

notice of our talking long and close together.

Presently he rejoined, standing a little distance away and in a careless attitude.

"Boson," said I, addressing him with my eyes on the deck, so that from a distance I would not appear to be speaking, "Miss Robertson told Stevens that her father would handsomely reward every man on board this ship on her arrival in port. He asked her what he would give and she said a hundred pounds to each man. If this was repeated to the men what effect would it produce?"

"They wouldn't believe it."

"My father would give each man a promise in writing," she exclaimed. "They wouldn't trust him," said the boatswain, without reflecting. They'd think it a ruse to bring 'em together to give 'em into custody. If I was one of them that's what I should think, and you may be sure I'm right."

"But he would give them written orders on his bankers; they could not think it a ruse," she said, eagerly, evidently enamored of her own idea since she saw that I entertained it.

"Sailors don't know nothing about banks and the like o' that, miss. There are thirteen men in the ship's company, counting the cook and the steward. Call 'em twelve. If your father had a bag of sovereigns on board this vessel, and counted out a hundred to each man, then they'd believe him. But I'd not believe them. They'd take the money and scuttle the ship all the same. Don't make no mistake. They're fond o' their wagabone lives, and the carpenter's given 'em such a talkin' to that they're precious keen on gettin' away and cuttin' off all evidence. It 'ud take more than a hundred pounds a man to make 'em willing to risk their lives."

He walked away once more and stood lounging at, chatting with Fish.

"I am afraid the boson is right," said I. "Having lived among them and heard their conversation he would know their characters too well to be deceived in the consequences of your scheme."

"But paws would pay them, Mr. Royle. He would give them any pledge that they might choose to name, that they would run no risk. The money could be sent to them—they need not appear—they need not be seen."

"We know they would run no risks but could we get them to believe us?"

"At least let us try."

"No—forgive me—we must not try. We must have nothing more to say. You have spoken to Stevens; let him talk among the men. If the reward tempt them be sure they will concert measures among themselves to land you. But I beg you to have no faith in this project. They are villains who will betray you in the end. The boatswain's arguments respecting them are perfectly just—so just that he has inspired me with a new kind of faith in him. He owns that his own life is in jeopardy, and I believe he will hit upon some expedient to save us. See how he watches us! He will join us presently. I, too, have a scheme dawning in my head, but too imperfect to discuss as yet. Courage!" I said, animated by her beauty and the deep, sneaking expression of her blue eyes; "the boson's confession of his own danger makes me feel stronger by a man. I have greater confidence in him than I had. If I could but muster a few fire-arms—for even the steward might be made a man of, fighting for life with a revolver in his hand—there is nothing I would not dare. But twelve to two!—what is our chance? It must not be thought of, with you and your father depending for your lives on ours."

"No," she answered, firmly. "There must be other and better ways. I will think as well as you."

The boatswain came sauntering towards us. He flung a coil of rope over a belaying-pin, looked over the ship's side approached us nearer, and pulled out a pipe and asked me for a light. I had one in my pocket and gave it to him. This was his excuse to speak.

"It isn't as suspicious-lockin' to talk now as it would be at night or in the cuddy—and in the cuddy there's no telling whose ears are about," he said.

"I'll give you my scheme thought on since breakfast, and listen close, for I durstn't talk much: after this we must belay, or the men'll be set jawing. When we come to the Gulf of Mexico, you'll let me know how long it'll be afore we're fifty mile of the Mississippi. I helped to stow the cargo in this vessel, and she's chock full, and there's only one place as they'll be able to get at to scuttle her, and that's right for'ard of the fore hatch. I'll let that out to Stevens hit by bit, in an ordinary way, and he'll remember it. The night afore we heave to—you'll tell me when—I'll fall overboard and get drowned. That'll happen in your watch. We'll get one o' them pakin'-cases full o' tin-tacks up out o' the steering and stow it away in one of the quarterboats, and you'll let that drop overboard—d'ye see? which'll sound like a man's body, and sink right away, and then you'll roar out that the boatswain's fallen overboard."

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