WOLFGANG,

OR,

THE WRECKER'S BEACON.

CHAPTER I.

BEFORE THE GALE.

The good ship Pathfinder, of New York, and bound to Copenhagen, had entered the North Sea, having left the Straits of Dover two days behind.

The commander of the ship was a young man, not over eight-and-twenty, and his name was Maurice Lester. He stood by the taffrii, gazing off upon the horizon to the eastward, ever and anon raising his hand above his head to feel if there was any wind stirring, and as often casting his eye aloft to see how the canvass hung. As he stood thus his mate approached, and spoke to him:

"What d'ye think of this, Capt'n?"

"I think we're in for a storm, sir," the master replied. "And I tell you what it is, Griffin," he added, after sweeping the horizon again with his eye, "when it comes it will be an earnest one. None of your broad Ocean puffs, with nothing but water to hatch wind from; but we'll have it right fresh from some of those places where they know how to make things blow."

"Then you think we'll have a hard one?" said Griffin.

"Aye," answered the captain with almost a shudder, "I feel it in my bones."

In the meantime, Captain Lester had been watching the sea and sky as before, and he fancied that the signs of the storm were growing more and more palpable every moment. The sun was going down in a thick bank, giving to the whole western horizon a dull, purplish red, bloody hue, with here and there spots of a darker tinge, like openings, through the fiery cloud, looking like a fearful blackness behind.

"Do you see how strangely it looks off there?" said the captain, raising his finger towards the point where the sun was setting.

"Yes, sir," returned Griffin "I have been watching those dark places."

And others noticed the same thing, and spoke of it, too.

Seven o'clock came and went. Eight o'clock came, and the first watch was set.

"Don't go below," said the captain, as the men of the last dog-watch left their stations. "This calm can't last a great while. You had better batten down the hatches now, while there is nothing else to do, for I am sure there will be need of having them closed before the coming of another day."

The men had had no thoughts of going below, for they could see and feel: and they were not wholly ignorant of what was coming; so they went to work and secured the hatches with thick tarpaulins; and when this was done those who had no particular station collected about the wheel. Another hour passed away—and another. Ten o'clock came, and still not a breath. The ship lay upon the water like a dead thing, with the ropes, and blocks, and sails, rattling and flapping as she was swayed to and fro by the lazy swells of the sea.

"What does it mean?" cried Griffin, as the bay struck five bells.

"Hark!" said the captain, almost instantly, "I guess you'll soon see. Did you feel that?—Ha!—and that?"

It was a puff of wind, and a light flying of spray; or, perhaps, it was a spit of rain. At all events, the puff was felt; and the drops of water fell upon other cheeks than Maurice Lester's: which came over the dark waters. So other ears heard the roar which followed, and other bodies quivered beneath the shock of the stormgiant when he came in his might.

Aye—the storm had come. It came with wind and rain, and with an angry, heaving of the sea. It came with darkness like Erebus, and with the voice of thunder. The gale continued increase with fury as the long night passed away. When the morning came the scene was one of awful grandeur. The wind was howling with terrific fury; and the broad sea was lashed into huge mountains, that foamed, and tumbled, and leaped along over the bosom of the deep, seeming every moment ready to whelm and engulf the frail bark that struggled within the demon grasp.

When Captain Lester had observed the signs of the morning, he feared that the storm would continue through the day; and so he told his men. The sky wore a look of horror, and rain was now driving down, mingling with the lashing sea. At noon it was still worse.

At length night shut in again, and not a sign yet of the passing away of the storm. The frightful howling of the tempest seemed rather to have increased than abated. The men gathered upon the quarter-deck, clinging for support to the racks and rails—for the life-lines swayed so much that they were afraid of them—gathered as near to the light of the binnacle-lamp as they could, as though even from such feeble beams they might find some comfort. But not all were there. No—not all! Fearless, true-hearted men had been swept away by the storm. Near a score were left; but how many shall see the light of another day?

At nine o'clock—Captain Lester went below. He took down a chart of the North Sea, and having spread it upon the table, he sat down to examine it. He was thus engaged when Mr. Griffin came down, but he did not look up until he had finished the calculation.

"How is it?" the mate asked, as he saw his commander lay down his dividers.

"I have been making a reckoning, and I find that we have but little more sea room left. The course we have made since we were, has been, as near as I can calculate, north-west by-west, so that we must have been driving towards the coast of Northumberland. I think we have plenty of room to stand on until midnight; but we cannot stand on much longer. If the gale does not abate by that time I know not what we shall do."

The captain started up from his chair, and would probably have walked across the cabin, but at that moment a heavy sea caught the ship, and gave her a pitch forward, which caused him to catch his seat as quickly as possible. As soon as the floor had gone from the deck, and the vessel had struggled up from the shock, he looked into his companion's face, and said, in a voice made tremulous by deeper emotion than he had before manifested:

"Griffin, I have something upon my mind more than you know; and I am anxious to communicate it, too. I must tell it now, for I have a strange foreboding of coming ill. Something is to happen that will bear great calamity to some of us. I am not croaking—I am only reading what the Unseen has written in my soul. However, you shall hear my story. You have heard that my parents were both lost at sea."

"Yes," said the mate.

"And perhaps you know that they were lost in this sea?"

"I have heard so, sir."

"Aye—so it was. I was a boy then. They were on their way to Copenhagen, as we should be now. My father commanded the ship—she was called the "Clara Jane." She was named for my mother; and she was a stanch, noble craft. I was at school then, in Troy; and when I think that my parents were dead I was well nigh mad with grief. I used to think, in my first hours of orphanage, that my heart would break; and, I think such would have been the case if they had kept right at school. But some of those who cared for me came to see me, and it was finally arranged that I should go to sea. And I prospered—prospered so well that, when I was twenty years old, they gave me command of a ship.

"The man who owned the ship which I first commanded was named Thornton. He had a daughter named Carrie—one of the sweetest, purest, and loveliest creatures that ever graced this poor life of earth. She was four years younger than myself, but even then I first knew her—and she was not then more than fourteen—she was a woman in intellect and grace, though a child in simplicity of love and confidence. Mr. Thornton did not object to my suit, so I had her with all my soul, and was blessed to know that she loved me in return. It had been arranged that we should be married when she was twenty years old,—that had been our plan for more than two years. Mr. Thornton having set the bounds himself. It lacked two months of the time, and I had arranged to remain at home until we were married. But Thornton had a heavy ship freighted for Copenhagen, and her Captain was dying. He could find no one to take his place but me, and he asked me to go. I could not refuse; but I asked that I might be married first. Mr. Thornton shook his head, and said no. But he had another plan which he said would be better. He had been planning to visit Copenhagen, where he had two brothers in business—they were in company with him—and he said he would take the next ship, and bring Carrie out with him, and we should be married there. I finally consented to take out the new ship, and Mr. Thornton, with his daughter, was to meet me in Copenhagen, and there we were to be married, and all three come home together. The evening before I sailed I spent with Carrie, and when I left her I felt that I was leaving my very life.

"Well," continued Lester, wiping his eyes, "I went to Copenhagen. I waited a month—then I heard that the American ship, "*White Fawn*," with William Thornton and daughter on board, had touched at Dover, and that all were safe and well when she left. I waited another week, and then I crossed over to Hamburg; but I could learn nothing there. Next I went to London, and there I learned enough to assure me that the ship had been lost! On the second day after she left Dover a severe storm had arisen, and several vessels had been reported lost. I sent my ship home in charge of the mate, and spent four months in searching after the lost ones; but I could gain no trace of them. Not even a piece of the wreck could I find—not a mark of the ship nor of its crew. I came home with a sad and heavy heart."

Maurice Lester stopped a few moments, and bowed his head upon his hands, for his feelings had almost overcome him. In a little while, however, he looked up again, and added, in a trembling tone.

"Ah, my dear friend, you do not know what I have suffered—tongue cannot tell it, nor can pen write it. That blow did break my heart—it broke it in the rending of its tenderest cords; and in the crushing of all its earthly hopes!—Do you believe in dreams?"

The mate started, not so much at the character of the question, as from the sudden manner in which it was put.

"Well," said Lester, in a lower tone, "I have had a dream repeated many times; but never has it come to me so directly and so vividly as within the past three or four days. *Carrie Thornton is not dead!* I know she is not!—she has appeared to me repeatedly in a dream, and calls upon me to save her! To night, as I stood all alone by the mizzen rigging, trying to peer out into the thick gloom, I heard her voice as plainly as you now hear mine, and she called out for me to save her. Of course what followed was mere fancy, though even that affected me much. I thought I saw her standing not far off, upon a huge sea, with her arms stretched imploringly towards me—saw her then, with my eyes open, as I have often seen her in my sleeping dream!——"

At this point the captain was cut short in his speech by the cry of "Look no!" from the deck. They hurried up and found the men crowding forward.

"What is it?" Lester asked.

"I think it is a light, sir," replied Parker "Here, sir,—just stand here. Now turn your eye about four points upon the larboard bow.—Wait, now, till she rises. There!—there?—See!—Did you see it, sir?"

Yes—he had seen it; and he knew it must be a light upon the shore; but it was a great way off. He watched until he had seen it several times, and then he remarked to his mate that it must be a light-house. The light was bold and distinct, and evidently at a considerable height above the level of the sea; for, had it not been so, it could not have been seen at that distance. After a short consultation, during which reference was had to the chart of the Northumberland coast, it was decided that this light must be upon Dorton Point. To the North of Dorton, as the captain knew from personal experience, as well as from the chart, there was a snug harbor, of easy entrance. These things were settled.

As soon as it had been determined where the light was, Capt. Lester made all possible haste to determine his course of action. Had the thing been practicable, he would have laid his ship to; but that could not be done. No one even gave it a serious thought. Still was determined that the ship should stand on, at least till something further was discovered.

At half-past twelve the gale had moderated considerably. The light was now to be seen very plainly whenever the ship rose, and the captain and his officers felt sure that they were right in their calculations.

"At all events," said the former, "we have no choice but to stand on, at least——"

He was interrupted by a cry from the hows that made every soul start with horror.

"BREAKERS! BREAKERS!"

Captain Lester leaped forward, and in a very few moments he was satisfied that the warning had not been a false one; for he could not only hear the awful roar of the breaking sea, but he fancied that he could see the gleaming of the white foam as it flew high in the air. As quickly as possible the topsail was taken off, and the anchors cut loose. The ponderous grapplings plunged into the hissing sea, and the iron cables were spun through the hawse holes like lightning. Snap went the starboard cable, and in a moment more a shock was felt as the larboard anchor found bottom; but it could not hold. The cable parted as though it had been a hemp string, and on swept the devoted ship.

"In heaven's name," gasped Griffin, "what does this mean? See! The light is still burning as brightly as ever—as far from a league away—and yet here are the rocks directly on our bows! What can it mean?"

Maurice Lester did not answer, but an old, weather-beaten sailor, who stood at the wheel, and who had looked a thousand dangers in the face, answered for him:

"It's a Wrecker's Beacon! I've seen such things afore. There aint no use in firin' the gun, sir. That light was put there to lead poor Jack to his death that the coast-sharks might pick his bones."

"Breakers! Breakers!—*on the starboard bow!—No!—On the larboard!*—Breakers!"

But it was too late for mortal help. The ship had her her doom. She went upon the rocks with a crash that sounded high above the roar of the elements.

CHAPTER II

WOLFGANG.

Maurice Lester was near the mark, did gale way when the ship struck, having started off to look to the helm. The shock threw him upon his back, and he tried to get up, but ere he could, regain his feet the flood of wild waters came sweeping over the deck, and he was thrown—he knew not where. He only knew that the flood came—that he caught him in its giant grasp—that it hurled him as a gale hurls a feather—that his hand was hurt—that his body was bruised and bruised—and then the lamp of his consciousness went out. When he came to him self it was daylight, and the rays of the sun were beaming above him. At first he did not attempt to move, any further than simply to assure himself that he was really alive and sensible; but sought to recall the events of the past, which he did, very clearly, up to the time when his ship struck upon the rocks,—he could go no farther. After this he raised himself upon his elbow, and tried to gaze about him. He found himself upon a bed of sand, between two immense rocks. He had been landed therein that nook, and the tide had gone out and left him. In a little while he rose to his feet, and managed to crawl up, by the aid of a standard spar, over a low part of one of the rocks.

After seeing all that was to be observed from this point, he moved on towards where he thought he should present itself an open beach, for he felt faint and sick, and he wished to find help as soon as possible. After toiling over slippery, slimy rocks, and cruel, tearing crags, until his clothing was all torn, and his flesh bruised and lacerated, he finally reached an open space among the rocks, where many pieces of the wreck had been lodged, and where he found the bodies of three of his men. He hastened to the spot where they lay—two of them being clasped in each other's arms—but he found no signs of life.

With a sad, heavy heart, Lester passed on, and presently he found two more dead bodies, and one of them was Dick Griffin, his chief mate. He kneeled down by the officer's side and felt of the head; but it was cold and lifeless, and the skull was broken. Gently he laid it back upon the sand, and then moved on again. And he saw more dead men also. Could it be possible that he had been the only one left alive?

Hal—wait—what is this? If never—if this life!

Captain Lester hurried forward, as fast as his feeble strength would permit, and found two men lying by the side of a heavy spar. One of them was dead; but the other gazed up into his commander's face, and stretched forth his hands as though he would ask for mercy. He knew was Dick Mangle, and he had been one of the best seamen on board the ship.

"Poor Dick!" said Lester, kneeling by his side and lifting his head. "Are you badly hurt?"

"They've done it for us!" the sailor answered, in a weakening voice. "They've killed Tom. Aint he dead?"

It was the body of stout Tom Brocket that lay close by, and when the captain had made himself sure that there was no particle of life in it, he reported the same to Dick

"But," he added, "what do you mean? Who has done you harm?"

"Haven't you seen 'em?" the man asked, struggling for breath

"Seen whom? What do you mean?" demanded Lester, eagerly.

Dick started up to his elbow, and gazed around; but he seemed to find nothing for which he was looking, and he sank back again. The effort made this effort he might have spoken further, but the act of rising had exhausted him, and the last grain of strength was leaving him

"What do you mean?" cried Lester, as he saw that the poor fellow was sinking. "Has any body harmed you?"

Dick managed to raise his hand to his head—to a point above the left ear—and, as he did so, he whispered—

"Look out—they asked for the cap'n. That's where they struck!" He tried to speak further, but his voice failed him.

What could this mean? Maurice Lester started to his feet and gazed around. Who had killed his men?

The captain was disturbed in his meditation by the sound of voices not far off, and upon turning he beheld four men coming up from the water. He who came in advance was a tall, muscular man, with a gaunt, bony frame, somewhere about fifty or fifty-five years of age, and habited in a garb of blue cloth, cut into a frock, or shirt, which was secured at the waist by a broad pistol-belt.

Maurice Lester was startled when he beheld the stalwart leader and his three ruffianly companions; and, considering all the circumstances, it is no wonder that he was startled. However, he had not much opportunity for reflection, for, by the time he had fairly made out the party, they were upon him.

"Hallo," the leader cried as he saw him "there we have another;" and as he came up he added: "And I guess we've found a live one, too—one that knows something. Say, who are ye?"

This last sentence was addressed to Maurice, who quickly answered:

"My name is Lester. And now, to be fair, what is your name?"

"Well, I guess you've heard it before. Men call me Ryan Wolfgang."

"WOLFGANG!" repeated Lester, with a start.

"Yes; that is my name."

Then Wolfgang was not a myth after all. That mysterious wrecker, whose name was a source of terror to honest sailors, was a being of flesh and blood, like other men. Maurice gazed upon him with wonder; and as he gazed he felt that he looked upon a fiend incarnate. He had often heard of the pirate wrecker, and so dark and mystic had been the tales which the North Sea sailors had told, that he had been inclined to believe that the whole theme was a fabrication. Now, however, he had no more doubt, for the man before him looked as dark and bloody as were any of the pictures he had heard drawn of him upon the forecastle

But our hero was not allowed much time for reflection. Wolfgang plied him with questions, to all of which Lester gave straight forward answers; well knowing that evasion would prove no practical purpose, and hoping by his frankness to prophesy the month's friend in whose assumed power he knew himself to be!

When he was over, I had intended that the narrative should tell how I parted with the cargo the vessel was freighted, and what it fetched $30,000 in specie was said, but I cannot give it, and remarked to one of his comrades in an undertone which perhaps he intended should not reach the ears of the *White Fawn* had been a few years before. The mention of the name seemed to take fast hold of Carrie Thornton, and I fancied that I had been guilty of a blunder. Maurice Lester saw the shock that he nearly felt—the earth. He gazed at her, perhaps the frame quivered momentarily.

"What's the matter," said Wolfgang. "You didn't seem to have much strength left. Bring him along to where we can look after him

The minister glance which he accompanied this last remark, and the peculiar emphasis laid upon the word "collector," struck a chill to our hero's heart. But he could not give his own safety much thought, while he was partly forced and partly carried along after Wolfgang, who strode rapidly on for nearly half an hour. He could think only of the White Fawn, that had been wrecked on that coast, and of his beloved Carrie, who had, perhaps, in company with those same men, trod the same path he was now treading. What had been her fate. Had she been murdered by these wretches, or reserved for some more deplorable doom? These thoughts filled him with unutterable agony.

Wolfgang had now drawn near the water's edge, and soon come to the mouth of a cave, he entered it, followed by the three ruffians who had charged of our hero. The interior of the cave sloped upward from the entrance for some distance and then became almost level. The captive (for such Maurice Lester was to be) was left to lay for quite an hour, during which time what he thought, with a thrill of horror, were human bones strewn around the cavern, but he could not clearly make them out in the dim light. He also noticed that the bottom of the cave was very wet, as though it had recently been covered with water. The wrecker then came stepping at last, near what seemed the end of the cave, and making a sign to his followers, they clapped manacles on the wrists and ankles of Maurice before he had time to note their intention

"Now, Captain Lester," said Wolfgang, "you must remain in this place for a short season. *You are perfectly safe here.* Silence! Say not a word! If you attempt to leave this place, you will be slain the moment you set foot outside the cave."

Thus speaking, the chieftain and his followers silently but rapidly withdrew, leaving Maurice Lester in the utmost amazement. As they passed from the mouth of the cave, their feet were wet by the rising waves. *The tide was just coming in*

After a short time, the captive looked about him with eyes somewhat accustomed to the dim light, and he came satisfied that what he had supposed was the human bones were really such. There were many of them! And moving among them were huge rats, seeking for prey! The top of the cavern, in some places, was but a few feet above his head, and in one place he discovered a small aperture, through which a faint light struggled, and on going underneath it, he thought he saw the color of vegetation and flowers.

On turning, from the contemplation of this aperture, towards the mouth of the cave, Captain Lester observed, with alarm, that the water was creeping up the sloping bottom. What if it should rise to the cavern. Oh how he could scream for help upon the heap of the human bones! They were the sad memorials of other hapless pirates who had been left in that cave to perish by drowning.

Slowly but surely the water crept along. The vermin fled before them to the elevated spot on which Maurice stood. Slowly following, the incoming waters at length reached his feet

At the end of the cave, within a few feet of the wall, and and beneath the aperture before spoken of, was a large piece of rock, some four feet high, that might have fallen from above. To this Maurice hastened quickly as his manacled feet permitted. After some exertion, he succeeded in climbing to its top, and stood there bound with a few inches of water at the foot of the cavern. But he was not allowed to remain there alone. As the water began to creep up around his base, the rats also sought refuge upon the rock. Fearful was the conflict he had to undergo with these vermin. They fought fiercely to dispute his right to the place, and he could not clearly make them out in the dim light. He also noticed that the bottom of the cave was very wet, as though it had recently been covered with water. The wrecker came stepping at last, near what seemed the end of the cave, and making a sign to his followers, they clapped manacles on the wrists and ankles of Maurice before he had time to note their intention

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And still higher the waters rose, and more thickly the foul vermin clustered upon the devoted captive's shoulders and head, as their only place of safety. Fierce fears at last by the horrors of his situation, he was about to plunge into the surging tide and seek a watery grave, when his attention was arrested by the tread of rapid footsteps near the aperture above his head, and the sound of a sharp masculine voice, almost instantly followed by a noise as of a struggle, and a piercing shriek which thrilled Maurice Lester to the very soul. He could not be mistaken—it was CARRIE'S voice. Again he heard it, but ring in tones of entreaty—oh, it was her voice. She was not dead! She lived and was near him! Gathering all his strength, he shouted, "Carrie! Carrie! CARRIE!"

A dead silence followed, he had only heard the faint murmurings of the still rising waters, and the splash of the rats as they left from the wreck of captive's head and shoulders, only to return again, in their fierce struggles for a perch of safety from the advancing tide, which had now nearly reached our hero's shoulders

The shore recalls a thrilling story that will be published in a few days. We give this as a sample. The entertainment of it lies in where it leaves off here can be found only in the New York Ledger, the great family paper, to which the most popular writers in the country contribute, and which is for sale at all the news stands throughout the city and country, where papers are sold. Remember and read "The Wreck Ashore,"