FREDERICK MARRYAT

# MASTERMAN READY; OR, THE WRECK OF THE "PACIFIC"

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EAN 8596547326342

DigiCat, 2022
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# "Masterman Ready"

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## Chapter One.

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It was in the month of October, 18—, that the *Pacific*, a large ship, was running before a heavy gale of wind in the middle of the vast Atlantic Ocean. She had but little sail, for the wind was so strong, that the canvas would have been split into pieces by the furious blasts before which she was driven through the waves, which were very high, and following her almost as fast as she darted through their boiling waters; sometimes heaving up her stern and sinking her bows down so deep into the hollow of the sea, that it appeared as if she would have dived down underneath the waves; but she was a fine vessel, and the captain was a good seaman, who did what he considered best for the safety of his vessel, and then put his trust in that Providence who is ever watchful over us.

The captain stood before the wheel, watching the men who were steering the ship; for when you are running before a heavy gale, it requires great attention to the helm: and as he looked around him and up at the heavens, he sang in a low voice the words of a sea song:

“One wide water all around us,
All above us one black sky.”

And so it was with them;—they were in the middle of the Atlantic, not another vessel to be seen, and the heavens were covered with black clouds, which were borne along furiously by the gale; the sea ran mountains high, and broke into large white foaming crests, while the fierce wind howled through the rigging of the vessel.

Besides the captain of the ship and the two men at the wheel, there were two other personages on deck: one was a young lad about twelve years old, and the other a weather-beaten old seaman, whose grisly locks were streaming in the wind, as he paced aft and looked over the taffrail of the vessel.

The young lad, observing a heavy sea coming up to the stern of the vessel, caught hold of the old man’s arm, crying out—“Won’t that great wave come into us, Ready?”

“No, Master William, it will not: don’t you see how the ship lifts her quarters to it?—and now it has passed underneath us. But it might happen, and then what would become of you, if I did not hold on, and hold you on also? You would be washed overboard.”

“I don’t like the sea much, Ready; I wish we were safe on shore again,” replied the lad. “Don’t the waves look as if they wished to beat the ship all to pieces?”

“Yes, they do; and they roar as if angry because they cannot bury the vessel beneath them: but I am used to them, and with a good ship like this, and a good captain and crew, I don’t care for them.”

“But sometimes ships do sink, and then everybody is drowned.”

“Yes; and very often the very ships sink which those on board think are most safe. We can only do our best, and after that we must submit to the will of Heaven.”

“What little birds are those flying about so close to the water?”

“Those are Mother Carey’s chickens. You seldom see them except in a storm, or when a storm is coming on.”

The birds which William referred to were the stormy petrels.

“Were you ever shipwrecked on a desolate island like Robinson Crusoe?”

“Yes, Master William, I have been shipwrecked; but I never heard of Robinson Crusoe. So many have been wrecked and undergone great hardships, and so many more have never lived to tell what they have suffered, that it’s not very likely that I should have known that one man you speak of, out of so many.”

“Oh! but it’s all in a book which I have read. I could tell you all about it—and so I will when the ship is quiet again; but now I wish you would help me down below, for I promised mamma not to stay up long.”

“Then always keep your promise like a good lad,” replied the old man; “now give me your hand, and I’ll answer for it that we will fetch the hatchway without a tumble; and when the weather is fine again, I’ll tell you how I was wrecked, and you shall tell me all about Robinson Crusoe.”

Having seen William safe to the cabin door, the old seaman returned to the deck, for it was his watch.

Masterman Ready, for such was his name, had been more than fifty years at sea, having been bound apprentice

to a collier which sailed from South Shields, when he was only ten years old. His face was browned from long exposure, and there were deep furrows on his cheeks, but he was still a hale and active man. He had served many years on board of a man-of-war, and had been in every climate: he had many strange stories to tell, and he might be believed even when his stories were strange, for he would not tell an untruth. He could navigate a vessel, and, of course, he could read and write. The name of Ready was very well suited to him, for he was seldom at a loss; and in cases of difficulty and danger, the captain would not hesitate to ask his opinion, and frequently take his advice. He was second mate of the vessel.

The *Pacific* was, as we have observed, a very fine ship, and well able to contend with the most violent storm. She was of more than four hundred tons burthen, and was then making a passage out to New South Wales, with a valuable cargo of English hardware, cutlery, and other manufactures. The captain was a good navigator and seaman, and moreover a good man, of a cheerful, happy disposition, always making the best of everything, and when accidents did happen, always more inclined to laugh than to look grave. His name was Osborn. The first mate, whose name was Mackintosh, was a Scotsman, rough and ill-tempered, but paying strict attention to his duty—a man that Captain Osborn could trust, but whom he did not like.

Ready we have already spoken of, and it will not be necessary to say anything about the seamen on board, except that there were thirteen of them, hardly a sufficient number to man so large a vessel; but just as they were

about to sail, five of the seamen, who did not like the treatment they had received from Mackintosh, the first mate, had left the ship, and Captain Osborn did not choose to wait until he could obtain others in their stead. This proved unfortunate, as the events which we shall hereafter relate will show.

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# Chapter Two.

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Master William, whom we have introduced to the reader, was the eldest boy of a family who were passengers on board, consisting of the father, mother, and four children: his father was a Mr Seagrave, a very well-informed, clever man, who having for many years held an office under government at Sydney, the capital of New South Wales, was now returning from a leave of absence of three years. He had purchased from the government several thousand acres of land; it had since risen very much in value, and the sheep and cattle which he had put on it were proving a source of great profit. His property had been well managed by the person who had charge of it during his absence in England, and he was now taking out with him a variety of articles of every description for its improvement, and for his own use, such as furniture for his house, implements of agriculture, seeds, plants, cattle, and many other things too numerous to mention.

Mrs Seagrave was an amiable woman, but not in very strong health. The family consisted of William, who was the eldest, a clever, steady boy, but, at the same time, full of

mirth and humour; Thomas, who was six years old, a very thoughtless but good-tempered boy, full of mischief, and always in a scrape; Caroline, a little girl of seven years; and Albert, a fine strong little fellow, who was not one year old: he was under the charge of a black girl, who had come from the Cape of Good Hope to Sydney, and had followed Mrs Seagrave to England. We have now mentioned all the people on board of the Pacific: perhaps we ought not to forget two shepherd's dogs, belonging to Mr Seagrave, and a little terrier, which was a great favourite of Captain Osborn, to whom she belonged.

It was not until the fourth day from its commencement that the gale abated, and then it gradually subsided until it was nearly a calm. The men who had been watching night after night during the gale now brought all their clothes which had been drenched by the rain and spray, and hung them up in the rigging to dry: the sails, also, which had been furled, and had been saturated by the wet, were now loosened and spread out that they might not be mildewed. The wind blew mild and soft, the sea had gone down, and the ship was running through the water at the speed of about four miles an hour. Mrs Seagrave, wrapped up in a cloak, was seated upon one of the arm-chests near the stern of the ship, her husband and children were all with her enjoying the fine weather, when Captain Osborn, who had been taking an observation of the sun with his sextant, came up to them.

"Well, Master Tommy, you are very glad that the gale is over?"

“I didn’t care,” replied Tommy, “only I spilt all my soup. But Juno tumbled off her chair, and rolled away with the baby, till papa picked them both up.”

“It was a mercy that poor Albert was not killed,” observed Mrs Seagrave.

“And so he might have been, if Juno had not thought only of him and nothing at all about herself,” replied Mr Seagrave.

“That’s very true, sir,” replied Captain Osborn. “She saved the child, and, I fear, hurt herself.”

“I thump my head very hard,” said Juno, smiling.

“Yes, and it’s lucky that you have a good thick woolly coat over it,” replied Captain Osborn, laughing.

“It is 12 o’clock by the sun, sir,” said Mackintosh, the first mate, to the captain.

“Then bring me up the latitude, Mr Mackintosh, while I work out the longitude from the sights which I took this morning. In five minutes, Mr Seagrave, I shall be ready to prick off over our place on the chart.”

“Here are the dogs come up on deck,” said William; “I dare say they are as glad of the fine weather as we are. Come here, Romulus! Here, Remus!—Remus!”

“Well, sir,” said Ready, who was standing by them with his quadrant in his hand, “I should like to ask you a question. Those dogs of yours have two very odd names which I never heard before. Who were Romulus and Remus?”

“Romulus and Remus,” replied Mr Seagrave, “were the names of two shepherds, brothers, who in ancient days founded the city of Rome, which eventually became the

largest and most celebrated empire in the world. They were the first kings of Rome, and reigned together. History says that Remus affronted Romulus by leaping over a wall he had raised, and Romulus, in his anger, took away his life; but the history of early days is not to be depended upon."

"No, nor the brothers either, it appears," replied Ready; "however, it is the old story—two of a trade can never agree. One sometimes hears of Rome now—is that the same place?"

"Yes," replied William, "it is the remains of the old city."

"Well, one lives and learns," said Ready. "I have learnt something to-day, which everyone will to the last day of his life, if he will only ask questions. I'm an old man, and perhaps don't know much, except in the seafaring way; but I should have known much less if I did not ask for information, and was not ashamed to acknowledge my ignorance; that's the way to learn, Master William."

"Very good advice, Ready,—and, William, I hope you will profit by it," said Mr Seagrave; "never be ashamed to ask the meaning of what you do not understand."

"I always do, papa. Do I not ask you questions, Ready?"

"Yes, you do, and very clever questions for a boy of your age; and I only wish that I could answer them better than I can sometimes."

"I should like to go down now, my dear," said Mrs Seagrave; "perhaps Ready will see the baby down safe."

"That I will, ma'am," said Ready, putting his quadrant on the capstan: "now, Juno, give me the child, and go down first;—backwards, you stupid girl! how often do I tell you that? Some day or another you will come down with a run."

“And break my head,” said Juno.

“Yes, or break your arm; and then who is to hold the child?”

As soon as they were all down in the cabin, the captain and Mr Seagrave marked the position of the vessel on the chart, and found that they were one hundred and thirty miles from the Cape of Good Hope.

“If the wind holds, we shall be in to-morrow,” said Mr Seagrave to his wife. “Juno, perhaps you may see your father and mother.”

Poor Juno shook her head, and a tear or two stole down her dark cheek. With a mournful face she told them, that her father and mother belonged to a Dutch boer, who had gone with them many miles into the interior: she had been parted from them when quite a little child, and had been left at Cape Town.

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# Chapter Three.

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The next morning the *Pacific* arrived at the Cape and anchored in Table Bay.

“Why do they call this Table Bay, Ready?” said William.

“I suppose it’s because they call that great mountain the Table Mountain, Master William; you see how flat the mountain is on the top.”

“Yes, it is quite as flat as a table.”

“Yes, and sometimes you will see the white clouds rolling down over the top of it in a very curious manner, and that

the sailors call spreading the tablecloth: it is a sign of bad weather."

"Then I hope they will not spread the tablecloth while we are here, Ready," said William, "for I shall certainly have no appetite. We have had bad weather enough already, and mamma suffers so much from it. What a pretty place it is!"

"We shall remain here two days, sir," said Captain Osborn to Mr Seagrave, "if you and Mrs Seagrave would like to go on shore."

"I will go down and ask Mrs Seagrave," said her husband, who went down the ladder, followed by William.

Upon the question being put to Mrs Seagrave, she replied that she was quite satisfied with the ship having no motion, and did not feel herself equal to going on shore; it was therefore decided that she should remain on board with the two younger children, and that, on the following day, Mr Seagrave should take William and Tommy to see Cape Town, and return on board before night.

The next morning, Captain Osborn lowered down one of the large boats, and Mr Seagrave, accompanied by Captain Osborn, went on shore with William and Tommy. Tommy had promised his mamma to be very good; but that he always did, and almost always forgot his promise directly he was out of sight. As soon as they landed, they went up to a gentleman's house, with whom Captain Osborn was acquainted. They stayed for a few minutes to drink a glass of lemonade, for it was very warm; and then it was proposed that they should go to the Company's Gardens and see the wild beasts which were confined there, at which William was much delighted, and Tommy clapped his hands with joy.

“What are the Company’s Gardens, papa?” inquired William.

“They were made by the Dutch East India Company, at the time that the Cape of Good Hope was in their possession. They are, properly speaking, Botanical Gardens; but, at the same time, the wild animals are kept there. Formerly there were a great many, but they have not been paid attention to lately, for we have plenty of these animals in England now.”

“What shall we see?” said Tommy.

“You will see lions, Tommy, a great many in a large den together,” said Captain Osborn.

“Oh! I want to see a lion.”

“You must not go too near them, recollect.”

“No, I won’t,” said Tommy.

As soon as they entered the gates, Tommy escaped from Captain Osborn, and ran away in his hurry to see the lions; but Captain Osborn caught him again, and held him fast by the hand.

“Here is a pair of very strange birds,” said the gentleman who accompanied them; “they are called Secretaries, on account of the feathers which hang behind their heads, as the feather of a pen does when a clerk puts it behind his ear: but they are very useful, for they are snake-killers; indeed, they would, if they could, live altogether upon snakes, which they are very great enemies to, never letting one escape. They strike them with their feet, and with such force as to kill them immediately.”

“Are there many snakes in this country?” inquired William.

“Yes, and very venomous snakes,” replied Mr Seagrave; “so that these birds are very useful in destroying them. You observe, William, that the Almighty, in his wisdom, has so arranged it that no animal (especially of a noxious kind) shall be multiplied to excess, but kept under by being preyed upon by some other; indeed, wherever in any country an animal exists in any quantity, there is generally found another animal which destroys it. The Secretary inhabits this country where snakes exist in numbers, that it may destroy them: in England the bird would be of little value.”

“But some animals are too large or too fierce to be destroyed by others, papa; for instance, the elephant and the lion.”

“Very true; but these larger animals do not breed so fast, and therefore their numbers do not increase so rapidly. For instance, a pair of elephants will not have more than one young one in the space of two years or more; while the rabbits, which are preyed upon and the food of so many other beasts as well as birds, would increase enormously, if they were not destroyed. Examine through the whole of creation, and you will find that there is an unerring hand, which invariably preserves the balance exact; and that there are no more mouths than for which food is provided, although accidental circumstances may for a time occasion a slight alteration.”

They continued their walk until they came to the den of the lions. It was a large place, in closed with a strong and high wall of stone, with only one window to it for the visitors to look at them, as it was open above. This window was

wide, and with strong iron bars running from the top to the bottom; but the width between the bars was such that a lion could put his paw out with ease; and they were therefore cautioned not to go too near. It was a fine sight to see eight or ten of these noble-looking animals lying down in various attitudes, quite indifferent apparently to the people outside —basking in the sun, and slowly moving their tufted tails to and fro. William examined them at a respectful distance from the bars; and so did Tommy, who had his mouth open with astonishment, in which there was at first not a little fear mixed, but he soon got bolder. The gentleman who had accompanied them, and who had been long at the Cape, was relating to Mr Seagrave and Captain Osborn some very curious anecdotes about the lion. William and they were so interested, that they did not perceive that Tommy had slipped back to the grated window of the den. Tommy looked at the lions, and then he wanted to make them move about: there was one fine full-grown young lion, about three years old, who was lying down nearest to the window; and Tommy took up a stone and threw it at him: the lion appeared not to notice it, for he did not move, although he fixed his eyes upon Tommy; so Tommy became more brave, and threw another, and then another, approaching each time nearer to the bars of the window.

All of a sudden the lion gave a tremendous roar, and sprang at Tommy, bounding against the iron bars of the cage with such force that, had they not been very strong, it must have broken them. As it was, they shook and rattled so that pieces of mortar fell from the stones. Tommy shrieked; and, fortunately for himself, fell back and tumbled head

over heels, or the lion’s paws would have reached him. Captain Osborn and Mr Seagrave ran up to Tommy, and picked him up: he roared with fright as soon as he could fetch his breath, while the lion stood at the bars, lashing his tail, snarling, and showing his enormous fangs.

“Take me away—take me on board the ship!” cried Tommy, who was terribly frightened.

“What did you do, Tommy?” said Captain Osborn.

“I won’t throw any more stones, Mr Lion; I won’t indeed!” cried Tommy, looking terrified towards the animal.

Mr Seagrave scolded Tommy well for his foolish conduct, and by degrees he became more composed; but he did not recover himself until they had walked some distance away from the lion’s den.

They then looked at the other animals which were to be seen, Tommy keeping a most respectful distance from every one of them. He wouldn’t even go near to a Cape sheep with a broad tail.

When they had seen everything, they went back to the gentleman’s house to dinner; and, after dinner, they returned on board.

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# Chapter Four.

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The following morning the fresh water and provisions were received on board, and once more the *Pacific* stretched her broad canvas to the winds, and there was every prospect of a rapid voyage, as for many days she continued her passage with a fair wind and flowing sheet. But this did

not continue: it fell calm, and remained so for nearly three days, during which not a breath of wind was to be seen on the wide expanse of water; all nature appeared as if in repose, except that now and then an albatross would drop down at some distance from the stern of the vessel, and, as he swam lazily along with his wings half-furled, pick up the fragments of food which had been thrown over the side.

“What great bird is that, Ready?” inquired William.

“It is an albatross, the largest sea-bird we have. Their wings are very long. I have seen them shot, and they have measured eleven feet from the tip of one wing to the tip of the other when the wings have been spread out.”

“It is the first one that I have seen,” said William.

“Because you seldom meet them north of the Cape, sir: people do say that they go to sleep on the wing, balancing themselves high up in the air.”

“Papa,” said William, turning to Mr Seagrave, who stood by, “why is it that one bird can swim and another cannot? You recollect when Tommy drove the hens into the large pond, they flounced about, and their feathers became wet, and would support them no longer, and then they were drowned. Now, how does a sea-bird contrive to remain so long on the water?”

“Because a sea-bird, William, is provided with a sort of oil on purpose to anoint the outside of its feathers, and this oil prevents the water from penetrating them. Have you not observed the ducks on shore dressing their feathers with their bills? They were then using this oil to make their feathers waterproof.”

“How odd!”

“Don’t say how odd, William; that is not an expression to use when we talk of the wonderful provisions made by the Almighty hand, who neglects not the meanest of his creatures—say rather, how wonderful!”

“That’s very true, sir,” observed Ready; “but still you must not be too hard upon Master William, for I have heard many a grownup man make use of the same expression.”

On the third day of the calm, the barometer fell so low as to induce Captain Osborn to believe that they should have a severe gale, and every preparation was made to meet it, should it come on. Nor was he mistaken: towards midnight the clouds gathered up fast, and as they gathered up in thick piles, heaped one over the other, the lightning darted through them in every direction; and as the clouds rose up, so did the wind, but at first only in heavy gusts, and then lulling again to a calm.

“Ready,” said Captain Osborn, “how do you think we shall have the wind?”

“Why, Captain Osborn, to tell you the truth, I don’t think it will be steady to one point long. It may at first blow hard from the north, but it’s my idea it will shift soon to some other quarter, and blow still harder.”

“What think you, Mackintosh?”

“We’ll have plenty of it, and a long steady gale, that’s my notion; and the sooner we ship the dead lights the better.”

Mr Seagrave, with William, happened to be standing by at the time of this conversation, and at the term *dead* lights Willy’s face expressed some anxiety. Ready perceived it, and said—

“That’s a foolish name they give to the shutters which go over the cabin windows to prevent the water from breaking into the cabin when a vessel sails before the wind; you know we had them on the last time that we had a gale.”

“But, Ready,” said Captain Osborn, “why do you think that we shall have a shift of wind?”

“Well, I don’t know; perhaps I was wrong,” replied the old man, “and Mr Mackintosh is right: the wind does seem to come steady from the north-east, that’s certain;” and Ready walked away to the binnacle, and looked at the compass. Mr Seagrave and William then went below, and Mr Mackintosh went forward to give his orders. As soon as they were all gone, Ready went up again to Captain Osborn and said:

“Captain Osborn, it’s not for me to contradict Mr Mackintosh, but that’s of little consequence in a time like this: I should have held to my opinion, had it not been that the gentleman passenger and his son were standing by, but now, as the coast is clear, I tell you that we shall have something worse than a gale of wind. I have been in these latitudes before, and I am an old seaman, as you know. There’s something in the air, and there has been something during the last three days of calm, which reminds me too well of what I have seen here before; and I am sure that we shall have little better than a hurricane, as far as wind goes —and worse in one point, that it will last much longer than hurricanes generally do. I have been watching, and even the birds tell me so, and they are told by their nature, which is never mistaken. That calm has been nothing more than a repose of the winds previous to their being roused up to do their worst; and that is my real opinion?”

“Well, and I’m inclined to agree with you, Ready; so we must send topgallant yards down on deck, and all the small sails and lumber out of the tops. Get the trysail aft and bent, and lower down the gaff. I will go forward.”

Their preparations were hardly complete before the wind had settled to a fierce gale from the north-east. The sea rose rapidly; topsail after topsail was furled; and by dusk the *Pacific* was flying through the water with the wind on her quarter, under reefed foresail and storm staysail. It was with difficulty that three men at the wheel could keep the helm, such were the blows which the vessel received from the heavy seas on the quarter. Not one seaman in the ship took advantage of his watch below to go to sleep that night, careless as they generally are; the storm was too dreadful. About three o’clock in the morning the wind suddenly subsided; it was but for a minute or two, and then it again burst on the vessel from another quarter of the compass, as Ready had foretold, splitting the foresail into fragments, which lashed and flogged the wind till they were torn away by it, and carried far to leeward. The heavens above were of a pitchy darkness, and the only light was from the creaming foam of the sea on every side. The shift of wind, which had been to the west-north-west, compelled them to alter the course of the vessel, for they had no chance but to scud, as they now did, under bare poles; but in consequence of the sea having taken its run from the former wind, which had been north-east, it was, as sailors call it, cross, and every minute the waves poured over the ship, sweeping all before their weight of waters. One poor man was washed overboard, and any attempt made to save him would have

been unavailing. Captain Osborn was standing by the weather gunnel, holding on by one of the belaying-pins, when he said to Mackintosh:

“How long will this last, think you?”

“Longer than the ship will,” replied the mate gravely.

“I should hope not,” replied the captain; “still it cannot look worse. What do you think, Ready?”

“Far more fear from above than from below just now,” replied Ready, pointing to the yard-arms of the ship, to each of which were little balls of electric matter attached, flaring out to a point. “Look at those two clouds, sir, rushing at each other; if I—”

Ready had not time to finish what he would have said, before a blaze of light, so dazzling that it left them all in utter darkness for some seconds afterwards, burst upon their vision, accompanied with a peal of thunder, at which the whole vessel trembled fore and aft. A crash—a rushing forward—and a shriek were heard, and when they had recovered their eyesight, the foremast had been rent by the lightning as if it had been a lath, and the ship was in flames: the men at the wheel, blinded by the lightning, as well as appalled, could not steer; the ship broached to—away went the mainmast over the side—and all was wreck, confusion, and dismay.

Fortunately the heavy seas which poured over the forecastle soon extinguished the flames, or they all must have perished; but the ship lay now helpless, and at the mercy of the waves beating violently against the wrecks of the masts which floated to leeward, but were still held fast to the vessel by their rigging. As soon as they could recover

from the shock, Ready and the first mate hastened to the wheel to try to get the ship before the wind; but this they could not do, as, the foremast and mainmast being gone, the mizenmast prevented her paying off and answering to the helm. Ready, having persuaded two of the men to take the helm, made a sign to Mackintosh (for now the wind was so loud that they could not hear each other speak), and, going aft, they obtained axes, and cut away the mizen-rigging; the mizen-topmast and head of the mizenmast went over the side, and then the stump of the foremast was sufficient to get the ship before the wind again. Still there was much delay and confusion, before they could clear away the wreck of the masts; and, as soon as they could make inquiry, they found that four of the men had been killed by the lightning and the fall of the foremast, and there were now but eight remaining, besides Captain Osborn and his two mates.

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# Chapter Five.

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Sailors are never discouraged by danger as long as they have any chance of relieving themselves by their own exertions. The loss of their shipmates, so instantaneously summoned away,—the wrecked state of the vessel,—the wild surges burying them beneath their angry waters,—the howling of the wind, the dazzling of the lightning, and the pealing of the thunder, did not prevent them from doing what their necessity demanded. Mackintosh, the first mate, rallied the men, and contrived to fix a block and strap to the

still smoking stump of the foremast; a rope was rove through the block, and the main-topgallant sail hoisted, so that the vessel might run faster before the gale, and answer her helm better than she did.

The ship was again before the wind, and comparatively safe, notwithstanding the heavy blows she now received from the pursuing waves. Night again came on, but there was no repose, and the men were worn out with exposure and fatigue.

The third day of the gale dawned, but the appearances were as alarming as ever: the continual breaking of the seas over the stern had washed away the binnacles, and it was impossible now to be certain of the course the ship had been steered, or the distance which had been run; the leaky state of the vessel proved how much she had already suffered from the violent shocks which she had received, and the certainty was apparent, that if the weather did not abate, she could not possibly withstand the force of the waves much longer.

The countenance of Captain Osborn showed great anxiety: he had a heavy responsibility on his shoulders—he might lose a valuable ship, and still more valuable cargo, even if they did not all lose their lives; for they were now approaching where the sea was studded with low coral islands, upon which they might be thrown by the waves and wind, without having the slightest power to prevent it in their present disabled condition.

Ready was standing by him when Captain Osborn said—

“I don’t much like this, Ready; we are now running on danger and have no help for it.”

“That’s true enough,” replied Ready: “we have no help for it; it is God’s will, sir, and His will be done.”

“Amen!” replied Captain Osborn solemnly; and then he continued, after a pause, “There were many captains who envied me when I obtained command of this fine ship,—would they change with me now?”

“I should rather think not, Captain Osborn, but you never know what the day may bring forth. You sailed with this vessel, full of hope—you now, not without reason, feel something approaching to despair; but who knows? it may please the Almighty to rebuke those angry winds and waves, and to-morrow we may again hope for the best; at all events you have done your duty—no man can do more.”

“You are right,” replied Captain Osborn; “but hold hard, Ready, that sea’s aboard of us.”

Ready had just time to cling with both hands to the belaying-pins when the sea poured over the vessel, with a volume of water which for some time swept them off their legs: they clung on firmly, and at last recovered their feet.

“She started a timber or two with that blow, I rather think,” said Ready.

“I’m afraid so; the best vessel ever built could not stand such shocks long,” replied Captain Osborn; “and at present, with our weak crew, I do not see that we can get more sail upon her.”

All that night the ship flew in darkness before the gale. At daybreak the wind abated, and the sea went down: the ship was, however, still kept before the wind, for she had suffered too much to venture to put her broadside to the sea. Preparations were now made for getting up jury-masts;

and the worn-out seamen were busily employed, under the direction of Captain Osborn and his two mates, when Mr Seagrave and William came upon deck.

William stared about him: he perceived, to his astonishment, that the tall masts, with all their rigging and sails, had disappeared, and that the whole deck was in a state of confusion and disorder.

“See, my child,” said Mr Seagrave, “the wreck and devastation which are here. See how the pride of man is humbled before the elements of the great Jehovah.”

“Ay, Master Willy,” said old Ready, “look around you, as you well may. Do you remember the verses in the Bible?—if not, I remember them well, for I have often read them, and have often felt the truth of them: ‘They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.’”

“But, father,” said Willy, after a pause, “how shall we ever get to Sydney without masts or sails?”

“Why, William,” replied Ready, “we must do what we can: we sailors are never much at a loss, and I dare say before night you will find us under some sort of sail again. We have lost our great masts, so we must put up jury-masts, as we call them; that is, little ones, and little sails upon them; and, if it pleases God, we shall see Sydney yet. How is Madam, sir?” continued Ready to Mr Seagrave. “Is she better?”

“I fear she is very weak and ill,” replied Mr Seagrave; “nothing but fine weather will do her any good. Do you think that it will be fine now?”

“Why, sir, to tell you the truth, I fear we shall have more of it yet: I have not given my thoughts to the captain, as I

might be mistaken; but still I think so—I've not been fifty years at sea without learning something. I don't like the gathering of that bank there, Mr Seagrave, and I shouldn't wonder if it were to blow again from the very same quarter, and that before dark."

"God's will be done," replied Mr Seagrave, "but I am very fearful about my poor wife, who is worn to a shadow."

"I shouldn't think so much about that, sir, as I really never knew of people dying that way, although they suffer much. William, do you know that we have lost some of our men since you were down below?"

"No—I heard the steward say something outside about the foremast."

"We have lost five of our smartest and best men—Wilson was washed overboard, Fennings and Masters struck dead with the lightning, and Jones and Emery crushed by the fall of the foremast. You are young, Master Willy, but you cannot think too early of your Maker, or call to mind what they say in the burial service,—'In the midst of life we are in death.'"

"Thank you, Ready, for the lesson you have given my son," said Mr Seagrave; "and, William, treasure it up in your memory."

"Yes, William, they are the words of an old man who has seen many and many a one who was full of youth and spirits called away before him, and who is grateful to God that he has been pleased to preserve his life, and allow him to amend his ways."

"I have been thinking," said Mr Seagrave, after a silence of a minute or two, "that a sailor has no right to marry."

“I’ve always thought so, sir,” replied Ready; “and I dare say many a poor deserted sailor’s wife, when she has listened to the wind and rain in her lonely bed, has thought the same.”

“With my permission,” continued Mr Seagrave, “my boys shall never go to sea if there is any other profession to be found for them.”

“Well, Mr Seagrave, they do say that it’s no use baulking a lad if he wishes to go to sea, and that if he is determined, he must go: now I think otherwise—I think a parent has a right to say no, if he pleases, upon that point; for you see, sir, a lad, at the early age at which he goes to sea, does not know his own mind. Every high-spirited boy wishes to go to sea—it’s quite natural; but if the most of them were to speak the truth, it is not that they so much want to go to sea, as that they want to go from school or from home, where they are under the control of their masters or their parents.”

“Very true, Ready; they wish to be, as they consider they will be, independent.”

“And a pretty mistake they make of it, sir. Why, there is not a greater slave in the world than a boy who goes to sea, for the first few years after his shipping: for once they are corrected on shore, they are punished ten times at sea, and they never again meet with the love and affection they have left behind them. It is a hard life, and there have been but few who have not bitterly repented it, and who would not have returned, like the prodigal son, and cast themselves at their fathers’ feet, only that they have been ashamed.”