

Next
Friday,

"The Avenger;"

Or, His Fatal Secret.

The UNION JACK

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Every Friday - - - - -

The Best That Money Can Buy.



No. 430

"Where's the sack? In with him, quick! We can't linger here!" muttered Captain Quesada hurriedly. A sack was drawn over the feet of the English sailor, and the top was loosely tied over his head. Between the gag and the sack he was nearly suffocated.



A THRILLING ROMANCE OF THE SEA.—By CHARLES HAMILTON.

CHAPTER 1.

Ashore at Valparaiso—The Fandango—Trapped and Taken.

"YOUR life is in danger!"

Dudley Desmond could hardly believe his ears when he caught the words, about the last he had expected to hear just then.

The "Beagle" was lying in Valparaiso Harbour, and a good many of her crew were ashore—among others, Dudley Desmond, second mate.

Jack ashore, after a long voyage, likes to "see life," and quite a number of English seamen had come to the fandango at Pedrillo Panto's wine-shop.

A large apartment, divided by a ragged curtain, looped back, from the shop itself, was devoted to the dance; and there

big-bearded seamen were whirling slim, dark-eyed Chilean girls to the music rapped out of an old piano and scraped off a wheezy violin.

Dudley was looking on, amused by the bright variety of the scene, continually passed and repassed by the gliding couples. He especially noted the graceful movements of a tall girl, whose face was hidden under a thick reboso, and whose attire seemed to indicate that she belonged to a better class than most of the frequenters of Pedrillo Panto's establishment. She had passed him three times, and was again passing, when she suddenly slipped from the arm of her partner, and span full-tilt against Dudley.

The unlooked-for impact made the English sailor reel; but he kept his footing, and saved the girl from falling, by throwing his arms around her, and holding her tight.

And as he held her, her head dropped upon his shoulder, her lips approached his ear, and she rapidly whispered in English the words which amazed him:

"Your life is in danger!"

Before he could answer she had drawn herself from his arms, and was thanking him aloud in soft, liquid Spanish for saving her from a fall.

Her partner, a dark-faced, beetle-browed Chilean, came up, red and apologetic.

"You were very clumsy, Senor Corriento!" interrupted the girl. "But, come, let us finish our dance. Again thanks, Senor Ingleso."

And the Chilean, after giving Dudley a look which he did not understand, led her back to the dancers.

Dudley was left in a state of profound astonishment. He saw that the "accident" had been cunningly contrived by the veiled girl. She had detached herself from her partner for the purpose of giving him this warning without appearing to do so. But how was his life in danger? And, if it were, how did this girl know of it?

Dudley was puzzled. That unsuspecting seamen were often drugged and robbed, sometimes assassinated, in the South American seaport resorts,



But, without even a scratch, she severed the cord at his wrists and placed the knife in his hand. In a moment more he had his feet free.

THE AVENGER; OR, HIS FATAL SECRET.

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he knew very well. But there were plenty of seamen in the place, evidently flush of money, who would more naturally be selected for robbery than a quiet, sober officer; and as for personal enemies, the young man wasn't aware that he had any.

"Who can she be?" Dudley murmured. "Not one of the regular dancers here, I am sure. She looks like a girl of the better class, who has come veiled to the fandango, not caring to be recognised in such a lively place. In figure she isn't unlike the girl I saw yesterday on the Santiago road. I wish I could see her features."

When the dance ended, the girl of the rebozo vanished in the crowd, and did not reappear.

"Your life is in danger!" "He was sure that they 'be words buzzed in Dudley's ears. But where was the danger? It was not being idly spoken. But where was the danger?

In a quiet way, he glanced about him, taking note of all the occupants of the fandango hall.

"Ah, that's her partner!" he muttered—"the fellow she called Corriento."

The man stood at some distance, in conversation with two others—one a Chilean, like himself, the other an Englishman.

The aspect of the latter arrested Dudley's attention. He was a man of a few years more in age than himself. Not a sailor, evidently, nor yet a trader. He had a pale, aristocratic face, clear-cut features, haughty glance. His clothes were plain and ill-cut; but Dudley easily guessed that they were only donned to avoid comment at the fandango. What could this man, with the manners of a Pall Mall lounge, be doing in a Valparaíso fandango-hall?

Strangest of all, there was something familiar in the face of this man, though Dudley was quite sure that he had never seen him before.

The Englishman was looking at Dudley; while he talked with the two Chileans, his glance kept wandering towards the young sailor.

Perhaps it was this—perhaps it was intuition—but, like a flash, it came to Dudley that this was the man he had to fear.

Could he have heard what was being said by the trio, he would have had proof.

"I am sure this is the man," said Corriento. "He has been pointed out to me by a seaman of the 'Beagle.'"

"Then it only remains to get him aboard the felucca," remarked the other Chilean, a thick-set, sailor-like man of forty, with a white scar on his forehead, the trace of a poniard-slash in some affray.

The tall Englishman pulled at his moustache. "I have no doubt about his identity, Captain Quesada. His features convince me."

"His features, Mr. Leicester? I thought you had never seen him before?"

"Neither have I. Still, I have reason to know his features. That is Dudley Desmond, undoubtedly."

"That settles it. As soon as he leaves—"

"Arrange the details yourself. I will await you on board the 'Cascabel.'"

With a nod to the Chileans, Leicester walked swiftly away. Dudley saw him disappear into the dark street from the wine-shop door.

Reflecting that the best thing he could do would be to get back to the "Beagle," Dudley sauntered away, assuming an air of careless unconcern.

But, once in the street, his carelessness vanished. He took the centre of the narrow, dirty thoroughfare, and kept his eyes well open upon either side.

In a few minutes he became aware that a number of the wine-shop loungers had followed him out. He quickened his pace a little, but pride would not allow him to run.

"By Jove! they've headed me off!"

At the end of the street four or five dark forms stood in a line, with the evident intention of disputing his passage.

Dudley set his teeth grimly. His revolver glimmered in his hand now. Useless to call for help; he knew of old the ways of Valparaíso police. He had only himself to depend upon.

"Stand, señor!" "What do you want?" "A rush was the only answer.

"Back, you hounds!" Dudley's six-shooter glittered at a level. The assailants sprang back like frightened curs. At the same moment there came a patter of feet behind, and the voice of Captain Quesada.

"Seize him!" Dudley dashed forward. The Chileans, recovering their nerve, sprang at him like cats.

Crack! Down went one of them, yelling, with a bullet in his chest. Dudley darted on.

A tearing knife had rent his collar; a bludgeon had paralysed for the time his left arm. But he kept both courage and coolness. The Chileans, silent and furious, came racing after him.

If ever there was a wolf in sheep's clothing, it was Santo, the pirate chief, who posed as a peaceful country squire. Read all about it in the next issue.

Every Friday

Dudley turned into a wider street. The night-prowlers would not dare to follow him from a dark corner, and fastened upon him with such a knowledge that he was dragged to the ground before he knew that he was attacked.

He had no chance of rising. His pursuers were upon him like a pack of wolves. His revolver was snatched away. A noose gripped his legs, another his wrists. A stinking bandanna, shoved roughly into his mouth, stifled his voice.

Half stunned, wholly amazed, Dudley felt like a man in a dream.

His flesh had quivered in horrible anticipation of a thrust, but he unexpectedly found himself taken prisoner instead of being murdered. He could not fathom the design of his captors.

"Where's the sack? In with him, quick! We can't have here!" muttered Captain Quesada hurriedly.

A sack, the odour of which told that it had lately been full of onions, was drawn over the feet of the English sailor, and the top was loosely tied over his head. Between the gag and the sack he was nearly suffocated, but there was no help for it.

Upon the shoulders of the rascally gang he was carried rapidly away—through reeking alleys and crooked by-paths, under a chilly wind, which penetrated the sack, warned him that he was near the sea.

Where was he going? What was to be done with him? Was his body to be launched into the ocean from some lonely spot on the shores of the bay? A thousand surmises flashed through his mind, and a thousand fears.

He could see nothing, but sounds he was familiar with told him soon that he was being placed in a boat, which speedily put off from the shore.

"Take the sack off him now, Corriento. We must not take a dead prisoner to Mr. Leicester."

"Why is he not drowned at once, since it is his death the English sailor desires?"

"Orders, Corriento—orders!"

"Well, it doesn't concern me; but you know that Estrella is on board the 'Cascabel.'"

"Estrella will see nothing and hear nothing."

"She has already seen this Englishman. She took a fresh into her head to go to the fandango, and in the dance she slipped from my arm and collided with Dudley Desmond."

"Well, if she has seen him once, she will not see him twice, so it is of no consequence."

Dudley understood Spanish, and so he learned all that this brief dialogue could tell him.

Corriento stooped over the bound sailor, and pulled away the sack. The cool sea breeze fanned his face, and the Chilean, seeing him gasp, removed the gag also. Dudley drew in a long breath of air with unspeakable gladness.

"Whither are you taking me, señors?" he asked, as politely as he could.

"Have you your bludgeon at hand, Corriento?" Captain Quesada asked.

"It is here, captain."

"If the prisoner speaks again, stun him."

"Si, señor."

Dudley held his tongue. But he used his eyes, and did not fail to note all his surroundings. An open boat on a starling bay. Dim mountains beyond the shore—the Andes, as he knew. A crowd of South Americans in the boat, mostly Chileans. Red sashes, knives and pistols, Panama hats, and swarthy, fierce faces. Plainly a crew of cutthroats, the scum of Valparaíso.

They were pulling seaward. Corriento was seated beside the man he called "captain." The latter was steering. Dudley recognised him as the man with the scarred forehead, whom he had seen at the fandango, talking to Corriento and the English stranger.

"Ho, the boat!"

"A line, quick!"

The boat graced against the hull of a handsome felucca, and several dark faces looked down from above.

The prisoner was hauled aboard, and at once taken down the little hatchway aft, and bundled into a dark cabin. There, with his limbs still bound, he was left lying upon the floor.

The door was closed, and locked upon the outside.

Dudley struggled into a sitting posture, and leaned back against a bulkhead.

"What can be the explanation of this mystery?" he murmured. "Can it be that they mistake me for someone else? What grudge can this Englishman, Leicester, have against me? I'm in a fog."

From without came to his ears a voice—the sweet voice that had spoken to him at the fandango.

"Are you weighing anchor, my father?"

"At once, Estrella."

"Then we will to-night?"
 "We will tonight. Return to your cabin."
 And in a few minutes Dudley knew by the motion of the door that she was upon the open sea.

CHAPTER 2

Fast to Fate—A Mysterious Embody—Caught in the Gale.

DUDLEY remained alone for about half an hour. The words rang in his mind, but he would not risk calling out to ask the Chilians to loosen them, for he guessed that if he made his voice heard the gag would be released in his mouth.

At length the door opened, and the light of a candle illuminated the dark cabin.

A man entered, closing the door behind him. Dudley looked up. It was the mysterious Englishman of the midnight hall. His brow at once the cold, clear-cut face and eyes. He did not, however, betray his knowledge.

Leicester set the candle down upon a locker, close to Dudley, and took a long, earnest look at the young man's features.

"What you are finished," said Dudley, with difficulty repressing his anger, "perhaps you will tell me why you have led me brought here by these scoundrels."

Leicester shook his head.

"I shall tell you nothing," he replied coolly. "If you're the man I want, the knowledge will not benefit you in any way, for the Pacific Ocean will soon roll over your head."

"And if I am not?"

"In that case, I shall set you ashore, upon your promise to reveal nothing of this night's work, and you will be none the wiser for your adventure."

"The details! Tell me who you take me for, then, and let me know if I am to live or die."

Leicester pulled a stool across the cabin, and sat down facing the board sailor.

"That is not my plan," he answered. "It is you who are to speak. Tell me who and what you are, and I shall know if I have been mistaken in assuming you to be Richard—never mind whom. Don't try to deceive me, for I have other means of information, and I shall infallibly detect you, which will be your sentence of death."

"If my hands were free you should not catechise me!" cried Dudley. "But under the circumstances—"

"Under the circumstances, please make haste, as I have no time to waste."

Dudley was loath to defy him, but the apparently accidental slipping of the name "Richard" encouraged him to believe that he was mistaken for another person, so after all the worst course was to state plainly just who and what he was.

"My name is Dudley Desmond," he said. "I am second mate on board the ship 'Beagle,' now lying in Valparaiso Harbour."

Leicester's face was expressionless. Dudley could not tell how his information affected him.

"Your father's name?"

"Richard Desmond."

"Tell me about him."

"He was born in Bristol. He was a seaman; rose to be skipper, and commanded his own vessel. I learned my profession under him. But I really don't see how this can interest—"

"Continue, please," interrupted Leicester.

Dudley went on with a shrug.

"He was ruined, and died five years ago. Do you want to know the particulars? Very well. His best friend, Robert Leicester, who was his relative, and had been his mate for years, got into difficulties. He had at one time saved Captain Desmond's life at the risk of his own. My father considered he was bound to stand by him at any cost. So—"

"What had Leicester done?" asked Leicester abruptly.

"I do not know. I suspected a breach of the law, which he looked up. But I cannot be sure. Anyhow, it ruined my father. He sold his ship, and sacrificed nearly everything."

"And you agreed to that?" asked Leicester, looking at Dudley keenly.

"I did not oppose it. My mother was dead, and I was able to support myself, and I did not think of interfering. Dad Ray of Biscay upon the first voyage out."

"The fine eyes of the young sailor were dimmed for a moment. Leicester did not appear to notice it.

"So Robert Leicester was under the deepest obligations to be said to have been the cause of his death. To you also he owed great gratitude, since you allowed your prospects to be sacrificed for his sake."

"Doubtless," said Dudley, in wonder. "But— Ah, I see now," he exclaimed.

Leicester started violently.

"What do you see?"
 "There was a familiarity in your features when I saw you at the fandango hall."

"Oh, you saw me there, did you? And to whom do you think I bear a resemblance?"

"To Robert Leicester. I see it plainly now."

Leicester rose, kicked away the stool, and walked to the door.

"Stop!" exclaimed Dudley. "Are you not going to set me free?"

"Decidedly not!"

"But I am not the person you supposed."

"Pardon me. You are the very person."

"You spoke the name of Richard—"

"That was a little trick to encourage you to tell the truth in case you tried to fool me with a pack of lies," explained Leicester, smiling satirically.

Dudley set his teeth, and his eyes blazed.

"You cowardly scoundrel! Do you mean to leave me here to be murdered by these South Americans?"

"I am sorry for you, but—"

"What have I done to incur your hatred?"

"Nothing. I do not hate you. But say necessities down you irrevocably; how, it is not needful for me to explain. If you would make any preparations for death, make them. I allow you an hour."

Leicester opened the door, and passed out. He was perfectly tranquil. It was clear that he did not regard a man's life as a matter of much moment.

Dudley did not find it possible to take matters so calmly. In an hour he was to be launched into the sea.

It seemed like some black dream. A few hours ago he had left the "Beagle" for a run ashore, never thinking of danger. Captain Danby would be expecting him back before now. The "Beagle" was to sail in a couple of days. Danby wouldn't wait for him. The skipper was a choleric old seadog, and wouldn't have waited for an emperor. Not that it would do Dudley much good if he did wait. He would be food for fishes long before the ship sailed. But, with the "Beagle" gone, there would be no chance of inquiry into his fate, no likelihood of these wretches ever being brought to justice. Dudley ground his teeth at the humiliation of being drowned with as little impunity as if he were a dog.

An hour! In so short a space, only a miracle could save him.

Then, like a ray of light in Cimmerian gloom, came the recollection of Estrella.

She had evidently known of his danger beforehand, for she had warned him at the fandango. And this warning showed that she pitied him. She was aboard the felucca; might she not aid him?

It was a slender chance, for what could a girl do amidst such a crew of cutthroats? But it kept Dudley from despair.

Leicester, as he left Dudley's cabin, saw a light in the adjoining one; and he stepped in.

An ironical smile played over his thin lips as he saw Captain Quesada and Corriento there. He knew that the two Chilians had been eavesdropping, with their ears to the thick bulkhead separating the two rooms.

"I have promised the prisoner an hour, captain," he said.

"By that time all will be ready, I hope."

"Certainly, señor. It will be only necessary to tie a lump of lead to his legs."

"But the señorita—your daughter—you do not wish her to see it done?"

"She is in her cabin, which she will not leave before dawn."

Leicester nodded, and went up the hatchway ladder. As he put out his head above the deck, he gasped, for a blast of wind nearly knocked him over.

Dark clouds were scudding across the sky, and lines of white marked the sea to right and left. A canopy of dead black was floating down from the summits of the Andes.

"A thousand demons!" panted Leicester, clutching a stay as he rose on deck. "It's a hurricane! Ho, there, Captain Quesada, do you want your vessel to go to the bottom like a stone?"

The Chilean captain came grumbling up the ladder. With true Spanish carelessness the crew had allowed the squall to find them unprepared; the drowsy watch noticed nothing till the blast came.

"El Demonio take the weather!" he growled. "Who would have looked for a gale to-night?"

But he was a sailor; he issued orders rapidly, and the Chilians set to work to obey them.

The huge lateen sails were taken in with the utmost difficulty, but successfully at last.

Leicester swept the white-ridged sea and blackening sky with a troubled glance.

Certainly the aspect of both was threatening, full of ill-omen for the tottering felucca.

He walked aft, to where Captain Quesada stood beside the helm.

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"Will there be danger?" he asked abruptly.
The Captain's eye smiled. Leicester frowned laughingly and
smiled.

"You mistake me. I do not fear death. But am I to be
betrayed at the moment of success by your infernal carac-
ters? That's what I want to know."

"Captain Quesada smiled slyly.
"There is always danger in a Pacific gale," he answered;
"and this will likely to turn out a stiff one. But I have a
few ships, and a large crew. You are as safe on the 'Casca-
bel' as about as about here."
"That's saying a good deal," Leicester remarked distrust-
fully.

"But I was born to the sea. You will see how the
'Cascahel' will defy the storm!" exclaimed Captain Quesada.
"Come."

As if in answer to the Chilean's boastful words, came a
sudden blast which whipped out the bowsprit like a stick,
and carried it a cable's length through the air before dropping
it into the ocean.

Captain Quesada uttered a Spanish oath.
Leicester burst into a laugh of angry derision.
"Is that what you call defying the storm, captain?"
"But! That could not be helped."

"No, and it can't be helped if we all go to the bottom to-
gether!" angrily exclaimed Leicester. And he strode away
with contracted brow.

The Chilean shrugged his shoulders. He did not care for
Leicester's anger. Besides, he had things of nearer conse-
quence to think about. Water blasts came from the west;
the sea ran high fore and aft; and Quesada began to fear
that the forecastle would follow the bowsprit. He said so to
Corriento, who turned deadly pale. The mate of the "Casca-
hel" was not gifted with over much courage.

"It will be a struggle for life, then!" he exclaimed, with
chattering teeth.

"Yes; we might have been better employed than in lis-
tening to the talk of the Englishmen," Captain Quesada said
grimly. "And we made nothing out of it, either. I am as
much in the dark as Desmond."

"Albuquerque was in charge of the watch. It was his
last the gale took us by surprise."

"Send him to me," said the captain.
In a minute or two a burly, black-browed Valparaiso man
stood uneasily before the captain, who eyed him with savage
curiosity.

"Why didn't you keep your sleepy eyes open? You were
snoring in the lee of the sail, I suppose. Take that!"

A clotted pistol smote the bowswain on the side of the
head as he started back. He gave a howling cry, and rolled
over to leeward.

At that moment the felucca shipped a heavy sea. There
was a scrambling, a clutching, and yells of warning. But no
warning could save the dazed man reeling away from the
captain's fierce blow. The receding water caught him, and
whirled him over the bulwark like a cork. From the darkness
of the leaping sea a white face glimmered for a moment, a
faint cry rang; then the doomed wretch vanished for ever.

CHAPTER 3.

The Captain's Daughter—A Terrible Night—In the
Shadow of Death—How Dudley Saved the Felucca.

DUDLEY was soon aware that a gale was raging on the
Pacific, for the rolling of the felucca sent him tumbling
across the cabin again and again. With his arms and
ankles bound, he could not make an effort to save him-
self, and he was shifted to a fresh corner every time a sea
struck the "Cascahel," so that he had a pretty rough time
of it. There was a silver lining to the cloud, however, for he
believed that the gale brought him a respite, as the Chilean
would not be likely to attend to him while the sea was in an
uproar, and peril shadowed the felucca.

In the crash of billows and cracking of rope and spar, he
did not hear the door open, but soon a low, cautious voice
caught his ear.

"Senor Ingleso, where are you?"
It was the voice of Donna Estrella.

"Here," gasped Dudley, who was in a corner, with a stool
and a cushion piling themselves upon him.

The girl, sure-footed, nimble—a true sailor lass—reached
him in the semi-darkness, and he felt her grasp. How she
avoided cutting his flesh with the knife she wielded, he didn't
know. But, without even a scratch, she severed the cord
at his wrists, and placed the knife in his hand. In a moment
more he had his feet free.

"Hold to the bunk, senor, and you will be safe."

Her voice guided him. She was holding on to the edge of
an empty bunk, and he did the same. There was no more
danger of being footed.

"How can I thank you, Donna Estrella?"

The howling of the gale overhead did not materially inter-
fere with talk in the cabin. It was easy for them to hear one
another's voices.

"You have little to thank me for, senor."

"You have given me liberty."

"But, I fear, not life. Oh, senor, I fear that you will not
live to leave this vessel!"

"At least I have a chance now," Dudley remarked. "The
you, senorita—will not the captain be angry with you when he
learns—"

"I care not. I had two reasons for coming hither, senor.
One, to save you; the other, to save my father. You, from
death; my father, from a crime. You must remember, senor,
how we met upon the Santiago road yesterday, and you struck
down the drunken sailor who insulted me. You told me your
name then. Judge of my horror when I heard Corriento and
my father talking of kidnapping you, for the sake of the
stranger's gold."

Dudley could not see her face, but he knew that it was wet
with tears.

"A few chance words put me on the scent. Then I forced
myself to—to play the spy," she said, in a choking voice. "For
the sake of preventing a crime. I heard them say that you
were likely to go to the fandango-hall to-night, as most of the
'Beagle's' men went there. In the hope of seeing you and
warning you, senor, I veiled myself with a rebozo, and allowed
Corriento to take me to the dance."

"You contrived it skillfully, Donna Estrella, and I was able
to give them a tussle before I was taken; but they were too
many for me in the end."

"Senor, your face has told me that you are a man of honour,
else I had never found courage to aid you and rely upon you.
Promise me—"

"Anything," said Dudley earnestly.

"Do not let me be the cause of harm coming to my father.
You must deem him a villain; but I—I can see reasons, ex-
cuses; in short, he is my father, and I owe him a daughter's
duty."

"Upon my honour," said Dudley, "Captain Quesada shall
not suffer injury at my hands. I will spare him, even at the
cost of recapture. It will only be giving you back what you
have just given me."

Estrella gave a little gasp of relief. Between her regard
for her father's safety and her desire to save the victim of
his murderous compact, the poor girl was in a very difficult
position.

"Oh, senor, you are a noble caballero, and I am grateful
to you!" she exclaimed. "But may the Holy Virgin grant
you a safe escape from this felucca!"

"And, even so," said Dudley, "when shall I see you again,
Donna Estrella?"

"See me? Ah, never! You will never see me again!
Remember me with kindness, senor, and do not think too
hardly of Luis Quesada. He was a different man once. It is
your countryman's gold that has tempted him to this deed of
black wickedness!"

"I don't doubt it, and I long for a reckoning with that
heartless scoundrel Leicester! But, Donna Estrella, can you
give me any clue to the cause of the enmity he bears me? I
have never met him before, and I know nothing of him,
except that he resembles a man who was my father's friend."

"I know nothing; and Captain Quesada is, I believe, as
ignorant as I am. There is a surmise of Corriento's that a
fortune is at stake. But Senor Leicester keeps his own
secrets."

"A fortune at stake!" Dudley repeated, puzzled. "I do
not understand how that can be."

"I must return to my cabin, senor. If my maid Nola
misses me, she will warn my father. Do you go on deck. In
the darkness they will not recognise you, and you will be
safest there. Whether you may find a chance of escape I know
not, but at least it is best not to await the assassins here."

"I will help you return."

Dudley, strong and active, quickly assisted the girl to her
cabin, across the little cuddy. There he took her hand, and
touched it with his lips.

"Donna Estrella, whether I live or die, to my last moment
I shall be grateful to you!"

"I shall pray for your safety, senor."

Her heart was beating strangely as she passed into her
cabin.

"How brave! how noble!" she murmured. "How like the
hero of my dreams!" And then she blushed for no apparent
reason.

And Dudley, as he ascended the hatchway, said to himself
that this was a girl to whom he could give his heart.

The hatches were not battened down. This neglect of the
Chilians enabled Dudley to reach the deck without difficulty.
It was very dark there. The sky—shadowy blue when last
he saw it—had changed to inky black. Dimly the wave-crests

One Halfpenny.

seamed about the felucca. The wind tore through the rigging with continuous shrieks. Dudley drew to the side, and held on to an iron stanchion, and the crew were too preoccupied to notice this addition to their number.

Captain Quesada held on by the binnacle, and every time he had a chance of making his voice heard, he shouted an order.

Dudley soon became aware that he wanted the hatches closed; but the crew, afraid of being torn away by the wind, refused to leave their places. Some, indeed, had lashed themselves fast for security.

"Towards and fools!" Captain Quesada snarled. "If the mast goes, the sea will make a clear breach over the felucca, and she'll fill like a bucket."

"Curse the Englishman!" Corriento quavered. "It was on his account that we put to sea to-night!"

"Bah, it is clear that we must do the work ourselves!"

The captain leaned towards the helmsman, and shouted: "Do you hear, Garcia? I am going to close the hatch. Keep the felucca before the wind!"

"Si, señor."

"Come, Corriento."

"Diablo! I cannot let go, or the wind—"

"Coward!" growled the captain in his ear.

"Come, or you shall feel my poniard!"

The mate reluctantly obeyed.

Dudley saw their intention, and, foes as they were, a sailor's instinct made him go to their aid. Neither of the Chilians had the slightest idea of his identity. It was too dark to see faces.

By their united efforts the hatch was closed and securely fastened. Captain Quesada struggled forward to look at the foremast; Corriento remained clinging to the coamings of the hatchway.

Dudley strained his eyes to look aloft. He heard a cracking, which, to his experienced ears, gave warning of a coming catastrophe. The foremast had been damaged by the terrific wrench when the bowsprit was torn away. It was in no condition to resist the ceaseless assaults of the gale.

"It's going," was Dudley's reflection. "By Jove! his rashly compact with Leicester is likely to cost Captain Quesada dear. If the felucca survives the night, it will be a stroke of excellent fortune."

Crash!

It was the snapping of the foremast. Broken off six or seven feet above the flush deck, the mast came down, bringing with it spars, ropes, and sails. A loud and thrilling cry sharply followed the crash, and Dudley knew that some poor wretch had been pinned to the deck by the falling wreckage.

It was Captain Quesada. He lay with a weight of wood and tackle across his legs, unable to rise.

The felucca yawed wildly, the helmsman, in his terror, letting go the wheel.

A loud despair broke from the crew. The sea rose like a mountain on her quarter. It seemed that only a miracle could save the felucca from being engulfed.

At the critical moment an authoritative voice was heard, speaking Spanish which was perfectly comprehensible, if not exactly Castilian.

"Helmsman, look to your wheel! Port, you fool—port! Men, cut axes and knives; cut away the mast! To work; cut away for your lives!"

When SANTO THE PIRATE consigned Jack Raymond to a watery grave he thought he had seen the last of him; but readers of THE AVENGER! will see how he was tracked. Complete next Friday.

Mechanically the helmsman obeyed, and the felucca luckily answered her helm.

A dozen of the bolder seamen, without knowing or caring who gave the order, only recognising that their sole chance of life lay in obeying it promptly, rushed to do the bidding of Dudley Desmond.

For it was Dudley who had sprung into the captain's place, and uttered the quick command.

He had saved the ship!

The mast, bound to the felucca by the rigging, lay half aboard, half overboard, and the "Cascabel" heeled over till her ports touched the water.

But knife and axe, hacking at the taut ropes, cut them asunder swiftly; and each, parting with a crack like a rifle-shot, eased the felucca as it snapped, till at last the remaining two or three parted of themselves, and the mast slid into the sea.



Crash! It was the snapping of the foremast. A thrilling cry followed, and Dudley knew that some poor wretch had been pinned to the deck by the falling wreckage.

The felucca righted—a dismayed, draggled-looking hulk, but secure!

Captain Quesada had been relieved of his embarrassment by the loss of the mast, and he now attempted to rise, but he found that he could not. His right leg had been injured. He moaned out a curse.

"Are you hurt, captain?"

"Diablo, yes! Who are you? I know your voice; you gave the order to cut away the mast. But—"

"I am Dudley Desmond. Can I help you?"

The Chilian gave a gasp.

"Dudley Desmond! Carajos! Is it to you that I owe my life and my ship?"

"Even so. But don't repine," Dudley said, ironically, as Quesada rapped out another oath. "The chances are that the felucca will go to the bottom before morning."

"Carambo, you are the cause of all—you, and that accursed Leicester, who would have you eunk in the open sea, as if Valparaiso Bay were not deep enough!"

Dudley laughed; he was in a grimly humorous mood.

"Come, come, captain, you must acknowledge that I didn't willingly board your vessel."

Quesada replied only with an inarticulate growl.

A loud shout from several of the Chilean seamen sounded above the howling wind.

Dudley looked up, and saw a glare of red and green out of the darkness to starboard. A ship was bearing down full upon the felucca.

Like the threatening eyes of some night-monster, the lights of the strange vessel gleamed nearer and nearer, and the crew, believing a collision inevitable, hushed their voices in dumb, gripping terror.

Dudley, with a fo'e's'lla oath upon his lips, darted to the helm, struck aside the paralysed Chilean there, and grasped the spokes himself.

With the strength of three men, he jammed the helm down.

It was touch-and-go, he knew that. If the felucca did not obey him at once, half a minute more would see the stranger's prow grinding through her timbers.

The thinning eyes, red and green, glared yet more near and threatening, and dimly the shape of the stranger loomed out of the darkness—an English cutter, taut and trim, sails furled and hatches battened down.

The Chileans gasped and moaned in the agony of the moment. Not cowards they, but the peril was so close, so crushing and overpowering.

But the felucca swung round strainingly, as it were, under protest, and the cutter glided by, so near that a biscuit could have been tossed from one vessel to the other.

A shout from English throats told that the cutter's men had just seen the felucca, and knew the narrow escape both vessels had had.

Dudley, iron-nerved as he was, turned almost giddy the moment the peril was past.

"That was a narrow squeak, if you like!" he muttered, his heart-beating like a hammer.

The helmsman picked himself up, and stepped back to his post, dazed.

"Sapristi, it's the Englishman!"

"Yes, the Englishman, who has saved your vessel twice."

The Chilean's hand had mechanically gone to his sash for a weapon. But he did not draw one. Without a word more, he took the helm from Dudley.

Dudley made his way back to Captain Quesada. The captain's hand sought his.

"Why, what's this?" said Dudley, astonished, and not particularly pleased.

"Give me your hand, señor."

"There it is. But is it your custom, captain, to shake hands with a man you are employed to drown?"

The bitter railery made Quesada wince.

"Do not speak of that, I beg of you. Think you that I shall harm you after this?"

"What, you have changed your mind?" exclaimed Dudley. And he said to himself, "Estrella seems to be in the right; there is good in this desperado."

"Decidedly, señor. But for your ready courage and your truly noble generosity, we had been at the bottom now. Señor, it is of my daughter I am thinking. Her life I owe to you, and I can never repay the debt. I swear by the Holy Virgin that you shall leave the 'Cascabel' as safe and sound as when you boarded her!"

This was good news to Dudley. He had, in saving the felucca, acted upon impulse, upon the instinct of a sailor, forgetting that the vessel was manned by a gang of desperadoes, who meant to murder him as soon as the gale went down. Not a thought had he had of the results to himself. The discovery that Captain Quesada's heart was not dead to gratitude came very agreeably to him.

"By Jove! captain, I'm greatly obliged to you! And if you could add to this favour another—if you would let me settle accounts with Leicester before you set me ashore, I shall be your eternal debtor!"

Captain Quesada did not reply; perhaps in the noise of the gale he did not hear.

The dreadful night wore away.

Dudley kept close to Quesada, for the captain's injury almost crippled him, and without the aid of the strong English arm, he would have been hurled into the sea half a dozen times. Of his own crew, not one wasted a moment's attention upon him. Every man was looking out for himself, and himself alone.

Dawn glimmered at length over the summits of the Andes—visible from the felucca, although she was many miles out at sea.

The gale dropped at the first glimpse of the sun; but the sea did not go down, and most of the Chileans looked for further rough weather before long.

The morning, however, was welcome. Strong draughts of squarish redness returned animation to the chilled and drenched seamen. As soon as they had leisure to look about them, the presence of the Englishman on deck was noted. The seamen

exchanged looks of wonder; but, as Captain Quesada gave the order, they did not offer to molest him.

"Your leg is hurt, captain," Corriento said, approaching his chief, and looking at Dudley sideways, with a very open expression upon his swarthy face. "Shall I help you to your cabin?"

"No; I must remain on deck. Bring me some coffee."

"And the English señor?"

"He has saved my life—all our lives."

"No doubt; but remember that his death is worth a thousand pesos to us."

"You dastard!" snarled the captain. "You will not touch a peso of it!"

Corriento scowled ominously.

"Do you mean to say that you spare the life of the Englishman and sacrifice the reward?"

"It is my will; and if you grumble, remember the name of Albuquerque."

"I have not forgotten it, captain, neither have I the boatswain's brother was just speaking of it."

There was a hidden threat in the tone of Corriento. Captain Quesada did not appear to notice it. He repeated the order for the cushions. Corriento brought them, and the captain obtained a more comfortable resting-place than a hard deck.

He gave sharp orders concerning the work to be done to repair the damage of the storm. Dudley noticed a stiffness in the seamen's manner, but they obeyed. He began to see that his peril was not over, in spite of Quesada's reassurance. The crew remained to be reckoned with.

Probably Quesada's authority was not undisputed by the gang at the best of times; and, now he was crippled, it was more than possible that, if he crossed their wishes, they would be a revolt.

Dudley looked curiously for the appearance of Leicester; the advent would bring matters to a climax, he thought.

Leicester, aware that he would be of little or no service on deck, had decided that it wasn't worth while to get dressed for nothing, and consequently had passed the time in his cabin while the storm raged.

When he appeared, he was the only man aboard who didn't look wet and draggled.

Dudley heard his step in the hatchway, and drew a deep breath. He felt that a contest for life or death was about to begin.

Leicester swept the soaked and littered deck with a careless glance; but when his eyes fell upon Dudley Desmond, his carelessness vanished. He came rapidly forward, with his eyes hardening grimly.

Dudley met his eyes without flinching.

"Captain Quesada, I am sorry to see that you are hurt. What does this mean? Why is not this man overboard now, agreed?"

"He saved the ship last night, señor."

"Indeed!" Leicester said, shrugging his shoulders.

"When I was disabled, and my men lost their heads, Desmond saved us from being run down by another vessel."

"H'm! h'm! Very—er—noble; perhaps a little theatrical. And he asks—"

"He asked nothing; it was I who offered."

"And what becomes of our compact?"

"It lapses, of course. I tell you he saved every life aboard, and I am not such a villain as to let him be hurt after that."

A dangerous look came into Leicester's eyes.

"I respect your scruples, captain; but don't expect me to submit to be played with like this!"

"I command this vessel!" cried the Chilean fiercely, and his eyes flashed.

Leicester smiled with haughty disdain.

"A fig for you and your command! Do you consider me so utterly that Dudley Desmond shall be spared?"

"I do."

Leicester gave a shrug, and turned his cool, keen gaze upon Dudley.

"Whatever you have done, Dudley Desmond, you have done of your own free will; and, although you may expect some gratitude due to you, yet you cannot expect a man in the world to allow that to interfere with a long-planned and ruin the master-coup of his life."

"I expect nothing of a heartless and unscrupulous scoundrel such as you are!" answered Dudley calmly.

"Spare your breath; you cannot move me with words."

Leicester said, without any show of anger. "You must know because I have too much at stake to allow you to fail."

His hand had gone into his pocket, as he seemed to growl.

reappeared, with a revolver in it.

"Hold!" shouted Captain Quesada, striving to rise and sink back with a moan.

Regardless of the Chilean, Leicester levelled the revolver at Dudley's face, and pulled the trigger.

MURDER WILL OUT! as Santos, the retired pirate, who masqueraded as a country squire, learned to his cost. See our complete novel, **THE AVENGER**, in next Friday's **UNION JACK**.

CHAPTER 4.

Went to a Million!—The Quest of Samuel G. Sampson.

CAPTAIN DANBY, of the "Beagle," was in an exceedingly peculiar frame of mind that morning.

He was standing at his ship, at Valparaiso, and things in general, when a boat approached from the bay, coming from a neat little cutter, which had just arrived the day before.

"Alo! Is that the 'Beagle'?" hailed a tall, broad-shouldered red-bearded man from the boat.

Captain Danby was never a master of courtesy, and just now he had the politeness of a grizzly bear—and no more.

"He worked over the rail."

"Hain't ye got eyes?" he demanded.

"Well, I calculate," assented the red-bearded man; and he did not require much keenness to see that he was a native of the Northern continent.

"Well, then, if ye use 'em, instead of yer tongue, ye'll see that this is the 'Beagle.' Ain't the name painted on the quarter in plain English?"

"Keep yer wool on, matey!" responded the stranger, who came lightly up the side as he spoke. "Since this is the 'Beagle,' I calculate you're Captain Danby?"

"Yes, I am."

"And you've got a second mate who answers to the name of Dudley Desmond? That's the critter I want."

The touched the cause of the skipper's ill-humour, and there was an explosion at once.

"Then you'd better look round the booze-shops in Valparaiso!" he roared. "He went ashore last night—for an hour or so, he said—and hasn't come back. I'll divorce him, er, that's wot I'll do! Forty things for him to attend to! My chief mate laid up with a gammy leg; me got to palaver at the Customs; all the ship going to Old Harry! And this is the time, er, he chooses for going on the randan! But I'll divorce him! He shall take his chest for'ard, by thunder he shall!"

The red-bearded stranger listened to this tirade with amusement at first, but before the irate skipper had concluded he had become very serious.

"What's that?" he exclaimed. "Dudley Desmond gone ashore, and not turned up agin? Thunder, am I too late after him?"

Then the skipper of the "Beagle" was puzzled.

"Too late! What do you mean?" he asked gruffly.

"There has been foul play!"

"Foul play! Rot! Likewise, mate!" snorted Captain Danby, who wasn't willing to admit himself in the wrong.

"Dudley Desmond ain't the feller to be hounded!"

"Look here," said the big American, "do you know who I am? I'm Samuel G. Sampson, and I was Robert Estcourt's partner at the goldmines over in Australia. When he hopped the twig, he says to me, says he, 'I've left it all to Dudley for his father's sake; but I've a nephew, a scoundrel who was my rain, who'll upset it if he can, and I want you to see that he does Dudley no harm.'"

"And when I made inquiries, and found that Dud had sailed in the 'Beagle' from Liverpool, I followed in my cutter, er, 'latin' that I should catch you here, and see Dud and warn him afore the nephew chap could get his blow in. But I can see that the scallywag's been at work! But if he has hurt Dudley, I'll make him squirm for it! I'll squash him, you bet!"

And Samuel G. Sampson stamped upon the deck with a vehemence that made Captain Danby jump.

"You're talking Dutch to me," said the skipper. "What are you steering at, anyhow?"

"Look, you, Robert Estcourt made a big fortune at the new mines in Western Australia, and he's left it all to Dudley Desmond, for his own sake and his father's. A cool million, er?"

"Great Scott! My second mate heir to a million!" ejaculated the skipper in amazement.

"That's the exact size of it, pardner."

"Come down in the cabin, and take a glass of grog," said Danby, quite cordially; and Sampson, nothing loth, accepted the invitation.

Over the drinks he further explained his fears for Dudley's safety. The nephew of Estcourt was a wild, dissolute fellow, who had wasted his own money, and, by a villainous trick, so both were ruined. The dead mine-owner had had the gravest fears that he would seek to destroy Dudley before he could come into his inheritance.

Captain Danby, who admitted that Dudley had ever been one of the most sober and regular of young men, was now convinced that his second mate's absence was not voluntary.

"Valparaiso's a wild hole, Mr. Sampson!" he said, with a dubious shake of the head. "If this Lascelles Estcourt has

had time to get to work, there isn't much chance of seeing Desmond again. But we'll do our best. He was a fine young chap!"

"Do you know where he went last night?"

"Yes—to Pedrillo Panzo's fandango-hall. That's in a pretty tough quarter. A good many of my men were there; maybe they saw something of him."

The seamen of the "Beagle" were all questioned by the skipper and the American. Many of them had seen Dudley at the fandango. The boy's mate recollected that a Chilean had asked him to point out Dudley Desmond, saying that he wanted to ask for a job in the stowing of the "Beagle's" cargo. He had noticed, too, that several Chileans followed Dudley out when he left the fandango, and somebody had spoken to him of a shot fired in the street.

"Looks bad!" Captain Danby remarked. "Suppose you go and see what Pedrillo Panzo can tell you? I know the man; gold would make him speak if he were dumb. Sorry I can't spare time; but anybody'll direct you."

Half an hour later Samuel G. Sampson was in the wine-shop of the respectable Pedrillo.

The big and burly American, with his good-humoured face and red beard, was endowed with all a Yankee's natural 'outeness; and Pedrillo, cunning scamp as he was, would have found it hard to deceive him.

By a judicious combination of threats and promises, Sampson got the truth out of Pedrillo.

The wine-shop-keeper did not dare to be too reticent, for upon his premises were two members of Captain Quesada's crew, severely hurt in the scuffle with Dudley, and he knew that if Sampson invoked the police, the two seamen would tell all they knew to save their own skins. And if there was punishment to be evaded, and reward to be pocketed, Pedrillo Panzo intended to be first in the field.

The wine-shop was the habitual resort of Captain Quesada's crew when ashore, and naturally the kidnapping of Dudley had not taken place without the cognisance of Pedrillo.

Sampson learned with dismay that Dudley had been taken forcibly upon the felucca "Cascabel" by order of a mysterious Englishman.

"Of course, senor, you understand that I had no hand in such a lawless proceeding!" said honest Pedrillo, blandly. "I happened to hear some of the fellows talking. And I heard, too, Captain Quesada address the English caballero by the name of Leicester."

Sampson was looking very sombre. Dudley on board the felucca, alone, amid a crew of cutthroats in the pay of his rival for the mine-owner's million! There wasn't one chance in a thousand that the young man could be rescued alive—Sampson knew that. Nor did he see how the assassin was to be punished.

The black deed done, Leicester would vanish. Sampson hadn't the least doubt that the mysterious Englishman, whom Captain Quesada addressed by the name of Leicester, was in reality Lascelles Estcourt, his partner's rascally nephew. But who was to prove it? Who was to prove even that the man had ever landed upon the shores of Chili?

"I must find the felucca!" cried Sampson. "Man, tell me how to save Dudley Desmond's life, and you will be a thousand dollars the richer!"

The wine-shop-keeper's greedy black eyes glistened.

"I have but little hope, senor, but I'll do all I can. There was a dreadful gale last night, and I do not think Captain Quesada meant to make a voyage; therefore he may soon be back in Valparaiso. By feeling the harbour police—"

A sudden recollection struck the American.

"Describe the felucca to me!" he exclaimed.

Pedrillo, wondering, did so.

"By thunder, it must be the same! We nearly ran her down last night in the gale. Her bowsprit and foremast were gone, I remember. She can't have crawled far in that condition. Maybe we'll meet her creeping back to the bay. I'll find her, right enough. And if Dudley Desmond ain't alive, by Jove I'll make those Gressars squirm! There won't be any of their precious soldados or alcaides to interfere on the blue water. If they've murdered Dud, they shall all walk the plank, by thunder they shall!"

Pedrillo hadn't any objection to that. But he pointed out that Captain Quesada had a crew of thirty men, armed, Gun-runners in time of war or revolution, smugglers in the time of peace, the desperadoes were accustomed to the free use of pistol and poniard, and would think little of cutting every throat aboard the Senor American's vessel if he crossed their path.

At this the red-bearded giant smiled grimly, remarking that he had a score of English and American seamen, and cutlasses and revolvers enough in the arm-chest to equip them for battle; and then he "guessed" that they could lick all South America, with Mexico thrown in.

At this boast of the self-reliant Anglo-Saxon, Pedrillo only showed his yellow teeth in a grin.

THE AMAZING STORY of a famous pirate chief living in peaceful retirement as a country squire is narrated in next Friday's UNION JACK.

The American hastened away from the winch, and in a very short time the "Gold Book" was showing her stern to the bay of Valparaiso.

CHAPTER 5.

Dudley Defends Himself—Captain Quesada's Doom—The Attack of the Chilians—"Aho!"

THE action of Leicester had not taken Dudley Desmond by surprise.

He had been looking for just such a move. Leicester, disappointed by the tools he employed, was certain to attempt to finish the work with his own hands. Dudley watched him like a cat.

The moment the revolver came up, Dudley sprang at Leicester, and, even as the trigger was pulled, Leicester fell to the deck under a stunning blow. The bullet flew skyward.

Leicester, who had never looked for such quick and decisive action on the part of the quiet-looking young sailor, dropped like a log, and lay for some seconds dazed.

Dudley did not waste an instant. The Chilians were looking on with swelling faces, half inclined to leap at him like bloodhounds, as they were. He bent over the fallen man, and wrenched away his revolver. Gripping it, he stood erect, his eyes flashing, colour glowing in his cheeks, as if the "feel" of a weapon in his hand gave him new life.

In the brown hand of Corriento a dagger gleamed; but he hurriedly thrust it back into his scabbard, and made himself as small as possible amongst the crew.

"Listen to me, all of you," Dudley said in Spanish. "I am a desperate man; I will not be tamely murdered! At the first sign of attack I shall shoot to kill! That is a warning you will do well to remember!"

Leicester rose to his feet. A blue mark was making itself visible upon the white forehead, where Dudley's fist had struck like a hammer. In his eyes was a demon's rage. But his manner was calm; he was as cool as ice.

"By Jove! you have neatly turned the tables, Desmond!" he said. "But this is only the first trick."

Dudley's finger played with the trigger. "I am inclined to shoot you dead, you murderous scoundrel! Why should I show you mercy?"

"Why, indeed?" Leicester shrugged his shoulders. "Shoot, then, if my friends here will allow you to throw away ten thousand pesos, which belong to them."

There was a growl from the Chilians, and a glimmer of drawn knives.

Captain Quesada raised himself upon his elbow.

"Men, I command you not to molest Senor Desmond, who is my friend. Senor Leicester, I warn you that if you do not take care, you will not live to go ashore. At your next attempt upon Senor Desmond, I myself will blow your brains out. Comrades, return to your work!"

The Chilians obeyed, slowly and sullenly. Leicester went forward with Corriento, talking with him.

Dudley looked at Captain Quesada.

"Your men do not take it calmly, captain. It looks to me as if a revolt is quite on the cards."

The captain nodded with a black look.

"Nevertheless, senor, I have given you my word, and I will keep it."

"Good; I do not doubt you."

"How did you escape from your bonds?" asked the Chilean abruptly.

"I do not think I shall tell you that."

"Bah! it was Estrella who released you! There can have been no other way."

"Do not be angry with her, captain, since her action has had such fortunate results."

"I am not angry with her, Senor," said Quesada, in an earnest voice. "I am sorry I ever undertook this affair. It was Leicester's gold that tempted me. He offered—with good security, too—a princely sum for the kidnapping of you, and your death after he had satisfied himself of your identity. I was a smuggler, sir; but we do not call smuggling a crime. I had losses, my crew were unpaid and clamorous; I was in desperate need of money; and so I fell to Leicester's temptation. I argued that it mattered little. My men would have accepted his blood-money if I had not, and your death would have been equally certain. But, since Estrella has somehow heard of the plot, I thank the saints that I am yet guiltless of your death!"

"It was to save you from that guilt, senor, that your daughter released me," said Dudley.

"Yes, yes, I understand."

The Chilean captain was silent for a few minutes; then he said abruptly, in a changed voice:

"Senor, will you look at my leg, and tell me what you think of my injury? I suffer little pain, which is so strange that I cannot help thinking—"

He did not finish, and for the first time it occurred to Dudley that Quesada's injury was of a serious nature.

Willingly he left the calabazero leg with his knife, and examined the crushed limb.

His face involuntarily grew grave. A painful smile crossed the face of the Chilean.

"What do you think, senor?"

"I am no surgeon, captain. The injury is great. But there is no reason—"

"Don't try to deceive me, boy."

"Well, captain, you will lose the leg."

"Is that all?"

Dudley did not reply.

"Diablo! you know as well as I do that my leg is dead already, and that I myself will be dead by night!" exclaimed the Chilean, with abrupt energy. "When I strove to rise a while ago, and could not, a feeling came over me—a terrible sickness in every joint—which told me that death was at hand."

"It looks bad, and there's no denying it, captain," Dudley admitted reluctantly.

The Chilean showed no fear in his face.

"It is just!" he said in a low voice—"it is the justice of Heaven! I do not fear to die, senor. But what—ah, Dios!—what will become of Estrella—miya carissima Estrella—when I am below the sea?"

"As long as I live, captain, she will never want a friend," said Dudley, deeply moved.

"But, senor, how to leave this vessel! Leicester's gold tempts the crew, as—Heaven forgive me!—it tempted me. I order them to put back to Valparaiso, they will not obey!"

"That seems to be certain. But do you fear for Estrella?" asked Dudley.

"Alone, among such a lawless crew, I do fear for her when I am dead," muttered Quesada.

Dudley was greatly disturbed. It was useless to utter the reproaches that rose to his lips. The blame lay wholly upon Captain Quesada. But, repentant and in the shadow of death, it would be cruel, as well as useless, to say so. Though how much of the Chilean's repentance was due to genuine contrition, and how much to the miscarriage of the plot and the imminence of death, it would have been hard to say.

What was to be done was a question which Dudley, turning it over in his mind, found difficult to deal with.

His cogitations upon the subject were cut short by the appearance of Estrella on deck.

The girl had passed a time of anguish in her cabin. She had heard the firing of Leicester's revolver, and her heart was chilled by the dread that the murder, which she had endeavoured to prevent, had been accomplished, in spite of her generous efforts. She pictured the body of Dudley lying prone, with a red splash upon the handsome, noble face, and she could have shrieked with the pain of the imagining.

But Nola, the dark-faced, half-caste serving-maid, soon reassured her, for she spied out of the hatchway, and saw how matters really were on deck.

And so Estrella learned that Dudley was safe, and that her father was hurt. She at once came on deck—a little pale, but her raven tresses a little freer than usual, but lovely as ever.

Dudley greeted her with grateful cordiality, and in a few terse sentences explained how matters stood, telling her everything except that the captain was dying.

"But, my father, shall you not be taken down to your cabin?" asked Estrella.

"No, carissima; I must remain here. I must remain to face those pelados, who would revolt at once if I were down there. They would only have to close the hatches upon me!" then, Estrella; while here—My child, you are not afraid!"

Her face was very white now, and there was a startled look in her starry eyes; but her lips were firm; her courage never faltered.

"You shall see, my father," she answered.

"My brave girl! Do you, then, descend to my cabin, and bring me the case of revolvers and the cartridge-box. We shall need it."

Certainly it looked like it. The Chilean crew had ceased the work of repair, and stood for'ard in an attentive group. The round Leicester and Corriento. The latter was talking volubly, the former putting in a sentence every now and then. The looks, the gestures, of the Chilians were extremely excited. Black looks were cast towards Dudley Desmond and the wounded captain.

It was clear that Leicester had drawn them from their allegiance, never very strong. The ill-success of Captain Quesada's late smuggling ventures had weakened his rule. The disaster of the storm, and his resolve to protect the Englishman and sacrifice the ten thousand pesos, were the last straw. How easy to arrange to carry out the project, and share the reward, without allotting the chicken-hearted captain a single peso!

That was what Corriento proposed, and what the crew very soon came to regard as an excellent idea. Leicester soon saw that he was virtually captain of the "Cascabel." His heart

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The girl clutched the arm of the murderer, and so for a moment stayed the stroke; and then Dudley, having one arm freed, let go the mast and grappled with Leicester.

lost with fierce pleasure, though his cold, haughty face retained its usual calmness.

Manned, the brother of Albuquerque, who had been washed overboard after Quesada struck him down, was eager for revenge; and, indeed, the boatswain's fate was resented by most of the crew. Quesada had not meant death to follow his angry blow, but Corriento easily made the crew believe otherwise. Corriento had ideas of succeeding to the command, and he was heart and soul on Leicester's side.

"But how about the senorita?" Garcias asked suddenly.

Leicester broke in.

"She must not be hurt."

"Nobody wants to hurt her, senor; but she is a tiger-cat! It is true, she ponierded Jose Damela, who tried to kiss her when he was drunk; and he might even have died of the stab, senor, if Captain Quesada had given him time, instead of throwing him overboard as soon as he heard of the occurrence."

"Carambo, that's true!" cried Corriento. "She is a little cat; she will show her teeth!"

"Well, you can tie her up," said Leicester carelessly.

"If I suppose so!"

"What is she carrying to the captain?" asked Pinzon, the second mate, as he saw Donna Estrella reappear on deck.

"His pistol, by El Diablo! Come, we must settle accounts with them before they load."

Manuel and Pinzon led the rush.

Captain Quesada saw the swarthy ruffians coming, and his hand feebly sought his cash.

Dudley stood with flashing eyes, his revolver at a level. To his side sprang Estrella, her bosom heaving, her black eyes ablaze, a Spanish dagger in her hand.

"Back, you dogs!" cried the resonant English voice.

"Back, I say!"

"Strike him down!"

"Ahoy!"

Almost the conflict had commenced—but not quite. The strange voice from the sea came not an instant too soon, and there was a pause of astonishment.

"Ahoy!"

CHAPTER 6.

A Respite—The Cutter and the Felucca—Sampson's Threat—A Desperate Recourse—Caught in the Current—Breakers Ahead.

FOR some time past the crew of the "Cascabel" had been too busily preoccupied to notice a sail that came out of the sea-ridges from the direction of Valparaiso.

But aboard the cutter-yacht "Gold Brick" keen eyes had been watching for a felucca with foremast and bowsprit missing. A telescope at the peak and another on the poop had not been idle, and the "Cascabel" was sighted at last by Samuel G. Sampson.

The disablement of the felucca, and the disputes on board, had caused her to drift idly, and Samuel Sampson, heading for the vicinity where he had nearly run her down the night before, then calculating—with Skipper Brown's aid—the current and the wind, had succeeded in tracking the "Cascabel" without much difficulty.

Favoured by luck, he sighted the felucca an hour after he left the Bay of Valparaiso, and the "Gold Brick" drew rapidly near to her—dangerously near, considering the roughness of the sea.

It was Samuel G. Sampson who, standing in the gangway, gripping a rope to steady himself, hailed the drifting felucca.

His hail, as we have said, came just in time to stop the conflict that was, in fact, commencing.

The Chilians, like baffled bloodhounds, stood snarling, with poniards as yet unstained.

Dudley's finger loosened upon the trigger, which was yielding to his touch.

"Ahoy, there!" came the loud bull-voice across a cable's length of turbid water. "I'm Samuel G. Sampson, gents, and I'm after Dudley Desmond, who's been kidnapped aboard your craft! Look out if you hurt him, for I'll make every mother's son of you walk the plank, I will, by thunder!"

The big Yankee could see the startling tableau upon the felucca's deck, and the threatening aspect of the South Americans filled him with alarm for Dudley.

Leicester ground his white teeth.

Samuel G. Sampson was no stranger to him by name, and

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the appearance of the red-bearded American upon the scene clearly showed that he had knowledge of the plot against Dudley.

Upon the cutter could be seen numerous seamen, armed with cutlasses and revolvers; and Leicester, who had a hearty hatred and contempt for his allies, did not believe a Chilean victory possible in the event of a fight.

The Chilians, indeed, enraged at first, were inclined to renew the attack upon Dudley, but the more they looked at the cutter, the less they fancied the idea of a tussle with the stalwart tars they could see there.

"But they can't board us," growled Corriento. "A boat couldn't live in such a sea; and, as for running alongside, it can't be done till the sea goes down."

Leicester's looks brightened.

The cutter had no guns, and could not board; he would baffle Samuel G. Sampson after all.

But, as if the keen-witted Yankee guessed what the schemer was thinking, came the bull-voice again:

"I've followed yer craft from Valparaiso ter snake Dudley Desmond outer yer clutches. Do ye hear, Mr. Lascelles Estcourt?—for I calculate you're there. You won't git that little million this journey. If I don't hev Dudley Desmond alive, not one of you shall ever see land again! Let him be touched, only so much as a ha'r of him, and I'll run your craft down—I will, by thunder! Helmsman," he roared, "when I say 'Go,' jest you drive into that craft amidships! Do you hear?"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

There were pale faces on the Chilean deck then.

Crippled by the loss of her mast and bowsprit, the once-so-active felucca was little better than a lumbering hulk in point of sailing, and could not hope to elude the cutter if the latter really attempted to run her down.

If Sampson carried out his threat, it meant grim death for every soul aboard, for the restless, tumbling sea would spare none.

And that the American was in deadly earnest every line of his rugged face, every tone of his powerful voice, unmistakably showed.

Dudley, with a great throb of relief at his heart, more for Estrella than for himself, realised, as he looked at the scared, dusky faces, that the danger was over—for the present, at least.

Leicester knew it, too, and, though the blackest passions ran riot in his breast, he kept his cynical calm.

"Mr. Sampson," he called out, coolly, "you hold all the trumps, and you may take the tricks. We will care for Dudley Desmond as for a beloved brother. Send a boat for him, and he's yours."

"You know I can't send a boat for him, you scalawag, in such a sea! But I shall keep by you till it goes down. And let Dudley Desmond be in sight, too, for if I git to 'spicion foul play, down goes your craft to Davy Jones!"

"We are yours to command," answered Leicester, with a mocking inflection in his voice.

"Don't try any foolin', that's all! Dudley Desmond!"

"I am here."

"Keep your pecker up. I'm Samuel G. Sampson, and I guess as how I kin save yer bacon!"

"I thank you with my heart, my friend, though I don't know what I have done to deserve the trouble you are taking upon my account!"

"I was Bob Estcourt's pardner, ye onderstand, and when he kicked ther bucket I undertook to see that you got the million he left you, and not that galoot, Lascelles Estcourt, who calls himself Leicester, and is the darndest hoss-thief and sounder generally the sun ever shone upon!"

"I—a million!" gasped Dudley in amazement.

"Yaas, kiddy, you're heir to a million, which is why that darned villain is goin' for yer! But keep a stiff upper-lip, and trust to Samuel G. Sampson."

"Thanks; so I will."

The Chilians had suddenly dispersed.

Leicester and Corriento stood by the bows in earnest talk, a good distance from Dudley Desmond.

"I don't see how we can baffle that cursed Americano!" Corriento remarked, with a hopeless gesture. "How he can have got upon our track is a mystery. Not that it matters how. He is here, and he has foiled us."

"Not quite. There are chances yet."

"No chances that the crew will take—or I either, for that matter," the Chilean answered, with a decided shake of the head. "The Americano was in earnest, as you saw, and if he carried out his threat, we should all go to the deuce together!"

"We have a respite. In this sea he cannot board us—for how long?"

"Five or six hours at the least, even if the rough weather doesn't return."

"Look you, my friend, there is so much at stake that I would sacrifice everything, short of life itself, to gain my

object!" Leicester spoke with unusual earnestness. "I would give a reward of ten thousand pesos. That sum I would gladly pay, yes, treble—for the death of Dudley Desmond. But if I fail me, I tell you frankly, you'll get nothing!"

Corriento looked thoughtful. He was poor, grasping, but unscrupulous. He was strongly tempted.

"Tell me how matters stand," he said slowly. "I have one resource, which would be fearfully risky, and I don't lightly dare it. Let me know exactly what it is, and I shall do it."

Leicester hesitated. His nature—haughty and reserved—shrank from confidence with this low-browed, rascally Chilean. But he reflected swiftly that his fate was in Corriento's hands; this was his last chance for the million. He decided to do as the Chilean required.

"A million is at stake," he replied. "You heard that my founded Yankee told Desmond that he was heir to a million. My uncle went to the Western Australian mines a poor man. By a lucky strike he became one of the richest mine-owners there. He died, and nearly all his money is left to Dudley Desmond in his will."

"That is strange, since you are his nephew."

"Not at all. You see, I have always had the faculty of spending money, without ever possessing the slightest inclination to earn any, with the result that I made an end of my patrimony in a couple of years of London life, and had to live by my wits after that. I am perfectly frank with you, you see."

"Upon my mother's side I come of an ancient and noble family, so I suppose my dislike of labour is hereditary. Anyway, when the fellows at the clubs fought shy of my money, and the horses I backed took to always losing, my next step was a forgery, of which I cleverly laid the guilt upon my uncle. He was a simple fool of a sailor—mate on Captain Desmond's ship. How was I to know that he would ever come to be a millionaire?" said Leicester ruefully.

"Ah, diablo! You could not expect your uncle to leave you his money after that," ejaculated Corriento.

"The matter was hushed up. The money, which I had pocketed, was refunded by my uncle and his friend Captain Desmond, both of whom it ruined. Then Robert Estcourt emigrated to Australia, and Captain Desmond re-entered the service of his old employers. He was drowned at sea; while Estcourt made his pile at the diggings. With the result that he leaves all his cash to Desmond's son, Dudley—a very distant relation—while I, his own nephew, am left out in the cold, without even the proverbial shilling to console me."

"Sapristi! I know what I should have done in your place, senior"—and Corriento tapped his dagger significantly.

"That is what I resolved upon at once—the death of young Desmond. If I could not have the million, as the heir of my uncle, I would inherit it from Dudley. I am his sole relative; his heir; though we never met before he went to the fandango at Valparaiso. At any cost I must have the million. Now you understand, Corriento, how I am placed. Slay me Dudley Desmond, and name your own reward."

The brows of the Chilean wrinkled over his cunning eyes. He was thinking what a hold he would have over Leicester, what a gold-mine the millionaire would be to him, if that scheme could be carried through successfully.

"It shall be done!" he cried.

Leicester's eyes glittered.

"Then, the last resource you spoke of, what is it?" he asked eagerly.

Corriento cast an uneasy glance around upon the turbid sea and the distant Andes.

Afar, the high rocky shore could be seen. It was shoreward that the current was drifting the felucca. Leicester followed Corriento's glance, and caught a glimpse of his meaning. He drew a deep breath.

"It will be terribly risky," said the Chilean slowly, and his swarthy face became very sombre.

"Hang the risk!" the Englishman exclaimed, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"It will destroy the felucca. But that is nothing. In the event of success you will pay us for that?"

"Certainly. Don't count the cost," answered Leicester.

"But the question is: Can you run ashore in a place where the breakers will spare us?"

"I think so. But the risk will be great."

"And then the cutter will be unable to help Dudley Desmond, and between us we shall see that he is drowned, to a certainty," Leicester chuckled.

"Especially as he will probably cumber himself with the girl when the ship strikes. He is that kind of fool," declared the sagacious Corriento.

"Let it be done. Lose no time."

"We shall have to be careful. It will not do to rouse the suspicious of that great brute of an American. He would run us down if he guessed, for he would have more chance of rescuing Dudley Desmond from the water, here, than among

the breakers."

"But how will your comrades take it?"

"They would run much greater risks for gold. You may see that gold is not new to them, either."

And Leicester, glancing at the faces, worried faces of the Chilean crew, admitted that most of them had probably seen wilder work than this.

While Leicester and Corriento arranged this final coup, the others continued to drink, and the cutter to stand by, as near as the burning billows permitted.

Captain Quenda and Estrella were both immensely relieved by the coming of the American, and the girl's starry eyes gleamed with pleasure when she turned them towards the trim English cutter, riding the rough Pacific so gallantly.

The captain and his daughter both believed the danger to be over; but Dudley held a very different opinion. He gauged Leicester's character more correctly, and he looked upon the coming of hostilities simply as a respite. He could not imagine a remorseless and calculating a schemer yielding up a million without further struggle.

Dudley did not speak his forebodings; but he kept a keen watch upon the crew, and he loaded the revolvers ready for an emergency.

Captain Quenda took the opportunity when Estrella went below to bring a meal to them, to speak to Dudley about his plan.

"How am I to break it to her?" he groaned. "What will she say when she knows I am dying?"

Dudley, who had noted, and was touched by, the girl's intense affection for the rough sea-captain, could only shake his head sadly.

"I can feel death creeping on," said Quenda, whose face had become white as chalk. "I marvel that I am still alive. Diablo! I wish those scoundrels had finished me just now. That would be the end, at least."

"Don't tell her," said Dudley. "You have many hours of life left. And something may happen."

The Chilean's feverishly-glittering eyes sought his.

"What do you mean, Don Dudley? Does not the vicinity of that cutter secure us?"

"To tell you the truth, captain, I cannot help thinking that mischief is brewing," Dudley admitted. "Leicester and those rascals are talking and nodding, and I cannot believe it will be for nothing."

The return of Estrella to the deck interrupted Dudley, and he said no more on the subject.

A meal—about the strangest of which Dudley Desmond had ever partaken—was made there, under the glow of the strengthening sunshine.

The strangest, for the surroundings were such as he had never dreamt of twenty-four hours previously. The rolling felucca, the sloppy deck, the boisterous sea, the lowering sky, and the scowling cutthroats for food—few men could have eaten a mouthful at such a time and place. But Dudley had a sailor's appetite, and the cassava cakes and boiled beef and Chilean wine disappeared just as if he had been taking his regular rations on board the old "Beagle."

Estrella, who ate little herself, in vain tried to persuade her father to eat. He contented himself with the wine, which put a little colour into his deathly face. That grim death hovered over him the poor girl did not suspect. A sprain, or something of that kind, he made her believe was all that ailed him. He could not bear to deal the blow which should banish the light from her eyes, and drive the blood from her cheeks and lips.

An hour passed, and so quiet were the seamen—working again at the repairs now—that Dudley began to think that perhaps he had been too suspicious.

The repairs had been resumed by Leicester's advice, to throw dust in the eyes of the enemy. Dudley noticed that the Chileans worked slowly and lazily; but then he knew that such was their custom.

The felucca was by this time within easy view of the shore. A considerable distance southward of Valparaiso, a long spur of the Andes ran down to the sea, and the shore was broken, rugged, a dreary waste of barren rocks. No habitations could be seen, only gaunt, grey cliffs, stony acclivities, jagged reefs, amongst which the currents wound tortuously—here racing, there crawling, according to their hidden laws.

A more dangerous spot for a ship, even in calm weather, could scarcely have been found on the whole Pacific slope. And towards this grave of vessels the "Cascabel" was drifting, with a speed that insensibly increased each minute. For a strong current had caught her, and Pinzon, at the helm, kept her in it.

Several of the men had been busy at the rigging, but Dudley had not noticed that, instead of repairing damage, they were deliberately weakening it, so that the mainmast would fall at the first strain.

Captain Quenda lay near the foot of the mainmast, and the Englishman was ever at his side. The mast was extremely likely to fall upon him—and Dudley. That was part of Corriento's plan.

Leicester, keeping up the pretence of having abandoned his project, lounged on the gangway, smoking Mexican cheroots, languid and indifferent.

From the "Gold Brick" telescopes and keen eyes watched the "Cascabel"; but Samuel G. Sampson, new to the coast of Chile, did not for some time note the danger into which the felucca was drifting.

But at length the cutter came dancing nearer to the felucca, and Leicester knew that the game was seen. Clearly came the powerful voice of Sampson:

"Ahoy, the felucca!"

"Hallo, there!" shouted back Dudley, thinking that the American wished to assure himself of his safety. "All serene, old fellow!"

"Serene be jiggered! Your craft is in a current. If you don't look out, you'll be upon the rocks before you can say 'whisky-and-soda!'"

"By Jupiter! is that so?" The sailor's keen eyes swept the sea. "Helmsman, hard-a-port!"

Pinzon took no notice.

"Do you hear?" Dudley's eyes began to glitter. "Is it that you want to run ashore, you scoundrell?"

He made a step aft. Corriento signed to the helmsman.

Pinzon let go the wheel, leaving the helm to its own devices.

There could be but one result. The felucca was in a powerful current, full of unexpected twists and turns, and there was a wind which was almost fierce enough to be called a gale.

The felucca yawed, and lurched round, for a moment drifting broadside on, and it looked as if she would turn turtle. But the cut stays parted, and the mainmast went by the board with a terrific crashing and rending. Clear off at the deck it snapped, and went bodily into the sea, and an eddy of the current whirled it away in the twinkling of an eye.

Corriento muttered a curse. It had not crushed the little group, as he had hoped it would. But their escape had been very narrow. As for the crew, they, knowing what to expect, had given the mast a wide berth.

Dudley ran to the helm, sent Pinzon reeling into the scuppers with a single fist-blow, planted full in the insolent, swartthy face, and grasped the wheel.

The "Cascabel" resumed her course. He could do no more, for the masts were gone, and it was impossible to spread a sail, even if the crew had been willing to do so; so there was no escape from the deadly grip of the current. And this was stronger now. Little patches of white foam bubbled up round the felucca, and the water raced by, bearing the helpless craft swiftly onward to her doom.

The rugged face of Samuel G. Sampson became less ruddy as he watched from the gangway of the cutter.

"Saay, Dudley, how's the look-out?"

"We are bound for the rocks, friend, and nothing can save us. These scoundrels have planned it!" Dudley shouted back, white with rage. "Do not let us go aground. If we are to perish, let every villain here find a grave below the sea! You cannot save my life, but avenge me! Run down the felucca!"

"By thunder, I will!" cried the American; and his voice rang out the order.

Like a bloodhound leaping upon its prey, came the cutter, darting direct at the crippled "Cascabel."

CHAPTER 7.

In Sight of Death—Aground!—The Struggle for Life—The Courage of Estrella—Fortune Favours the Brave.

DUDLEY ran forward to Estrella. "Is it death, then?" asked the girl; and her eyes were still calm and bright.

"I fear so; but cling to me, Estrella, and if there's a chance—"

"Save my father!" cried the brave donna. "He is helpless; give your aid to him."

A sudden swerve of the felucca nearly threw them down at this moment.

Corriento, with a face like chalk, had sprung madly to the helm, and the "Cascabel," true to his hand, eluded the charge of the "Gold Brick."

Now she was racing shoreward, and the cutter flew on her track.

Sampson was exposing his own vessel to terrible danger. But in his excitement he did not think of that, nor did a man of his crew.

With the felucca run down, there was some hope of picking up Dudley; and Sampson was grimly determined to see her timbers crushing under the prow of the "Gold Brick."

It had become a race between the two vessels now—the felucca flying shoreward, the cutter in pursuit; and the latter had an advantage here, for the foretopmast was set, and filled by the breeze.

Corriento had told Leicester that his resource was a desperate

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one; but he had not expected it to be so desperate as this. Foam was boiling round the "Cascabel." Ahead sounded the booming of the breakers. The Chilean crew, utterly forgetting Dudley, were absorbed in their own peril. Some kicked off their boots, ready for the struggle with the waters. Corriento, with a shrill cry, came running forward.

Crash! The bows of the cutter jammed upon the "Cascabel's" stern with a terrific concussion.

A terrible, trembling shiver ran through the felucca, and the cutter, receding, left a great gap in her stern.

The rudder was smashed, and the taffrail broken down. Below in the cabins sounded the rush of water. Nola came shrieking to the deck.

Still sped on the felucca; but her stern drooped lower. Corriento looked shoreward, and grinned gleefully.

"We shall do it!" he cried.

The threatening rocks parted to right and left, and a stretch of sand was visible between.

Leicester, calm and cold as ever, looked to the land.

"We shall reach that before we sink, señor!" the Chilean cried. "Sapristi! I knew we should do it!"

His doubts were gone now.

"And Desmond—it is time," said Leicester.

Corriento looked towards the group by the mainmast.

Clearly they were prepared for a rush. Dudley's pistol was in his hand; Estrella was similarly armed. Captain Quesada, propped up on his cushions, clutched in each hand a revolver.

"Not yet," said the prudent Corriento. "A desperate affair is out of the question now. Wait till the felucca strikes."

Leicester nodded. Without being a poltroon like Corriento, he was equally cautious. In a few minutes it would be impossible to use firearms on board the "Cascabel," with heavy seas swooping over her. Then he would deal with Dudley.

The cutter was falling behind. When she struck the felucca, and receded, the wind had torn her topsail clean away, and it looked for a minute as if the topmast would follow suit.

That did not happen; but the "Gold Brick" lost ground while fresh canvas was spread, and Samuel G. Sampson saw that he would not be "in at the death."

A terrific, grinding shock. The felucca had struck!

A mounting wave had lifted and hurled her upon the sand, as a bowler might toss a ball.

Shoreward swam and struggled the Chileans through dashing wave and blinding foam.

As the catastrophe came, Quesada had shrieked out to Dudley to save Estrella, and the English sailor had cried back that, with Heaven's aid, he would do it. And so he clutched the dazed girl, and looked his last upon Captain Quesada.

For, as the torrent rolled away, there remained Dudley Desmond, clinging to the mainmast stump with one arm, and with the other holding fast the fainting Estrella.

But of Captain Quesada there was no sign. He had been swept resistlessly away, to meet death in the breakers.

"Oh, my father! my father!" cried Estrella.

"At last!" hissed Leicester, as he threw himself upon Dudley.

Corriento, when the racing torrent came, had failed him, and, thinking only of his own safety—like the others—had gone plunging shoreward.

Leicester cared not. He had expected it.

A knife was gripped between his teeth as he scrambled along the reeling deck towards Dudley.

The felucca lay heeling over upon the sand, in which she was half embedded, and the waves beat the hull with hammer-like blows, while a second huge billow was gathering force to sweep over her like the former torrent.

It was at this fearful moment that Dudley felt the clutch of Leicester, and caught the glimmer of the threatening knife.

"You coward!" he hissed out, wild with rage. But, numbered as he was, he could not defend himself, and but for Estrella the blade would have been buried in his body.

The girl clutched the arm of the murderer, and so for a moment stayed the stroke; and then Dudley, having one arm freed, let go the mast, and grappled with Leicester.

Inspired by mutual fury, they gripped and closed, and rolled on the slanting deck. And then Estrella saw that Dudley had fallen undermost, and that Leicester was freeing his hand to stab.

The hot Spanish blood ran fiercely in her veins. She saw this man, the cause of all her misfortunes, the cause of her father's death, about to strike down her last friend on earth; and for the next minute the gazelle became a tigress.

Like a flash of light she darted towards the struggling men, and her Spanish poniard flashed and fell, and rose again, with its glitter dulled.

And Leicester, with a single hollow moan, relaxed his grasp upon Dudley; his weapon fell from his hand, and, with agony and death in his face, he pitched over and lay quivering.

Dudley leaped up, amazed, from the jaws of death, as the dripping poniard dropped from Estrella's hand.

Her face had gone deadly white.

"You saved me!" cried Dudley.

"I—I struck him down."

"Brave girl!"

Forgetful of everything, he clasped the slender form in his arms, pressing her to his heart—his heart, into which the consciousness of love had leaped at that thrilling moment. And Estrella, forgetful, too, rested there like a tired child.

We have taken minutes to tell it, but all this passed in seconds. And now the rolling billow struck the felucca, and once more she was buried under the waters, Dudley clutched an iron ring and Estrella, and holding on for dear life.

The torrent passed and left them—Dudley faint, exhausted, and breathless, Estrella in a swoon. The body of Leicester had vanished, carried away by the water, with the last spark of life stifled out of it, amid the foaming surf. Gone, too, was Nola—gone all but these two. Dudley looked round with haggard eyes.

Was there no hope, then?

Should he struggle ashore, to meet death at the hands of the Chileans, or await it here? He did not believe that he could resist the next sea that broke over the deck.

The cutter had dropped her anchor, and was straining at her cable, seaward, too far to help him.

But what was that which, dancing like a cork upon the heaving sea, was drawing nearer and nearer to the wreck? A boat, with the jib set. Was Sampson mad? The boat could reach the wreck, that was not difficult. But how return! Against the current, oars or sails would be useless; no boat could live. It only floated now by a miracle.

Dudley held Estrella fast, and gazed at the advancing boat.

"Here we are!" cried the bull-voice of Samuel G. Sampson, as he actively gained the felucca's sloping deck. "Make it fast, lads; never mind the boat!"

Then Dudley understood.

The American had brought a line from the cutter, which the ready seamen speedily secured to the capstan of the felucca. The boat, emptied of its crew, went bobbing away into the surf.

"Now, then, Dud, my boy. You're a sailor, and I've no doubt you've crossed a bridge like that before."

The single line, swaying over the turbid waters, sometimes dipping into them, looked a perilous kind of bridge, but Dudley did not doubt his own ability to follow it. His fears were for Estrella.

"We must rig a noose on the line for her," he said.

"Leave her to my charge; you are played out."

Dudley shook his head.

"You may help, but I shall not leave her."

There was no time for argument.

"Look out!" came a sudden warning.

Again a heavy roller passed over the felucca. To the rope they clung with desperate tenacity, and Dudley felt the help of Sampson's brawny arm. The "Cascabel" shivered and strained. It was evident that she would soon go to pieces.

"Buck up! That's right; under her arms. Poor little critter, how white she looks! Buck up, lads, and the good Lord help us!"

And so the brave seamen worked their way back to the cutter along the swinging line.

Earlier in his sea-life, Dudley had been saved from a wreck on the English coast by the same means, and his experience was useful now. His courage never failed. The thought of Estrella's peril kept fatigue at bay. It seemed an age before he had worked far enough along the rope to hear the encouraging cheers from the cutter. But when he heard the hearty English voices it gave him new life.

On and on, with aching arms and reeling brain, splashed and dashed and buffeted, till at length strong arms stretched out to aid, and he was safe.

Dudley was dimly conscious of kind faces and welcoming voices, of a deck beneath his feet. Then his head went round and round, and he knew no more.

Even then, with his guests safely bestowed below, Samuel G. Sampson did not have an easy task to clude the danger into which his generous quest had drawn his vessel. But he had a skilful skipper and a willing crew, and at length the cutter rode freely and safely, far out upon the open sea.

One more scene ere we lay aside the pen. A green arbut, a sunny sky, a handsome sailor, and a lovely lass.

"Yes, Estrella, the million is mine now; but, unless you share it, what is its value to me? You saved my life; make it happy."

Estrella's answer is not in words, but her eyes fully satisfy the wooer, and he clasps her to his heart, as he did that terrible day upon the wrecked felucca.

And so we close our story at this, the happiest period of our hero's life, leaving him a successful lover and a millionaire.

THE END.

Read THE AVENGER! in next Friday's UNION JACK, and see how Jack Raymond tracked down the gentleman pirate. Full of thrilling adventures. Complete. One Halfpenny.