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"Boat ahoy, I say!"

I turned and then sprung to my feet with a shout of joy. Close astern of us, within toss of a biscuit, lay a little fore-and-aft schooner, with her canvas shaking to the light south-westerly wind, into the very eye of which her jib-boom pointed.

She was a craft of some twenty-five tons, painted black, sitting low on the water, a beautiful model to the eye, schooner-rigged, as I have said, her canvas old and grimy and liberally patched, her masts badly stayed her standing rigging gray for want of tar. A fellow in a red shirt and a blue cap, like a French smack-man, leaned with his bare arms upon the rail, staring at us with a face of dark yellow. Over the fore-castle bulwarks were the heads of four negroes attired in bright colors, and another negro stood at the long, slender tiller, that swayed in his hand while he gazed at us with his mouth open behind the yellow-faced man. All these details were swept upon my mind with photographic swiftness and fidelity.

I cried out: "For God's sake, take us on board. You shall be handsomely repaid for any trouble we give you. We have outlived a terrible night and are in great distress, and must perish if you do not receive us."

"Can yah manage to scull dah boat 'longside, d'yah t'ink?"

"Oh, yes!" I cried, "oh, yes!"

I whipped out my knife, sprung forward deliciously, dragged at the sea-anchor hauled it streaming into the boat, severed the ligatures, and seizing a paddle floundered aft with it, and fell to sculling the boat toward the schooner. Once a horrible swooning feeling seized me, and I was forced to pause to rally my senses, on which the yellow man bawled out, "Look out for dis yeerie line," and here a coil of rope into the boat, which Miss Grant caught, and we were dragged alongside. The moment we gained the deck the brave and beautiful girl broke down. She hid her face and sobbed bitterly. Her emotion was tonical upon me as an obligation to bear up, otherwise I believe I should have given way as weakly as any woman, so true it is that sudden joys, like griefs, confound at first.

"What would yah like done wid dis yeerie boat, sah?" exclaimed the yellow-faced man.

"Get her aboard, if you please," said I, "or take her in tow, or cast her adrift. She is of no use to us now, thank God!"

"Them rugs is yours, I reckon," said the man.

"Yes," I answered, "I shall be glad to have them. We may need them here."

He took a look at the boat and then ran his eye along the little schooner's deck in a sort of calculating way and exclaimed, "Tain't good enough to send the likes of her adrift. Dere's room yeerie, I guess. Hi! Toby, Ebenezer, Jupiter, lay aft, you tree niggers, and get dis boat inboard. Daddy, jump for dat luff-tackle; jump, mah Hatriean, and stop scratching your head. Quick an' lively's dah word all roun' now."

All was now bustle; the negroes walloped about, bawling out like school-boys at play, making the craft we had just vacated splash to their tumbling confusion as though they would capsize her. Suddenly the yellow-faced man, who was looking at them over the rail, roared out, "Halloo! What you do, hey, you black teeves? What! you steel my goods, hein! T'under and flames! I gib you something proper to eat, my dickey-birds. Stop now!" with which he plumped clean into the boat, jumping as though he meant to go clean through her. I looked to see what was the matter, and observed all three negroes with their mouths full; one with a lump of turtle in his hand, another with a crawfish, and a third with a bunch of bananas. Their greedy gobbling was like to choke them. Apparently they meant to stow a good cargo away before they could be stopped. The instant, however, the yellow-faced man was in the boat he let drive with his head at the stomach of the negro nearest him, who fell with a crash as if shot; but the other two showed fight, poisoning their heads in a butting posture and awaiting the onset in that attitude, though they continued to cram their mouths nevertheless.

"Drap what yah're eating, you black teeves ob de world!" shouted the yellow man, who wisely came to a pause on observing their hostile demeanor. "Yah both hang for blasted pirates when we gets to Nassoo! you see now! Yes, yah, both swings for dis, high as de highest tree dere is. Yah'll see now. Drap it, I say."

But by this time the fellows had nothing to drop saving some claws of crawfish, which promptly fell from the black paws that held them, while the men looked up at me grinning from ear to ear. Amid the utmost confusion, the yellow-faced man remaining till the last in the boat to guard our poor remaining stock of provisions, the little craft's nose was got to the gangway, the block of the luff-tackle hooked on to the ring-bolt in the stem, and then all hands came aboard to hoist her in. The fellow at the helm left it to help, and though my emotions just then leaned very little to the side of merriment I laughed till I was breathless at the contortions of the blacks as they pulled in company with the yellow man, every dusky throat delivering a yell with each drag on its own account, till all at once just as the bows of the boat were showing over the side, crack! the fall of the tackle

parted, down tumbled the negroes in a heap, with the yellow man on top of them where they spurred and kicked at one another like a jump of spiders in the bottom of a glass, filling the air with execrations and shouts, while they rolled over and over in an inextricable muddle of black faces, cucumber shanks, red, yellow and white head-gear, and shirts that threatened to become rags in a very little while if the sport went on.

I looked for the boat and found her under water, floating with just the line of her gunwales above the surface, and the rugs, shawls, umbrellas and the like quietly sinking past her in the blue heave of the swell. The yellow man scrambled out of the twisting group with his cap gone; but now he proved himself uglier than had been at all conjecturable while his head was covered, for he was a bald as a turnip down to the semicircle where his wiry hair brushed out thick as the frill of a Persian cat, and as coarse as cocoa-nut fibre. In fact, his bald head showed now like the top of an ostrich's head stuck in the hair of a mattress. He ran to look at the boat, and when he found she was under water he yelled out, "Yah dingy villains! Look at yah work, yah black pig-gies!" and in a paroxysm of rage went butt in afresh for the first negro at hand; but Ebenezer, as the black was called, was too sharp for him; he sprang aside, and the yellow man drove head foremost against the single old pump that stood before the mainmast. The blow he fetched himself would have lasted a white man for a life-time, but it appeared to cause the fellow no more inconvenience than was to be remedied by a brief spell of rubbing. I was getting tired of all this.

"Better get the block unhooked and let the boat go," said I. "What I want has floated out of her, and there's nothing left in the locker that's worth the saving. Besides, I want to have a talk with you. You'll lose nothing by pushing ahead."

"Right yah are," he answered, "Jump now, some black debble, and free de block. Way 'loft, way 'loft, Toby, and bring dot tackle down."

He looked about him for his cap, found it, put it on his head, and came aft to where Miss Grant and I had seated ourselves on some raised contrivance just abaft the rudder-head.

"What's the name of this schooner?" said I.

"Dah Orphan, sah," he answered.

"Where are you bound to, may I ask?"

"We're out wrecking," he answered, then seeing I did not understand, he added, "Dah Orphan's a wrecking craft dat visits dah islands 'way from 'Providence down to Inaguey and dah Moma passage to see what's to be got 'longshore."

I understood him now, for I had heard of such vessels.

"You hail from Nassau, I suppose?"

"Yaas," he said, "dat's my country,"

inspecting first Miss Grant and then myself with growing curiosity.

"I may take it you're captain here?"

"Dat's so, sah."

"Your name, pray?" said I.

"Capt'n Emilius Jeremiah Ducrow," he answered, drawing himself up, and speaking slowly and emphatically.

"Well, Captain Ducrow," said I, preserving my gravity with an effort, that was harder for the demureness I noticed in Miss Grant's face, "before I tell you our story, let me thank you from the very bottom of my heart—and, of course, I speak for this lady as well as myself—for your handsome and timely rescue of us."

He kicked out his heel as he scraped a bow at me and said:

"I see yah a gent. I witness it troo dah accent of yah language. Dere's neber no mistakin' a gent. I mix in fust-class company ashore myself, and could tell perlite breedin' blindfold by de mere smell of him. Now den," he roared, suddenly turning and looking forward, "get dat gangway shipped. T'under and slugs! tain't dinner-time yet, yah blooming shark-fishes, and so I tells yah. Lay aft to dis hellum, Moses. Beg a t'ousand pardons, sah," he continued, rounding upon me with another scrape and a kick up behind, "but niggers is de most ex-crooshatin' people to manage. Dey works 'pon your temper more nor aching teef," saying which he extended his arms, drooping his yellow hands, while he turned his head from the direction in which he seemed to point, with his face puckered up into an expression of loathing which the twist of his mouth rendered monstrously ugly and comical.

"Well, now," said I, "I want to tell you our story, but before I begin I should be glad to know if there's anything to eat aboard this little hooker."

"Oh, yes, sah; dere's eating to be had—middling coarse eating, ah; not fit for dis lubberly lady," he bowing low to Miss Grant, "but dah best Capt'n Ducrow can perwidge."

"We have not had bite nor sup since last night," said I. "What can you give us?"

"Will yah hab it yeerie or in de cabin?" he inquired.

"Here," said I, making a shrewd guess at the temperature below.

He called to one of the negroes and told him to put a pot of chocolate upon the fire, then to lay aft with a bit of cold salt beef, ship's biscuits, plates and the like. "And bear a hand, mah humming-bird," he said, "for tain't dinner-time yet, yah know. Now sah," he continued addressing me, assuming a fine air of dignity in his manner, "while yah wittles is making ready, I shall be glad ob yah story."

[TO BE CONTINUED]

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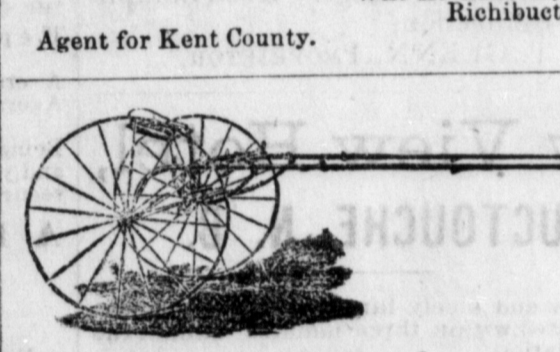
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