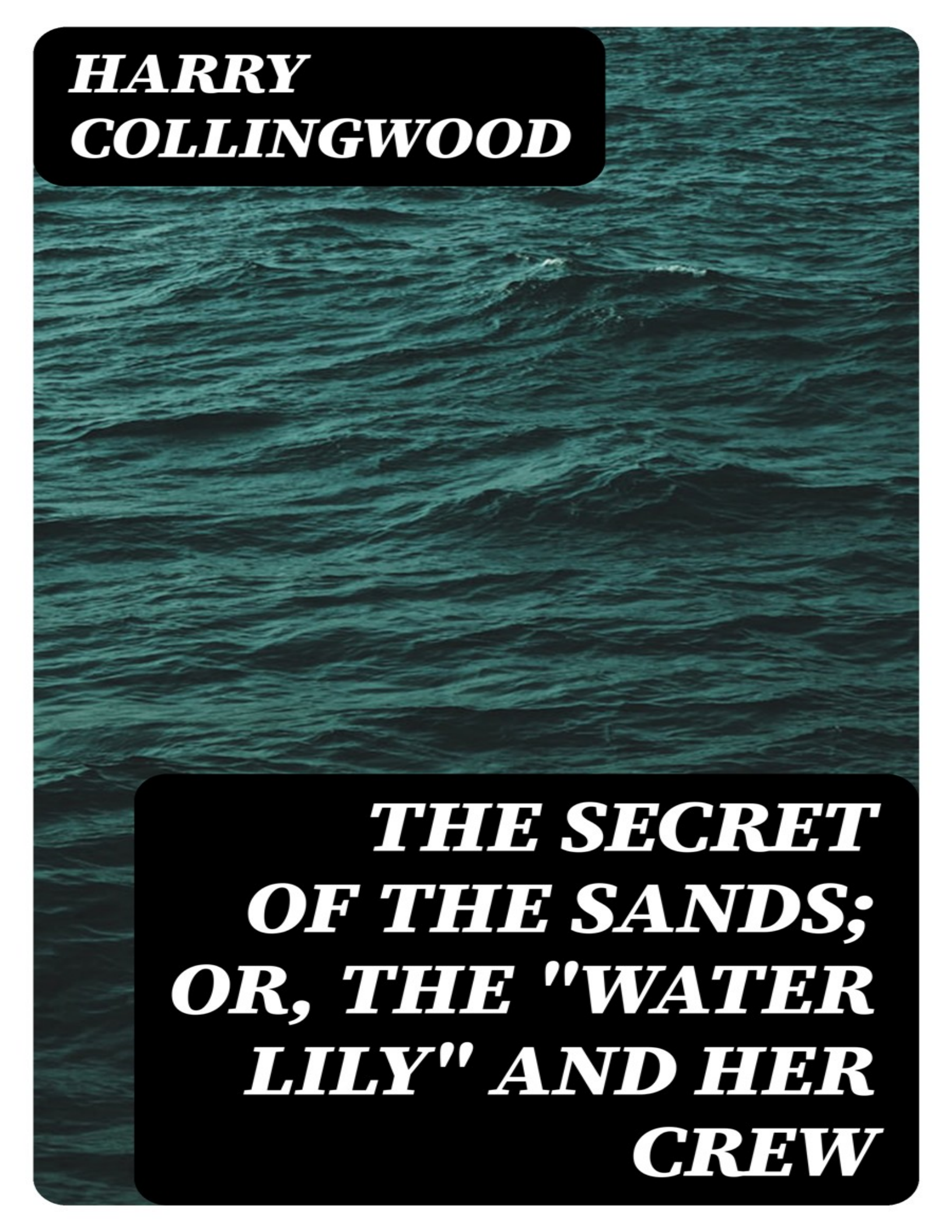




***HARRY
COLLINGWOOD***

***THE SECRET
OF THE SANDS;
OR, THE "WATER
LILY" AND HER
CREW***

Harry Collingwood

The Secret of the Sands; Or, The "Water Lily" and her Crew

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Preface.

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The attention of the public has been directed, on more than one occasion within the last few years, to voyages of a more or less lengthy character, undertaken in craft of very small tonnage; and a great deal has been said and written concerning the foolhardiness of such undertakings. This, however, is more apparent than real, though much must necessarily depend, in such voyages, on the adventurer's skill as a seaman and his nerve and self-possession in critical moments. Almost, if not quite, as much will also depend upon the design, construction, and equipment of the craft in which such an adventure is undertaken; but where all these conditions are favourable, the actual danger may be reduced in quite a surprising degree.

Such voyages, however, if of any considerable length, are sure to abound in adventure; and, in selecting one as the groundwork of my story, it has been my aim to endeavour at once to make it interesting and readable to those who have a liking for the sea and for nautical adventure, and to convey a few useful hints (gathered from my own experience) respecting the design and management of small craft, and of the precautions which are so absolutely necessary in the navigating of them.

But it must be distinctly understood that, in selecting this subject, I have had no intention whatever of advocating, or recommending, such voyages, or of underrating the risks which, under the most favourable circumstances, they involve; my purpose has simply been to combine a little

information with, I hope, a great deal of interest and amusement; and if my book serves but to while pleasantly away an idle hour or two for the general reader, or conveys a scrap of useful information to the young yachtsman, that purpose will be fully accomplished.

Harry Collingwood.

October, 1878.

Volume One—Chapter One.

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The Wreck.

It was the last week in the month of November, 18—, when the event occurred which proved to be the *primum mobile* of the following adventures.

The weather, for some days previous, had been unusually boisterous for the time of year, and had culminated, on the morning on which my story opens, in a “November gale” from the south-west, exceeding in violence any previous gale within the memory of “the oldest inhabitant” of the locality. This is saying a great deal, for I was at the time living in Weymouth, a most delightful summer resort, where, however, the feelings are likely to be more or less harrowed every winter by fearful wrecks on the far-famed and much-dreaded Chesil Beach, which connects the mis-named *island* of Portland with the mainland.

We had dined, as usual, at the primitive hour of one o’clock; and with Bob Trunnion—about whom I shall have more to say anon—I had turned out under the verandah to enjoy our post-prandial smoke, according to invariable usage. My sister Ada would not permit us the indulgence of that luxury indoors, and no conceivable disturbance of the elements could compel us to forego it altogether.

We were pacing the verandah side by side, quarter-deck fashion, with our hands behind our backs and our weeds between our teeth, making an occasional remark about the weather as the sheeted rain swept past us, and the trees in the distance and the leaf-denuded shrubs in the garden

bowed before the fury of the blast, when a coastguardman, whom I had occasionally encountered and spoken to in my rambles, came running past, enveloped in oilskins and topped by a sou'-wester.

As he went by, seeing us, he shouted, "Ship coming ashore in the West Bay, sir!" and was the next minute at the bottom of the hill, *en route*, as fast as his legs could carry him, for the town.

Our house was situated in a pleasant suburb called Rodwell; the high-road which passed our door led direct to the Smallmouth Sands, at the farther extremity of which was the Chesil Beach; and we conjectured that the coastguardman had come from the beach along this road to give notice to the chief officer stationed in the town.

To run indoors, don our foul-weather rigging, and notify my sister that we were off to the scene of the anticipated wreck, was the work of a moment. The next we were in the road, inclined forward at an angle of forty-five degrees against the wind, and staggering slowly ahead in the direction of the sands. The coastguardman had a fair wind of it, and was going a good eight knots when he passed us; but just at the top of the hill, as we were exposed to the full strength of the gale, we did not forge ahead at more than about one knot. However, matters mended soon after, for we surmounted the brow of the hill, and began the descent on the opposite side; here the road took a slight bend, which brought the wind well abeam; so keeping close under the hedge to windward of us, we rattled away as fast as we could go.

After nearly an hour's severe exertion we reached the beach. The vessel which was expected to come on shore was a full-rigged ship, apparently of about eight hundred or a thousand tons, and evidently a foreigner, by her build and rig. Some conjectured her to be French, some Spanish, and others avowed their belief that she was a German; but she was still too far off, and the weather too thick, to enable any one to form a clear judgment as to her nationality.

"Whoever she is," said the chief boatman, "the skipper of her is a downright good seaman, and doesn't intend to lose his ship whilst he can do anything to save her. He drove into the bay about two hours ago, sir," said he, turning to me, "and this is the second time that he's tried to fetch out again; but, Lord! he don't know this place so well as I do, or he'd be as sartain as I be that she'll never go outside o' the Bill o' Portland again. The ship don't float that, with her sails alone, could get out of the bay, once she got into it, with the wind and tide the way it is now; and afore the tide turns he'll be knocked into matchwood, or my name's not Joe Grummet. There he comes round again," continued the man, who had kept his eye on the vessel all the time he was speaking; "but it's no good; he's more 'n a mile to leeward of where he fetched last time, and he'd better give it up and run her ashore whilst 'tis light enough to get the hands out of her, if so be as it please God to let any on 'em come ashore alive."

The vessel had, as Grummet remarked, altered her course; running off rapidly before the wind, and consequently towards the land; and those who knew nothing about nautical matters would have supposed that

her commander had at length given up the contest, and was about to run her on shore.

But we knew better. The vessel had merely been kept away in order to *wear* her; *staying* in such a tremendous gale and sea being utterly out of the question. And as we watched we saw her come slowly to the wind on the opposite tack; her yards were braced sharp up, her sheets flattened in, and once more the battle for life was resumed against the hostile elements.

But it was evident that the noble ship's career was ended. The operation of *wearing* had brought her into fearful proximity with the land; and though she carried reefed mainsail and foresail under close-reefed topsails, and fore and main topmast staysails, it was evident that she was driving to leeward at a frightful rate, and that the period of her existence must now be measured in minutes.

"Now, lads! bear a hand!" shouted Grummet, "and let's signal her to run in here. The beach is steeper here than anywhere within the next three or four mile; and if he happens to come in on the back of a sea, he'll run up pretty near high and dry; and we may get some of the poor souls ashore alive, and cheat Davy Jones out of the best part of his bargain this bout, anyway."

A large red bandana handkerchief was produced and seized to the end of a boat-hook; this extempore flag and staff Grummet took in his hand, and, proceeding to the summit of the beach, commenced waving it to and fro, to attract the attention of the people on board the doomed ship. She was now so close that we could see the two men

at her wheel, and a man, whom we supposed to be the master, standing by the mizen rigging.

Just abaft the mainmast, and huddled together under the shelter of the weather bulwarks, we could see some seven or eight more of her crew, and others were doubtless cowering elsewhere out of sight.

Grummet waved his flag energetically from the crest of the beach, and the coastguardmen busied themselves in making such slight preparations as were in their power to assist the crew in escaping from the wreck. Several coils of line had been brought down to the beach; one man who announced himself to be a good swimmer, had secured an end of the smallest of these to his waist; he now stood prepared to divest himself of all his superfluous clothing at a moment's notice, and to attempt the hazardous experiment of rushing into the boiling surf, to drag out any poor unfortunate whom he might be able to reach. Others were engaged in various ways in preparing themselves to render what assistance was in their power, when a cry from Grummet announced that the crisis had arrived; on looking up we saw that the stranger's fore-topmast had gone in the cap; and now hung to leeward, with the topsail and topmast staysail thrashing to ribbons; the latter threatening at every jerk to take the bowsprit out of the ship. The foresail was also split from head to foot; and, even as we looked, the overstrained canvas gave way, and, fluttering for a moment in the furious gale, parted from the bolt-ropes, and came flying like a shred of cloud to leeward.

The ship, thus deprived of her head-sail, luffed into the wind: and the moment that the rest of her canvas shook,

away it came also, leaving her helpless and unmanageable, with the sea sweeping her deck fore and aft.

“Now stand by, men,” shouted Grummet, “and each one do his best for the poor souls; for they were never nearer to death’s door than they will be in another two minutes. If he had run her stem on to the beach they might have stood a chance; but I fear it is all over with them now, for she’ll come ashore broadside on, and all on us knows what that means.”

Fortunately, the catastrophe had happened immediately to windward of that part of the beach on which we stood; a spot, as Grummet had observed, where the shipwrecked crew would have a better chance of reaching the shore alive than they would have had if stranded on any other part of it for some miles on either side; but the loss of their sails had rendered the prospect of their escape considerably less than it would have been had they been able to watch their chance, *sail* the ship in on the crest of a wave, and so beach her.

The next half minute or so was one of most intense and painful excitement to us spectators on shore. Each man moved nearer to the water, and cast off some article of clothing, or gave a last look to the line, or a final adjustment to the life-buoy round his waist. For myself, I had stripped off my jacket and waistcoat, and placed them, together with my hat, in the hands of my friend Bob, who could not swim; and I now stood with the end of a line, knotted into a bowline, in my hand, ready to do anything which the emergency of the moment might require.

The master of the vessel appeared to be aware of our intention, and the meaning of the signal which Grummet had shown; and as it was now impossible to run the ship *stem* on upon the beach, he did the next best thing; and waving his hand to the men who, like true seamen, still stuck to the wheel, they put the helm hard up, that she might come in stern on.

The manoeuvre was partially successful; but unfortunately she came ashore between two seas; and the undertow of the one taking her stern, whilst the succeeding sea struck her bow, she fell broadside-to in an instant, her three masts went by the board, and the sea made a clean breach over her.

One poor fellow was seen to leap overboard at the moment that the ship struck; and half-a-dozen of the men on the beach rushed down into the water, making frantic efforts to get at him. But he could not swim; and those who tried to reach him were flung back, bruised and senseless, upon the beach, only to be dragged away again as the sea receded; and had it not been for the ropes and life-buoys round their waists, by which their comrades hauled them on shore, they must have lost their lives. As it was, one of them, in some way or other, got out of the life-buoy, and we saw him swept away almost from our very feet.

I was an expert swimmer; and as soon as I saw the poor fellow being swept away, I slipped my head and shoulders through the bowline knot I held in my hand, dashed into the surf, and, resorting to my usual tactics of diving through the breakers, managed to get hold of the man with one hand,

while I raised the other above my head, as a signal to those on shore to haul away upon their end of the line.

As soon as I felt the line tighten round me, I grasped the man round the body, and in another moment we were both on the beach, in the arms of those who had run down to meet us. By these we were dragged up out of reach of the sea, and, on staggering to my feet, I had the satisfaction of seeing the man who had jumped overboard from the wreck being hauled on board again.

Loud were the thanks and praises I received for my conduct in bringing the other on shore; but without waiting to listen to them, I hastily explained that I would try to take a line on board the wreck, as, if I could succeed in this, there might possibly be some chance of saving the major portion, if not the whole of the crew. Accordingly I dashed into the surf once more; and at length, after the most superhuman efforts, though the distance was barely thirty yards, I reached the ship's side, and was drawn on board by a line which her crew threw to me. The men crowded round me, rapidly talking in some language which I could not understand, and looking as much relieved as though I had the power of taking them all on my back at once, and swimming on shore with them. I stood for a moment to recover my breath; and at the same time looked about to see what resources might be at my command. I noticed a towing hawser coiled away upon what had originally been the deckhouse forward, but which was now stove in and battered almost out of recognition. An eye was spliced in one end of this hawser; and taking it up, I signed to the men to pass it over the stump of the foremast.

They understood me, and, seeing my object in wishing it done, they had it over in a twinkling; in another moment, they had the heavy coil capsized, the other end bent on to the line which I had brought on board with me, and were paying it rapidly over the side.

As I turned to address the master of the vessel, who, I noticed as I was hauled up the side, was then standing at the break of the poop, issuing instructions to his crew, I saw him in the act of descending the poop-ladder, and I stepped towards him. At this moment the ship was lifted up by a perfect mountain of a sea, and hove over on her beam-ends; all hands of us were flung violently to leeward; and before apparently any of us had time to recover our feet, another sea swept down upon us; there was a terrific—an ear-splitting crash, a wild, agonised cry, and I found myself clear of the wreck, struggling wildly for life, with the body of the master within arm's length of me.

He was apparently dead, and floating face downwards; but I grasped him by the hair, turned him on his back, and struck out for the beach. Twice were we flung like corks upon the pebbles of the strand, and twice dragged off into deep water again by the merciless undertow. The first time I dug my fingers, knees, and the toes of my boots into the pebbles, in the hope of bringing myself and my senseless charge to an anchor; but I might as well have attempted to grasp the air. The whole of that portion of the beach which was exposed to the action of the sea was a vast moving mass, the shingle being alternately thrown up and sucked back again in tons, as the water hurled itself high upon the beach and then rushed back into the foaming abyss.

The second time we were thrown up with such violence that I was stunned; but the third time the brave fellows on the beach, who had been making the most frantic efforts to get at us, would take no denial. They watched their chance, and as they saw us again drifting in two, with ropes round their waists, rushed into the sea, grasped us, one each, firmly round the body; and, though they were lifted off their feet and dragged away to seaward like feathers by the retiring breaker, never let go their hold until we were hauled up high and dry, clear beyond the reach of the heaviest wave.

The efforts made to restore me to consciousness were soon successful, but my fellow-sufferer, the master of the vessel, appeared to be seriously injured. It was nearly half an hour before the faintest signs of returning animation were perceived; and when at length consciousness returned, the poor fellow appeared to be suffering the most excruciating agony.

As soon as I was once more able to look about me, I found that the wave which had washed the master and me overboard, had broken the wreck in two just abaft the mainmast, flinging the stern portion much nearer the shore, whilst it had turned the other half fairly bottom up, precipitating, of course, all the poor fellows, who were so busy paying out the hawser, into the sea. The people on the beach watched eagerly for their reappearance above water, but not one of them was ever seen again. It afterwards transpired that there was not a swimmer amongst the entire crew, which, all told, amounted to fifteen hands.

The intelligence of a wreck had attracted a large concourse of people to the spot, notwithstanding the discomfort attendant on being abroad in so violent a gale; and one gentleman had taken upon himself to despatch omnibuses from the town, well supplied with blankets, etc., for the relief and benefit of any poor sufferers who might reach the shore alive. Into one of these vehicles the unfortunate master of the ship was now placed with the utmost care, a couch being extemporised for him in the bottom of the 'bus by piling together all the blankets which had been sent. In spite, however, of the utmost care in driving, the jolts were frequent, and sometimes rather heavy, and the poor fellow's groans indicated such intensity of suffering, that by the time we were half way to town I decided I would take him to my own house, whereby he would be spared nearly half an hour of anguish.

It fortunately happened that, just as I had come to this resolution, a gentleman rode up, and learning who we had inside, volunteered his services. I immediately accepted them, desiring him to ride back to the town, and despatch to my house the ablest physician he could find. When the 'bus drew up at our door, the doctor was there in readiness for his patient, whom we lifted out, apparently in the last stage of exhaustion, and carried carefully into the house and upstairs into my own room, where my sister (advertised by Bob, who had made the best of his way home on foot) had a cheerful fire blazing in the grate, hot water in abundance, and everything else ready that her womanly sympathy could suggest.

Volume One—Chapter Two.

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The Secret.

The doctor remained with the sick man more than half an hour; and when I heard his footstep descending the staircase I went out and met him.

“The poor fellow is sinking rapidly,” said he, in reply to my inquiries; “he has received severe internal injuries, and is bleeding to death inwardly. I can do nothing, absolutely *nothing* for him. Keep him quiet, and humour him as much as you can; excitement of any kind will only hasten his dissolution.” I cheerfully promised to do all I could for the dying man; and the doctor took his leave, promising to call again the last thing in the evening.

As soon as the doctor was out of the house I went upstairs and into the sick-room, where I found the patient in bed, and Bob, with his boots off, gliding as quietly about the room as a trained hospital nurse, doing all he could to contribute to the comfort of his charge.

The opening of the door attracted the sick man’s attention, and he feebly turned his head in my direction. As soon as he recognised me, he beckoned me to approach; and I drew a chair to the side of the bed, asking him how he felt.

“Like one whose moments are numbered;” replied he in perfectly pure English, but with a sonorous ring in the articulation of the words, which betrayed the fact that he was not speaking in his mother tongue. “Señor,” he continued, “I am dying; the doctor has candidly told me so,

though I needed no such assurance from him. The dreadful pangs which shoot through my tortured frame, are such as no man could long endure and live. I am a true Catholic, señor, and I would fain see a priest, or some good man of my own creed; that I may confess, and clear my guilty soul from the stains which a life of sinful indulgence and contempt of Heaven's laws has polluted it with. I know there are many of my faith in England, it may be that there are some in this place. Know you of any such?"

I replied that there certainly was a Catholic church in the town, but it was situated at some distance from the house in which he now lay; consequently it would perhaps be an hour before the priest could be found and brought to him; "but," added I, "I will send for him forthwith, and until he arrive I will sit here and keep you company."

So saying, I called Bob on one side, and directed him to proceed, as quickly as possible, into town, and bring the Reverend Father without a moment's delay, to the house.

As soon as Bob had departed, I resumed my seat by the bedside. Extending his burning hand towards me, he clasped mine, and endeavoured to raise it to his lips. "Señor," said he, "since it is the will of God that I am to die, I can but bow to that will in submission; but I would I could have been spared for a few years to testify my gratitude to you for your brave and noble efforts in behalf of my crew and myself—my poor people, my poor people," he sobbed—"all, all lost!"

He was silent for nearly five minutes; and I took advantage of the opportunity to explain to him that what I had done was no more than any other Englishman would do

if he had the power, under similar circumstances; that such conduct was thought nothing of among our nation; being regarded as simply a duty which each man owed to every other, in like circumstances of distress with his own.

“I know—I know,” replied he, “the English are as generous as they are brave; but still I would I had it in my power to express my thanks otherwise than in words. But I am alone in the world which I am so soon to leave. Not one have I of my own name or blood to whom I can bequeath my debt of gratitude; and when my ship went to pieces to-day (she was my own property, señor), I became a beggar. I have not so much property left as will pay the expenses of my burial; and here I lie, indebted to a stranger, and that stranger a foreigner, for the shelter which covers my dying head, as I soon shall be for the coffin and the grave which await my lifeless clay.”

I was beginning to say something, with the intention of diverting his mind from so painful a train of thought, when he interrupted me eagerly.

“And yet,” continued he, “poor as I am, it is in my power to make you rich—ay, beyond the utmost scope of your imagination. And I will, I *will*! Why should I take this secret to the grave with me? In a few hours I shall be beyond the want of earthly riches, but you, señor, are young, and look forward to a long life; doubtless, like other men, you have already indulged in many a bright day-dream which the possession of wealth would go far to realise. Listen, gentil señor; I must be brief, for I feel that I have no time to lose. I have been shipwrecked once before. It is now nearly three years ago since I sailed from Valparaiso for Canton, whence

we were to proceed to Bombay, and so home round the Cape of Good Hope. I was then chief mate. We met with nothing but calms for the first three weeks of our passage, after which the weather changed, and we had a succession of adverse gales until we were within fifteen degrees of the line. Here we were worse off than ever, for at one moment we were lying in a glassy calm, and perhaps in five minutes afterwards were under close-reefed canvas, or possibly bare poles. At length a furious squall threw the ship on her beam-ends, and we were compelled to cut away all three of her masts to save her from foundering. And then the squall settled down into a perfect hurricane, and we could do nothing but suffer the ship to drive dead before it. Near midnight we were flung violently to the deck by a tremendous shock. The ship was on shore, dashing her bottom out upon the rocks. And it was so dark, señor, that we were unable to see each other. Oh! the horror of that night; it is as fresh upon me now as it was at the moment that it happened."

The poor fellow's face was streaming with perspiration. I begged he would not distress himself by recalling such painful recollections, but in spite of my remonstrance he continued his story.

"The ship broke up beneath our feet, and I found myself swimming, I knew not where, in the midst of a quantity of floating wreck, to a piece of which I clung. I was surrounded on every side by breakers; but not far from me I could perceive, by the absence of the phosphorescence, that the water was smooth. I urged myself, and the plank to which I clung, in that direction, and soon reached the smooth water;

after which I suffered myself to drift. The water was quite warm, and I experienced no inconvenience whatever from my immersion. After the lapse of perhaps an hour, possibly more, I felt the ground beneath my feet, and staggering out of the water, I flung myself upon the dry land, and, notwithstanding the howling of the wind and the roar of the breakers, I fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

“When I awoke the sun was beating fiercely down upon my uncovered head; the sky was cloudless; and a calm had succeeded to the gale of the night before. I rose to my feet, and on looking about me, discovered that I had been cast upon one of those coral islands which so thickly stud some portions of the Pacific. I was—as I am now—the only one who escaped the wreck alive. The bodies of my shipmates lay scattered along the shore; and a long and arduous day was spent in burying them where they lay, in such shallow graves as I could scoop in the sand with the aid of a piece of splintered plank. The beach was strewn with wreckage which had been washed over the reef and into the smooth water; and I was overjoyed to find amongst this the long-boat, perfectly uninjured. In her I visited the scene of the wreck; and there, after diligent search, I found the means and a sufficiency of appropriate materials to enable me to fit her for a lengthened voyage.

“I was more than two months on the island before my preparations were complete, for life was very enjoyable in that delightful spot, and I felt in no hurry to get away. At length, whilst walking along the beach one evening, my attention was attracted to three or four pieces of old, worm-eaten, weather-worn timber, which I had often noticed

before, projecting above the sand; and curiosity now impelled me to walk up to and examine them. A careful scrutiny revealed to me that they formed part of the framework of a ship; and I resolved that I would return the next day and ascertain whether what I saw was merely a detached piece of wreck, or whether the entire hull lay there embedded in the sand.

“The next morning I repaired to the spot, armed with a primitive substitute for a shovel, which I had contrived to manufacture, and an iron bolt, to serve the purpose of a crow-bar, which I had procured the previous night by burning it out of a piece of wreck. I had worked for perhaps an hour, when I reached some planking, which I immediately recognised as the deck of the ship. This I proceeded to clear of sand, uncovering the deck in an extending circle from the spot where I had first encountered it, until I had an area of about fifteen or sixteen feet laid bare. And now I met with a breach in the deck; so instead of clearing away further, I began to dig down again; I toiled thus for four days, señor; by which time? I had discovered that the wreck was that of a small vessel, of perhaps one hundred and thirty tons (though, small as she was, she had been built with a full poop); that she was a very ancient craft indeed; and that her cargo consisted of nothing but *gold*, señor, that is, with the solitary exception of a strong wooden box (which, even after so long an interment, offered considerable resistance to my efforts to open it), containing an assortment of what I took to be pebbles of different kinds, but which I afterwards found were unpolished gems. Yes, señor; there lay the gold in ingots, each wrapped in

matting, and each ingot as much in weight as I could well lift. The matting was decayed in the first three or four tiers, and the metal discoloured almost to blackness; but towards the centre of the cargo (which is, probably, not more than twelve tiers deep altogether), the matting, though so rotten that it crumbled to dust as I touched it, had preserved the colour of the metal; and there it lay, bar after bar, gleaming with the dull yellow lustre peculiar to virgin gold.

“I ballasted my boat entirely with ingots; selecting the most discoloured I could reach, so that they might be less easily recognisable as gold, and the risk I ran of being ultimately robbed of them reduced in the same proportion. I also took a few of the pebbles (as I thought them) out of the box; after which I set to work to cover in the whole once more. I completed my task by burning down the timbers which had at first attracted my attention (and which I found were a portion of her stern frame), so that nothing remained above the surface of the sand to betray the whereabouts of my treasure. I then carefully marked the spot in such a manner that I could find it again; and completed my preparations for departure with all speed.

“I had been at sea ten days, when I was taken ill. Whether it was the effect of excitement or exposure I know not; but I fell into a raging fever, which left me almost at the point of death. I was so weak that I had not strength to crawl to the water-cask; and the feeble efforts I made to reach it so exhausted me that at length I fell in a swoon to the bottom of the boat. In this condition I was discovered by a passing ship, the crew of which took me on board; but, as a smart breeze happened to be blowing at the time, they

would not wait to hoist in my boat; and she was set adrift with enough gold on board her to have purchased a principality.

“Regrets were useless, and the loss, heavy as it was, troubled me little; I knew where to find sufficient to satisfy my utmost needs. At length I reached home, and, by the merest accident, bethought myself one day of my pebbles. I suspected they were valuable, or they would not have been found where they were. Judge of my surprise when I learned that the four I had left (for I lost the rest somewhere) were worth a sufficient sum to enable me to do exactly what I wished; viz., buy a ship of my own. I did so; and was on my way in her to my treasure-island, when the gale sprung up which has reduced me to my present condition.

“And now, señor, I am about to put *you* in possession of such information as will enable you to find my island. It is in latitude about — S., and in longitude about — W., as nearly as I had the means of ascertaining; and is uninhabited, and, I should say, unknown; for during my entire stay there, I never observed one solitary sign of man’s foot having ever pressed the soil. You will readily recognise the island from the fact that it has a remarkable isolated group of seven cocoa-nut trees growing closely together on the extreme northernmost point of the island. The central tree of this group, and one of the others, bears a mark (made by the removal of a piece of bark) as large as a man’s two hands. When you have identified these trees, walk away from them, keeping them *in one*, until you open, clear of the trees on the southern end of the island, a portion of the reef which you will observe just rising above the water’s edge.

When you have done this, you will be standing, as nearly as possible, immediately above the hole in the deck of the wreck, through which I burrowed to her golden cargo.”

The Spaniard (for such I found him to be) then went on to describe the manner in which I should find the passage through the reef into the lagoon, giving me as much information as he could from memory of the various dangers to be avoided. He had carefully prepared a chart of the channel before leaving the island; but this was on board the vessel he had just lost.

I could see that the excitement produced by so much talking was fearfully reducing his strength, and I more than once endeavoured to persuade him to postpone the completion of his narrative, but he was sensible that he had but a short time to live, and so anxious was he to give me all the information necessary to enable me to discover this strangely buried treasure, that my endeavour to stop him did more harm even than the talking, so I was compelled perforce to suffer him to proceed. And though I felt it my duty to urge him not to excite himself, I must confess that I was deeply interested to learn how I might become possessed of the wealth to which he had referred in such glowing terms; for since it was manifest that he could not live to enjoy it himself, and as he had declared he had no relative in the world, I thought I might as well become his heir.

He continued to talk for some time longer, until he had explained to me everything he could think of which would facilitate my efforts to reach the buried treasure; and then, with a sigh of mingled exhaustion and relief, he closed his

eyes, and seemed to sink into a half sleep, from which he roused himself at frequent intervals, to crave the refreshment of a draught of lemonade.

At length the sound of carriage wheels was heard; and almost immediately afterwards Bob returned, accompanied by the Catholic priest. The sick man opened his eyes, and feebly welcomed the good old man who had so readily answered his appeal for spiritual consolation. I then retired, leaving them alone to engage in the most solemn rite appertaining to their religion.

Rather more than an hour elapsed before I was recalled to the sick-room. When I stood once more at the bedside of the dying Spaniard, I saw that he had but a few minutes longer to live. He was so weak, the clergyman said, that it was with the utmost difficulty he had succeeded in expressing his wish to see me again before he died.

As I drew near his eye brightened, and a faint smile of welcome lighted up his face. His lips moved, but so faint was the whisper which escaped them, that I was obliged to bow my face close to his ere I could distinguish the words. With a painful effort he gasped, "Señor, promise me that, if you succeed, you will have two hundred masses said for my soul?"

When I assured him that his request should be faithfully complied with, the contracted brow relaxed; the expression of anxiety vanished; and in its place a smile of satisfaction and perfect happiness slowly spread itself over the pinched and pallid features, where, the next moment, it was indelibly fixed by the hand of death.

I have dwelt at such length upon this introductory episode of my story that I must now “turn the hands up and make sail” in earnest, for we have a voyage of many thousands of miles before us; and, like all thorough seamen, having once shipped for the voyage, we are impatience personified until the anchor is atrip, the canvas sheeted home, the watch set, and the lively little barkie dashing merrily away over the heaving billows, her snowy canvas gleaming in the setting sun, and the cliffs of Old England fast fading into purple mist astern.

Volume One—Chapter Three.

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Bob's Proposition.

After we had reverently laid the Spaniard to rest in his alien grave, I gave my friend Bob a full and accurate account of all that had passed, showing him at the same time the copious notes I had, at the earliest opportunity, jotted down to assist and refresh my memory in case I should ever find myself in a position to seek the hidden treasure.

But it is now necessary that I should introduce the *dramatis persona* who have already cast their shadows on the curtain; and this I will do with all possible brevity.

"*Place aux dames.*" Ada Collingwood, my darling and only sister, was at this time approaching her seventeenth year, and was a dainty specimen of lovely girlhood just budding into still lovelier womanhood. Her figure was petite, promising in due time to develop into the most faultless perfection of shape: and her laughing blue eyes and rich profusion of silky golden hair set off to perfection a face which, perhaps, no one would have dreamed of calling *beautiful*, any more than they would have dreamed of denying that it was charmingly piquant, and irresistibly *pretty*. Her temper was equable; she was gifted with a rich flow of animal spirits, and a keen perception of the ludicrous, which would have upset the gravity of the most confirmed hypochondriac.

Nevertheless, if occasion required it, her merry ringing laugh could be hushed, her joyous elasticity of movement

could be subdued, and no one better than she could assume the *rôle* of the sick-nurse, or the tender and sympathising confidante of distress. And lastly, she adored, with a blind unreasoning idolatry for which there was no excuse, your humble servant, her unworthy brother.

Of myself, it becomes me not to say very much. I was just turned twenty-one: six feet high: and vanity whispered, in confirmation of my sister's energetic and oft-repeated assertions, a trifle more than moderately good-looking. I was an only son (as my sister was an only daughter), and I had received my education at the Royal Naval School at Greenwich, with the understanding that I was to join my father on its completion, when he would continue and finish what is there so well begun, thus making me "every inch a sailor."

On leaving school I joined my father (who was master and part owner of a fine dashing clipper), in the capacity of midshipman, and went some six or seven voyages with him: on the last of which, or rather a few days after its termination, I was seized with a violent attack of rheumatic fever, from which I had not recovered sufficiently to rejoin the ship by the time that she was once more ready for sea. I was consequently left at home under Ada's care (my dear mother had been dead some years), to recover at leisure, and amuse myself as well as I could, until another voyage should be accomplished, and an opportunity once more offered for me to repossess myself of my quarters in the old familiar berth. That opportunity never arrived, for at the time my story opens, my father had been two years "missing." He sailed from Canton with the first cargo of the

new season's teas, and from the moment that the good ship disappeared seaward she had never been heard of; not the faintest trace of a clue to the mystery of her fate having, so far, been discovered.

Bob Trunnion was a middle-aged man, of medium stature, great personal strength, and no very marked pretensions to beauty; but he was as thorough an old sea-dog as ever looked upon salt water. His visage was burnt to a deep brick-red by years of exposure to all sorts of weather; and his hair and beard, which had once been brown, were now changed to the hue of old oakum by the same process, except where, here and there, a slight sprinkling of grey discovered itself. He had been a sailor almost all his life; having "crept in through the hawse-pipe" when he was only twelve years old; since when, by close application, and perseverance, he had gradually worked his way aft to the quarter-deck. He joined my father's ship as second mate, on the same voyage as I did, and on the following voyage took the chief mate's, berth, in place of a man whom my father was compelled to discharge for confirmed drunkenness.

The last time that my poor father passed down Channel, outward-bound, Bob had the misfortune (as we thought it then), to fall off the poop and break his arm. It was what the surgeons call a compound fracture, and certainly looked to be a very ugly one; so, as the ship happened at the time to be off Saint Alban's Head, my father ran into Weymouth roads, and sent Bob ashore to our house to be cured, and to bear me company; shipping in his stead the second mate,