

HOW IT ALL HAPPENED AND OTHER STORIES.

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SAVED FROM THE WRECK.

I.

THERE'S not a trace left of the cottage which once stood by the Tower side of the beach, and which was the first and last house in the village of Ursley. It was a snug, cheery little place, all painted black outside, with long, low windows, whose small panes shone in the sun like diamonds; and if anybody who stepped inside hadn't called that room a reg'lar picter they must ha' been hard to please, for I don't know one single place o' the world's globe that could be mentioned but old Mat Lawson would have pointed to some sort o' a curiosity, and said, "Mate, that 'ere comes from there." Oh, he was a clever old chap, Mat was.

"How it all happened," etc. II.

He'd been to every place, and knew something about everything; and now that he'd had a stroke, and lost the use of his legs, he used to sit by the fire-side and ruminate upon it all. Though he was past work he didn't want for anything, for, one way or another, in his time he'd saved a decent little sum of money, and nobody in Ursley had things more comfortable like than old Mat. 'Tisn't too much to say that in my young days to me that cottage was heaven upon earth. I hadn't got much of a home myself, for my father's missus wasn't my mother, and the house was in a constant uproar with a parcel of youngsters who got cuffed or spoiled, according to the mood she was in, which (being a little given to drinking) was generally a pretty contrary one. Of course I was a sailor, and reckoned pretty handy; and old Mat, with whom I was an uncommon favourite, employed me to sail the little craft he was part-owner of, so that there was always an excuse for his being the last house to go to before I left Ursley, and the first to enter when I got back again. I suppose I needn't say that old Mat was not the entire cause of all this. He had a daughter who was the pride of the place; for, go where you might, you never met the equal of Norah Lawson. I'd known her ever since

she was a little toddling thing so high, when I was a great, awkward boy, and used to carry her down the beach, or swing her across the ford stream. Little by little she'd crept round my heart till I just worshipped her; and she knew it too, and used to make me fetch and carry for her like a dog, and run here and there at her bidding as if I'd been only born to be her slave, which, I take it, was pretty much the light she did at that time view me in. However, so long as she never asked any of the other chaps to do anything for her, I was happy; and in all her talk of what she should do, I noticed my name was always brought in, so that I felt nobody had the same chance with her that I had. Old Mat, I know, looked upon me as his son, and in the village everybody coupled our names together. It was just as it took Norah when she heard any of this joking,—one time she'd fire up and wonder what people meant by it, at another she'd burst out laughing and look at me with her lovely eyes till I didn't know whether I was standing on my head or my heels. Well, matters was just in this sort of trim about the end of one September. The month had been a very hot one, and now we were in for a regular storm. It had threatened, on and off, all the week, and every one saw