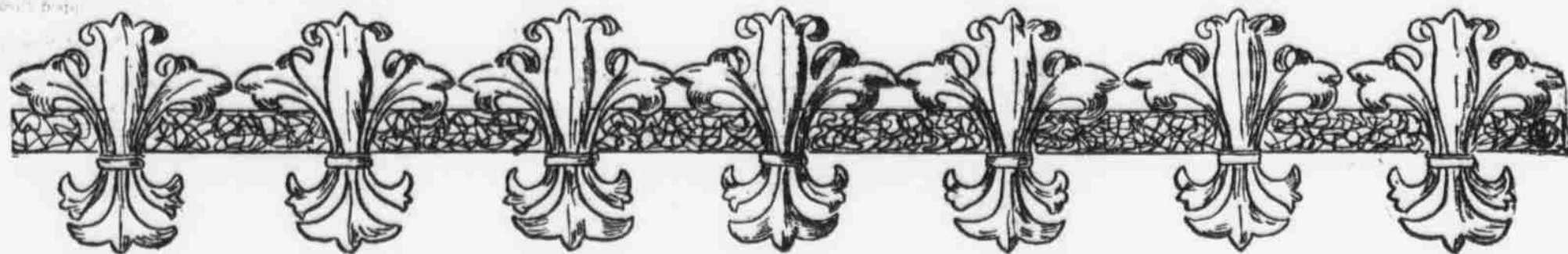


# The Diamond Derelict---Being the Record of a



## Young Man Who Finally Won Out---By Edward Marshall

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### CHAPTER XIV.

When the devil first set a wooden ship on fire he looked at it and grinned. "There," said he, "that's nearer hell than any devilment that I've invented yet."—The Log Book of The Lyddy.

**T**HERE could be no hiding the facts from the crew now. The news spread like wildfire among the men, and most of them secretly partisaned Parton's cause, although the sailor who had seen the first encounter kept his word and said nothing, or almost nothing, about it.

The mate, knocked unconscious for the second time, recovered slowly, and was too weak from loss of blood and too sickened by pain to make it possible for him to do anything particularly aggressive that afternoon or night.

Parton's place was a puzzling one. He momentarily expected that the mate's fury over his second defeat would result in at least an attempt to carry out his threat and order Parton into irons; but the hours passed and nothing of the sort was done.

Parton nursed his bruised and swollen neck and face as well as he could; but the prospect seemed to him to be a most unutterably gloomy one. He could have fared little worse if he had stayed ashore and taken his chances with his stepfather and Scotland Yard.

The situation on board was almost an impossible one. It seemed out of the question that it should remain in statu quo until the ship landed in New York. And even then Parton could not predict in his mind what was likely to occur when that time came.

A new and imminent worry also grew out of the captain's condition. That wild shriek had meant that some change had come in it. It crossed Parton's mind once that the cry might have been caused by the fact that the old man had witnessed from his bunk the struggle on the cabin floor, and that he had used this shriek because it was his only way of expressing horror at what he may have been convinced was impending murder, but this seemed too impossible to be worthy of serious consideration.

The period of the captain's apparent loss of reasoning power had extended over almost two weeks. During that time Parton had been sure that he had not only been totally incapable of expressing himself, but that he had been unable to intelligently interpret in his mind the events that passed within the very limited range of his vision.

Parton learned that the captain had fallen into a deep stupor after the episode, but when he went to the companionway entrance to go down to see him he was informed by the sailor who was on guard there that the mate had given orders that he was to be in no circumstances permitted to go below.

This angered him, but it did not surprise him. He could hardly feel that the situation had changed for the worse, except in so far as the personal inconvenience which the fight and the resulting exile from the cabin caused might be considered an aggravation of its discomforts.

He knew now that for the remainder of the voyage he would have to look out for his safety with exceeding care, but the mere fact that the mate had attacked him showed that he recognized the strength of the charge which Parton held over his head as a price for his own immunity from disclosure.

It was evident that he was no longer so certain as he had been that Parton was wholly in his power. He could still bring the charges against Parton; charges which he could not be entirely certain would be sustained or would even have a serious effect on the young man after he had gone ashore. But, on the other hand, he must know that there could be no such possibility of doubt in his own case if Parton should make an accusation of theft against him.

The mate did not know which of the men it was who had seen him rifle Parton's berth, but that he had actually been seen at it by some one of them was certain—otherwise Parton would have known nothing about it.

So, therefore, there would be the testimony of the sailor against him, and added to this would be Parton's own statement that he had afterwards caught him in the very act of overhauling his traps and that this had been the cause of the fight.

The mate's position was not wholly enviable, but he was too angry to look after his own best interests. Besides it was

reasonable to suppose that he had now gone too far to make it possible for him to have a reconciliation with the ship's passenger.

The discipline of the ship also demanded that he must make at least a show of punishing Parton for having thrashed him. He had an uncomfortable conviction that what small respect the men had for him before the unfortunate encounters in the cabin was now lost, but he felt that he must do all that he could to regain it by exhibiting the firmness of a commander.

Before these unfortunate episodes had occurred, Parton had looked forward with considerable dread to the day when he should land in Boston. He had decided that if he was to be arrested there he would certainly be arrested on the very day of his landing. But the situation on the ship had become so uncomfortable that he actually longed for landing day

understood him and made a desperate attempt to reply to him in some way, but he failed utterly.

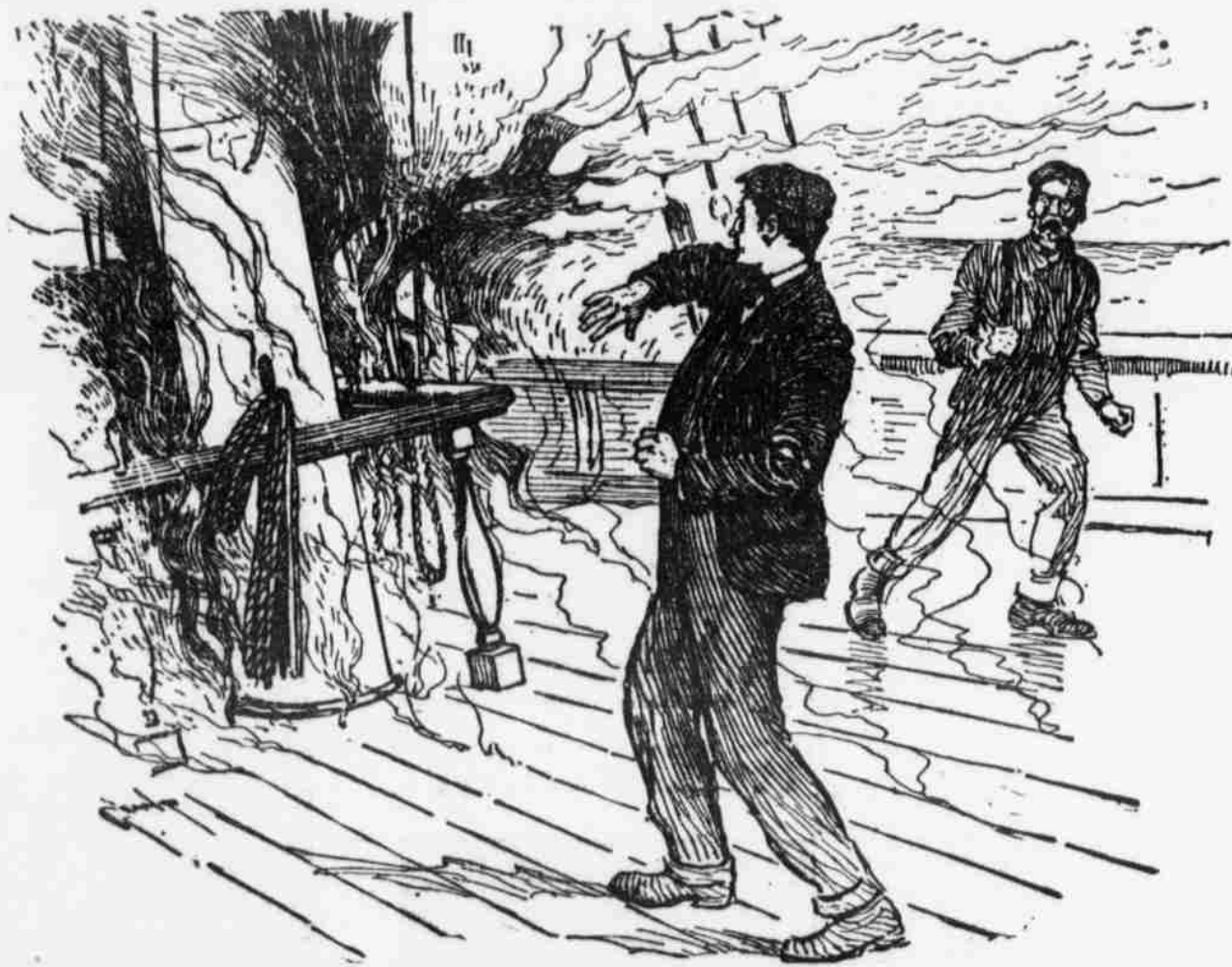
Two sailors who had descended into the cabin after Parton, and who were standing close behind him as he leaned over the captain's berth, were at this juncture ordered roughly out of the cabin by the mate. That they should have come in at all, Parton reflected, was an evidence of how completely the discipline of the ship had gone to pieces. After they had slouched away, to the accompaniment of much angry expletive from the mate, the man turned curiously on Parton.

"What in hell are you doing down here!" he said wickedly. "I gave orders that you were to stay on deck until this voyage was ended. If I catch you down here again I'll have you put in irons. Now get out!"

Parton did not strike him again, al-

A reason for this might have been that a sailor who had quietly entered the cabin silently went to the side of the young Englishman and ranged himself there, while the two men who had descended into the room in response to the captain's uncanny cry turned back in evident defiance of the mate's orders, and were but too obviously prepared to take the side of the passenger in any fight between him and the unpopular man who had, through the captain's illness fallen into the supreme command of the ship.

Parton stood waiting for him, not withstanding the evidently friendly intentions of the sailors and there was in his face that iron look which made the mate cower before. It made him cower again and with a muttered oath he slouched out of the cabin, the two sailors who were standing in the companionway entrance retreating before him. After he had reached the



A ROARING MASS OF FLAME SHUT HIM OFF FROM REACHING THE HOLD.

and its possible perils, as promising a welcome relief.

About 6 o'clock a sailor came to him where he was sitting aft of the wheel, and asked him if he wished to have his meal brought to him there. He was not to be permitted to enter the cabin again. Even while Parton was considering what reply he should make, there came through the skylight a repetition of that slow, blood-curdling cry. The shrill, vibrating shriek quavered upward, not loudly, but with a strange, penetrating quaver that made Parton half start from his chair and brought more than one sailor running from the forward deck where they were gathered after their evening meal, smoking their pipes and gossiping about the day's exciting episodes.

Entirely disregarding the mate's orders, Parton dashed to the companionway and down the four or five steps with long, jumping strides. No one offered to detain him and there was no one on watch at the cabin entrance. Parton went on, paying no attention whatever to the mate, who, he saw in the dim light of the cabin, was standing near the center of the little room, leaning on the table and gazing as if struck dumb toward the captain's berth. Parton, turning his head neither to the left nor to the right, went at once to the side of the old man.

He lay to all appearance quite as he had been, but Parton saw with delighted wonder that as he approached there came a change of expression, slight but unmistakable, on his face, and it seemed to him that there was a still further change as he bent over him and asked him slowly and with an effort to make his words very distinct, if there was anything which he wished to have done for him. It was evident to Parton that the old man heard him,

though the temptation was strong in him to do so. But he wheeled on him so suddenly and so fiercely that the mate almost fell backward in his effort to avoid what he thought would be a blow.

"Damn you and damn your orders," said Parton grimly and quietly. "Your orders! Give them to the sailors, who have to obey them and who can't strike back. Don't give them to me, you cowardly thief."

He had advanced a step toward the mate, who by this time had placed the width of the cabin table between the infuriated but quiet young Englishman and himself.

"If you dare to make any remark to me or about me on this voyage, from now until the time it ends," said Parton, "I'll thrash you again, and I'll thrash you so thoroughly that it will be many a day before you'll command anything bigger than a bed in a hospital bay."

"I came down here because I heard the captain of this ship cry out as if he were in pain. I thought that you were hurting him, and I had reason to believe that you are not the kind of a man to hesitate even at torturing a sick man. Now, from this time until this voyage ends I shall be in this cabin as much as I like and out of it as much as I like."

"If you don't want my company here stay out of it yourself. If you bother me in any way whatsoever I will first call on the crew to put you in irons, and will get it, too, and then, when we go ashore, I will see to it that you are locked up for robbery on the high seas."

He made another move toward the mate and again the man fell away from him. His body crouched and that his muscles were tense as steel was visible even through his shirt and pea jacket. But he struck no blow.

deck Parton could hear him cursing the men and giving various bullying orders.

For a moment Parton stood quietly listening to him, and then went to the captain's berth, rendered anxious by the strange change which he saw had occurred in the appearance of the old man.

There were still mutterings, but they were no longer confined to the words of the queer oath which he had substituted for more offensive swearing in order to please his wife. In fact, the noises which now came from his lips were not words at all, but mere incoherent, unconnected, almost inarticulate sounds.

But Parton scarcely felt that the change was for the worse, for there was unmistakably a gleam of real intelligence in the eyes of the prostrate seaman. His skin, too, which had been ghastly white, glowed as with a fever, and the hands now moved spasmodically and with an uncanny rapidity.

There seemed to be something desperate in their continual struggles to open and shut quickly.

Their movement was so strange and so great a change was indicated in it that for a moment Parton kept his eyes fixed upon them, scarcely glancing at the captain's face, and paying small attention to the torrent, slow moving but ceaseless, of unconnected words which bubbled from between his lips. From these words it was apparent to Parton that the old man's mind was dwelling, in its enfeebled state, on the fact that he had violated the insurance regulations, and had amongst his cargo the invoice of explosive. For over and over again came the words:

"Amidships! Amidships! Amidships!" And then, ever with the three iterations, came the word "Humber! Humber! Humber!" At first Parton did not conceive the