

(From Chambers Journal.)

A Cast of the Net.

THE STORY OF A DETECTIVE OFFICER.

CHAPTER IV.—CONTINUED.

It was so dark we could hardly see them—for we could just make out there were now two persons in the boat—but, as they reached the shore, a lamp that was burning on the wharf helped us a little. We could not clearly see what they were doing, but they certainly got out of the boat, and as certainly, there were then more than two figures moving about, and seemingly engaged in placing parcels in the wherry. But it was very gloomy there; they were in the shade of the wharf, and the lamp glimmered weak and faint, through the thick rain. It was the more difficult to see what was being done, because there were several boats tied up to the landing-place, making some confusion in the darkness. At last, however, we could see that they were pushing off from the shore; so it was time for us to move. We pulled back for a while (there was no doubt as to which way the others would come,) and then sheering off lay between two colliers until we saw the wherry we had watched go by, and once more we pulled after them.

"I'm blest, if I don't think there's another boat following us," says Peter Tilley, staring as hard as he could behind us. I looked, but couldn't see anything; and Peter owned he might have been mistaken.

We could not make out how many was in the foremost boat. There was only one man rowing, that was plain; and he pulled short round at the proper place, as I knew he would, and rowed toward the Dutch trader. As he did so, we lost him for a second, a big steamer lying between us; but the hull of the vessel did not obstruct the view up the river. I seized the moment, and waved my lantern twice. It was all right. As quick as thought the light on board the oyster-smack was moved also, and then we too were pulling across the stream. I wanted to capture my men on board the trader, as otherwise the paper might be got rid of, because I couldn't be positively certain that it was not already on board. In fact, Mr. Edmund Byrle was my chief aim; not the skipper.

The wherry pulled under the bows of the vessel; we followed just in time to see by a very convenient flash of light, two packages handed up; then a figure, which we had recognized by the same flash as the bony ferryman, got into the ship. As he disappeared, our wherry touched the vessel; and at the same instant to my great relief, a long black Thames police galley came along-side us, and its crew, five constables, with Barney Wilkins, who was there as guide, clambered up like cats. I and Peter imitated them, but not quite so quickly; and when I looked over the bulwark, I saw by the light of a couple of lanterns, screened from the outside, four or five men, the boatman and the skipper being two, lifting up a great lid which fitted in the deck—the hatches I heard it called—while by their sides lay the packages of paper. I could not see Mr. Byrle; but there was no time to consider; we all jumped in at once, the men looking round in amazement at the noise. I fancied that just then I heard a shout from the boat.

"What do you all want here?" said the skipper, angrily.

"We hold a warrant"—I began.

"Oh, it is you, is it?" he screeched, like a hyena, or something of that sort. "I owe you a little for a past score, and you shall have it." As quick as lightning he pulled a long straight knife from the side of his trousers, where it must have been in some sort of sheath, and jumped at me with such suddenness, that he would have stabbed me, only Barney Wilkins snatched a handspike from the deck, and dashing between us, hit him down with such a blow that the skipper fell with a crash like a bullock when it is killed, the blood pouring from his head instantly.

It was as quick as thought. The other men were all seized in a breath. So quick was it all done, that I had no idea Barney was hurt, until he reeled, made a wild clutch as if he caught at something for support, and then pitched forward on his hands and knees.

"Hello, Barney!" I said, stooping down to him. "What's the matter, old fellow?"

"It's all up, Mr. Nickham," he gasped, "he's done me. I only hope I've killed him. Where's the other?"

"Oh, never mind the other, Barney," I says. "Where are you hurt?"

But as I spoke, one of the men came with a lantern, and Barney had no occasion to answer me, for I could see a straight stream of blood running from his chest unto the deck; and his hands giving way from weakness, he fell over on his side.

"Pull in for the shore, you, sir!" said the sergeant of the Thames police to my waterman. "You know Marigold street? Knock up Mr. Gartley, and tell him what has happened. Say we are afraid to move the men to his house, so he had better come aboard."

To be Continued.

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