THE NEGRO of the Narcissus

by
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PART V.

The little cabin was as hot as an oven. Outside the men called by Charley who informed them, in tones of delight, that there was a row going on in Jimmy's place, pushed before the closed door, too startled to open it. All hands were there. The watch below had jumped out on deck in their shirts, as after a collision.

Men running up asked, "What is it?" Others said, "Listen!"

The muffled screaming went on:

"On your knees. On your knees."

"Shut up."

"I see you dying this minnyt—before my eyes—as good as dead now."

"Help!" shouted Jimmy, piercingly.

"No, in this valley—look upward," howled the other.

"Go away! Murder! Help!" clamored Jimmy.

"What's the matter now?" said a seldom-heard voice. "Fall back, men!"

"Fall back, there!" repeated Mr. Creighton, sternly, pushing through.

"Here's the old man," whispered some. "The cook's in there, sir," exclaimed several, backing away.

The door clattered open; a broad stream of light leaped out on wondering faces. A warm whiff of vitiated air passed. The two mates towered head and shoulders above the spare, gray-headed man who stood revealed before them, in shabby clothes, stiff and angular, like a small carved figure, and with a thin, composed face. The cook got up from his knees. Jimmy sat high in the bunk, clasping his drawn-up legs. The tassel of the blue night-cap almost imperceptibly trembled over his knees. They gazed astonished at his long, curved back, while the white corner of one eye gleamed blindly at them.

"What are you doing here?" asked Mr. Baker, sharply.

"My duty," said the cook, with ardor.

"Your—what?" began the mate.

Capt. Allistoun touched his arm lightly. "I know his caper," he said, in a low voice. "Come out of that, Podmore," he ordered, aloud.

The cook wrung his hands, shook his fists above his head, and his arms dropped as if too heavy. "I make you responsible," he cried, desperately, turning half around. "That man is dying. I make you——"

"You there yet?" called the master, in a threatening tone.

"No, sir," he exclaimed, in startled voice. The boatswain led him away by the arm; some one laughed. Jimmy lifted his head for a stealthy glance, and in one unexpected leap sprang out of his bunk. Belfast ran to his support. He did not appear to be aware of any one near him; he stood silent for a moment battling single-handed with a legion of nameless terrors. Heavy breathings stirred the darkness. The sea gurgled through the scuppers as the ship heeled over to a short puff of wind.

"Keep him away from me," said James Wait at last, in his fine baritone voice, and leaning with all his weight on Belfast's neck. "I've been better this last week. I am well—I was going back to duty—tomorrow—now if you like—captain." Belfast hitched his shoulders to keep him upright.

"No," said the master, looking at him fixedly.

"Why not?" cried a voice from the shadows. "The man's all right, sir."

"I am all right," said Wait with eagerness. "Been sick—better—turn to now. Keep away from me," giving Belfast a petulant push, and reeling, fetched against the door post. His cheek bones glistened as though they had been varnished. He snatched off his nightcap, wiped his perspiring face with it, flung it on the deck. "I am coming out," he said, without stirring.

"No. You don't," said the master curtly. Bare feet shuffled, disapproving voices murmured all round; he went on as if he had not heard: "You have been shamming sick. Why anybody can see that. There's nothing the matter with you, but you choose to lie up to please yourself—and now you shall lie up to please me. Mr. Baker, my orders are that this man is not to be allowed on deck to the end of the passage."

"We've got to say something habout that," screeched Donkin from the rear. "Never mind, Jim. We will see you righted," cried several together. An elderly seaman stepped to the front. "D'ye mean to say, sir," he asked ominously, "that a sick chap ain't allowed to get well in this 'ere hooker?"

Behind him Donkin whispered excitedly among a staring crowd where no one spared him a glance, but Capt. Allistoun shook a forefinger at the angry, bronzed face of the speaker. "You—you hold your tongue," he said, warningly.

"Hare we bloomin' macheens?" inquired Donkin, in a piercing tone, and dived under the elbows of the front rank. "Soon show 'im we ain't boys. The man's a man if he is black. We ain't goin' to work this bloomin' ship shorthanded if Snowball's all right. He says he is. Well, then, strike, boys, strike! That's the bloomin' ticket!"

Capt. Allistoun said sharply to the second mate: "Keep quiet, Mr. Creighton," and stood composed in the tumult, listening with profound attention to the mixed growls and screeches, to every exclamation and every curse of the sudden outbreak. The big shape of Mr. Creighton hovered silently about the slight figure of the master.

"We have been hymposed upon all this voyage," said a gruff voice, "but this 'ere fancy takes the cake. That man is a shipmate. Are we bloomin' kids? Giv'us our Jimmy."

This seemed to cause a variation in the disturbance. There was a fresh burst of squabbling uproar. A lot of quarrels were set going at once.

"They have started a row among themselves now," said Mr. Creighton, with disdain; "better get aft, sir. We will soothe them."

"Keep your temper, Creighton," said the master. And the three men began to move slowly toward the cabin door.

The elder seamen, bewildered and angry, growled their determination to go through with something or other; but the younger school of advanced thought exposed their and Jimmy's wrongs with confused shouts, arguing among themselves. Inside the cabin, Belfast, helping Jimmy into his bunk, twitched all over in his desire not to miss all the row, and with difficulty restrained the tears of his facile emotion. James Wait, flat on his back under the blanket, gasped complaints.

"We will back you up, never fear," assured Belfast, busy about his feet.

"I'll come out tomorrow morning—take my chance—" mumbled Wait, "skipper or no skipper." He lifted one arm with great difficulty, passed the hand over his face. "Don't you let that cook——" he breathed out.

"No, no," said Belfast, turning his back on the bunk. "I'll put a head on him if he comes near you."

"I will smash his mug!" exclaimed faintly Wait, enraged and weak. "I don't want to kill a man, but——" He panted fast like a dog after a run in the sunshine.

Some one just outside the door shouted, "He's as fit as any of us!" Belfast put his hand on the door handle.

"Here!" called James Wait, hurriedly, and in such a clear voice that the other spun around with a start. James Wait, stretched out black and deathlike in the dazzling light, turned his head on the pillow. His eyes stared at Belfast, appealingly and impudent.

"I am rather weak from lying-up so long," he said, distinctly. Belfast nodded.

"Getting quite well now," insisted Wait.

"Yes. I noticed you getting better this—last month," said Belfast, looking down. "Hallo! What's this?" he shouted and ran out.

He was flattened directly against the side of the house by two men who lurched against him. A lot of disputes seemed to be going on all around. Donkin hissed: "Go for them—it's dark!" The crowd took a short run aft in a body—then there was a check. Donkin, agile and thin, flitted past with his right arm going like a windmill—and then stood still suddenly with his arm pointing rigidly above his head. The hurtling flight of some small, heavy object was heard; it passed between the heads of the two mates, bounded heavily along the deck, struck the after hatch with a ponderous and deadened blow.

The bulky shape of Mr. Baker grew distinct. "Come to your senses, men!" he cried, advancing to the arrested crowd.

"Come back, Mr. Baker," called the master's quiet voice. He obeyed unwillingly.

There was a minute of silence, then a deafening hubbub arose. Above it Archie was heard energetically: "If ye do oot ageen I wull tell!" There were shouts. "Don't!" "Drop it!" "We ain't that kind!" The black cluster of human forms reeled against the bulwark, back again toward the house. Shadowy figures could be seen tottering, falling, leaping up. Ringbolts rang under stumbling feet. "Drop it!" "Let me!" "No!" "Curse you—hah!" Then sounds as of some one's face being slapped; a piece of iron fell on the deck; a short scuffle, and some one's shadowy body scuttling rapidly across the main hatch before the shadow of a kick.

"Throwing things—good God!" grunted Mr. Baker, in dismay.

"That was meant for me," said the master, quietly. "I felt the wind of that thing; what was it—an iron belayingpin?"

Gradually the tramping noises, the confused sound of voices, died out, and the officers coming on the poop discussed the events. Mr. Baker was bewildered and grunted; Mr. Creighton was calmly furious; but Capt. Allistoun was composed and thoughtful. He listened to Mr. Baker's growling argumentation, to Creighton's interjected and severe remarks, while looking down on the deck he weighed in his hand the iron belaying pin—that a moment ago had just missed his head—as if it had been the only tangible fact of the whole transaction. He was one of those commanders who speak little, seem to hear nothing, look at no one—and know everything; hear every whisper; see every fleeting shadow of their ship's life.

His two big officers towered above his lean, short figure; they talked over his head; they were dismayed, surprised and angry, while between them the little, quiet man seemed to have found his taciturn serenity in the profound depths of a large experience. Lights were burning in the forecastle; now and then a loud gust of babbling chatter came from forward, swept over the decks, and became faint, as if the unconscious ship, slipping gently through the great peace of the sea, had left behind and for ever the foolish noise of turbulent mankind. But it was renewed again and again. Gesticulating arms, profiles of heads with open mouths appeared for a moment in the illuminated squares and doorways. Black fists darted—withdrew.

"Yes. It was most damnable to have such an unprovoked row sprung on one," assented the master. He didn't think there would be any further trouble just then. A bell was struck aft, another, forward, answered in a deeper tone, and a clamor of ringing metal spread round the ship in a circle of wide vibrations that ebbed away into the immensurable night of an empty sea. Didn't he know them! Didn't he! In past years. Better men, too. Real men to stand by one in a tight place. Worse than devils, too, sometimes—downright, horned devils. Pah! This—nothing. A miss is as good as a mile.

The wheel was being relieved in the usual way. "Full and by," said, very loud, the man going off. "Full and by," repeated the other, catching hold of the spokes.

"This head wind is my trouble," exclaimed the master, stamping his foot in sudden anger. "Head wind! all the rest is nothing." He was calm again in a moment. "Keep them on the move tonight, gentlemen; just to let them feel we've got hold all the time—quietly, you know. Mind you keep your hands off them, Creighton. Tomorrow I will talk to them like a Dutch uncle. A crazy crowd of tinkers! Yes, tinkers! I could count the real sailors among them on the fingers of one hand. Nothing will do but a row—if—you please."

He went down three steps, and changing his tone, spoke with his head near the deck: "I shan't turn in tonight, in case of anything; just call out if—— Did you see the eyes of that sick nigger, Mr. Baker? I fancied he begged me for something. What? Past all help. One lone black beggar among the lot of us, and he seemed to look through me into the very hell. Well, let him die in peace. He must have been half a man once. Keep a good lookout." He disappeared down below, leaving his mates facing one another, and more impressed than if they had seen a stone image shed a miraculous tear of compassion over the incertitudes of life and death.

In the blue mist spreading from twisted threads that stood upright in the bowls of pipes, the forecastle appeared as vast as a hall. Between the beams a heavy cloud stagnated, and the lamps surrounded by halos burned each at the core of a purple glow in two lifeless flames without rays. Wreaths drifted in denser wisps. Men sprawled about the deck, sat in negligent poses, or, bending a knee, drooped with one shoulder against a bulkhead. Lips moved, eyes flashed, waving arms made sudden eddies in the smoke.

"Stick together, boys," roared Davies. Belfast tried to make himself heard. Knowles grinned in a slow, dazed way. A short fellow, with a thick, clipped beard, kept on yelling periodically: "Who's afeard? Who's afeard?" Another one jumped up, excited, with blazing eyes; sent out a string of unattached curses and sat down quietly. Two men discussed familiarly, striking one another's breast in turn, to clinch arguments. Three others, with their heads in a bunch, spoke all together with a confidential air, and at the top of their voices.

One could hear: "In the last ship—— Who cares? Try it on one of us if——. Knock under? Not a hand's turn. He says he is all right—I always thought—Never mind——"

Belfast cried once more with uplifted arms, "The man is dying, I tell ye!" then sat down suddenly on the hatch and took his head between his hands.

All looked at Sullivan, gazing upward from the deck, staring out of dark corners, or turning their heads with curious glances. They were expectant, and appeared as if that old man, who looked at no one, had possessed the secret of their uneasy in

dignations and desires, a sharper vision, a clearer knowledge. And, indeed, standing there amongst them, he had the uninterested appearance of one who had seen multitudes of ships, had listened many times to voices such as theirs, had already seen all that could happen on the wide seas. They heard his voice rumble in his broad chest, as though the words had been rolling toward them out of a rugged past. "What do you want to do?" he asked. "I have seen rows aboard ship before some of you were born, for something or nothing; but never for such a thing."

"The man is dying, I tell ye," repeated Belfast, woefully, sitting at Sullivan's feet.

"And a black fellow, too," went on the old seaman. "I have seen them die like flies."

He stopped, thoughtful, as if trying to recollect grewsome things, details of horrors, hecatombs of negroes, and they looked at him absorbed. He was old enough to remember slavers, bloody mutinies, pirates, perhaps. Who could tell through what violences and terrors he had lived? What would he say?

He said. "You can't help him; die he must." He made another pause. His mustache and beard stirred. He chewed words, mumbled behind tangled white hairs; incomprehensible and exciting, like an oracle behind a veil. "Bringing all this head wind. Afraid. The sea will have her own. Die in sight of land. Always so. They know it—long passage—more days, more dollars. You keep quiet. What do you want? Can't help him." He seemed to awake from a dream. "You can't help yourselves," he said, austerely. "Skipper's no fool. He has something on his mind. Look out—I say! I know 'em!" With eyes fixed in front of him he turned his head from right to left, from left to right, as if inspecting a long row of astute skippers.

"He said 'e would brain me!" cried Donkin in a heartrending tone.

Sullivan peered downward with puzzled attention, as though he couldn't find him. He radiated unspeakable wisdom, clear unconcern, the chilling air of resignation. Round him all the listeners felt themselves somehow completely enlightened by their disappointment, and, mute, they lolled about with the careless ease of men who can discern perfectly the irremediable aspect of their existence. He, profound and unconscious, waved his arm once, and strode out on deck without another word.

One or two vaulted heavily into upper berths, and, once there, sighed; others dived head first inside lower bunks, swift, and turned round instantly upon themselves, like animals going into lairs. Belfast got up and approached Archie's berth.

"We pulled him out," he whispered sadly.

"What?" said the other with sleepy discontent.

"And now we will have to chuck him overboard," went on Belfast, whose lower lip trembled.

"Chuck what?" asked Archie.

"Poor Jimmy," breathed out Belfast.

"He be blowed!" said Archie with untruthful brutality, and sat up in his bunk. "It's all through him."

"'Tain't his fault, is it?" argued Belfast, in a murmur.

He wandered about as though he had lost his way in the dim forecastle, and nearly fell over Donkin. He contemplated him from on high for a while. "Ain't ye going to turn in?" he asked.

Donkin looked up hopelessly. "Will they spit on me?" he asked with pained anxiety.

"Who—spit?" hissed Belfast, coming back a step. "I would split your nose this minyt if I hadn't Jimmy to look after! Who d'ye think we are?"

Donkin rose and watched Belfast's back lurch through the doorway. On all sides invisible men slept, breathing calmly. He seemed to draw courage and fury from the peace around him. Venomous and thin-faced, he glared from the ample misfit of borrowed clothes as if looking for something he could smash. His heart leaped wildly in his narrow chest.

"Ye're no men!" he cried, in a deadened tone. No one moved. "Yer 'aven't the pluck of a mouse!" His voice rose to a husky screech. Wamibo darted out a disheveled head, and looked at him wildly. "Ye're sweepings ov ships! I 'ope you will all rot before you die!" Wamibo blinked, uncomprehending, but interested.

Donkin sat down heavily; he blew with force through quivering nostrils, he ground and snapped his teeth, and, with the chin pressed hard against the breast, he seemed busy gnawing his way through it, as if to get at the heart within.

In the morning the ship, beginning another day of her wandering life, had an aspect of sumptuous freshness, like the springtime of the earth. The washed decks glistened in a long, clear stretch; the oblique sunlight struck the yellow brasses in dazzling splashes, darted over the polished rods in lines of gold, and the single drops of salt water forgotten here and there along the rail were limpid as drops of dew, and sparkled more than scattered diamonds. The sun, rising lonely and splendid in the blue sky, saw a solitary ship gliding close-hauled on the blue sea.

The men pressed three deep abreast of the mainmast and opposite the cabin door. They shuffled, pushed, had an irresolute mien and stolid faces. At every slight movement Knowles lurched heavily on his short leg. Donkin glided behind backs, restless and anxious, like a man looking for an ambush. Capt. Allistoun came out suddenly. He walked to and fro before the front. He was gray, slight, alert, shabby in the sunshine, and as hard as adamant. He had his right hand in the side pocket of his jacket, and also something heavy in there that made folds all down that side. One the seamen cleared his throat ominously.

"I haven't till now found fault with you, men," said the master, stopping short. "And I don't now, but I am here to drive this ship and keep every man-jack aboard of her up to the mark. If you knew your work as well as I do mine, there would be no trouble. You've been braying in the dark about 'See tomorrow morning!' Well, you see me now. What do you want?"

He waited, stepping quickly to and fro, giving them searching glances. What did they want? They shifted from foot to foot; they balanced their bodies; some, pushing back their caps, scratched their heads. What did they want? Jimmy was forgotten; no one thought of him, alone forward in his cabin, fighting great shadows, clinging to brazen lies, chuckling painfully over his transparent deceptions. They wanted great things. And suddenly all the simple words they knew seemed to be lost forever in the immensity of their vague and burning desire.

"What is it—food?" asked the master. "You know the stores had been spoiled off the Cape."

"We know that, sir," said a bearded sea dog in the front rank.

"Work too hard—eh? Too much for your strength?" he asked again. There was an offended silence.

"We don't want to go shorthanded, sir," began at last Davies in a wavering voice, "and this 'ere black——"

"Enough," cried the master. He stood scanning them for a moment, then walking a few steps this way and that, began to storm at them coldly, in gusts violent and cutting like the gales of those icy seas that had known his youth. "Tell you what's the matter? Too big for your boots. Know half your work. Do half your duty. Think it too much. If you did ten times as much it wouldn't be enough."

"We did our best by her, sir," cried someone with shaky exasperation.

"Your best," stormed on the master. "You hear a lot on shore, don't you? They don't tell you there your best is much to boast of. I tell you. Your best is no better

than bad. You can do nomore. No, I know, and say nothing. But you stop your caper or I will stop it for you. I am ready for you. Stop it." He shook a finger at the crowd.

"As to that man"—he raised his voice very much—"as to that man, if he puts his nose out on the deck without my leave I will clap him in irons. There!"

The cook heard him forward, ran out lifting his arms, horrified, unbelieving, amazed, and ran in again. There was a moment of profound silence, during which a bow-legged seaman, stepping aside, expectorated decorously into the scupper.

"There is another thing," said the master calmly. He made a quick stride and with a swing took an iron belaying pin out of his pocket. "This!" His movement was so unexpected and sudden that the crowd stepped back. He gazed fixedly at their faces, and some at once put on a surprised air as though they had never seen a belaying pin before. He held it up. "This is my affair. I don't ask you anything. You know it; it has got to go where it came from." His eyes became angry. The crowd stirred uneasily. The master watched them attentively. "Donkin," he called out in a short, sharp tone.

Donkin dodged behind one, then behind another, but they looked over their shoulders and moved aside. Capt. Allistoun moved close to him.

"You know this," asked the master.

"No, I don't," answered the other with cheeky trepidation.

"You are a cur. Take it," ordered the master. Donkin's arms seemed glued to his thighs; he stood, eyes front, as if drawn on parade.

"Take it," repeated the master, and stepped closer; they breathed on one another. "Take it," said Capt. Allistoun again, making a menacing gesture. Donkin tore away one arm from his side.

"Vy hare yer down hon me?" he mumbled with effort and as if his mouth had been full of dough.

"If you don't—" began the master. Donkin snatched at the pin as though his intention had been to run away with it, and remained stock still holding it like a candle.

"Put it back where you took it from," said Capt. Allistoun, looking at him fiercely. Donkin stepped back, opening wide his eyes. "Go, you blackguard, or I will make you," cried the master, driving him slowly backward by a menacing advance. He dodged and with the dangerous iron tried to guard his head from a threatening fist.

"Good! By Jove!" murmured appreciatively Mr. Creighton in the tone of a connoisseur.

"Don't tech me," snarled Donkin, backing away.

"Then go. Go faster."

"Don't yer 'it me. I will pull yer hup afore the magistryt. I'll show yer hup."

Capt. Allistoun made a long stride, and Donkin, turning his back fairly, ran off a little, then stopped, and over his shoulder showed yellow teeth. "Further on, fore rigging," urged the master, pointing with his arm.

"Hare yer goin' to stand by hand see me bullied," screamed Donkin at the silent crowd that watched him.

Capt. Allistoun walked at him smartly. He started off again with a leap, dashed at the forerigging, rammed the pin into its hold violently.

"Hi will be heven with yer yet," he screamed at the ship at large, and vanished beyond the foremast.

Capt. Allistoun spun round and walked back aft with a composed face, as though he had already forgotten the scene. He looked at no one.

"That will do, Mr. Baker. Send the watch below," he said, quietly; "and you men try to walk straight for the future," he added in a calm voice. He looked pensively for awhile at the backs of the impressed and retreating crowd. "Breakfast, steward," he called, in a tone of relief through the cabin door.

"Ready, sir," said the steward, appearing before him as if by magic, and with a stained napkin in his hand.

"Ah! All right. Come along, Mr. Baker—late—with all this nonsense."

A heavy atmosphere of oppressive quietude pervaded the ship. In the afternoon men went about washing clothes and hanging them out to dry in the unprosperous breeze with the meditative languor of disenchanted philosophers. Very little was said. The problem of life seemed too voluminous for the narrow limits of human speech, and by common consent it was abandoned to the great sea that had from the beginning enfolded it in its immense grip; the sea that knew all, and would in time infallibly unveil to each the wisdom hidden in all the errors.

And in the confused current of impotent thoughts that set unceasingly this way and that through bodies of men, Jimmy bobbed up upon the surface, compelling attention, like a black buoy chained to the bottom of a muddy stream. Falsehood triumphed. It triumphed through doubt, through stupidity, through pity, through sentimentalism. We set ourselves to bolster it up, from compassion, from recklessness, from a sense of fun. Jimmy's steadfastness to his untruthful attitude in the face of the inevitable truth had the proportions of a colossal enigma—a manifestation, grand and incomprehensible, that at times inspired a wondering awe, and there was also, to many, something exquisitely droll in fooling him thus to the top of his bent.

The latent egoism of tenderness to suffering appeared in the developing anxiety not to see him die. His obstinate non recognition of the only certitude whose approach we could watch from day to day was as disquieting as the failure of some law of nature. He was so utterly wrong about himself that one could not but suspect that he had access to some source of superhuman knowledge. He influenced the moral tone of our world as though he had it in his power to distribute honors, treasures or pain; and he could give us nothing but his contempt.

It was at that time that Belfast's devotion (and also his pugnacity) secured universal respect. He spent every moment of his spare time in Jimmy's cabin. He tended him, talked to him; was as gentle as a woman, as tenderly gay as an old philanthropist, as sentimentally careful of his charge as a model slave owner. But outside he was irritable, explosive as gunpowder, somber, suspicious, and never more brutal than when most sorrowful.

With him it was a tear and a blow; a tear for Jimmy, a blow for anyone who did not seem to take a scrupulously orthodox view of Jimmy's case. We talked about nothing else. At any time of the day and often through the night, some man could be seen sitting on Jimmy's box. In the evening, between six and eight, the cabin was crowded, and there was an interested group at the door. Everyone stared at the negro.

He basked in the warmth of our interest. His eyes gleamed ironically, and in a weak voice he reproached us with our cowardice. He would say, "If you fellows had stuck out for me, I would be now on deck." We hung our heads. "Yes, but if you think I am going to let them put me in irons just to show you sport. Well, no. It ruins my health, this lying up, it does. You don't care. We were as abashed as if it had been true. His superb impudence carried all before it. We would not have dared to revolt. We didn't want to, really. We wanted to keep him alive till home—to the end of the voyage.

Sullivan, as usual, held aloof, appearing to scorn the insignificant events of an ended life. We all knew the old man's ideas about Jimmy, and nobody dared to combat them. They were unsettling; they caused pain; and, that was worse, they might have been true for all we knew. Only once did he condescend to explain them fully, but the impression was lasting. He said that Jimmy was the cause of head winds. Mortally sick men linger till the first sight of land, and then die; and Jimmy knew that the land would draw his life from him. It is so in every ship. Didn't we know it?

We felt uneasy. The common saying, "More days, more dollars," did not give the usual comfort, because the stores were running short. Much had been spoiled off the Cape. We were on half allowance of biscuit. Peas, sugar and tea had been finished long ago. Salt meat was giving out. We had plenty of coffee, but very little water to make it with. We took up another hole in our belts and went on scraping, polishing, painting the ship from morning to night.

And soon she looked as though she had come out of a bandbox; but hunger lived on board of her. Not dead starvation, but steady living hunger that stalked about the decks, slept in the forecastle; the tormentor of waking moments, the disturber of dreams. We were weary, hungry, thirsty; we commenced to believe Sullivan, but with unshaken fidelity dissembled to Jimmy. We spoke to him with jocose allusiveness, like cheerful accomplices in a a clever plot; but we looked to the westward over the rail with mournful eyes for a sign of hope, for a sign of fair wind, even if its breath should bring death to our reluctant Jimmy. In vain! The universe conspired with James Wait. Light airs from the northward sprang up again; the sky remained clear; and round our weariness the glittering sea, touched by the breeze, basked voluptuously in the sunshine, as though it had forgotten our life and trouble.

(To be Concluded.)

THE STRANGER WHO RIZ UP.

A mile outside of Groversville I met four men, who were carrying a fifth on a door, and a natural curiosity prompted me to ask how the victim had been injured.

"Wall, stranger," replied one of the four, "that's my son Ben, and I reckon I kin give it to ye straight. Me and Ben was up to Groversville this mawnin' to git a pa'r o' butes. It was butes we went fur, wasn't it, Ben?"

"Yes, pop," faintly replied the young man on the door, as he opened his eyes and looked around.

"We went into a stoh and asked fur butes, and in that stoh was a humble-lookin' critter who was eatin' crackers and cheese and askin' the way to Pineville. He was a humble-lookin' critter, wasn't he, Ben?"

"He was, pop."

"It wasn't none o' Ben's bizness about that critter," continued the old man, "but he was feelin' colty, and kinder wanted to do sunthin' smart. He looks the man over and then sez to me:

"'Pop, I'm goin' to skeer that kuss outer this town and half-way up the mounting.'

"'As how?' sez I.

"'By yellin' in his ear,' sez he.

"'Mebbe he'll skeer and mebbe he won't,' sez I. 'He looks powerful lonesome and down-hearted, but yo' can't allus tell how a critter will perform.' That's what you said and I said, wasn't it, Ben?"

"That's what we said," sighed Ben.

"I didn't want you to yell, but you felt colty and wouldn't take my advice?"

"I jest wanted to skeer him, pop."

"Yes, you wanted to skeer him. You got around behind him and drawed a long breath and let 'er go. It was a mighty yell, Ben—the powerfulest yell I ever heard. I'm braggin' about that yell, Ben."

"Thankee, pop."

"But it didn't skeer nobody, like you thought it would. The stranger jest riz up slow, drawed a pistol from behind and the fust thing you knowed you had three bullets into ye. He riz up slow, didn't he, Ben?"

"He did."

"And he fired three bullets into your karkass and walked out doahs with his crackers and cheese, and said you could hev more lead if you hankered fur it?"

"Yes, pop, he said that," whispered Ben.

"But he didn't want no more," continued the father as he turned to me. "He'd got all he wanted and some to spare, and so we put him on a doah and ar' takin' him home fur the doctor to work at. Mebbe he'll die and mebbe he'll git well. If he dies I shan't blame that humble-lookin' critter 'tall. If he gits well he won't never do no more yellin' in anybody's ear, unless thar's a handy hill to dodge behind. That's all—let the purcession move on!"

DRIVING OUT THE CHILDREN.

"Yes, I've raised up a large family, but none of the children ar' left with me," replied the old man in answer to my question. "Last y'ar I made up my mind they'd never amount to anythin' unless they made a start fur themselves, and so I bought Bill a shotgun and says:

"'Bill, this yere roost ain't fur yo' no mo'. Jest go out and do sunthin' to start yo'self along.'

"And Bill he took that gun and went over to Orange Valley and shot a revenoo officer and got into State prison fur life and is all settled down. When he had gone I bought a bike for Sally and took it home and says:

"'Sally, this yere roost ain't fur yo' no mo'. Git on that bike and go out into the world and ketch a man.'

"And she didn't lose two minits hoppin' into the saddle and whizzin' up the road, and in two weeks she was married to a feller who saved her from gittin' run over by a six-mewl team. The day arter she left I called Joe up and says to him:

"'Joe, yer mouth ar' too big and yer knees are shackelty, but mebbe thar's sunthin' in ye arter all. I'll gin ye that old blind ox to make a start with, and don't yo' come back to this roost no mo'.'

"Joe took the ox and went, and shuck my hide if he didn't lead him down to the railroad and git him killed by a train and rake in $40 damages! Yes, sah, and he bought a mewl with the money and is gittin' rich by carryin' the mails. Jim was next. I calls him up and looks him over and says:

"'Jim, yo'r too pizen lazy to eat good bacon, but I'm goin' to send yo' out to hustle. All I kin spar' yo' is a dollar in cash. Don't cum back to this roost till you've made yer fortune.'

"Jim took the dollar and went, and durn my buttons if he didn't hire out to a dime museum as the champion terbaccer chewer of the world, and he's now drawin' a salary of $25 a week and board. Thar' was one left, and that was Sue, and I calls her up and says:

"'Sue, it's time fur yo' growed-up chil'en to be a-gittin'. I'll buy you a new pa'r o' shoes and a sunbonnet, and yo' must light out.'

"Sue started right off next day and got married, and up to this time she's eloped three times, sot the house afire twice and pizened her husband twice. Looks like she'd do the best of the hull lot."

Crazy, Certainly.

"Bobson is certainly daft about that new baby of his."

"What has he done?"

"Why, we were all talking about the tariff at the office last Saturday, but Bobson only made one remark."

"What did he say?"

"He wanted to know if they had raised the duty on catnip tea."—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Not as a Conqueror.

(From the New Orleans States.)

Tammany Hall is now firmly convinced that Low, the conquering hero, will no come.

The Syndicate House.

It was called the "Syndicate House" because it stood on land purchased by a syndicate for the coal which had been discovered there. The purchase took in 300 acres of land, and that included a two-story brick farm-house and out-buildings. As secretary of the company, I gave the house a looking over before we closed that deal. It was an old house, so far as years went, in good repair, and it was decided that the superintendent of the mine should occupy it with his family. The house had not been occupied for three or four years, the widow who owned it and of whom we bought, living several hundred miles away. It gives one a lonesome feeling to go over a house which has stood tenantless for years, and though all the rooms in this house were full of sunshine, I thought I had never been through a more lonely building. It needed paint and paper, as you would naturally suppose, but it wasn't this which prejudiced me. I couldn't have really defined my prejudice nor given any reasonable explanation, but when I left the house I felt that there was something uncanny about it.

I sent four men down from the city to paint and paper, and as the place was three miles from the nearest village, a stove, bedding, and other furniture were sent with the workmen, that they might cook their own meals and pass the night there. I went down on the second day of their stay to look after other matters, and had only got out of my buggy when the men announced that they were going back to town. Their excuses were vague and unsatisfactory, but I finally pinned them down to a declaration that the house was "queer." When asked to define this term they all agreed that certain strange noises had kept them awake most of the night. The season was May, and some of the windows had been left open. The noises, they said, consisted of wails and groans, with the sound of footsteps crossing the floor. I laid it to a cat prowling about, and argued with them so successfully that they finally agreed to try it another night. It was ridiculous that four grown men should let "queer noises" frighten them off, and before I left the place I had them very much ashamed of themselves. I was to be down again next day, and to my surprise and indignation I met the men at the railroad station. We were in a hurry to complete the renovation, and I went for them pretty hot about leaving the job. The oldest and most intelligent man of the four acted as spokesman for the rest, and humbly swallowing the dose I gave him, he replied:

"I have got as much courage as the average man, but I tell you that there is something queer about that house—something so queer that I would not pass another night there for $500 in cash. You may ridicule and laugh, but do you think all four of us would throw up that job unless we had heard things to upset us? There's been murder done in that house, and there's a hoodoo on it. It gives one a creepy feeling to enter any of the rooms in broad daylight."

I was vexed with the men for leaving their work, and spoke harshly, and at this they retorted that if I would remain in the house alone that night they would return in the morning and work a week without pay. This led to more angry discussion, and at length I told them that I had made up my mind to stop for the night. None of them offered to keep me company, nor did I want their companionship. I left them at the village, warning them not to gossip and make fools of themselves, and drove over to the mine and the house.

I went all through the building from cellar to garret, having no hopes of making any discoveries, and certainly making none, and finally made up my mind that the gang of men in the shanty half a mile away had been responsible for the alarms. There were ten of these men, and they were clearing off the land, and as they were a rollicking set, they might have felt like playing a joke on the men in the house. I spoke to the foreman about it, but he assured me that none of the men had left the shanty after dark. I did not tell him that I proposed to pass the night in the house and was sure that none of the gang had any idea of my intention. I was about the place all day, having plenty to do, and half an hour before sunset drove away as if for the village. At a farm house half a mile away I got supper and left the horse and buggy, and it was dark when I got back to the "Syndicate House." There were two lamps and three or four candles, and as soon as I had shut down the windows and closed the blinds I lighted up and went over the house again, taking care to look into every corner and make sure that no one was in hiding.

I frankly confess to you that I had no more than secured myself in the house than I began to wish I had a companion. I had no weapons, and was surprised and irritated to find myself in a nervous condition. The cellar was the length and width of the house, and without a partition, while the garret was the same. On the first floor was a parlor, sitting-room, dining-room and a pantry off the kitchen. The chamber floor contained three bedrooms, with a closet for each, and on the lower floor was a hall running almost the length of the house. The workmen had papered one room and partly painted two others. After going through the house I took a seat in the kitchen and extinguished all the lights save a single lamp. The workmen had left a couple of novels on the table, and I began reading, and thus put in the time until 11 o'clock, but even as I read I had a nervous, uneasy feeling. It wasn't fear, but it ate at my nerves until I finally threw down the book and opened the back door and passed out. It was a still, quiet night, moonless, but not so very dark, and as I smoked a cigar I heard several wagons pass along the highway. I remained outdoors about a quarter of an hour and then re-entered the kitchen to finish the book.

As I opened the door I found the room in darkness. I had left a bright light on the table, and there was not draught enough to flare a candle. I stood for a moment undecided, having no feeling but surprise, and of a sudden I heard soft footsteps retreating into the sitting-room. It was the echo of slippered feet, or of one walking on tip-toe, and I traced their progress for a distance of twenty feet. My first thought was to step outside and close the door after me, but I put it aside and lighted a match and advanced to the lamp. The chimney was just a little warm, proving that the light had been out at least ten minutes. The wick had not been turned, and this meant that the light had been blown out. Although my heart was in my mouth and my hair curling, I picked up the lamp and went through every room of the house, finding nothing, of course. When I returned to the kitchen I was shaking like a leaf, and but for pride I should have bolted out into the open. I lighted the second lamp and two of the candles and placed them in the rooms down-stairs, and then forced myself to sit down.

It was ten minutes or more before I recovered my nerves, and I then tried to find a reason for the lamp going out. I was trying to argue with myself that there was a draught somewhere when a noise like the singing of a telegraph wire in the wind came from the hall, and was speedily followed by a wail and a sobbing. It was like a child crying out in distress, and it lasted fully thirty seconds. This was the sound which had driven the workmen out of the house, but it did not drive me out. I trembled so that I feared to drop the lamp, and my throat was so dry that I could not have made a loud sound, but I passed through the rooms into the hall and up stairs, and once more looked about me. So upset was I that, in descending the stairs, I had to sit down three different times, and my feet dragged after me as I returned to the kitchen. I fell into a chair and sat there shaking for many minutes, but I was still determined not to be run out. If the noise came again and I listened closely, perhaps I could interpret it. I waited and waited, growing calmer all the time, and had just consulted my watch and noted that it was twenty minutes after midnight when a pat! pat! pat! of footsteps caught my ear. They began in a room overhead and descended the stairs and came along the hall and through the sitting-room. Every step was as distinct as could be, though gentle, and I'd have almost staked my life that a woman or a child was approaching.

I sat looking into the open door of the sitting-room which was lighted by a candle, but though I heard the footsteps I saw nothing. They crossed the room—they entered the kitchen—they advanced to the table, and as my hair stood up and my heart choked me the lamp was blown out and I was left in semi-darkness. If I tell you that I screamed out and jumped for the door and fled across the grass you will not call me cowardly. That's what I did do, and going to the farmer's barn I put in the remainder of the night on the hay-mow. It was 8 o'clock in the morning when I returned to the "Syndicate House." The lights I had left burning had not burned out, but had blown out. There was nothing but this to see. When I drove over to the village I found the workmen waiting for me. I told them I had passed the night in the house and heard nothing but rats at work, but they refused to go back.

I did not press the matter, as I had other plans, and two nights later the superintendent, who was to occupy the house, was installed to pass the night. I had frankly related my experience and had been met with ridicule, just as I expected. He was a hard-headed, practical man, fifty years of age, and fearless of everything human. He jumped at the chance of solving the mystery, and we drove over and went through the house together. He said the ghostly footsteps I had heard was the gnawing of rats, and that I had forgotten to close some window, and thus created a draught to blow out the lights. In fact, he burlesqued the matter from start to finish, and to show his contempt for the ghost he insisted that I take away all the lights but a single candle, and that not even a match should be left him.

I left the house as darkness came and went to pass the night with the farmer. At 1 o'clock in the morning we were aroused by the superintendent, and in all my life I never saw a man more broken up than he was. He first heard a wailing and sobbing at about 10 o'clock, and had then gone over the entire house and sought to locate the sounds and prove to himself that they were the result of natural causes. The sounds came again at 11, and he made another tour. Every door and window was secure, and the night was as quiet outside as the one I had passed. Soon after 11 o'clock, as the man sat at the kitchen table trying to find a reason for things, he heard footsteps on the cellar stairs. The stairs led up into the kitchen, but while the door opening into the room was shut it had neither bolt nor lock on it. He plainly heard the footsteps take every stair in rotation until the top was reached, and then the door softly swung open. It was not over six feet from him, and he was looking full at it. He expected to see a human being appear, but nothing was there—nothing but darkness. There was a minute of deepest silence, and then the candle at the superintendent's elbow was suddenly blown out. He admitted that he never was so scared in his life. For a few seconds he could not move a finger, and though he had seen no one he fully expected to be struck or stabbed. Then he made a rush for the back door, shut it behind him as he went out, and ran for his life.

After breakfast I went back to the house with him. There was his half-consumed candle—there the open cellar-door, which I knew had been closed the night before. What hand had opened that door? What breath had extinguished the candle? What had cried out in that wailing, sobbing way? I wanted nothing more to do with the house and the superintendent said he would live in a stable first. I hired a constable to pass a night there, and the poor man was nearly frightened to death. Next night two of the woodcutters put in the time until one o'clock and then left the house. I then told the whole story to the board of directors, and it was decided to pull the house down. If the house was haunted the miners would soon discover the ghost in the mine, and that would not do at all. Sooner than have any gossip about it the house was torn down and the material used elsewhere. Was the mystery solved in the tearing down? No. Things occurred just as I have told you, and no one was able to give any satisfactory explanation.

CHARLES B. LEWIS.

Murder Postponed.

Two flashy colored boys stood in the hot sun in front of the railway eating house and looked at each other with their eyes rolled sideways. "Look hyah, you piece o' dahk meat, I got some bone-handled trouble in my pocket waitin' fo' you if you eveh come 'round that baby tryin' to undamine me!"

"Slow up, boy! You's on slippery road, an' if you don't drive caihful you going to fall right in dat ditch, fus' thing you knows."

"Don't get me stahted, coon! Don't 'rouse me. I wouldn't like to do it, but I could jes' lay hold of yo' dahk body and cut it up into rubbah balls. I ain't used dat razah faw whole week now, an' it's gettin' uneasy. I can feel it movin' in my pocket an' sayin', 'Mistah, let me get out an' do someping.'"

"Look heah, yo' bettah sing dat razah to sleep, 'kase yo' evah reach faw it yo' jes' see whole atmosphere full o' niggah wool, striped shirt an' blue kloze. Yes, sah, you'd have to be geth'd up in a basket. I got a piece o' shiny hadwaih in my pocket, an' it sings sweet an' low, an' ev'y time it speaks to you it han's you a pound o' lead. Look out faw me, boy!"

"Hush, coon. I really love trouble."

"Don't stah't nothin' 'less you want to lose money faw yo' folks. Costs money to plant a coon; yes, sah. You don't get dem sivah-handled boxes faw nothin'; no, sah. Got any o' dem papah cigahs, Henry?"

Henry reached for his package of cigarettes, and the traveler, who had been waiting to see murder done, gave an exclamation of disgust, and walked into the railway station.—Haberdasher.