

silence and the suspense wore upon their nerves until the final struggle came in the shape of a boom to save them from madness. And it came with a rush and a will, cyclonic, tremendous, overpowering. By sheer weight of human flesh the Europeans were pinned against the rail, fighting at handgrips with a cruel and cunning foe far better prepared for such business than they. For at such close quarters pistols were practically worthless save as clubs, while knives could slip to slay through almost any interstice, however straitened. O'Rourke had no time to think of his companions. Stung to desperation by the silent, unrelenting fury of his assailants—twice he was conscious of the white-hot agony of a knife-thrust, one penetrating the flesh of his side and scraping his ribs, the other biting deep into his thigh—he fired until he had but one cartridge left in his revolver, and expended that blowing out the brains of an extraordinarily persistent coolie, then dropped the useless weapon and trusted to his naked strength.

It served him well for a little. One man, precipitated by the weight of those behind him into the adventurer's arms, he seized by the throat and throttled in a twinkling; then lifting him from the deck, he exerted his power to the utmost, and cast the body like a log into the midst of the mêlée. Thus clearing a little space, he found himself able to step aside and let another run past him into the bulwark;