

## CHAPTER VII

### A Pause

Good old Arcturion! Maternal craft; that rocked me so often in thy heart of oak, I grieve to tell how I deserted thee on the broad deep. So far from home, with such a motley crew, so many islanders, whose heathen babble echoing through thy Christian hull, must have grated harshly on every carline.

Old ship! where sails thy lone ghost now? For of the stout Arcturion no word was ever heard, from the dark hour we pushed from her fated planks. In what time of tempest, to what seagull's scream, the drowning eddies did their work, knows no mortal man. Sunk she silently, helplessly, into the calm depths of that summer sea, assassinated by the ruthless blade of the swordfish? Such things have been. Or was hers a better fate? Stricken down while gallantly battling with the blast; her storm-sails set; helm manned; and every sailor at his post; as sunk the Hornet, her men at quarters, in some distant gale.

But surmises are idle. A very old craft, she may have foundered; or laid her bones upon some treacherous reef; but as with many a far rover, her fate is a mystery.

Pray Heaven, the spirit of that lost vessel roaming abroad through the troubled mists of midnight gales--as old mariners believe of missing ships--may never haunt my future path upon the waves. Peacefully may she rest at the bottom of the sea; and sweetly sleep my shipmates in the lowest watery zone, where prowling sharks come not, nor billows roll.

By quitting the Arcturion when we did, Jarl and I unconsciously eluded a sailor's grave. We hear of providential deliverances. Was this one? But life is sweet to all, death comes as hard. And for myself I am almost tempted to hang my head, that I escaped the fate of my shipmates; something like him who blushed to have escaped the fell carnage at Thermopylae.

Though I can not repress a shudder when I think of that old ship's end, it is impossible for me so much as to imagine, that our deserting her could have been in any way instrumental in her loss. Nevertheless, I would to heaven the Arcturion still floated; that it was given me once more to tread her familiar decks.