

MOONFLEET

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The voices came nearer, and there was a mingled sound as of men shouting to one another, and gathering in from different places. 'Twas from the cliff-top that the voices came, and thither Elzevir and I looked up, and there too Maskew kept his eyes fixed. And in a moment there were a score of men stood on the cliff's edge high above our heads. The sky behind them was pink flushed with the keenest light of the young day, and they stood out against it sharp cut and black as the silhouette of my mother that used to hang up by the parlour chimney. They were soldiers, and I knew the tall mitre-caps of the 13th, and saw the shafts of light from the sunrise come flashing round their bodies, and glance off the barrels of their matchlocks.

I knew it all now; it was the Posse who had lain in ambush. Elzevir saw it too, and then all shouted at once.

"Yield at the King's command you are our prisoners!" calls the voice of one of those black silhouettes, far up on the cliff-top.

"We are lost," cries Elzevir;" it is the Posse; but if we die, this traitor shall go before us," and he makes towards Maskew to brain him with the pistol.

"Shoot, shoot, in the devil's name," screams Maskew, " or I am a dead man."

Then there came a flash of fire along the black line of silhouettes, with a crackle like a near peal of thunder, and a fut, fut, fut, of bullets in the turf. And before Elzevir could get at him, Maskew had fallen over on the sward with a groan, and with a little red hole in the middle of his forehead.

"Run for the cliff side," cried Elzevir to me ; " get close in, and they cannot touch thee," and he made for the chalk wall. But I had fallen on my knees like a bullock felled by a pole-axe, and had a scorching pain in my left foot. Elzevir looked back. "What, have they hit thee too?" he said, and ran and picked me up like a child. And then there is another flash and fut, fut, in the turf; but the shots find no billet this time, and we are lying close against the cliff, panting but safe.