

deed be distinguished, but I fancied I could recognize human voices in it, although I was forced to confess that I had never heard from mortal lips such exquisite melody, for as the strain across the night, now swelling out clear and full as if sang almost at our ears, and then melting away in the distance until it died off like the faintest breathing of a wind harp, I was tempted almost to attribute the music to angelic visitants. The old boatswain seemed to assign the sounds to the same cause, for drawing nearer to my side, he ran his eye cautiously and as if in awe, up to the mast head; and then looked with a blank and puzzled gaze, in which, perhaps, supernatural fear might be detected, into my face.

My own astonishment, however, was but momentary. Hastily scanning the horizon, I had noticed that the mist in the direction of the island had been, during the fifteen minutes that I had been idly looking over the ship's side, slowly creeping up towards us, although in every other direction, except down in the extreme distance, the sky was as clear as before. At first moreover my imagination had yielded to the impression that, as the strain died away on the night, it came out again from a different quarter of the horizon, but when divesting myself of the momentary influence of my fancy, I began to analyse the causes of this phenomenon, I became satisfied that the sounds in reality arose out of the bank of clouds, to windward, and the illusion had been produced by the rising and falling of the strain upon the night. When therefore the old boatswain turned to me with his baffled look, I had made up my mind as to the real causes of that which puzzled the veteran seaman.

'There is a craft up yonder in that fog,' I said, pointing to windward, 'and there are women on board, for the voices we hear are too sweet for those of men.'

I said this with a calm smile, which at once dissipated the fear of my companion, for after thinking a moment in silence, the puzzled expression of his face gradually cleared away, and he replied with a low laugh, which I thought, notwithstanding, a little forced.

'You are right—and that's a reason for book larin I never thought of before. Here have I sailed for a matter of forty years or so, and yet I could not exactly come at the cause of these same sounds, when you, who havn't been ten years on the water,—though you're a smart scolar, I must say, for your years—can tell at once all about it, just because you've had a riggilar iddication. Book larin ain't to be despised arter all,' he continued shaking his head—'even for a boatswain, and, by the blessing of God, I'll borrow the good book of the parson, to morrow, and go at it myself; for when I was young I could spell, I calculate, at the rate of a ten-knot breeze. But mayhap,' he continued, his thoughts suddenly changing, that craft up yonder may turn out a fat prize—we could soon overhaul her if the wind would only breeze up a little.'

The wind, however, had now fallen to a dead calm and the sails hung idly from the masts, while the ship rolled with a scarce perceptible motion upon the quiet sea. A current was setting in however, to the island, and we were thus gradually borne nearer to the unseen craft. This soon became evident from the greater distinctness of the sounds, and at length, I thought I could distinguish a few of the words sung, which seemed to be of a Spanish air. As the night advanced the music ceased, but the silence did not long continue. Suddenly a shriek was heard rising fearfully on the air, followed by a strange mixture of noises, as if oaths, groans and entreaties, and even sounds of mortal strife were all mingled in one fearful discord. The shriek was now repeated, with even more fearful vehemence; and then came the report of a pistol across the darkness. Our hearts beat with strange feelings. What nefarious deeds were being done on board the unseen craft? Hitherto the captain, who had strolled on deck to enjoy the music, had said that he should await the dawn, or at least the appearance of a breeze, before overhauling the stranger, but now he came to the determination of ordering out the boats, and learning the cause of those fearful outcries.

'Some hellish work, I fear,' he said, 'is going on yonder, perhaps a pirate has boarded the craft, for the villains infest these islands. Board her at every risk, and then no mercy to the fiends if they are really at work.'

The boats were hastily lowered, manned and shoved off from the side of the

ship. The second lieutenant commanded one of the boats, and to me was deputed the charge of the other. We proceeded rapidly and as noiselessly as possible, into the bank of clouds and soon lost sight of The Arrow, although long after her hull and spars had disappeared in the obscurity, her top light was to be seen like a red baneful star, floating in the firmament. Our guide meanwhile, was the sounds of strife on board the invisible craft; but as we proceeded, the uproar died away, and for a few moments a profound silence reigned. Then came a few sullen plunges in the water which we were at no loss to understand. The men sprung to their oars with renewed vigor at the sounds. A perfect stillness reigned once more, but we knew, from the distinctness which we had heard the plunges, that we were close on to the craft. Steering in the direction therefore, from which the sounds had come, we glided along the smooth surface of the sea with almost incredible velocity. Not a word was spoken, but the oarsmen strained their sinews to the utmost, while the officers gazed intently into the gloom ahead. Each moment seemed an age. Scarcely a dozen more strokes of the oar had been given, however, when the outlines of a brig shot up, as if by magic, out of the mist ahead, and almost instantaneously a voice from the stranger hailed us in the Spanish tongue.

'Keep her to it my lads—pull with a will,' I said, as the boat commanded by the lieutenant dashed on without heeding the hail.

'Boats ahoy!' shouted another voice from the brig, and this time the words were in English, 'lay on your oars or we'll fire into you,' and at the same time, a score of heads was faintly seen crowding the bulwarks of the vessel.

'Dash into her my brave lads!' exclaimed the lieutenant, standing up in the stern sheets, and waving his sword aloft, another pull and we are up to them.'

The men cheered in reply, and, with a jerk that made the ash blades bend like willow wands, we shot up to the sides of the brig. But not unopposed, for almost before the lieutenant had ceased speaking, the dark villains crowding the sides of the brig poured in a rattling fire on us that would have checked men in the pursuit of a less holy object. But the character of the assassins who had taken the brig had now become apparent, and every man of our crew, remembering that agonizing shriek, thirsted to avenge the sufferer. The volley of the pirates was not, however, as deadly as it might have been had they not been taken partially by surprise; and been in consequence, without that preparation to meet us which they otherwise would have shown. Their discharge, however—God knows!—was deadly enough. The stroke oarsman, but a few feet in advance of me, fell across the thwart. But the other boat, being in advance of me, suffered far more, for I saw several of the men stagger in their places,—while the lieutenant, springing up like a deer, tumbled headlong into the stern sheets. He had been shot through the heart. The impetus, however, which the last gigantic stroke of the men had given to the boats sent them onwards to the brig, and we struck her side almost instantaneously with the fall of my superior.

'Vengeance,' I shouted, 'vengeance my lads! follow me,' and springing into the forechains of the brig, I leaped from thence upon her deck, and found myself, the next moment, almost unsupported amidst a circle of desperate foes. But it was only for a moment that I was left without aid. I had scarcely exchanged the first parry with a brawny desperado who met me at the bulwark, when my gallant fellows came pouring in after me, inflamed to double fury by the loss we had suffered, and betokening by their stern determined looks that the approaching conflict was to be one of extermination or death. The pirates seemingly aware of their situation, glared on us with the fury of wild beasts, and sprung with curses and yells to repel the boarders. This left me, for the instant, almost alone with my stalwart opponent, and had my cause been less righteous or my skill at my weapon not a proverb, I should have trembled for my life. Rarely indeed have I seen a finer looking or more masculine man than my opponent on that fatal night. He was a tall snawy Spaniard, of the native complexion, with a dark, glittering, fearful eye, and a huge black mustache such as I never saw on man before or since. His head was bare with the exception of a red scarf which was bound around it in the form of a turban,

the ends of which depended on the left side, as I have sometimes seen them fancifully arranged by the creole girls of the islands. His shirt collar was thrown open, displaying a broad and brawny chest that would have served as a model for that of an athletic. His arms were bared to above the elbow, and in his hand he held a common cutlass; but a brace of huge silver mounted pistols, and a dagger with a splendidly ornamented hilt were thrust into the scarf he wore around his waist. I forgot to mention that a small cross, the jewels of which sparkled in the comparative darkness, depended by a rich gold chain from his neck.

I am able to give this description of him, because when we found ourselves almost alone, we paused a moment, as men engaged in a deadly single combat will often do, before commencing our strife. I suspected at once that I was opposed to the leader of the pirates, and he seemed to feel that I held the same office among the assailants, for he gazed at me a moment, with a kind of proud satisfaction, which, however, settled down, as his eye took in my comparative slight proportions, to an expression of sneering scorn. Our pause, although sufficiently long for me to observe all this, endured but for an instant, for the momentary admiration of my foe faded before that sneering expression, and making a blow at him with my cutlass, which he dexterously repelled, we were soon engaged in mortal combat. At first my opponent underrated my powers, but a wound, which I gave him in the arm, seemed to convince him that victory would cost him an effort, and he became more wary. For several moments the conflict was only a rapid exchange of passes; during which our blades rattled and flashed incessantly; for neither of us could gain the slightest advantage over the other. How the combatants progressed during this interval I neither knew nor cared to ascertain, for so intensely was I engrossed in my duel with the pirate leader that I heard nothing but the ringing of our blades, and saw only the glittering eye of my opponent. Those only who have been engaged in a deadly strife can understand the feelings of one in such a situation. Every faculty is engrossed in the struggle—the very heart seems to stand still, awaiting the end. The hand involuntarily follows the impulse of the mind, and the eye never loses sight of that of its destined victim. The combat had continued for several minutes, when I saw that the pirate was beginning to grow cheafed, for the calm, collected expression of his eye gave place gradually to one of fury, and his lungs were made with inconceivable rapidity, and with a daring amounting to rashness. It took all my skill to protect myself, and I was forced at length to give ground.

The eye of the pirate glared at his success like that of a wild beast already sure of its prey, and, becoming even more venturesome, he pressed forward and made a pass at me which I avoided with difficulty, and then only partially, for the keen blade, although averted from my heart, glanced sideways, and penetrating my arm inflicted a fearful wound. But at the time I was insensible of the injury. I felt the wound no more than if a pin had pierced me. Every thought and feeling was engrossed by the now defenceless front of my antagonist, for as he lunged forward with his blade, he lost his defence and his bosom lay unguarded before me. Quick as lightning I shortened my blade and prepared to plunge it into the heart of the pirate. He saw his error and made an attempt to grasp a pistol with his left hand, to ward off the blow with his sword arm. But it was in vain. With one desperate effort I drove my blade inwards—it cut through and through his half opposed defence—and with a dull heavy sound went to his very heart. His eyes glared an instant more wildly than ever—his lips opened, but the faint cry was stifled ere it was half uttered—a quick, shuddering, convulsive movement passed over his face and through his frame, and, as I drew out the glittering blade, now red with the life blood of one who, a moment before, had been in full existence, the pirate fell back dead upon the deck.

At the same moment I heard a hearty cheer, and looking around, I saw that our brave fellows had gained a footing on the deck, and were driving the pirates backwards towards the stern of the vessel. I now for the first time, felt the pain of my wound. But hastily snatching the scarf from the body of my late opponent, I managed to bandage my arm so as partially to stop the blood, and hurried to head my gallant tars.

All this had not occupied three minutes, so rapid are the events of a mortal combat. I had at first thought that we had been forgotten in the excitement of the strife, but I had not wholly unobserved, for as I stooped to snatch the scarf of the pirate, one of his followers who had seen him fall, levelled a pistol at me with a curse, but the missile was struck up by one of my men, just as it was discharged, and the ball lodged harmlessly in the bulwark beside me. In another instant I was again in the midst of the fight. The red scarf that I wore however, reminding the pirates of the death of their leader, called down on me their revenge, and my appearance in the strife was a signal for a general rush upon me.

'Down with him,' roared a tall swarthy assassin, who, from his tone of authority, I judged to be the second in command, 'cut him down—revenge! revenge!'

I was at that moment surrounded on two sides by the pirates, while my gallant tars raised their blades in an arch over me, I escaped the cutlasses of the foe.

'Hurl the bell hounds to perdition,' growled a veteran fore-top man, as he dashed at the piratical lieutenant.

'Stand fast all—life or death—that for your vengeance,' was the response of the foe as he levelled a pistol at the breast of the gallant seaman. The ball sped on its errand, and the top man fell at my feet.

My men were now infuriated beyond all control. They dashed forward like a torrent, sweeping everything before them. The pirates, headed by their leader, made one or two desperate efforts to maintain their ground, but the impetuosity of their antagonists was irresistible, and the desperadoes, at first sullenly giving way, at length were forced into an indiscriminate retreat. A few of the most daring of the freebooters, however, refused to yield an inch and were cut down, while others, after flying a few paces turned and died at bay; but with the mass the love of immediate life triumphed over the fear of an ultimate ignominious death, and they retreated to the fore-hatch, down which they were driven. A few attempted to regain the long crank boat in which they had attacked the brig from the island, but their design was anticipated by one of our fellows who gave a brace of shot through her bottom.

I now bethought me of the female whose shriek had first alarmed us; and advancing to the cabin, I descended with a trembling heart, anxious and yet fearing to learn the truth. I have faced death in a hundred forms—in storm, in battle, and amidst epidemics, but my nerves never trembled before or since as they did when I opened the door into the cabin. What a sight was there! Extended on the floor lay a white haired old man, with a huge gash in his forehead, and his long silvery locks dabbled in his own gore. At his side, in a state of grief approaching to stupefaction, sat, or rather knelt, a lovely young creature who might be about seventeen, her long golden tresses dishevelled on her snowy shoulders, and her blue eyes gazing with a dry stony look upon the face of her dead parent. Both the daughter and the father were attired with an elegance which bespoke wealth if not rank. Around her were several female slaves, filling the cabin with their lamentations, and at intervals, vainly endeavouring to comfort their young mistress. Several books and a guitar were scattered about, and the whole apartment, though only the cabin of a common merchant brig, had an air of feminine grace and neatness. The sight of the instruments of music almost brought the tears into my eyes. Alas! little had that lovely girl imagined, when singing her artless songs, in what misery another hour would find her.

My entrance, however, partially aroused the desolate girl. She looked up with alarm in every feature, gazed at me irresolutely a moment, and then frantically clasping the body of her murdered parent, shrunk from my approach. The negro women clustered around her, their lamentations stilled by their fears.

'You are free—thank God!' said I, in a voice husky with emotion, 'the murderers of your parent are avenged.'

The terrified girl looked at me with an expression which I shall never forget—an expression in which agony, joy and doubt were all mingled into one—and then, pressing the cold body of that old man close to her bosom, she burst into a flood of tears; while her slaves, reassured by my words, resumed their noisy grief. I knew that the tears of the agonized daughter would relieve her grief and respecting the sacredness of her sorrow, I withdrew to the deck.