THE BLUE LAGOON & THE GARDEN OF GOD

SEQUEL

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The Blue Lagoon & The Garden of God (Sequel)

e-artnow, 2021
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EAN 4066338120311

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CHAPTER I
WHERE THE SLUSH LAMP BURNS

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Mr Button was seated on a sea-chest with a fiddle under his left ear. He was playing the “Shan van vaught,” and accompanying the tune, punctuating it, with blows of his left heel on the fo’cs’le deck.

> “O the *Frinch* are in the bay,
> Says the *Shan van vaught*.”

He was dressed in dungaree trousers, a striped shirt, and a jacket baize—green in parts from the influence of sun and salt. A typical old shell-back, round-shouldered, hooked of finger; a figure with strong hints of a crab about it.

His face was like a moon, seen red through tropical mists; and as he played it wore an expression of strained attention as though the fiddle were telling him tales much more marvellous than the old bald statement about Bantry Bay.

“Left-handed Pat,” was his fo’cs’le name; not because he was left-handed, but simply because everything he did he did wrong—or nearly so. Reefing or furling, or handling a slush tub—if a mistake was to be made, he made it.

He was a Celt, and all the salt seas that had flowed between him and Connaught these forty years and more had not washed the Celtic element from his blood, nor the belief in fairies from his soul. The Celtic nature is a fast dye, and Mr Button’s nature was such that though he had been shanghaied by Larry Marr in ’Frisco, though he had got drunk in most ports of the world, though he had sailed with Yankee captains and been man-handled by Yankee mates,

he still carried his fairies about with him—they, and a very large stock of original innocence.

Nearly over the musician's head swung a hammock from which hung a leg; other hammocks hanging in the semi-gloom called up suggestions of lemurs and arboreal bats. The swinging kerosene lamp cast its light forward, past the heel of the bowsprit to the knightheads, lighting here a naked foot hanging over the side of a bunk, here a face from which protruded a pipe, here a breast covered with dark mossy hair, here an arm tattooed.

It was in the days before double topsail yards had reduced ships' crews, and the fo'cs'le of the *Northumberland* had a full company: a crowd of packet rats such as often is to be found on a Cape Horner "Dutchmen" Americans—men who were farm labourers and tending pigs in Ohio three months back, old seasoned sailors like Paddy Button—a mixture of the best and the worst of the earth, such as you find nowhere else in so small a space as in a ship's fo'cs'le.

The *Northumberland* had experienced a terrible rounding of the Horn. Bound from New Orleans to 'Frisco she had spent thirty days battling with head-winds and storms—down there, where the seas are so vast that three waves may cover with their amplitude more than a mile of sea space; thirty days she had passed off Cape Stiff, and just now, at the moment of this story, she was locked in a calm south of the line.

Mr Button finished his tune with a sweep of the bow, and drew his right coat sleeve across his forehead. Then he took out a sooty pipe, filled it with tobacco, and lit it.

"Pawthrick," drawled a voice from the hammock above, from which depended the leg, "what was that yarn you wiz beginnin' to spin ter night 'bout a lip me dawn?"

"A which me dawn?" asked Mr Button, cocking his eye up at the bottom of the hammock while he held the match to his pipe.

“It vas about a green thing,” came a sleepy Dutch voice from a bunk.

“Oh, a Leprachaun you mane. Sure, me mother’s sister had one down in Connaught.”

“Vat vas it like?” asked the dreamy Dutch voice—a voice seemingly possessed by the calm that had made the sea like a mirror for the last three days, reducing the whole ship’s company meanwhile to the level of wasters.

“Like? Sure, it was like a Leprachaun; and what else would it be like?”

“What like vas that?” persisted the voice.

“It was like a little man no bigger than a big forked raddish, an’ as green as a cabbidge. Me a’nt had one in her house down in Connaught in the ould days. O musha! musha! the ould days, the ould days! Now, you may b’lave me or b’lave me not, but you could have put him in your pocket, and the grass-green head of him wouldn’t more than’v stuck out. She kept him in a cupboard, and out of the cupboard he’d pop if it was a crack open, an’ into the milk pans he’d be, or under the beds, or pullin’ the stool from under you, or at some other divarsion. He’d chase the pig—the crathur!—till it’d be all ribs like an ould umbrilla with the fright, an’ as thin as a greyhound with the runnin’ by the marnin; he’d addle the eggs so the cocks an’ hens wouldn’t know what they wis afther wid the chickens comin’ out wid two heads on them, an’ twinty-seven legs fore and aft. And you’d start to chase him, an’ then it’d be mainsail haul, and away he’d go, you behint him, till you’d landed tail over snout in a ditch, an’ he’d be back in the cupboard.”

“He was a Troll,” murmured the Dutch voice.

“I’m tellin’ you he was a Leprachaun, and there’s no knowin’ the divilments he’d be up to. He’d pull the cabbidge, maybe, out of the pot boilin’ on the fire forenint your eyes, and baste you in the face with it; and thin, maybe, you’d hold out your fist to him, and he’d put a goulden soverin in it.”

“Wisht he was here!” murmured a voice from a bunk near the knightheads.

“Pawthrick,” drawled the voice from the hammock above, “what’d you do first if you found y’self with twenty pound in your pocket?”

“What’s the use of askin’ me?” replied Mr Button. “What’s the use of twenty pound to a sayman at say, where the grog’s all wather an’ the beef’s all horse? Gimme it ashore, an’ you’d see what I’d do wid it!”

“I guess the nearest grog-shop keeper wouldn’t see you comin’ for dust,” said a voice from Ohio.

“He would not,” said Mr Button; “nor you afther me. Be damned to the grog and thim that sells it!”

“It’s all darned easy to talk,” said Ohio. “You curse the grog at sea when you can’t get it; set you ashore, and you’re bung full.”

“I likes me dhrunk,” said Mr Button, “I’m free to admit; an’ I’m the divil when it’s in me, and it’ll be the end of me yet, or me ould mother was a liar. ‘Pat,’ she says, first time I come home from say rowlin’, ‘storms you may escape, an’ wimmen you may escape, but the potheen ’ill have you.’ Forty year ago—forty year ago!”

“Well,” said Ohio, “it hasn’t had you yet.”

“No,” replied Mr Button, “but it will.”

CHAPTER II
UNDER THE STARS

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It was a wonderful night up on deck, filled with all the majesty and beauty of starlight and a tropic calm.

The Pacific slept; a vast, vague swell flowing from far away down south under the night, lifted the *Northumberland* on its undulations to the rattling sound of the reef points and the occasional creak of the rudder; whilst overhead, near the fiery arch of the Milky Way, hung the Southern Cross like a broken kite.

Stars in the sky, stars in the sea, stars by the million and the million; so many lamps ablaze that the firmament filled the mind with the idea of a vast and populous city—yet from all that living and flashing splendour not a sound.

Down in the cabin—or saloon, as it was called by courtesy—were seated the three passengers of the ship; one reading at the table, two playing on the floor.

The man at the table, Arthur Lestrange, was seated with his large, deep-sunken eyes fixed on a book. He was most evidently in consumption—very near, indeed, to reaping the result of that last and most desperate remedy, a long sea voyage.

Emmeline Lestrange, his little niece—eight years of age, a mysterious mite, small for her age, with thoughts of her own, wide-pupilled eyes that seemed the doors for visions, and a face that seemed just to have peeped into this world for a moment ere it was as suddenly withdrawn—sat in a corner nursing something in her arms, and rocking herself to the tune of her own thoughts.

Dick, Lestrange’s little son, eight and a bit, was somewhere under the table. They were Bostonians, bound

for San Francisco, or rather for the sun and splendour of Los Angeles, where Lestrange had bought a small estate, hoping there to enjoy the life whose lease would be renewed by the long sea voyage.

As he sat reading, the cabin door opened, and appeared an angular female form. This was Mrs Stannard, the stewardess, and Mrs Stannard meant bedtime.

“Dicky,” said Mr Lestrange, closing his book, and raising the table-cloth a few inches, “bedtime.”

“Oh, not yet, daddy!” came a sleep-freighted voice from under the table; “I ain’t ready. I dunno want to go to bed, I—Hi yow!”

Mrs Stannard, who knew her work, had stooped under the table, seized him by the foot, and hauled him out kicking and fighting and blubbering all at the same time.

As for Emmeline, she having glanced up and recognised the inevitable, rose to her feet, and, holding the hideous rag-doll she had been nursing, head down and dangling in one hand, she stood waiting till Dicky, after a few last perfunctory bellows, suddenly dried his eyes and held up a tear-wet face for his father to kiss. Then she presented her brow solemnly to her uncle, received a kiss and vanished, led by the hand into a cabin on the port side of the saloon.

Mr Lestrange returned to his book, but he had not read for long when the cabin door was opened, and Emmeline, in her nightdress, reappeared, holding a brown paper parcel in her hand, a parcel of about the same size as the book you are reading.

“My box,” said she; and as she spoke, holding it up as if to prove its safety, the little plain face altered to the face of an angel.

She had smiled.

When Emmeline Lestrange smiled it was absolutely as if the light of Paradise had suddenly flashed upon her face: the happiest form of childish beauty suddenly appeared before your eyes, dazzled them—and was gone.

Then she vanished with her box, and Mr Lestrange resumed his book.

This box of Emmeline's, I may say in parenthesis, had given more trouble aboard ship than all of the rest of the passengers' luggage put together.

It had been presented to her on her departure from Boston by a lady friend, and what it contained was a dark secret to all on board, save its owner and her uncle; she was a woman, or, at all events, the beginning of a woman, yet she kept this secret to herself—a fact which you will please note.

The trouble of the thing was that it was frequently being lost. Suspecting herself, maybe, as an unpractical dreamer in a world filled with robbers, she would cart it about with her for safety, sit down behind a coil of rope and fall into a fit of abstraction: be recalled to life by the evolutions of the crew reefing or furling or what not, rise to superintend the operations—and then suddenly find she had lost her box.

Then she would absolutely haunt the ship. Wide-eyed and distressed of face she would wander hither and thither, peeping into the galley, peeping down the forescuttle, never uttering a word or wail, searching like an uneasy ghost, but dumb.

She seemed ashamed to tell of her loss, ashamed to let any one know of it; but every one knew of it directly they saw her, to use Mr Button's expression, "on the wandher," and every one hunted for it.

Strangely enough it was Paddy Button who usually found it. He who was always doing the wrong thing in the eyes of men, generally did the right thing in the eyes of children. Children, in fact, when they could get at Mr Button, went for him *con amore*. He was as attractive to them as a Punch and Judy show or a German band—almost.

Mr Lestrange after a while closed the book he was reading, looked around him and sighed.

The cabin of the *Northumberland* was a cheerful enough place, pierced by the polished shaft of the mizzen mast, carpeted with an Axminster carpet, and garnished with mirrors let into the white pine panelling. Lestrange was staring at the reflection of his own face in one of these mirrors fixed just opposite to where he sat.

His emaciation was terrible, and it was just perhaps at this moment that he first recognised the fact that he must not only die, but die soon.

He turned from the mirror and sat for a while with his chin resting upon his hand, and his eyes fixed on an ink spot upon the table-cloth; then he arose, and crossing the cabin climbed laboriously up the companion-way to the deck.

As he leaned against the bulwark rail to recover his breath, the splendour and beauty of the Southern night struck him to the heart with a cruel pang. He took his seat on a deck chair and gazed up at the Milky Way, that great triumphal arch built of suns that the dawn would sweep away like a dream.

In the Milky Way, near the Southern Cross, occurs a terrible circular abyss, the Coal Sack. So sharply defined is it, so suggestive of a void and bottomless cavern, that the contemplation of it afflicts the imaginative mind with vertigo. To the naked eye it is as black and as dismal as death, but the smallest telescope reveals it beautiful and populous with stars.

Lestrange’s eyes travelled from this mystery to the burning cross, and the nameless and numberless stars reaching to the sea-line, where they paled and vanished in the light of the rising moon. Then he became aware of a figure promenading the quarter-deck. It was the “Old Man.”

A sea captain is always the “old man,” be his age what it may. Captain Le Farges’ age might have been forty-five. He was a sailor of the Jean Bart type, of French descent, but a naturalised American.

“I don’t know where the wind’s gone,” said the captain as he drew near the man in the deck chair. “I guess it’s blown a hole in the firmament, and escaped somewheres to the back of beyond.”

“It’s been a long voyage,” said Lestrange; “and I’m thinking, Captain, it will be a very long voyage for me. My port’s not ’Frisco; I feel it.”

“Don’t you be thinking that sort of thing,” said the other, taking his seat in a chair close by. “There’s no manner of use forecastin’ the weather a month ahead. Now we’re in warm latitoods, your glass will rise steady, and you’ll be as right and spry as any one of us, before we fetch the Golden Gates.”

“I’m thinking about the children,” said Lestrange, seeming not to hear the captain’s words. “Should anything happen to me before we reach port, I should like you to do something for me. It’s only this: dispose of my body without —without the children knowing. It has been in my mind to ask you this for some days. Captain, those children know nothing of death.”

Le Farge moved uneasily in his chair.

“Little Emmeline’s mother died when she was two. Her father—my brother—died before she was born. Dicky never knew a mother; she died giving him birth. My God, Captain, death has laid a heavy hand on my family; can you wonder that I have hid his very name from those two creatures that I love!”

“Ay, ay,” said Le Farge, “it’s sad! it’s sad!”

“When I was quite a child,” went on Lestrange, “a child no older than Dicky, my nurse used to terrify me with tales about dead people. I was told I’d go to hell when I died if I wasn’t a good child. I cannot tell you how much that has poisoned my life, for the thoughts we think in childhood, Captain, are the fathers of the thoughts we think when we are grown up. And can a diseased father—have healthy children?”

“I guess not.”

“So I just said, when these two tiny creatures came into my care, that I would do all in my power to protect them from the terrors of life—or rather, I should say, from the terror of death. I don’t know whether I have done right, but I have done it for the best. They had a cat, and one day Dicky came in to me and said: ‘Father, pussy’s in the garden asleep, and I can’t wake her.’ So I just took him out for a walk; there was a circus in the town, and I took him to it. It so filled his mind that he quite forgot the cat. Next day he asked for her. I did not tell him she was buried in the garden, I just said she must have run away. In a week he had forgotten all about her—children soon forget.”

“Ay, that’s true,” said the sea captain. “But ’pears to me they must learn some time they’ve got to die.”

“Should I pay the penalty before we reach land, and be cast into that great, vast sea, I would not wish the children’s dreams to be haunted by the thought: just tell them I’ve gone on board another ship. You will take them back to Boston; I have here, in a letter, the name of a lady who will care for them. Dicky will be well off, as far as worldly goods are concerned, and so will Emmeline. Just tell them I’ve gone on board another ship—children soon forget.”

“I’ll do what you ask,” said the seaman.

The moon was over the horizon now, and the *Northumberland* lay adrift in a river of silver. Every spar was distinct, every reef point on the great sails, and the decks lay like spaces of frost cut by shadows black as ebony.

As the two men sat without speaking, thinking their own thoughts, a little white figure emerged from the saloon hatch. It was Emmeline. She was a professed sleepwalker—a past mistress of the art.

Scarcely had she stepped into dreamland than she had lost her precious box, and now she was hunting for it on the decks of the *Northumberland*.

Mr Lestrange put his finger to his lips, took off his shoes and silently followed her. She searched behind a coil of rope, she tried to open the galley door; hither and thither she wandered, wide-eyed and troubled of face, till at last, in the shadow of the hencoop, she found her visionary treasure. Then back she came, holding up her little nightdress with one hand, so as not to trip, and vanished down the saloon companion very hurriedly, as if anxious to get back to bed, her uncle close behind, with one hand outstretched so as to catch her in case she stumbled.

CHAPTER III
THE SHADOW AND THE FIRE

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It was the fourth day of the long calm. An awning had been rigged up on the poop for the passengers, and under it sat Lestrange, trying to read, and the children trying to play. The heat and monotony had reduced even Dicky to just a surly mass, languid in movement as a grub. As for Emmeline, she seemed dazed. The rag-doll lay a yard away from her on the poop deck unnursed; even the wretched box and its whereabouts she seemed to have quite forgotten.

"Daddy!" suddenly cried Dick, who had clambered up, and was looking over the after-rail.

"What?"

"Fish!"

Lestrange rose to his feet, came aft and looked over the rail.

Down in the vague green of the water something moved, something pale and long—a ghastly form. It vanished; and yet another came, neared the surface, and displayed itself more fully. Lestrange saw its eyes, he saw the dark fin, and the whole hideous length of the creature; a shudder ran through him as he clasped Dicky.

"Ain't he fine?" said the child. "I guess, daddy, I'd pull him aboard if I had a hook. Why haven't I a hook, daddy?—why haven't I a hook, daddy?— Ow, you're *squeezin'* me!"

Something plucked at Lestrange's coat: it was Emmeline—she also wanted to look. He lifted her up in his arms; her little pale face peeped over the rail, but there was nothing to see: the forms of terror had vanished, leaving the green depths untroubled and unstained.

“What’s they called, daddy?” persisted Dick, as his father took him down from the rail, and led him back to the chair.

“Sharks,” said Lestrange, whose face was covered with perspiration.

He picked up the book he had been reading—it was a volume of Tennyson—and he sat with it on his knees staring at the white sunlit main-deck barred with the white shadows of the standing rigging.

The sea had disclosed to him a vision. Poetry, Philosophy, Beauty, Art, the love and joy of life—was it possible that these should exist in the same world as those?

He glanced at the book upon his knees, and contrasted the beautiful things in it which he remembered with the terrible things he had just seen, the things that were waiting for their food under the keel of the ship.

It was three bells—half-past three in the afternoon—and the ship’s bell had just rung out. The stewardess appeared to take the children below; and as they vanished down the saloon companion-way Captain Le Farge came aft, on to the poop, and stood for a moment looking over the sea on the port side, where a bank of fog had suddenly appeared like the spectre of a country.

“The sun has dimmed a bit,” said he; “I can a’most look at it. Glass steady enough—there’s a fog coming up—ever seen a Pacific fog?”

“No, never.”

“Well, you won’t want to see another,” replied the mariner, shading his eyes and fixing them upon the sea-line. The sea-line away to starboard had lost somewhat its distinctness, and over the day an almost imperceptible shade had crept.

The captain suddenly turned from his contemplation of the sea and sky, raised his head and sniffed.

“Something is burning somewhere—smell it? Seems to me like an old mat or summat. It’s that swab of a steward, maybe; if he isn’t breaking glass, he’s upsetting lamps and

burning holes in the carpet. Bless *my* soul, I'd sooner have a dozen Mary Anns an' their dustpans round the place than one tomfool steward like Jenkins." He went to the saloon hatch. "Below there!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"What are you burning?"

"I an't burnin' northen, sir."

"Tell you, I smell it!"

"There's northen burnin' here, sir."

"Neither is there, it's all on deck. Something in the galley, maybe—rags, most likely, they've thrown on the fire."

"Captain!" said Lestrange.

"Ay, ay."

"Come here, please."

Le Farge climbed on to the poop.

"I don't know whether it's my weakness that's affecting my eyes, but there seems to me something strange about the main-mast."

The main-mast near where it entered the deck, and for some distance up, seemed in motion—a corkscrew movement most strange to watch from the shelter of the awning.

This apparent movement was caused by a spiral haze of smoke so vague that one could only tell of its existence from the mirage-like tremor of the mast round which it curled.

"My God!" cried Le Farge, as he sprang from the poop and rushed forward.

Lestrange followed him slowly, stopping every moment to clutch the bulwark rail and pant for breath. He heard the shrill bird-like notes of the bosun's pipe. He saw the hands emerging from the forecastle, like bees out of a hive; he watched them surrounding the main-hatch. He watched the tarpaulin and locking-bars removed. He saw the hatch

opened, and a burst of smoke—black, villainous smoke—ascend to the sky, solid as a plume in the windless air.

Lestrange was a man of a highly nervous temperament, and it is just this sort of man who keeps his head in an emergency, whilst your level-headed, phlegmatic individual loses his balance. His first thought was of the children, his second of the boats.

In the battering off Cape Horn the *Northumberland* lost several of her boats. There were left the long-boat, a quarter-boat, and the dinghy. He heard Le Farge's voice ordering the hatch to be closed and the pumps manned, so as to flood the hold; and, knowing that he could do nothing on deck, he made as swiftly as he could for the saloon companion-way.

Mrs Stannard was just coming out of the children's cabin.

"Are the children lying down, Mrs Stannard?" asked Lestrange, almost breathless from the excitement and exertion of the last few minutes.

The woman glanced at him with frightened eyes. He looked like the very herald of disaster.

"For if they are, and you have undressed them, then you must put their clothes on again. The ship is on fire, Mrs Stannard."

"Good God, sir!"

"Listen!" said Lestrange.

From a distance, thin, and dreary as the crying of sea-gulls on a desolate beach, came the clanking of the pumps.

CHAPTER IV
AND LIKE A DREAM DISSOLVED

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Before the woman had time to speak a thunderous step was heard on the companion stairs, and Le Farge broke into the saloon. The man's face was injected with blood, his eyes were fixed and glassy like the eyes of a drunkard, and the veins stood on his temples like twisted cords.

"Get those children ready!" he shouted, as he rushed into his own cabin. "Get you all ready—boats are being swung out and victualled. H--l! where are those papers?"

They heard him furiously searching and collecting things in his cabin—the ship's papers, accounts, things the master mariner clings to as he clings to his life; and as he searched, and found, and packed, he kept bellowing orders for the children to be got on deck. Half mad he seemed, and half mad he was with the knowledge of the terrible thing that was stowed amidst the cargo.

Up on deck the crew, under the direction of the first mate, were working in an orderly manner, and with a will, utterly unconscious of there being anything beneath their feet but an ordinary cargo on fire. The covers had been stripped from the boats, kegs of water and bags of biscuit placed in them. The dinghy, smallest of the boats and most easily got away, was hanging at the port quarter-boat davits flush with the bulwarks; and Paddy Button was in the act of stowing a keg of water in her, when Le Farge broke on to the deck, followed by the stewardess carrying Emmeline, and Mr Lestrange leading Dick. The dinghy was rather a larger boat than the ordinary ships' dinghy, and possessed a small mast and long sail. Two sailors stood ready to man the falls, and

Paddy Button was just turning to trundle forward again when the captain seized him.

“Into the dinghy with you,” he cried, “and row these children and the passenger out a mile from the ship—two miles—three miles—make an offing.”

“Sure, Captain dear, I’ve left me fiddle in the——”

Le Farge dropped the bundle of things he was holding under his left arm, seized the old sailor and rushed him against the bulwarks, as if he meant to fling him into the sea *through* the bulwarks.

Next moment Mr Button was in the boat. Emmeline was handed to him, pale of face and wide-eyed, and clasping something wrapped in a little shawl; then Dick, and then Mr Lestrange was helped over.

“No room for more!” cried Le Farge. “Your place will be in the long-boat, Mrs Stannard, if we have to leave the ship. Lower away, lower away!”

The boat sank towards the smooth blue sea, kissed it and was afloat.

Now Mr Button, before joining the ship at Boston, had spent a good while lingering by the quay, having no money wherewith to enjoy himself in a tavern. He had seen something of the lading of the *Northumberland*, and heard more from a stevedore. No sooner had he cast off the falls and seized the oars, than his knowledge awoke in his mind, living and lurid. He gave a whoop that brought the two sailors leaning over the side.

“Bullies!”

“Ay, ay!”

“Run for your lives—I’ve just rimimbered—there’s two bar’ls of blastin’ powther in the hould!”

Then he bent to his oars, as no man ever bent before.

Lestrange, sitting in the stern-sheets clasping Emmeline and Dick, saw nothing for a moment after hearing these words. The children, who knew nothing of blasting powder or its effects, though half frightened by all the bustle and

excitement, were still amused and pleased at finding themselves in the little boat so close to the blue pretty sea.

Dick put his finger over the side, so that it made a ripple in the water (the most delightful experience of childhood). Emmeline, with one hand clasped in her uncle's, watched Mr Button with a grave sort of half pleasure.

He certainly was a sight worth watching. His soul was filled with tragedy and terror. His Celtic imagination heard the ship blowing up, saw himself and the little dinghy blown to pieces—nay, saw himself in hell, being toasted by "divils."

But tragedy and terror could find no room for expression on his fortunate or unfortunate face. He puffed and he blew, bulging his cheeks out at the sky as he tugged at the oars, making a hundred and one grimaces—all the outcome of agony of mind, but none expressing it. Behind lay the ship, a picture not without its lighter side. The long-boat and the quarter-boat, lowered with a rush and seaborne by the mercy of Providence, were floating by the side of the *Northumberland*.

From the ship men were casting themselves overboard like water-rats, swimming in the water like ducks, scrambling on board the boats anyhow.

From the half-opened main-hatch the black smoke, mixed now with sparks, rose steadily and swiftly and spitefully, as if driven through the half-closed teeth of a dragon.

A mile away beyond the *Northumberland* stood the fog bank. It looked solid, like a vast country that had suddenly and strangely built itself on the sea—a country where no birds sang and no trees grew. A country with white, precipitous cliffs, solid to look at as the cliffs of Dover.

"I'm spint!" suddenly gasped the oarsman, resting the oar handles under the crook of his knees, and bending down as if he was preparing to butt at the passengers in the stern-sheets. "Blow up or blow down, I'm spint—don't ax me, I'm spint!"

Mr Lestrange, white as a ghost, but recovered somewhat from his first horror, gave the Spent One time to recover himself and turned to look at the ship. She seemed a great distance off, and the boats, well away from her, were making at a furious pace towards the dinghy. Dick was still playing with the water, but Emmeline's eyes were entirely occupied with Paddy Button. New things were always of vast interest to her contemplative mind, and these evolutions of her old friend were eminently new.

She had seen him swilling the decks, she had seen him dancing a jig, she had seen him going round the main deck on all fours with Dick on his back, but she had never seen him going on like this before.

She perceived now that he was exhausted, and in trouble about something, and, putting her hand in the pocket of her dress, she searched for something that she knew was there. She produced a Tangerine orange, and leaning forward she touched the Spent One's head with it.

Mr Button raised his head, stared vacantly for a second, saw the proffered orange, and at the sight of it the thought of "the childer" and their innocence, himself and the blasting powder, cleared his dazzled wits, and he took to the sculls again.

"Daddy," said Dick, who had been looking astern, "there's clouds near the ship."

In an incredibly short space of time the solid cliffs of fog had broken. The faint wind that had banked it had pierced it, and was now making pictures and devices of it, most wonderful and weird to see. Horsemen of the mist rode on the water, and were dissolved; billows rolled on the sea, yet were not of the sea; blankets and spirals of vapour ascended to high heaven. And all with a terrible languor of movement. Vast and lazy and sinister, yet steadfast of purpose as Fate or Death, the fog advanced, taking the world for its own.

Against this grey and indescribably sombre background stood the smouldering ship with the breeze already shivering in her sails, and the smoke from her main-hatch blowing and beckoning as if to the retreating boats.

“Why’s the ship smoking like that?” asked Dick. “And look at those boats coming—when are we going back, daddy?”

“Uncle,” said Emmeline, putting her hand in his, as she gazed towards the ship and beyond it, “I’m ’fraid.”

“What frightens you, Emmy?” he asked, drawing her to him.

“Shapes,” replied Emmeline, nestling up to his side.

“Oh, Glory be to God!” gasped the old sailor, suddenly resting on his oars. “Will yiz look at the fog that’s comin’—”

“I think we had better wait here for the boats,” said Mr Lestrange; “we are far enough now to be safe if—anything happens.”

“Ay, ay,” replied the oarsman, whose wits had returned. “Blow up or blow down, she won’t hit us from here.”

“Daddy,” said Dick, “when are we going back? I want my tea.”

“We aren’t going back, my child,” replied his father. “The ship’s on fire; we are waiting for another ship.”

“Where’s the other ship?” asked the child, looking round at the horizon that was clear.

“We can’t see it yet,” replied the unhappy man, “but it will come.”

The long-boat and the quarter-boat were slowly approaching. They looked like beetles crawling over the water, and after them across the glittering surface came a dullness that took the sparkle from the sea—a dullness that swept and spread like an eclipse shadow.

Now the wind struck the dinghy. It was like a wind from fairyland, almost imperceptible, chill, and dimming the sun. A wind from Lilliput. As it struck the dinghy, the fog took the distant ship.

It was a most extraordinary sight, for in less than thirty seconds the ship of wood became a ship of gauze, a tracery —flickered, and was gone forever from the sight of man.

CHAPTER V
VOICES HEARD IN THE MIST

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The sun became fainter still, and vanished. Though the air round the dinghy seemed quite clear, the on-coming boats were hazy and dim, and that part of the horizon that had been fairly clear was now blotted out.

The long-boat was leading by a good way. When she was within hailing distance the captain's voice came.

"Dinghy ahoy!"

"Ahoy!"

"Fetch alongside here!"

The long-boat ceased rowing to wait for the quarter-boat that was slowly creeping up. She was a heavy boat to pull at all times, and now she was overloaded.

The wrath of Captain Le Farge with Paddy Button for the way he had stampeded the crew was profound, but he had not time to give vent to it.

"Here, get aboard us, Mr Lestrange!" said he, when the dinghy was alongside; "we have room for one. Mrs Stannard is in the quarter-boat, and it's overcrowded; she's better aboard the dinghy, for she can look after the kids. Come, hurry up, the smother is coming down on us fast. Ahoy!"—to the quarter-boat—"hurry up, hurry up!"

The quarter-boat had suddenly vanished.

Mr Lestrange climbed into the long-boat. Paddy pushed the dinghy a few yards away with the tip of a scull, and then lay on his oars waiting.

"Ahoy! ahoy!" cried Le Farge.

"Ahoy!" came from the fog bank.

Next moment the long-boat and the dinghy vanished from each other's sight: the great fog bank had taken them.

Now a couple of strokes of the port scull would have brought Mr Button alongside the long-boat, so close was he; but the quarter-boat was in his mind, or rather imagination, so what must he do but take three powerful strokes in the direction in which he fancied the quarter-boat to be.

The rest was voices.

“Dinghy ahoy!”

“Ahoy!”

“Ahoy!”

“Don’t be shoutin’ together, or I’ll not know which way to pull. Quarter-boat ahoy! where are yiz?”

“Port your helm!”

“Ay, ay!”—putting his helm, so to speak, to starboard —“I’ll be wid yiz in wan minute—two or three minutes’ hard pulling.”

“Ahoy!”—much more faint.

“What d’ye mane rowin’ away from me?”—a dozen strokes.

“Ahoy!”—fainter still.

Mr Button rested on his oars.

“Divil mend them—I b’lave that was the long-boat shoutin’.”

He took to his oars again and pulled vigorously.

“Paddy,” came Dick’s small voice, apparently from nowhere, “where are we now?”

“Sure, we’re in a fog; where else would we be? Don’t you be affeared.”

“I ain’t affeared, but Em’s shivering.”

“Give her me coat,” said the oarsman, resting on his oars and taking it off. “Wrap it round her; and when it’s round her we’ll all let one big halloo together. There’s an ould shawl som’er in the boat, but I can’t be after lookin’ for it now.”

He held out the coat and an almost invisible hand took it; at the same moment a tremendous report shook the sea and sky.