

Idea that there could be an intelligent intention in these words, but then he remembered that the explosive which the captain had told him about was stowed amidships and that its name was Humberite.

He wondered vaguely if death was impending for the old man, and if, as so many people declare is often the case with dying people, he was thinking of the fact that he was carrying it without the knowledge of the underwriters in violation of his insurance agreement, with possible remorse.

Parton smiled gravely as he considered this possibility. He wondered if there was no greater sin than this, and wished that his own record were as clean.

He listened idly to the other babbling words that followed, not dreaming that there had come in the condition of the patient a change which would permit him to express intelligent ideas, no matter how crudely.

But there was an expression of such anxiety and a look so much like the old intelligence of the face there on the countenance of the prostrate man that when he caught one of the words which followed Parton started and paled with a sudden thought of peril.

The word was "Fire" and it was pronounced and repronounced with that strange monotony of repetition which had been one of the characteristics of the captain's mental disease from the first.

If Parton had studied medicine in any of the modern schools he would have known that the old man was at this moment showing unmistakable symptoms of a new and not unfavorable stage of the disease which had stricken him down. He would have known that his trouble from the start had been caused by a lesion, or bursting of a capillary near the center of speech and this change from the repetition of the purely meaningless words of his queer oath to other words which might possibly have some meaning might indicate that the resulting blood clot was being absorbed by nature and that the power of expressing ideas intelligently was returning to the old man.

He would also have known another thing which surely would have increased his pity and sympathy for the sturdy old mariner a hundred times—that very likely during the entire time he had been lying there, prostrate and apparently witless, he might very well have been able to think and reason as clearly as he ever could, and been denied only the power of expressing what he thought.

He would have known that those who have recovered from such attacks—and such recoveries are so rare that every one which has been known has been as carefully studied by the medical men who have been fortunate enough to observe it as ever eclipse was by the astronomers—have often said that during the entire time when they had lain apparently without the power of consecutive or intelligent thought their intelligences have, as a matter of fact, been abnormally acute and their knowledge of their own inability to express the thoughts that came to them has merely added mental torture to the awful physical pain which has beset them.

Then Parton noticed a change of expression in the captain's face. It showed that he had some control over the muscles for it was caused by a drawing up of the nose and a succession of definite and unmistakable sniffs. There was also in the eyes a look of such pitiful entreaty that Parton was impressed by the fact that there was in the captain's mind an idea which he was struggling desperately to communicate.

No words came from the lips now; but there were many repetitions of that unmistakable sniffing action of the nostrils. Then over and over again a hundred times for each word came the ceaseless repetitions of "Humber," "amidships" and "fire."

These words were again followed by the strange, sniffing contortions of the face.

An awful thought flashed into Parton's brain. Could it be possible that the old man really had an idea and that he was attempting to convey it? Did the words and the sniffing mean that he smelled fire in the ship and that he feared that it was amidships, where it might reach the Humberite and blow up the ship? Was the old man trying to warn him?

He bent over the captain and asked: "What do you mean, captain? Do you mean that the ship is on fire and that if it reaches the Humberite amidships it might blow her up? Is that what you mean?"

He gazed eagerly into the face of the sick man and alternately watched the eyes, which, it seemed to him, showed unquestionable evidence of intelligence. But there came no reply. Indeed, instead of any words of whatever kind, now the noises from the captain's lips became suddenly wholly formless and quite devoid of any possibility of meaning. Had it not been for that look of baffled intelligence and meaning in the eyes Parton would have turned away with a sigh of pity and paid no more attention to the vocal vagaries of the sick man.

But there was unquestionable intelligence in the eyes, and there was on the face as a whole an expression of strain and anxiety which had not been there before since he had been stricken.

And all the time the nostrils dilated and

contracted, dilated and contracted as do those of a man who detects some unpleasant odor in the air.

Parton, noticing this, almost involuntarily mimicked the facial movement. He himself sniffed the air of the cabin, and he saw, or thought he saw, a slight expression of relief pass over the captain's face as he did so. The old man's eyes were fixed on him with an intensity of gaze which seemed to be almost painful. But Parton could smell nothing except the usual odors of the ship's cabin.

For a moment he turned his face away from the captain and gazed helplessly about the cabin. The thought of fire on that explosive-laden ship was a terrible one. When he looked back at the captain the old man seemed to search his face for some sign that he had accomplished something by his survey of the cabin.

"I can smell nothing," said Parton, almost ridiculing himself for the idea that the old man, who was incapable of speech, could understand what others said.

Again the captain sniffed, sniffed, sniffed, and as he did so winked. The power of that movement had never been taken from him. From the first he had had apparently some control over the movements of his eyelids and eyeballs. An idea occurred to Parton. Perhaps there was a possibility of communicating with the old man through this very ability of his—about the only controllable power of movement which had not been taken from him. Parton acted on the idea without hesitation.

"Captain," he said slowly and very distinctly, "I can't understand you; but perhaps I can suggest a plan by which we may be able to communicate with each other. See if you can understand me."

He looked in the face of the sick man, and he believed, although, he was not sure, that there was a flash of intelligence in the anxious eyes there.

"Now, try to understand me, captain," said Parton very slowly and distinctly. "I shall speak very slowly and if I am right in what I say you are to tell me so by closing your eyes once. If I am wrong you are to let me know that by closing your eyes twice. Once for yes and twice for no. Do you understand?"

And the captain winked once. In half a dozen ways Parton, who was by no means sure of the usefulness of his plan, tried to prove to himself that the captain did not understand him, but that his winking was mere haphazard, muscular movement. But every test that he could think of proved otherwise, and finally he was convinced.

Then he realized for the first time the terrible agonies which the old man must have suffered as he lay there. It flashed upon him that during all that time he may have been wholly conscious, but unable to express himself. He wondered if those two cries had been intelligent efforts and not mere meaningless shrieks of physical agony.

He wondered if, in the first place, the captain had tried to call him, and in the second instance had tried to call others to his assistance. He wanted no more time, however, in wondering about what was past. He started to work on his new experiment.

"Now, captain," he said, very slowly and with very careful enunciation, "do you understand me? You are to wink once if I am right in what I guess at your meaning. You are to wink twice if I am wrong. Do you understand?"

The captain winked once. "I am not wrong in thinking that you understand?"

The captain winked twice. "A few moments ago you said three words, 'fire,' 'Humber' and 'amidships.' Did you mean by these words and by the action of your nostrils that you smelled fire on board and that it might reach the Humberite which is stored amidships?"

The captain winked once, and there was an expression of relief on his face which could not be mistaken.

"I cannot smell any fire," said Parton, now leaning forward with an intensity which the old man evidently recognized and was pleased by. "Are you certain that you do?"

The captain winked once. "Shall I call the mate?"

The captain winked twice. "You don't want me to call the mate; is that right?"

The captain winked once. "Shall I call someone else?"

The captain winked once. "Whom shall I call? I will name the men over and when I come to the right name let me know by winking once at me. Do you understand?"

The captain winked once. Then Parton named the crew over as well as he could. Long as he had been on the ship he was not familiar with all of their names, but most of them he knew. The man who had come to him and told him that the men would stand by him if the mate tried to put him in irons or otherwise harm him after the fight, was named Wilson. Parton remembered that.

He had spoken several of the men's names before he came to Wilson's, and the captain had made no sign, but when he came to Wilson's the old man's eyes closed tightly once. Again and again Parton tried the experiment, until at last he was

thoroughly satisfied that the old man wished to have him call Wilson.

He lost no time in hurrying to the deck and a backward glance at the captain seemed to show an expression of satisfaction on his face.

A sailor was busy coiling rope not far from the entrance to the companionway. Most of the watch which were at the time on duty were busy near him. The mate was standing by them, watching them surlily. He glanced at Parton in some surprise and a gleam of hatred shot across his face. Parton saw him, of course, but he paid no attention to him whatever. He spoke to the sailor nearest to him.

"Go and tell Wilson," said Parton quickly, "to come aft at once. Look sharp."

"Stay where you are," said the mate, taking a step forward. The man, who had jumped to his feet and was evidently about to start, hesitated for an instant. Parton looked first at the mate and then at the man. The position was a difficult one.

"Do as I tell you," he said finally to the sailor. "Do as I tell you and look sharp about it. The captain of this ship wishes to see Wilson in the cabin. Go tell him to come aft. The captain is in command again. Do as I tell you."

It was instantly evident that the mate did not intend to permit the man to go and Parton saw chances of new difficulties. The situation, however, admitted of no delay. Parton made a quick step toward the mate, who involuntarily retreated a few feet.

The man rose and went forward after Wilson. The mate and Parton remained almost absolutely quiet during his absence. In a moment he returned, followed by the wondering Wilson.

"Go down into the cabin, Wilson," said Parton, still keeping his eyes on the mate.

Wilson, wonderingly, did as he was told. He had almost disappeared into the companionway when Parton started after him. The mate made a movement as if to follow.

"You are not to come down," said Parton, calmly. "That is another order from the captain of the ship."

The mate still followed him as he took another step or two toward the companionway. Parton feared that his presence would annoy and confuse the captain, who was already under a great strain. He made up his mind quickly. Stopping short where he was, he made an appeal to the four or five men who were watching the scene curiously.

"Men," he said, calmly, but very slowly and distinctly, "the captain does not wish to have the mate come below at present. I am sorry that this is so, but it is. Now, if he makes any attempt to follow me into the cabin the captains wants you to prevent him from doing so. Do you understand?"

There could be no mistake about the fact that Wilson had been right when he had said that the men were ready to mutiny against the mate. Three of them instantly stepped before the companionway door. When Parton approached they separated and let him pass. The mate stopped, swore at them viciously and walked away. The tables were turned.

Once inside the cabin, Parton explained to Wilson as quickly as he could the situation. The man heard the extraordinary story with open-mouthed attention.

During this short prefatory statement the captain (they were standing close at the side of his berth) watched them intently. Once or twice Parton asked questions of him which he answered by winking as before. The sailor was greatly impressed by this. Parton saw that he was trying himself to see if he could detect the odor of burning which Parton believed that the acute nostrils of the sick man had found or which the captain thought that they had found. The sailor suddenly put his head under the cabin table. The deck there was covered by a heavy, cheap rug. The sailor pulled it away.

"I can smell it myself, sir," he said excitedly. "The smell's coming up through this hatch."

Parton had not even known that there was a hatchway concealed by the rug. The captain showed by his face that he was satisfied with the way things were going on.

"If I could leave her off, sir," Wilson went on, "I could soon tell what's the matter; but I can't do it alone. I'd have to have another man."

Instantly Parton went to the companionway and ran to the deck. He said nothing, but beckoned to the first man he saw to come below.

The sailor went below with Parton. The latter made no explanations to him. He could smell the smoke himself by this time, he thought. He hurriedly explained to the man what was in the air, and bade him help Wilson in removing the hatch.

"By God!" said the sailor. "That's what makes the deck hot amidships. The cargo's smolderin'. I said that deck was hotter'n I'd ever known a deck to be before, an' the mate he told me to go to hell. Said I'd find things hotter yet down there."

The labor of pushing the table out of the way and lifting the heavy hatch took not more than ten minutes, but it seemed like a long time to Parton. They had not raised one edge of it more than a fraction of an inch before their fears were confirmed. A thin stream of smoke curled through the

opening. Simultaneously they dropped their hold of it.

"Better leave it down, sir," said Wilson. "It'll burn ten times as fast if the air gets to it. I was on a ship on fire at sea once before. Better keep everything as tight as possible."

Parton glanced at the captain. The old man's face was drawn into lines of anxiety. He met Parton's gaze with a slow, single wink.

"What do you mean, captain?" asked Parton. "Is the man right? Is it better to leave the hatch down?"

The captain winked once. "What shall we do?" asked Parton. "Shall I tell the mate and have the hold pumped full?"

The captain's eyes said "No."

"You don't mean to abandon the ship, do you?" asked Parton in surprise.

The captain's eyes unmistakably said "Yes," and Parton knew the reason for it. He was thinking of the danger that the fire would reach the Humberite and blow them up.

"Shall I tell the mate to have the boats manned and abandon the ship?" asked Parton.

There could be no doubt about the meaning of the captain's following movement of the eyelid. Parton understood. The explosive, which would burn harmlessly when unconfined was first sealed in cans and then confined in the ship's hold and packed tightly round about with cargo. Its explosion would mean certain destruction.

Parton turned to the two men. It would not do to let them know the danger which they were really in. He said nothing about the Humberite and its dreadful possibility.

His work was cut for him and there was plenty of it. He must notify the mate of the dreadful situation, rush below and get his diamonds if he could, tell these men here to get some clothes on the sick man and do it himself if they were too badly frightened to, and then see to it that the vessel was abandoned as quickly as possible.

The fact that the men knew nothing about the presence of the explosive in the cargo saved them from being panic-struck. Also Parton's entirely calm manner had its effect on them, and they acquiesced when he told them to do what they could to clothe the captain without causing him too much pain, while he went to notify the mate of the fact of the fire.

Parton hurried up the companionway, and even as his feet touched the level of the deck he heard a shout which meant that his notification would be unnecessary. There were thin curls of smoke coming from the "midships" hatch and these had been discovered by the men.

A great cry of "Fire!" was raised and taken up by every man on deck. The mate, at first incredulous, then quickly convinced as the small curling spirals of smoke were pointed out to him, gave orders quickly.

He paid no attention to Parton, who was hurrying forward toward the hatch by which he must reach the portion of the hold in which his diamonds were hidden. But even as he hastened, while the mate was giving rapid orders and the men were in a frenzy of haste in preparing the boats for lowering, the smoke amidships was pierced by small tongues of flame.

These ran up the tarred tackle which hung about the base of the mainmast, and springing upward with almost inconceivable rapidity, caught the canvas. Tinder could not have been more eager to offer itself in sacrifice to fire than were the canvas and cordage of the Lydia Skolfeld. In less time than it would have taken Parton to have reached the forward hatch had he not paused in fascinated terror at the sight of the leaping flames on the mainmast the way was closed to him. A roaring mass of flame shut him off from the possibility of reaching the hold in which his treasures were concealed.

(To Be Continued.)

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