



The Wreck of the Grosvenor: An Account of the Mutiny of the Crew and the Loss of the Ship When Trying to Make the Bermudas (complete)

William Clark Russell

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There was every appearance of a south-westerly wind. The coast of France, which had been standing high and shining upon the horizon on the port bow, and so magnified by the clear northerly air that you could discern, even at that distance, the dim emerald sheen of the upper slopes and the streaky shadows thrown by projecting points and elbows on the white ground, was fast fading, though the sun still stood within an hour of its setting beyond the bleak Foreland. The north wind, which had rattled us with an acre of foam at our bows right away down the river, and had now brought us well abreast of the Gull lightship, was dropping fast. There was barely enough air to keep the royals full, and the ship's number, which I had just hoisted at the peak—a string of gaudy flags which made a brilliant figure against the white canvas of the spanker—shook their folds sluggishly. The whole stretch of scene, from the North Foreland down to the vanishing French headlands miles away yonder, was lovely at that moment—full of the great peace of an ocean falling asleep, of gently moving vessels, of the solemn gathering of shadows. The town of Deal was upon the starboard bow, a warm cluster of houses, with a windmill on the green hills turning drowsily, here and there a window glittering with a sudden beam of light, an inclined beach in the foreground with groups of boats high and dry upon it, and a line of foam at its base which sang upon the shingle so that you could hear it plainly amid intervals of silence on board the ship. The evening sun shining over the giant brow of the South Foreland struck the gray outline of the cliff deep in the still water, but the clear red blaze fell far and wide over the dry white downs of Sandwich and the outlying plains, and threw the distant country into such bold relief against the blue sky that, from the sea, it looked close at hand, and but a short walk from the shore. There were three or four dozen vessels at anchor in the Downs waiting for a change of wind or anticipating a dead calm for some hours. A few others, like ourselves, were swimming stealthily over the slack tide, with every foot of their canvas piled upon them with the effort to reach safe anchorage before the wind wholly failed and the tide turned. A large ship, with her sails stowed and her masts and rigging showing with the fineness of ivory-tracing against the sky, was being towed up Channel, and the slapping of the water by the paddles of the tug, in fast capricious revolutions, was quite audible, though both ship and steamer were a long league distant. Here and there small boats were rowing away from the anchored ships for the shore. Now and again you could hear the faint distant choruses of seamen furling a big sail or paying out more cable, the clank, clank of which was as pretty as music. Down in the east the heavens were a deep blue, flecked along the water line with white sails, which glowed in the sunshine like beacons.

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