.'

'On board my uncle's yacht, said I eagerly. 'Of course I remember you now, Sam; and I am glad to see an old friend again; but how on earth'—

'How did I come to be here?' interrupted the seaman; 'and how, too, did I come to be the broken-down, old, worthless waister that I am? Well, it is a long story, master, and I've neither time nor taste to spin much of a yarn. I went to the bad, never mind why, and that's the long and the short of it, lost my character as a yacht's blue-jacket, shipped foreign, knocked about for years in the China seas and off the Guinea coast—no matter where, so as rum was plenty and wages high—then was a man-o'-war's-man, and got my three dozen for drunkenness and desertion; and then to this. My own fault, partly, I daresay; but never mind that now. Your uncle, his honor the general, had a sort of regard for me, you may remember, sir'—

'And you deserved it, I am sure, Sam,' I answered kindly, as I looked down on the wreck of what had once been as fine a sailor as ever hauled at a rope, and who had seemed to me when, in my uncle's small yacht, a perfect treasury of accomplishments.

'I think I did, sir,' said Sam shaking his head sorrowfully; 'but the blackguard must have been precious strong in me all the time, or it isn't here I'd end my days, among a parcel of rafts that dont know stem from stern. Well, Mr. Alfred, I didn't come here to whimper, but to say a word in season to the nephew of my kind old master, his honor. There's worse nor me aboard; another chap of the same kidney, but twice as bad.'

'You mean Gregg, the captain?' said I, as my heart beat fast and thickly.

'Ay, ay!' returned the seaman, in studiously low tones; 'I mean him, and no other. I've sailed with him, and I know the stuff he's made of, and when he means mischief. He means it now; I can read it in his eye, plain as print; and— Hark ye, mister—do you think it was wood we carried down last to feed the fires?'

'I suppose so,' returned I, in surprise.

'No, sir,' said Sam drily; 'it was a load of hams, prime Kentuck, and as fat bacon as ever came out of Tennessee. The fires are that hot the stokers hardly dare open the iron doors, and the engines are straining, so that two niggers keep throwing water to cool the bearings. That's not all, for besides the loafing lubbers we carry for deck-hands, there are six seafaring men—two former shipmates of mine among 'em—chaps better known than trusted—and there orders are to keep together, and be roady to man a boat.'

'To man a boat?' said I greatly perplexed.

'Yes,' answered Sam Kentish, with an impatient jerk of the head, as if my dullness annoyed him; 'that boat up yonder, to starboard, swinging in the tackles. Right as a trivet she is, with the oars in her, and quite clear of poultry and lumber.' The other two boats, he added in a whisper, 'are littered with coops and awnings, and what not, and what's more—the plugs are out!'