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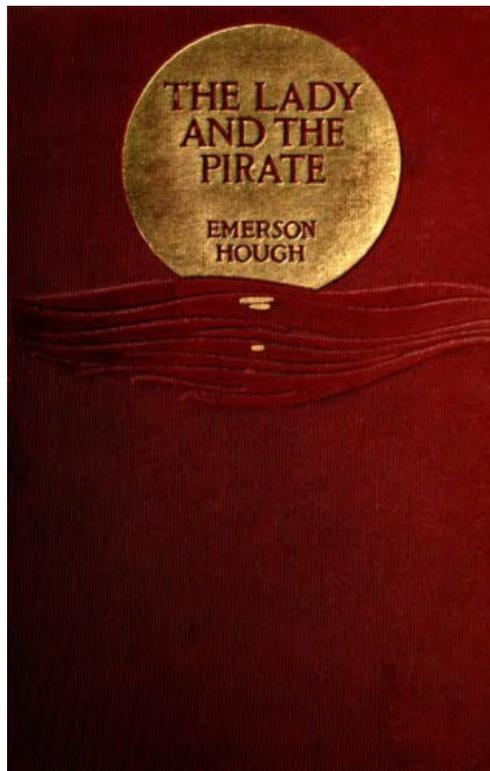
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THE LADY AND THE PIRATE

*Being the Plain Tale of a Diligent Pirate
and a Fair Captive*

By

EMERSON HOUGH

Author of

THE MISSISSIPPI BUBBLE, 54-40 OR FIGHT
THE PURCHASE PRICE, JOHN RAWN, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

HARRY A. MATHES

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**Thus the heartless jade stood,
unable to meet my eagle eye**

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THE LADY AND THE PIRATE

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH I AM A CAITIFF

I WAS sitting at one of my favorite spots engaged in looking through my fly-book for some lure that might, perhaps, mend my luck in the afternoon's fishing. At least, I had within the moment been so engaged; although the truth is that the evening was so exceptionally fine, and

the spot always so extraordinarily attractive to me—this particular angle of the stream, where the tall birches stand, being to my mind the most beautiful bit on my whole estate—that I had forgotten all about angling and was sitting with rod laid by upon the bank, the fly-book scarce noted in my hand. Moreover, a peculiarly fine specimen of *Anopheles*, (as I took it to be) was at that very moment hovering over my hand, and I was anxious to confirm my judgment as well as to enlarge my collection of mosquitoes. I had my other hand in a pocket feeling for the little phial in which I purposed to enclose *Anopheles*, if I could coax him to alight. Indeed, I say, I was at that very moment as happy as a man need be; or, at least, as happy as I ever expected to be. Imagine my surprise, therefore, at that moment to hear a voice, apparently intended for me, exclaim, "Halt! Caitiff!"

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I looked up, more annoyed than displeased or startled. It is not often one sees so fine a specimen of *Anopheles*; and one could have sworn that, but for my slight involuntary movement of the hand, he must have settled; after which—*crede experto!*—he would have been the same as in my phial, and doomed to the chloroform within the next hour. Besides, no matter who one may be or how engaged, it is not wholly seemly to be accosted as a caitiff, when one is on one's own land, offending no man on earth, owing no debt and paying no tribute, feudal, commercial, military or personal, to any man on earth.

The situation seemed to me singular. Had the time been some centuries earlier, the place somewhere in the old world, such speech might have had better fitting. But the time was less than a year ago, the place was in America. I was on my own lands, in this one of our middle states. This was my own river; or at least, I owned the broad acres on both sides of it for some miles. And I was a man of no slinking habit, no repulsive mien, of that I was assured, but a successful American of means; lately a professional man and now a man of leisure, and not so far past thirty years of age. My fly-rod was the best that money can buy, and the pages of the adjacent book were handsomely stocked by the best makers of this country and each of the three divisions of Great Britain; in each of which—as well as in Norway, Germany, or for the matter of that, India, New Zealand, Alaska, Japan or other lands—I had more than once wet a line. My garb was not of leather jerkin, my buskins not of thonged straw, but on the contrary I was turned out in good tweeds, well cut by my London tailor. To be called offhand, and with no more reason than there was provocation, a "caitiff," even by a voice somewhat treble and a trifle trembling, left me every reason in the world to be surprised, annoyed and grieved. For now *Anopheles* had flown away; and had I not been thus startled, I should certainly have had him. Yet more, no fish would rise in that pool the rest of that evening, for no trout in my little stream thereabout ever had seen a boat or been frightened by the splash of an oar since the time, three years back, when I had bought the place.

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I looked up. Just at the bend, arrested now by hand anchorage to the overhanging alders, lay a small boat, occupied by two boys, neither of more than fourteen years, the younger seemingly not more than twelve. It was the latter who was clinging with one hand to the drooping bushes. His companion, apparently the leader in their present enterprise, was half crouching in the bow of the boat and he, evidently, was the one who had accosted me.

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A second glance gave me even more surprise, for it showed that the boat, though not precisely long, low and rakish of build, evidently was of piratical intent. At least she was piratical in decoration. On each side of her bow there was painted—and the evening sun, shining through my larches, showed the paint still fresh—in more or less accurate design in black, the emblem of a skull and cross-bones. Above her, supported by a short staff, perhaps cut from my own willows, flew a black flag, and whatever may have been her stern-chaser equipment, her broadside batteries, or her deck carronades—none of which I could well make out, as her hull lay half concealed among the alders—her bow-chaser was certainly in commission and manned for action. The pirate captain, himself, was at the lanyard; and I perceived that he now rested an extraordinarily large six-shooter in the fork of a short staff, which was fixed in the bow. Along this, with a three-cornered gray eye, he now sighted at the lower button of my waistcoat, and in a fashion that gave me goose-flesh underneath the button, in spite of all my mingled emotions. Had I not "halted," as ordered, to the extent of sitting on quietly as I was, he no doubt would have pulled the lanyard, with consequences such as I do not care to contemplate, and mayhap to the effect that this somewhat singular story would never have been written.

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"Halt, Sirrah!" began the pirate leader again, "or I will blow you out of the water!"

I sat for a moment regarding him, my chin in my hand.

"No," said I at last; "I already am out of the water, my friend. But, prithee, have a care of yonder lanyard, else, gadzooks! you may belike blow me off the bank and into the water."

This speech of mine seemed as much to disconcert the pirate chieftain as had his me. He stood erect, shifting his Long Tom, to the great ease of my waistcoat button.

"Won't you heave to, and put off a small boat for a parley?" I inquired.

CHAPTER II

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IN WHICH I HOLD A PARLEY

THE two pirates turned to each other for consultation, irresolute, but evidently impressed by the fact that their prize did not purpose to hoist sail and make a run for it.

"What ho! mates?" demanded the captain, in as gruff a voice as he could compass: "Ye've heard his speech, and he has struck his flag."

"Suppose the villain plays us false," rejoined the "mates" or rather, the mate, in a voice so high or quavering that for a moment it was difficult for me to repress a smile; although these three years past I rarely had smiled at all.

The captain turned to one side, so that now I could see both him and his crew. The leader was as fine a specimen of boy as you could have asked, sturdy of bare legs, brown of face, red of hair, ragged and tumbled of garb. His crew was active though slightly less robust, a fair-haired, light-skinned chap, blue-eyed, and somewhat better clad than his companion. There was something winning about his face. At a glance I knew his soul. He was a dreamer, an idealist, an artist, in the bud. My heart leaped out to him instinctively in a great impulse of sympathy and understanding. Indeed, suddenly, I felt the blood tingle through my hair. I looked upon life as I had not these three years. The imagination of Youth, the glamour of Adventure, lay here before me; things I cruelly had missed these last few years, it seemed to me.

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"How, now, shipmates?" I remarked mildly. "Wouldst doubt the faith of one who himself hath flown the Jolly Rover? Cease your fears and come aboard—that is to say, come ashore."

"Git out, Jimmy," I heard the captain say in a low voice, after a moment of indecision. "Keep him covered till I tie her up."

Jimmy, the fair-haired pirate, hauled in on the alders and flung a grappling iron aboard my bank, which presently he ascended. As he stood free from the screening fringe of bushes, I saw that he was slender, and not very tall, one not wholly suited by nature to his stern calling. His once white jacket now was soiled, and one leg of his knickers was loose, from his scramble up the bank. He was belted beyond all earl-like need; wore indeed two belts, which supported two long hunting knives and a Malay kris, such as we now get from the Philippines; as well as a revolver large beyond all proportion to his own size. A second revolver of like dimensions now trembled in his hand, and even though its direction toward me was no more than general, I resumed the goose-flesh underneath my waistcoat, for no man could tell what might happen. In none of my works with dangerous big game have I felt a similar uneasiness; no, nor even in the little affair in China where the Boxers held us up, did I ever really consider the issue more in doubt. It pleased me, however, to make no movement of offense or defense; and luckily the revolver was not discharged.

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When the two had topped the bank, and had approached me—taking cover behind trees in a way which made me suspect Boy Scout training, mingled with bandit literature—to a point where we could see each other's features plainly, I moved over to one side of my bank, and motioned them to approach.

"Come alongside, brothers," said I, pushing my fly-rod to one side; "make fast and come aboard. And tell me, what cheer?"

They drew up to me, stern of mien, bold of bearing, dauntless of purpose. At least, so I was convinced, each wished and imagined himself to seem; and since they wished so to be seen thus, seized by some sudden whim, I resolved to see them. How I envied them! Theirs all the splendor of youth, of daring, of adventure, of romance; things gone by from me, or for the most part, never known.

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Frowning sternly, they seated themselves reluctantly on the grassy bank beside me, and gazed out in the dignity of an imagined manhood across my river, which now was lighted bravely by the retiring sun. Had I not felt with them, longed with them, they could never so splendidly have maintained their pretense. But between us, there in the evening on my stream with only the birds and the sun to see, it was not pretense. Upon the contrary, all cloaks were off, all masks removed, and we were face to face in the strong light of reality. As clearly as though I always had known them, I saw into the hearts of these; and what I saw made my own heart ache and yearn for something it had ever missed.

"What cheer, comrades?" I repeated at length. "Whither away, and upon what errand?"

Now a strange thing happened, which I do not explain, for that I can not. In plain fact, these two were obviously runaway boys, not the first, nor perhaps the last of runaway boys; and I was a man of means, a retired man, supposedly somewhat of a hermit, although really nothing of the sort; lately a lawyer, hard-headed and disillusioned, always a man of calm reason, as I prided myself; subject to no fancies, a student and a lover of science, a mocker at all superstition and all weak-mindedness. (Pardon me, that I must say all these things of myself.) Yet, let me be believed who say it, some spell, whether of this presence of Youth, whether of the evening and the sun, or whether of the inner and struggling soul of Man, so fell upon us all then and there, that we were not man and boys, but bold adventurers, all three of like kidney! This was not a modern land that lay about us. Yonder was not the copse beyond the birches, where my woodcock sometimes found cover. This was not my trout-stream. Those yonder were not my elms and larches moving in the evening air. No, before us lay the picture of the rolling deep, its long green swells breaking high in white spindrift. The keen wind of other days sounded in our ears, and yonder pressed the

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galleons of Spain! Youth, Youth and Adventure, were ours.

We smiled not at all, therefore, as, with some thoughtful effort, it is true, we held to fitting manner of speech. "We seek for treasure," piped the thin voice of him I had heard called Jimmy. "Let none dare lift hand against us!"

"And whither away, my hearties?"

"Spang! to the Spanish Main." This also from the blue-eyed boy; who, now, with some difficulty, managed to let down the hammer of his six-shooter without damage to himself or others.

"We didn't know but youse would try to stop us," exclaimed the red-haired leader. "We come around the bend and seen you settin' there; an' we was resolved—to—to——" [Pg 11]

"To sell our lives dearly!" supplemented Jimmy. "He who would seek to stop us does so at his peril." And Jimmy made so fell a movement toward his side-arms that I hastened to restrain him.

"Yes," said I; "you are quite right, my hearties."

"But, gee!" ventured the red-haired pirate, "what was you thinkin' about?"

"You ask me to tell truth, good Sire," I made reply, "and I shall do no less. At the very moment you trained your bow-chaser on me, I was thinking of two things."

"Speak on, caitiff!" demanded Jimmy fiercely.

"Nay, call me not so, good Sir," I rejoined, "for such, in good-sooth, I am not, but honest faithful man. Ye have but now asked what I pondered, and I fain would speak truth, an' it please ye, my hearties."

"What's he givin' us, Jimmy?" whispered the pirate captain dubiously, aside.

"Speak on!" again commanded he of the blue eyes. "But your life blood dyes the deck if you seek to deceive Jean Lafitte, or Henry L'Olonnois!"

(So then, thought I, at last I knew their names.)

In reply I reached to my belt and drew out quickly—so quickly that they both flinched away—the long handled knife which, usually, I carried with me for cutting down alders or other growth which sometimes entangled my flies as I fished along the stream. "Listen," said I, "I swear the pirates' oath. On the point of my blade," and I touched it with my right forefinger, "I swear that I pondered on two things when you surprised me." [Pg 12]

"Name them!" demanded Jimmy L'Olonnois fiercely.

"First, then," I answered, "I was wondering what I could use as a cork to my phial, when once I had yonder Anopheles in it——"

"Who's he?" demanded Jean Lafitte.

"Anopheles? A friend of mine," I replied; "a mosquito, in short."

"Jimmy, he's crazy!" ejaculated Jean Lafitte uneasily.

"Say on, caitiff!" commanded L'Olonnois, ignoring him; "what else?"

"In the second place," said I—and again I placed my right forefinger on the point of my blade, "I was thinking of Helena."

"Is she your little girl," hesitatingly inquired Jimmy L'Olonnois, for the instant forgetting his part.

"No," said I sadly, "she is not my little girl." [Pg 13]

"Where is she?" vaguely.

"Regarding the whereabouts of either Anopheles or Helena, at this moment," said I still sadly, "I am indeed all at sea, as any good pirate should be."

I tried to jest, but fared ill at it. I felt my face flush at hearing her name spoken aloud. And sadly true was it that, on that afternoon and many another, I had found myself, time and again, adream with Helena's face before me. I saw it now—a face I had not seen these three years, since the time when first I had come hither with the purpose of forgetting.

Jimmy was back in his part again, and doing nobly. "Ha!" said he. "So, fellow, pondering on a fair one, didst not hear the approach of our good ship, the *Sea Rover*?"

"In good sooth, I did not," I answered; "and as for these other matters, I swear on my blade's point I have spoken the truth."

Our conversation languished for the moment. Illusion lay in the balance. The old melancholy impended above me ominously.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH I AM A CAPTIVE

“WHAT ho! Jean Lafitte,” said I at length, rousing myself from the old habit of reverie, of which I had chiefest dread; “and you, Henri L’Olonnois, scourges of the main, both of you, listen! I have a plan to put before you, my hearties.”

“Say on, Sirrah!” rejoined the younger pirate, so promptly and so gravely that again I had much to do to refrain from sudden mirth.

“Why then, look ye,” I continued. “The sun is sinking beneath the wave, and the good ship rides steady at her anchor. Meantime men must eat! and yonder castle amid the forest offers booty. What say ye if we pass within the wood, and see what we may find of worth to souls bold as ours?”

“Tis well!” answered L’Olonnois; and I could see assent in Lafitte’s eyes. In truth I could discover no great preparations for a long voyage in the open hold of the *Sea Rover*, and doubted not that both captain and crew by this time were hungry. Odd crumbs of crackers and an empty sardine can might be all very well at the edge of the village of Pausaukee (I judged they could have come no greater distance, some twelve or fifteen miles); but they do not serve for so long a journey as lies between Pausaukee and the Spanish Main.

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They rose as I did, and we passed beyond the clump of tall birches, along the edge of my mowing meadow, and through the gate which closes my woodland path—to me the loveliest of all wood-trails, so gentle and so silent is it always, and so fringed, seasonably, with ferns and flowers. Thus, presently, we saw the blue smoke rising above my lodge, betokening to me that my Japanese factotum, Hiroshimi, now had my dinner under way.

To me, it was my customary abode, my home these three years; but they beside me saw not the rambling expanse of my leisurely log mansion. They noted not the overhanging gables, the lattices of native wood. To them, yonder lay a castle in a foreign land. Here was moat and wall, then a portcullis, and gratings warded these narrow portals against fire of musketoon. My pet swallows’ nest, demure above my door, to them offered the aspect of a culverin’s mouth; and, as now, I made my customary approach-call, by which I heralded my return from any excursion on the stream of an evening, I could swear these invaders looked for naught less than a swarm of archers springing to the walls, and the hoarse answer of my men-at-arms back of each guarded portal. Such is the power of youthful dreaming, such the residuary heritage of days of high emprise, when life was full of blood and wine and love, and savored not so wholly of dull commonplace!

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But indeed, (or so I presume; for at the moment my own imagination swept on with theirs) none manned the walls or rattled the chains of gate and bridge. The saffron Hiroshimi opened the screen door before us, showing no surprise or interest in my strange companions. Thus we made easy conquest of our castle. As we entered, there lay before us, lighted softly by the subdued twilight which filtered through the surrounding grove, the interior of that home which in three years I had learned much to love, lonely as it was. Here I now dwelt most of the time, leaving behind me, as though shut off by a closed door, the busy scenes of an active and successful life. (I presume I may fairly speak thus of myself, since there is no one else to speak.)

My pirate companions, suddenly grown shy, stood silent for a moment, for the time rather at a loss to carry on the play which had been easier in the open. I heard Jimmy draw a long breath. He was first to remove his hat. But his companion was quicker to regain his poise, although for a moment he forgot his pirate speech. “Gee!” said he. “Ain’t this great!”

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I doubt if any praise I ever heard in my life pleased me more than this frank comment; no, not even the kind word and hand-clasp of old Judge Henderson, what time I won my first cause at law. For this that lay about me was what I had chosen for my life to-day. I had preferred this to the career into which my father’s restless ambition had plunged me almost as soon as I had emerged from my college and my law-school—a career which my own restless ambition had found sufficient until that final break with Helena Emory, which occurred soon after the time when my father died; when the news went out that I, his heir, was left with but a shrunken fortune, and with many debts to pay; news which I, myself, had promulgated for reasons of my own. After that, called foolish by all my friends, lamented by members of my family, forgotten, as I fancy, by most who knew me, I had retired to this lodge in the wilderness. Here, grown suddenly resentful of a life hitherto wasted in money-getting alone, I had resolved to spend the remainder of my days, as beseemed a student and a philosopher. Having read Weininger and other philosophers, I was convinced that woman was the lowest and most unworthy thing in the scale of created things, a thing quite beneath the attention of a thinking man.

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I have said that I was scarce beyond thirty years of age. Even so, I found myself already old; and like any true philosopher, I resolved to make myself young. As hitherto I had had no boyhood, I determined to achieve a boyhood for myself. Studying myself, I discovered that I had rarely smiled; so I resolved to find somewhat to make me smile. The great realm of knowledge, widest and sweetest of all empires for a man, lay before me alluringly when I entered upon my business career; and so interested was I in my business and my books that only by chance had I met the woman who drove me out of both. A boy I had never been; nay, nor even a youth. I had always

been old. True, like others of my station, I had owned my auto cars, my matched teams—owned them now, indeed—but I had never owned a dog. So, when I came hither with ample leisure, perhaps my chief ambition was a deliberate purpose to encompass my deferred boyhood. Thus I had built this house of logs which now—with a surprised and gratifying throb of my heart I learned it—appealed to the souls of real boys. It was the castle where I dreamed; and now it was the palace of their dreams also. I felt, at least, that I had succeeded. My heart throbbed in a new way, very foolish, yet for some reason suddenly enjoyable.

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My house was all of logs and had no decorations of paint or tapestry within. Its only arras was of the skins of wild beasts—of the African lion and leopard, the zebra, many antelopes. The walls were hung with mounted heads—those of the moose, the elk, the bighorn, most of the main trophies of my own land and to these, through my foreign hunting, I had added heads of all the great trophies of Africa and Asia as well. A splendid pair of elephant tusks stood in a corner. A fine head of the sheep of Tibet, *ovus poli*—and I prize none of my trophies more, unless it be the fine robe of the Chinese mountain tiger—looked full front at us from above the fireplace. My rod racks, and those which supported my guns and rifles, were here and there about the room. The whole gave a jaunty atmosphere to my home. I had gone soberly about the business of sport; and in these days, that can be practised most successfully by a man with much leisure and unstinted means.

My books lay about everywhere, also, books which perhaps would not have appealed to all. My copies of the Vedas, many works on the Buddhist faith, and translations from Confucius, lay side by side with that Bible which we Christians have almost forgot. Here, too, stood my desk with its cases of preserved mosquitoes—for this year I was studying mosquitoes as an amusement. I had collected all the mosquito literature of the world, and my books, in French, German and English, lay near my great microscope. I had passed many happy hours here in the oblivion of mental concentration, always a delight with me, now grown almost a necessity if I were to escape the worst of all habits, that of introspection and self-pity.

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My piano and my violins also were in full sight; for the world of music, as well as the world of sport and youth, I was deliberately opening for myself, also in exchange for that closed world of affairs which I had abandoned. Indeed, all manners of the impedimenta of a well-to-do Japanese-cared-for bachelor were in evidence. To me, each object was familiar and was cherished. I had never felt need to apologize to any gentleman for my quarters or their contents—or to any woman, for no woman had ever seen my home. I may admit that, contrary to the belief of some, I was a rich man, far richer than I had need or care to be; and since it was not due to my own ability altogether nor in response to any real ambition of my own, I know I will be pardoned for simply stating the truth. My one great ambition in life was to forget; but if that might be best obtained in sport, in study, or amid the gentle evidences of good living, so much the better. Many men had called my father, stern and masterful man that he was, a robber, a thief, a pirate—in great part, I suspect, in envy that they themselves had not attained a like stature in similar achievement. But no one had ever called his son a pirate—until now! It made me oddly happy.

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I ought to have been happy here all these years, able to do precisely what I liked; but sometimes I felt myself strangely alone in the world. I was always silent and apparently cold—though really, let me whisper—only shy. Sometimes, even here, I found myself a trifle sad. It is difficult to be a boy when one starts at thirty; especially difficult if one has always been rather old and staid.

I tell all these things to explain that keen pleasure, that swift exultation, that rush of the blood to my cheeks, which I felt when I saw that my house and my way of life met the approval of real boys. Pirates, too!

Swift, therefore, fell once more the magic curtain of romance. I heard a strange voice, my own voice, saying: "Enter then, my bold mates, and let us explore this castle which we have conquered." Yes, illusion floated in through the windows on the pale light of the evening. This was a castle we had taken; and the detail that I chanced to own it was neither here nor there.

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"Prisoner," began L'Olonnois sternly—he was usually spokesman, if not always leader—"Prisoner, your life is spared for the time. Lead on! Attempt to play us false, and your blood shall be spilled upon the deck!"

"It shall be so," I answered. "And if I do not give you the best meal you have had to-day, then indeed let my life's blood stain the deck."

So saying, I nodded to Hiroshimi to serve the dinner.

CHAPTER IV

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IN WHICH I AM A PIRATE

WITH my own hands I have trained that prize, Hiroshimi, to cook and to serve; but only Providence could give Hiroshimi his super-humanly disinterested calm. He fitted perfectly into the picture of our dream. 'Twas no ordinary log house in which we sat, indeed no house at all. Beneath us rose and fell a stanch vessel, responsive to the long lift of the southern seas. It was not a rustle of the leaves we heard through the open windows, but the low ripple of

waves along our strakes came to our ears through the open ports. Hiroshimi did not depart to the kitchen; but high aloft our lookout swept the sea for sail that might offer us a prize.

If any say that this manner of illusion may not exist between two boys and a man, I answer that we did not thus classify it. By the new pleasure in my soul, by the new blood in my cheek, I swear we were three boys together, and all in quest of adventure.

True, at times our speech smacked less of nautical and piratical phrase, at times, indeed, halted. It is difficult for a twelve-year-old pirate, exceeding hungry, to ask for a third helping of grilled chicken in a voice at once stern and ingratiating. Moreover, it is difficult for a discreet and law-abiding citizen, with a full sense of duty, deliberately to aid and abet two youthful runaways. But whenever illusion wavered, L'Olonnois saved the day by resuming his stern scowl, even above a chicken-bone. His facility in rolling speech I discovered to be, in part, attributable to a volume which I saw protruding from his pocket. At my request he passed it to me, and I saw its title; *The Pirate's Own Book*. I knew it well. Indeed, I now arose, and passing to my bookshelves, drew down a duplicate copy of that rare volume, recounting the deeds of the old buccaneers. The eyes of L'Olonnois widened as I laid the two side by side.

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"You've got it, too!" he exclaimed.

I nodded.

"That explains it," said Jean Lafitte.

"Explains what?"

"Why, how you—why now—how you could be a pirate, too, just as natural as us."

"I have read it many a time," said I.

"Wasn't you never a pirate?" asked Jean Lafitte.

"No," said I, smiling, "although many have said my father was. He was very rich."

"Well, you can talk just like us," said Jean Lafitte admiringly, "even if you have lost all."

"Of course," said I exultingly. "Why not? I think as you do. As much as you I am disgusted with the dulness of life. I, too, wish to seek my fortune. Well then, why not, John Saunders? Why not, James Henderson?"

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Ah, now indeed illusion halted! Both boys, abashed, fell back in their chairs. "How did you know our names?" asked the older of the two at length.

"Nay, fear not," said I. "I do but seek to prove my fitness to join the jolly brotherhood, good mates."

"Aw, honest!" rejoined Jimmy; "you got to tell us how you knew."

"Well, then, let me go on. In your book, here, I saw your father's name, Jimmy. I know your father. He is Judge Willard Henderson of the Appellate Court in the city. I was admitted to the bar under him. He has a summer place at the lake above here, as I know, although I have never visited him there. I know your mother, too, Jimmy,—so well I should not like to cause her even a moment's uneasiness about you."

"Do you know my auntie, Helena Emory?" demanded Jimmy suddenly. I felt the blood surge into my face.

"Don't misunderstand me," I rejoined, "I only have some gift of the second sight, as I shall now prove to you. For instance, Jean Lafitte, I know your earlier name was John Saunders, although I never saw or heard of you before."

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"Well, now, how'd you know that?" demanded the elder boy.

"I did not promise to tell the secrets of my art," I smiled. I did not tell him that I had seen the name of Saunders on the tag of a shirt somewhat soiled.

"Your father's name was John before you," I added at a venture. He assented, half-frightened, although I had only guessed at this, supposing John Saunders to be a somewhat continuous family name in a family of auburn Highlanders.

"He sells farm stuff at the hotel above," I ventured. And again my guess was truth.

"You take the wagon there, sometimes, with vegetables and milk and eggs; and so you met Jimmy, here, and you went fishing together; and he told you stories out of his book. I fear, John, that your father licks you because you go fishing on Sunday. That was why you resolved to run away. You led Jimmy into that with you. Yesterday you took a boat from the lake near the hotel, and you painted her up and rigged her for a pirate ship. You rowed across the lake to the marsh where the little stream makes out—my trout-stream here. You followed that stream down, with no more trouble than ducking under a wire fence once in a while, until you came to my land, and until you saw me. You were afraid I might tell on you; and besides, you were pirates now; and so you took me prisoner. Marry, good Sirs, 'tis not the first time a prisoner has joined a pirate band!"

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"That's wonderful!" gasped Jean T. Lafitte Saunders. "And you say you have never been up to our lake!"

"No," said I, "but I have a map, and I know my river heads in your lake, and that very probably it runs out of the low marshy side. Besides, being a boy myself, I know precisely what boys would do. Tell me, do you think I would betray two of the brotherhood?"

"You won't give us away?" The elder pirate's face was eager.

"On the contrary, I'll see that you don't get into any trouble."

"That's a good scout!" ejaculated he fervently, his freckled face flushing.

"We wasn't—that is, we hadn't—well, you see?" began Jimmy. "Maybe we'd just have camped down here and gone back to-morrow. I was afraid about taking the boat. Besides, I've only got about six dollars, anyhow." He spread his wealth out upon the table before me frankly.

"Have no fear," said I. "To-night I shall write a few letters that will clear up every trouble back home, and allow us to continue our journey to the Spanish Main." [Pg 28]

"Oh, will you?" cried Jimmy, much relieved. "That'll be a good scout," he added.

Suddenly I found myself smiling at him, I who had smiled so rarely these years, whether in the Selkirks or the Himalayas, in Uganda or here in my own little wilderness—because Helena had left me so sad.

"But if I promise, you, also, must promise in turn."

Used as I was, already, to the astounding changes in Jimmy from boy to buccaneer and back again, I was now interested at the fell scowl which he summoned to his features, as soon as he felt relieved as to the domestic situation. "Speak, fellow!" he demanded; and folding his arms, presented so threatening a front that I saw my man Hiroshimi covertly lay hold upon a carving knife.

"Why, then, my hearties," said I, "'tis thus. I'll sign on as sea-lawyer and scrivener, as well as purser for the ship. Yes, I'll sign articles and voyage with you for a week or a month, or two months, or three. I'll provender the ship and pay all bills of libel or demurrage in any port of call; and by my fateful gift of second sight, which ye have seen well proven here to-night, not only will I see ye safe for what ye already have done, but will keep ye safe against any enemy we may meet, be he whom he may!" [Pg 29]

"'Tis well," said L'Olonnois. "Say on!"

"And in return I ask a boon."

"Name it, fellow!"

"Already I have named it—that I, too, shall be accepted as one of the brotherhood. Oh, listen"—I broke out impulsively—"I have never been a pirate, and I have never been a boy. I have had everything in the world I wanted and it made me awfully lonesome, because when you have everything you have nothing. I have nothing to do but eat and sleep, and hunt and fish, and read and write, and study and think, and play my music, here. I do not want to do these things any more. Especially I do not want to think. Boys do not think, and I want to be a boy. I want to be a pirate with you. I want to seek my fortune with you."

We sat silent, almost solemn for a moment, so sincere was my speech and so startling to them. But thanks to L'Olonnois and his saving book, illusion came to us once more in time.

"Will ye be good brother and true pirate?" demanded L'Olonnois. "And will ye take the oath of blood?"

"That I will!" said I.

"Brothers and good shipmates all"—broke in Jean Lafitte in a deep voice—"what say ye? Shall we put him to the oath?" [Pg 30]

"Aye, aye, Sir!" responded the deep chorus of scores of full-chested voices. Or, at least, so it seemed to us, though, mayhap, 'twas no more than Jimmy who spoke.

"Swear him, then!" commanded Jean Lafitte. "Swear him by the oath of blood."

"We—we haven't any blood!" whispered L'Olonnois, aside, somewhat troubled.

"That have we, mates," said I, "and the ceremony shall have full solemnity."

I took up my keen hunting knife and deliberately and slowly opened the side of my thumb, more to the pain of Jimmy, I fancy, than to myself, as I could see by the twitch of his features.

"By this blood I swear!" said I: "and on the point of my blade I swear to be a true pirate; to fight the fight of all; to divulge no plans of the company; and to share with my brothers share and share alike of all booty we may take."

"'Tis well!" said L'Olonnois, much impressed and delighted, as also was his mate, very evidently.

"And now, my brothers," said I, "you, also, must swear to divulge no secret of mine that you may

learn, to tell nothing of my plans, or my name, or the name of the port where I signed on the rolls."

"We don't know your name," said Jimmy, "but neither of us will give you away."

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Jean Lafitte was all for opening up his own thumb for blood, but I stopped him. "This will do," said I, and stained his fingers and those of L'Olonnois—who grew pale at sight of it to his evident disgust.

So, thus, I became a pirate, and we three were brother rovers of the deep. I fancied my associates would be loyal. I was thinking of a certain cousin of the younger pirate. Not for worlds would I seek to pursue her now; but there had arisen in my soul, already, a sort of strange wonder whether some intent of fate had sent this youngster here to remind me once more of her, whom I would forget.

"Now," said I at last, "let us seek what fare the castle offers for the night." I could see they were tired and sleepy, and so found for them bath and clean pajamas—somewhat too large to be sure—and good beds in the wing of my log house. And never, as I be a true pirate, never have I seen so many and so various single-fire and revolving short arms, in my life, as these two buccaneers disclosed when they unbelted and laid aside their jackets! Even thus equipped, I found them looking enviously at my walls, where hung weapons of many lands. I sent them to bed happier by telling them that, in the morning, they should select such as they chose for the equipment of our vessel. "Gee!" said Jean Lafitte again. "Gee! Gee!" He was so happy that I, too, was happy. It was L'Olonnois who changed that.

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"Methinks," said he, regarding me sternly, "that in yonder ivy-clad halls might dwell some lady fair! Tell me, is it not so?"

He stretched a thin arm out, in the sleeve of my smallest pajamas, and pointed a slender finger at the interior of my castle of dreams. Alas, after all it was empty! My old melancholy came back to me.

"No, my brothers," said I, "no maid has ever passed yon door. No, nor ever will."

L'Olonnois bent his flaxen head in dignified and manly sympathy. "I see," said he, "our brother in his youth has, perhaps, been deceived by some fair one!"

Upon which I left them for my own room.

If two buccaneers in my castle slept well that night, a third did not. Anopheles might go hang. I did not fancy my new microscope. I doubted if my last violin were a real Strad. I did not like the last music my dealers had sent out to me. My studies of Confucius and Buddha might go hang, and my new book as well. For now, before me, came the face of a certain pirate's aunt, and she was indeed a lady fair. And I knew full well—as I had known all these years, although I had tried to deceive myself into believing otherwise—that gladly as I had exchanged the city for the wilderness, with equal gladness would I exchange my leisure, all my wealth, all my belongings, for a moment's touch of her hand, a half-hour of talk heart-to-heart with her, so that, indeed, I might know the truth; so that, at least, I might have it direct from her, bitter though the truth might be.

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CHAPTER V

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IN WHICH WE SAIL FOR THE SPANISH MAIN

WHEN, in the morning, I passed from my quarters toward the main room which served me both as living-room and dining hall, I found that my pirate guests were also early risers. I could hear them arguing over some matter, which proved to be no more serious than the question of a cold bath of mornings, Jimmy maintaining that everybody had a cold bath every morning, whereas John insisted with equal heat that nobody ever bathed ("washed," I think he called it), oftener than once a week, to wit, on Saturdays only. They engaged in a pillow fight to settle it, and as Jimmy had John fairly well smothered by his rapid fire, I voted that the ayes appeared to have it when they referred the point to me.

As we are very remote and never visited in my wilderness home, it is not infrequent that I take my morning meal very much indeed in mufti, although Hiroshimi is always most exact himself. On this morning it occurred to us all that pajamas made a garb more piratical and more nautical than anything else obtainable, so we took breakfast—and I think Hiroshimi never served me a breakfast more delicate and tempting—clad as perhaps the Romans were, if they had pajamas in those times. All went well until the keen eyes of Jimmy, wandering about my place, noted a certain photograph which rested on the top of my piano—where I was much comforted always to have it, especially of an evening, when sometimes I played Mendelssohn's *Spring Song*, or other music of the like. It was the picture of the woman who did not know and very likely did not care where, or how, I lived—Helena Emory, to my mind one of the most beautiful women of her day; and I have seen the world's portraits of the world's beauties of all recorded days in beauty. Toward this Jimmy ran excitedly—I, with equal speed, endeavoring to divert him from his

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purpose.

"But it's my Auntie Helen!" he protested, when I recovered it and placed it in my pocket.

"It is your Auntie fiddlesticks, Jimmy," said I hastily, hoping my color was not heightened. "It is your grandmother! Finish your breakfast."

"I guess I ought to know—" he began.

"What!" I rejoined. "Wouldst pit your wisdom against one who has the second sight; have a care, shipmate."

"It was!" he reiterated. "I know ain't anybody pretty as she is, so it was."

"Jimmy L'Olonnois," said I, "let us reason about this. I——"

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"Lemme see it, then. I can tell in a minute. Why don't you lemme see it, then?" He was eager.

"Shipmate," I replied to him, "the hand is sometimes quicker than the eye, and the mind slower than the heart. For that reason I can not agree to your request."

"But what'd *he* be doing with Miss Emory's picture, Jimmy?" argued Lafitte.

"That's what I'd like to know," I added. "It may be that, in your haste, you have confused in your mind, Jimmy, some portrait with that of the Princess Amèlie Louise, of Furstenburg." (I had indeed sometimes commented on the likeness of Helena Emory to that light-hearted old-world beauty.) Jimmy did not know that a photograph of the princess herself, also, stood upon the piano top, nor did he fully grasp the truth of that old saying that the hand is quicker than the eye. At least, he gazed somewhat confused at the portrait which I now produced before his eyes.

"Who was she?" he inquired.

"A very charming young lady of rank, who eloped with a young man not of rank. In short, although she did not marry a chauffeur, she did marry an automobile agent. And surely, Jimmy, your Auntie Helen—whoever she may be—would do no such thing as that and still claim to be a cousin of a L'Olonnois?"

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"I don't know. You can't always tell what a girl's going to do," said Jimmy sagely. "But I don't think Auntie Helen's going to marry a auto man."

"Why, Jimmy?" (I found pleasure and dread alike in this conversation.)

"Because everybody says she's going to get married to Mr. Davidson, and he's a commission man."

Now, I am sure, my face did not flush. It may have paled. I tried to be composed. I reached for the melon dish and remarked, "Yes? And who is he? And really, who is your Auntie Helena, Jimmy, and what does she look like?" I spoke with a fine air of carelessness.

"She looks like the princess, you said," replied Jimmy. "And Mr. Davidson's rich. He's got a house on our lake, this summer, and he lives in New York and has offices in Chicago, and travels a good deal. He has some sort of factory, too, and he's awful rich. I like him pretty well. He knows how all the ball clubs stand, both leagues, every day in the year. You ought to know him, because then you might get to know my Auntie Helena. If they got married, like as not, I could take you up to their house. I thought everybody knew Mr. Davidson, and my Auntie Helena, too."

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Everybody did. Why should I not know Cal Davidson, one of the decenter chaps in the world? Why not, since we belonged to half a dozen of the same clubs in New York and other cities? Why not, since this very summer I had put my private yacht (named oddly enough, the *Belle Helène*) in commission for the first season in three years, and chartered her for the summer around Mackinaw, and a cruise down the Mississippi to the Gulf that fall? Why not, since I had still unbanked the handsome check Davidson had insisted on my taking as charter money for the last quarter?

Davidson! Of all men I had counted him my friend. And now here was he, reputed to be about to marry the girl who, as he knew, must have known, ought to have known, was all the world to me! Even if she would have none of me, and even though I had no shadow of claim on her—even though we had parted not once but a dozen times, and at last in a final parting—Davidson ought to have known, must have known! And my own yacht! Why, no man may know what may go forward in a yachting party. And, if perchance that fall he could persuade to accompany him Helena and her chaperon (I made no doubt that would be her Aunt Lucinda; for Helena's mother died when she was a child, and she was somewhat alone, although in rather comfortable circumstances) what could not so clever a man as Davidson, I repeat, one with so much of a way with women, accomplish in a journey so long as that, with no other man as his rival? It would be just like Cal Davidson to go ashore at St. Louis long enough to find a chaplain, and then go on ahead for a honeymoon around the world—on my boat, with my.... No, she was not mine ... but then....

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All my life I have tried to be fair, even with my own interests at stake. I tried now to be fair; and I failed! I could see but one side to this case. Davidson must be found at once, must be halted in mid-career.

It was about this time that Hiroshimi came in with the morning's mail and telegrams, all of which at my place come in from the railway, ten miles or so, by rural free delivery. I paid small attention to him, most of my mail, these days, having to do with gasoline pumps or patent hay rakes and lists from my gun and tackle dealers and such like.

Hiroshimi coughed. "Supposing Honorable like to see these yellow wire envelopings."

I glanced down and idly opened the telegram. It was from Cal Davidson himself, and read:

"Name best price outright sale bill Helen to me answer Chicago."

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So then, the scoundrel actually was on his way down the lakes, headed for the South, even thus early in the season! I knew, of course, that Bill Helen meant *Belle Helène*. As though I would sell my boat to him, of all men! It might almost as well have been a sale of Helena herself outright, as this cursed telegram stated. I crumpled the sheet in my hand.

"If Honorable contemplates some answering of mail this morning, it will be one ow-wore till the miserable pony mail carry all man comes," ventured Hiroshimi.

"Nothing this morning, Hiro," I managed to choke out, "and, Hiro, make ready my bag, the small one, for a journey."

"S-s-s-s!" hissed Hiroshimi, which was his way of saying, "Yes, sir, very well, sir." Surprise he neither showed now nor at any time; and since he never could tell at what hour I might conclude to start for his country or Europe or Africa or some other land for a stay of weeks or months, there was perhaps some warrant for his calm. He had less to do when I was away; although I always suspected him of poaching my trout with his infernal Japanese methods of angling.

At this moment L'Olonnois saw, through the open door, a red squirrel which scampered up a tree. At once he forgot all about his Auntie Helen and scampered off in pursuit, followed presently by Lafitte. This gave me time to decide upon a plan.... At last, I lifted my head again.... Why not, then?

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When L'Olonnois returned from the chase of the squirrel, he was all L'Olonnois and none Jimmy Henderson. The spell of his drama was upon him once more.

"What ho, mate," he began, scowling most vilely at me, "the sun is high in the heavens, yet we linger here. Let us up anchor, hoist the top-gallant mast and set sail for the enemy."

Jimmy's nautical terms might have been open to criticism, but there was no denying the bold and manly import of his speech. My own heart jumped well enough with it now.

"'Tis well, shipmate," said I. "Come, get ready your togs and your weapons, and let us away. As you say, the good ship tugs at her anchor chains this morning."

I managed to better the wardrobe of both boys by certain ducks and linens from my own store, albeit a world too large. Lafitte, none too happy at being thus uncongenially clean, was delight itself when set to selecting an armament from my collection. He chose three bright and clean Japanese swords, special blades of the Samurai armorers, forged long before Mutsuhito's grandfather was a boy—I had paid a rare price for them in Japan. To these he added three basket-handled cutlasses, which I had obtained in London, each almost old enough to have belonged to the crew of Drake himself. A short-barreled magazine pistol for each of us was his concession to the present unromantic age. As for Jimmy, he insisted on a small bore rifle as well as a shotgun. "We might see something," he remarked laconically.

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Thus equipped, I persuaded my associates to lay aside most of their somewhat archaic artillery. Neither had taken any thought of other supplies. Hiroshimi, however, now appeared, bearing, in addition to my hand luggage, two hampers, a roll of blankets and a silk tent in its canvas wrapper.

"Honorable is embarked in those small-going boat that is made tied to the bank?" inquired Hiroshimi. He had said nothing to me about my guests, or asked how they came; but as I knew he would find out all about it, anyhow, after his own fashion, I had not mentioned anything to him, or told him what to do. I only nodded now, relying on his efficiency. He now approached my young pirates, and rather against their will, removed from them some of their burden of weapons, slinging about himself bundles, baskets, bags and cutlery, until he almost disappeared from view. He cast on me a reproachful gaze, however, as he took from Lafitte's hand the bared blade of the old Samurai sword, and noted the ancient inscription on blade and scabbard as he sheathed it reverently.

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"What does it say, Hiro?" I asked of him.

"Very old talk, Honorable," answered Hiroshimi. "It say, 'Oh, Honorable Gentleman who carry me, I invite you to make high and noble adventurings.'"

"Let me carry it, Hiro," said I; and I tucked it under my own arm.

"Good!" exclaimed L'Olonnois. "Then you are going with us? And did you write the letters that you promised us?"

"I always keep my word."

"And it'll be all right back home about mother and the boat? I'll give you my six dollars!"

"There is no need. I told you, if you would make me one of the crew of the *Sea Rover* and let me seek my fortune with you, I would gladly pay all the reckoning of our journey."

"And how long will we be gone?"

"Till after your school begins, I fear."

"And how far are you going with us?"

"Spang! to the Spanish Main!" I answered.

So then we set forth down my woodland path.

CHAPTER VI

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IN WHICH I ACQUIRE A FRIEND

WE proceeded, therefore, through the wood, sweet in the dew of morning, among many twittering birds, and so came, presently, to the end of my path, where the little gate shuts it off from my mowing meadow; at the upper end of which, it may be remembered, the good ship *Sea Rover* lay anchored. The grass stood waist-high and wet in the dew as we turned along the meadow side, and L'Olonnois flinched a bit, although Lafitte waded along carelessly.

I observed that each boy had now thrust into his hat band a turkey feather, picked up, en route, along my field's edge. Jimmy was not sure of the correctness of this; and admitted that, sometimes, he had read literature having to do with Indian fighting, as well as piratical enterprises. I suggested that, to my mind, nothing quite took the place of the regulation red kerchief bound about the head; whereat, gravely, both L'Olonnois and Lafitte discarded their hats and feathers, for the bandannas which I proffered them. Having bound these about their foreheads, a great courage and confidence came to them.

L'Olonnois drew his sword, and with some care placed the blade between his teeth. "Hist!" exclaimed Lafitte, himself swept by his friend's imagination, and preparing to place his cutlass in his mouth also. "Let us approach the vessel with care, lest the enemy be about." So saying, each pirate with a mouthful of cold steel, and a hand shading his red-kerchiefed brow, stole through my clump of birches toward the bend, where the boat had first surprised me; myself following, somewhat put to it to refrain from laughter, although one rarely laughs in the young hours of the day, and myself rarely, at all.

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We were greeted by no hostile shot, and found our vessel quite as we had left her, as I could see at a glance when we neared the bank; but, none the less, something stirred in the bushes. A growl and a sudden barking, greeted Hiroshimi as he approached the boat in advance.

"You, Tige!" called out Lafitte. The dog—a dog none too beautiful, and now just a bit forlorn—approached us, alternately wagging in friendship and retreating in alarm.

"Well, what do you think of that!" said Jimmy. "We left him back at the lake—sent him home half a dozen times. How'd he get here, and how'd he know where we was?"

"He couldn't a-swum the lake," assented John. "And it was more'n ten miles around; and how could he smell where we went, on the water? Come here, Tige, you blame fool!"

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"Nay," said I, "he is no fool, this dog, but a creature of great reason, else he never could have found you. And I'll be bound he is as keen for adventure as any of us."

"He is coming here last night two ow-wore after dinner," said the omniscient Hiroshimi. "Also he bite me on leg. He, also, is malefactor."

"He has allotted to himself the duty of caring for the property of his masters, Hiro," I said, "and hence is not really a malefactor. Besides, since he would not leave the boat and follow our trail, he is by this time hungry. Feed him, Hiro."

But Hiroshimi was not eager to approach the piratical canine again; so I, myself, fished something from a hamper and called the dog to me. He ate gladly and most gratefully.

Now, it is a strange thing to say, but it is the truth, I had never before in my life fed a dog! I had won many knotty suits at law, had solved many hard problems dealing with human nature—and had found human nature for the most part rarely glad or grateful—but I have never owned or even fed a dog. A strange new feeling came in my throat now. Suddenly I swallowed some invisible intangible thing.

"John," said I, "what breed of dog is this?" Indeed, it was hard to tell offhand, although he had the keen head of a collie.

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"I guess he's just one o' them partial dogs," answered John, "mostly shepherd, maybe; I dunno."

"Very well, Partial shall be his name. And is he yours?"

"He runs round on the farm. He goes with Jimmy an' me."

"John, will you sell me Partial?" I asked this suddenly, realizing that my voice might sound odd.

"What'd ye want him fer?" he replied. "He'd be a nuisance."

"I think not. See how faithful he has been, see how grateful he is; and how wise. He reasoned where you were as well as I reasoned who you were. He knows now that we are talking about him, and knows that I am his friend—see him look at me; see him come over and stand by me. John, do you think—do you believe a dog, this dog, would learn to like me, ever? Would he understand me?"

"Well," said John judicially, standing sword in hand, "I dunno. Someways, maybe dogs and boys understands quicker. But you understand us. Maybe he'd understand you."

"Well reasoned, Jean Lafitte," said I, "perhaps your logic is better than you know, at least, I hope so. And now I offer you yonder magazine pistol as your own in fee, if you will sign over to me all your right, title and interest, in Partial, here. Evidently he belongs with us. He seems to care for us. And I experience some odd sort of feeling, which I can not quite describe. Perhaps it is only that I feel like a boy, and one that is going to own a dog. Is it a bargain?"

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"Sure! You c'n have him for nuthin'," said Lafitte. "He ain't worth nothin'. Besides, I can't charge a brother of the flag anything; anyhow, not you." I inferred that Jean Lafitte, also, was going to grow up into one of those men like myself, cursed with a reticence and shyness in some matters, and so winning a reputation of oddness or coldness, against all the real and passionate protest of his own soul.

"No, brother," I said to him: "I'll not offer you trade, but gift. Let it be that if I can win the dog, and if he will take me as his master and friend, he shall be mine. And you take the pistol, and have a care of it."

"That's all right!" said Lafitte shyly, yet delightedly, as I could see.

"Here, Partial!" I called to the dog; and being young and friendly, and attached to neither in particular, and only in general worshiping the creature Boy, he came to me! I fed him, stroked him, looked into his eyes. And in a few moments he put his feet on my shoulders, and licked at my ear, and began to talk to me in low eager whines, and rubbed his muzzle against my cheek, and said all that a dog could say in oath of feudal service, pledging loyalty of life and limb. At which I felt very odd indeed; and began to see the world had many things in it of which I had never known; but which, now, I was resolved to know.

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"Honorable is embarking those malefactor canine thing with so much impediments in this small-going boat?" inquired Hiroshimi.

"Yes," I answered. "At once. All four of us. Put the stuff aboard, Hiro."

So, somewhat crowded as the *Sea Rover* was, with three boys and a dog, not to mention our supplies and our armament, at last we were afloat with crew and cargo aboard. Hiro was not surprised, and asked no questions. With the salaam with which he announced dinner, he now announced his own departure for his duties at my deserted house; and as he walked he never turned around for curious gaze. Often, often have I, in my readings in the Eastern philosophy, endeavored to analyze and to emulate this Oriental calm, this dismissal from the soul of things small, things unessential and things unavoidable. An enviable character, my boy Hiroshimi.

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Now all was bustle and confusion aboard the good ship *Sea Rover*. "Stand by the main braces!" roared Lafitte.

"Aye, aye, Sir!" replied the crew, that is to say, Jimmy L'Olonnois.

"Hard a lee!"

"Hard a lee it is, Sir!"

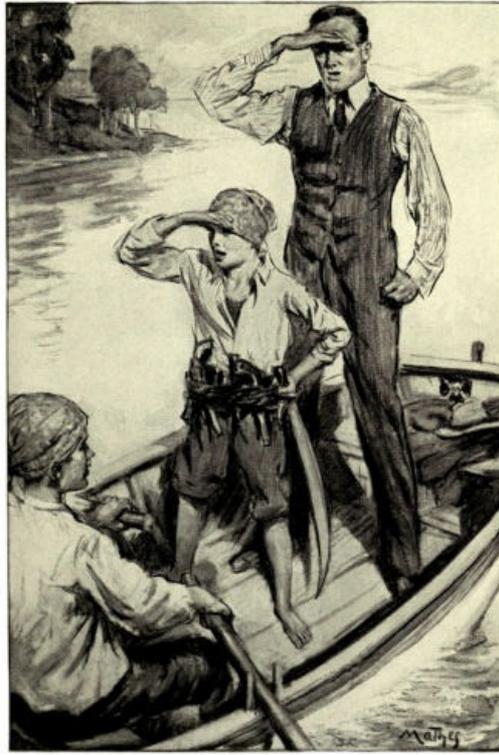
"Hoist the top-gallant mainsail an' clew all allow an' aloft!"

"Aye, aye, Sir!"

"Man the capstan! All hands to the starboard mizzen chains! Heave away!"

"Heave away!" rejoined our gallant crew, never for a moment in doubt as to the captain's meaning. And, indeed, he gave a push with an oar at the bank, which thrust us into the smart current of my little river.

We were afloat! We were off to seek our fortune!



**I, too, stood, shading my eyes with
my hand**

Ah, what a fine new world was this which lay before us! But for one thing, this had no doubt been the happiest moment in my life. For, always, the attaining of knowledge, the growth of a man's mind and soul, had to me seemed the one ambition worth a man's while; and now, as I might well be assured, I had learned more and grown more, these last twelve hours or so, than I had in any twelve years of my life before. Before me, indeed, had opened a vast and wonderful world. That morning, as we swept around curve after curve of the swift trout-stream that I loved so well, among my alders, through my bits of wood, along my hills—with Lafitte and L'Olonnois standing, each alert, silent, peering ahead under his flat hand to see what might lie ahead (I astern with Partial's head on my knee), I felt rise in my soul the same sweet grateful feeling that I had when the new world of music opened to me, what time I first caught the real meaning of the *Frühlingslied*. My heart leaped anew in my bosom, for the time forgetting its sadness. I saw that the world after all does hold faith and loyalty and friendship and perpetual, self-renewing Youth.... I also rose, cast my hat aside, and with one hand reaching down to touch my friend's head, I, too, stood, shading my eyes with my edged hand, peering ahead into this strange new world that lay ahead of me.

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CHAPTER VII

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IN WHICH I ACHIEVE A NAME

SO winding is my trout river, and so extensive are my lands along it, that it was not until nearly noon that our progress, sometimes halted by shallows, again swift in the deeper reaches, brought the *Sea Rover* to the lower edge of my estate. Here, the river was deeper and more silent, the waters were not quite so cold, but as we passed a high hardwood bridge from which issued a cool spring of water, I suggested a halt in our voyage, to which my companions, readily enough, agreed. We, therefore, disembarked and prepared to have our luncheon.

It was obvious to me that Jean Lafitte and Henri L'Olonnois were not on their first expedition out-of-doors, for they set about gathering wood and water in workmanlike fashion. They did not yet fully classify me, so, in boyish shyness, left me largely ignored, or waited till I should demonstrate myself to them. It was, therefore, with delicacy that I ventured any suggestions from the place where Partial and I sat in the shade watching them.

I have mentioned the fact that I had been a hunter and traveler, and had met success in the field; yet the truth is, I began all that late in life, and deliberately. To me, used to exact habit of thought in all things, and accustomed to be governed by trained reason alone, it was never enough to say that a thing was partly done, or well enough done to pass: only the best possible way had any

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appeal to me. I brought my reason to bear on every situation in life. Thus, I studied an investment carefully, and before going into it, I knew what the result would be. My investments, therefore, always have prospered, because they were not based on guess or chance, as nine-tenths of all the public's business ventures are. In the same way, I had gone deliberately about the matter of winning the regard of the only woman I ever saw who seemed to me much worth while. I argued and reasoned with Helena Emory that she should marry me, proving to her by every rule of logic that, not only was she the most lovable woman in all the records of the world, but, also, that love such as mine never had before been known in the world. Sometimes, as I logically proved the fitness of our union, and grew warm at my own accuracy, she wavered, relented, warmed: and then again, forgetting my argument, she would relapse into womanlike frivolity once more.... I did not like to think of this, as I sat in the shade with Partial. It cost me much in self-respect, irritated me.

But, having studied sport and outdoor living deliberately as I had studied the law and business and Helena, I had rather a thorough grounding, on life in the open, for I had read every authority obtainable; whereas my young associates had read none. So cautiously, now and then, I suggested little things to them, as that the fire need not be so large, and would do better if confined between two green side logs. I taught them how to boil the kettle quickly, how to make tea, and also, more difficult, how to make coffee; how to cook bacon just enough, and how to cook fish—for I had taken a few trout earlier in the day—and how to make toast without charring it to cinders. Again, I delighted them by telling them of little camping devices, and quite won their hearts when I found among Hiroshimi's packages, a small camp griddle with folding legs, of my own devising. It was quite clean and new, but it performed as I felt quite sure it would. In fact, reason will govern all things—except a woman.

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We ate *al fresco*, as true buccaneers of the main, and grew better and better acquainted. It occurred to me that mayhap the nautical education of my associates was, after all, somewhat superficial, so I set about mending it by explaining something of the rigging of the ship; and I gave them, by means of the *Sea Rover's* bowline, some lessons in sailorman splices and knots. The bow-line-in-a-bight, the sheet-bend, the clinch-knot, the jam-knot, the fisherman's water-knot, the stevedore's slip-knot, the dock-hand's round-turns and half-hitches for cable makefast, the magnus-hitch, the fool's-knot, the cat's-cradle, the sheep-shank, the dog-shank, and many others—all of which I had learned in books and in practise—I did for them over and over again; just as I could have done for them a half-dozen different ways of throwing the diamond-hitch in a pack-train, or the stirrup-hitch in a cow camp, or many other of the devices of men who live in the open; for beginning late in life in these things, I had studied them hard and faithfully.

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I could see—and I noted it with much gratification—that I was rising in the estimation of my pirates. It pleased me not at all to show that I knew more than they of these things, for I was older and my mind was long my trained servant; but I had monstrous delight in seeing myself accepted as one fit to associate with them. Once or twice, I saw the two draw apart in some debate which I knew had to do with me. "Well, now," Lafitte would begin; and L'Olonnois would demur. "No, I don't just like that one," he would say. By nightfall—and I presume I do not need to recall all the incidents of our afternoon, or of our pitching camp by the riverside an hour before sundown—I learned what was the subject of their argument. I had been admitted to the pirates' band, but the question was over my name.

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We sat by our fireside, before our little tent, after a pleasant meal which I know was well cooked because I cooked it myself—trout, a young squirrel, and toast, and real coffee—and Partial was close at my knee, having obviously adopted me. We were fifteen or twenty miles from my house, nearly twice that from their homes, but the world, itself, seemed very remote from us. We reveled in a new luxurious world of rare deeds, rare dreams all our own. I was conjuring up some new argument to put before Helena should I ever see her again—as of course I never should—when Lafitte rolled over on the grass and looked up at us.

"We was just saying," he remarked, "that you didn't have no name."

"That is true. I have not told you my name, nor have you asked it. Had you been impolite, you might have learned it by prying about my place." I spoke gravely and with approval.

"No, we didn't know who you was."

"Let it be so. Let me be a man of no name. A name is of no consequence, and neither am I."

"Sho, now, that ain't so. I never seen a better—now, I never seen—" Jean Lafitte's reticence in friendship, again, was getting the better of him.

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"So we said we'd call you Black Bart," added L'Olonnois.

"That is a most excellent name," said I after some thought. "At present, I can find no objection to it, except that I wear no beard at all and would have a red or brown one if I did; and that Black Bart was rather a pirate of the land than of the sea."

"Was he?" queried L'Olonnois. "Wasn't he a pirate, too, never?"

"There was a famous pirate chief known as Bluebeard or Blackbeard, and it may be, sometimes, they called him Black Bart."

"Wasn't he a awful desper't sort of pirate?"

"He is said to have been."

"It sounds like a awful desper't name," said Jimmy: "like as though he'd fill up his ship with captured maidens, an' put all rivals to the sword."

"Such, indeed, shipmate," said I, "was his reputation."

"Well," concluded L'Olonnois, "we couldn't think o' any better name'n that, because we know that is just what you would do."

(So, then, my reputation was advancing!)

"Wasn't you never a pirate before, honest?" queried Lafitte at this juncture. "Because, you seem like a real pirate to us. We been, lots of times, over on the lake." [Pg 58]

"It may be because my father was always called a pirate," I replied. "You see, in these days, there are not so many pirates who really scuttle ships and cut throats."

"But you would?"

"Certainly. 'Tis in my blood, my bold shipmate."

"We knew it," concluded L'Olonnois calmly. "So, after now, we'll call you Black Bart. You can let your whiskers grow, you know."

"True," said I. "Well, we will at least take the whiskers under advisement, as the court would say."

"We must be an awful long ways from home," ventured L'Olonnois, after a time.

"Hundreds of miles our good ship has ploughed the deep, and as yet has raised no sail above the horizon," I admitted.

"Do you—now—do you—well, anyhow, do you have any idea of where we are going?" demanded Lafitte, shamefacedly.

"Not in the slightest."

"But now—well—now then—"

In answer I drew from my pocket a map and a compass; the latter mostly for effect, since I knew very well the bed of our river must shape our course for many a mile. On the map I pointed out how, presently, our river would run into a lake, into which, also, ran another river; and would emerge on the other side much larger. I showed them that down that other river, as, indeed, down mine, logs used to float from the pine forests—many of my father's logs, of ownership said to have been piratical—and I showed how, presently, this stream would carry us into one of the ancient waterways down which millions of wealth in timber have come; and explained about the wild crews of river runners who once ran the rafts down that great highway, and into the greater highway of the Mississippi; whence men might in due time arrive upon the Spanish Main. [Pg 59]

"Is there any way a fellow can get across from Lake Michigan into the Mississippi River?" demanded Lafitte, who was of a practical turn of mind: and on the map I showed him all the old trails of the fur traders, explorers and adventurers, French and English, who had discovered our America long ago; whereat their eyes kindled and their tongues went dumb.

At last, I told them we must to our hammocks; and soon our bloody band was deep in sleep. At least, so much might have been said for Lafitte and L'Olonnois. Alone of the band of sea rovers myself, Black Bart, sat musing by the fire, the head of my friend, Partial, in my lap.

CHAPTER VIII

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IN WHICH WE HAVE AN ADVENTURE

OUR band of hardy adventurers arose with the sun on the morning following our first night in bivouac, and by noon of that day, thanks, perhaps, in some measure to my own work at the oars, and a sail which we rigged from a corner of the tent, we had passed into and through the lake which our map had showed us. Now we were below the edge of the pine woods, and our stream ran more sluggishly, between banks of cattails or of waving marsh grasses. We put out a trolling line, and took a bass or so; and once Lafitte, firing chance-medley into a passing flock of plover, knocked down a half-dozen, so that we bade fair to have enough for dinner that night. It was all a new world for us. No one might tell what lay around the next bend of our widening waterway. We were explorers. A virgin world lay before us. The nature of the country along the stream kept the settlements back a distance; so that to us, now, in reality, retracing one of the ancient fur-trading routes, we might almost have been the first to break these silences.

Toward nightfall we came into a more rolling and more park-like region; our prow was now heading to the westward, for the general course of the great river beyond. I had no notion to visit the city of Chicago, and our route lay far above that which must be taken by any large craft [Pg 61]

bound for the Mississippi route to the Gulf.

Farms now came down to the water's edge in places, villages offered mill-pond dams—around which, in scowling reticence, we portaged the *Sea Rover*, unmindful alike of queries and of jeers. I found time to post additional letters now. Indeed, I was preparing for a long and determined enterprise. It was the *Sea Rover* against the *Belle Hélène*; and, did the skipper of the latter loll along in flanneled ease and luxury, not so with the hardy band of cutthroats who manned our smaller and more mobile craft, men used to hardships, content to drink spring water instead of sparkling wines, and to eat the product of their own weapons.

We were I do not know how far from our first encampment, perhaps thirty miles or more, when toward five o'clock of the evening we concluded to land at a wooded grassy bank which offered a good camping place. We made all fast, and in a few moments had our tent up and a little fire going, Lafitte and L'Olonnois, at this, happy as any two pirates I ever have seen; and were on the point of spreading our canvas table cover upon the grass, when we heard a gruff voice hail us. [Pg 62]

"Heh! What're you doin' there?"

We turned, expecting to meet some irate farmer on whose land perhaps we innocently were trespassing; but the figure which now emerged from the screening bushes was rougher, bolder, and in some indescribable way wilder, than that of a farmer. I could not, at first, assign the fellow a place, for I knew this was an old and well settled country, and not supposed to be overrun with tramps or campers. He was a stout man nearly of middle age, dirty and ill clad, his coarse shirt open at the neck, his legs clad in old overalls, his hat and shoes very much the worse for wear. His face was covered with a rough beard, and so brown and so begrimed that, at once, I guessed this must be some dweller in the open. Yet he seemed no tramp; and even if he were, he had no right to hail us in this fashion.

I only looked at him, and made no answer, feeling none due. He came out into the open, followed by a nondescript dog, which had the lack of decency—and also of discretion—to attack my dog Partial with no parley or preliminary. I wot not of what stock Partial came, but somewhere in his ancestry must have been stark fighting strain. Mutely and sternly, as became a gentleman, he joined issue; and so well had he learned the art of war that in the space of a few moments, in spite of the loud outcry of the owner of the invading cur, he had him on his back in a throat grip which was the end of the battle and bade fair soon to be the end of the enemy. [Pg 63]

The man who had accosted us caught up a club and made toward Partial with intent to kill him. Then, indeed, we all sprang into action. In two strides I was before him.

"Drop that!" I said to him quickly, but I hope not angrily. "Call him off, Jack!" I cried to Lafitte at the same time.

The sound of conflict ceased as Partial was persuaded to release his fallen foe, and the latter disappeared, with more wisdom as to attacking a band of pirates. His owner, however, was not so easily daunted. He still advanced toward Partial, and as I still intervened, he made a vicious side blow at me with his club.

It all happened, almost, in the twinkling of an eye. Here, then, was an adventure, and before the end of our second day!

There was not time to learn or to ask the reason for this man's animosity toward us, and, indeed, no thought of that came to my mind. A man may lay tongue to one—within certain bounds—and one will only walk away from him; but the touch of another man's hand or weapon is quite another matter. That arouses the unthinking blood, and follows then, no matter the issue, the *gaudium certaminis*, with no care as to odds or evens. Wherefore, even as the club whizzed by to my side step, I came back from the other foot and smote the hostile stranger on the side of the neck so stiffly that he faltered and almost dropped. Then seeing that I was so much lighter than himself and perhaps valuing himself against me purely on a basis of avoirdupois, pound for pound, he gathered and came at me, roaring out blasphemy and obscenity which I had rather Lafitte and L'Olonnois had not heard. [Pg 64]

I had not often fought in fact, but knew that, sometimes, a gentleman must fight. What astonished me now was the fact that fighting contained no manner of repugnance to me. With a certain joy I met my foe, circled with him, exchanged blows with him—unequally it is true, for I was cool as though trying a cause at law, and he was very angry: so that he got most of my leads, and I but few of his, albeit jarring me enough to make my ears sing and my eyes blur somewhat, although of pain I was no more conscious than a fighting dog. The turf was soft underfoot, and the space wide, so that we fought very happily and comfortably over perhaps a hundred feet of country, first one and then the other coming in; until at last I had him so well blown that he stood, and I knew we must now end it toe to toe. I bethought me of a trick of my old boxing teacher, and stood before him with arms curved wide apart, inviting him to come into what seemed an opening. He rushed, and my left fist caught him on the neck. He straightened to finish me, but I stooped and brought my right in a round-arm blow, full and hard into the small of his back and at one side. It sickened him, and before he could rally, I stepped behind him, and having no ethics save the necessity of subduing him, I caught up his arm by the wrist, and slipping under it with my shoulder, pulled it down till he howled: a trick, only one of very many, which Hiroshimi patiently had taught me. [Pg 65]

That very naturally ended our contest, and it was near to ending our war-like neighbor as well.

During this warfare, which was short or long, I knew not, my associates, stunned and perhaps fearful, had sat silent; at least, I neither heard nor saw them. But now, all at once, over my shoulder I saw both Lafitte and L'Olonnois running in to my assistance. Each held in hand a bared blade of the samurai, and had I not shouted out to them to refrain, I have small doubt that in the most piratical and unsamuraic fashion they mayhap would have disemboweled my captive; for the old swords were keen as razors, and my friends were as red of eyesight as myself.

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"No! No!" I called to them, even as our victim writhed and roared in terror. "Drop your weapons—that isn't fair." They obeyed, shamefacedly and with regret, as I am convinced: for illusion with them, at times, indeed overleaped the centuries, and they were back in a time of blood: even as I was in a stone-age wrath for my own part.

"Come here, Jack," I ordered, "and you, too, Jimmy. Do you see how I have him?"

They agreed. "It's a peach," said Lafitte. "Make him holler!"

"No," I replied, easing off the strain on the wrenched arm, "he has already 'hollered.'"

"Yes, sure, 'nuff, 'nuff!—ye!" cried our captive, who, now, was in mortal terror and much contrition, seeing both flesh and blood and cold steel had all the best of him. "Lemme go!"

"Certainly," I assented; "we did not ask you to come, and do not want you to stay. But, first, I must use you in a few demonstrations to my young friends. Jack,"—and I motioned to him with my head—"get behind him."

Eagerly, his three-cornered gray eyes narrowed, Lafitte skipped back of my man, and with no word from me he fastened on the other wrist so suddenly the man had no warning, and with a strong heave of all his body he doubled that arm up also. Much roaring now, and many protestations, for when our prisoner began with abuse, we could change it into supplication by raising his bent arms no more than one inch or two.

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"Now, Jimmy," said I, "go in front of him, and put a thumb in the corner of his jaw, on each side. Press up until he begs our pardon." And, faith, my blue-eyed pirate, so far from shuddering at the task, at last managed to find those certain nerve centers known to all efficient policemen; and very promptly, the man made signs he would like to beg the boy's pardon and did so.

"Now, give me that arm, Jack," I resumed calmly, since our subject had no more fight left in him than a sack of meal. "So. Now go around and put your thumbs in his eyes—no, not really in his eyes, but in the middle of the bone above his eyes. So. Now, ask this boy's pardon, or I'll twist your arms off." And he asked it.

"You couldn't do it if you'd fight fair!" he bellowed.

"Could I not?" I asked. And cast him free. "Come on again, then."

"I'm afraid of them kids," said he. "They'd stick me."

"No, they would not," said I; but still he would not come on. Then I made a quick catch at his wrist, edgewise, and rolled my thumb along it at a certain place where the nerves lie close to the edge of the bone, as any policeman knows; and he would follow me, then. So I led him to our little camp-fire.

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"Now," said I to him, "be seated," and he sat. I asked him if he would shake hands with me and my boys and make up. He was very sullen, but, at last, did so, not cheerfully, I fear, for he was not of good blood.

"Tell me," I demanded then, seeing that the triumph of calm reason had been sufficient in his case, "why did you come here, and why do you try to drive us off, who are only on a peaceful journey as pirates, seeking our fortune?"

"Pirates!" he exclaimed. "Just what I thought. What's the use my leasin' the pearl fer a mile along here if anybody can come and camp, and go to work, right alongside o' me? If old farmer Snider, that owns this land, hadn't gone to town I'd have the law on ye. Me payin' my money in and gettin' no protection. Fishin's rotten, too!"

I now perceived that we had encountered one of those half-nomad characters, a fresh-water pearl fisherman, such as those who, for some years, with varying fortune, have combed the sand-bars of our inland river for the fresh-water mussels which sometimes, like oysters, secrete valuable pearls or nacreous bits known as slugs. This explained much to me.

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"I know the law," said I. "Farmer Snider can not lease the highway of yonder river where the *Sea Rover* passes. But I know also the law of the wilderness. One trapper does not intrude on another who has first located his country. We will pass on to-morrow. Meantime, if you don't mind, we will go with you to your camp and see how you do your work. Please forget that we have had any trouble. Had you but spoken thus at first, and not borne war against these bold pirates, all would have been well."

He looked at me oddly, evidently thinking my mind touched.

"Come!" I said, wiping the blood from my face, and passing him also a basin of water, "you fought well and the wonder is you did not kill me with one of those swings or swipes of yours. They were crooked and awkward, but they came hard."

He grinned and saved his face further by saying: "Well, you was three to one ag'in me." I smiled and let it stand so: and after a while, he arose stiffly and we all passed back into the wood.

We found that we were upon a little island, between two shallow arms of the stream. The camp of the pearl fisher lay at the lower end; and never have I seen or smelled so foul a place for human habitation. The one large tent served as shelter, and a rude awning sheltered the ruder table in the open air. But directly about the tent, and all around it in every direction, lay heaps of clam shells, most of them opened, some not yet ready for opening. I had smelled the same odor—and had not learned to like it—in far-off Ceylon, at the great pearl fisheries of the Orient. The "clammer" seemed immune.

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Presently, he introduced to us a woman, very old, extraordinarily forbidding of visage, and unspeakably profane of speech, who emerged from the tent; his mother, he said. It seemed that they made their living in this way, clamming, as they called it, all the way from Arkansas to the upper waters of the Mississippi. They had made this side expedition up a tributary, in search of country not so thoroughly exploited; without much success in their venture, it seemed. The old lady, her head wrapped in a dirty shawl, sat down on an empty box, and stroked a large and dirty Angora cat, another member of the family, the while she bitterly and profanely complained. It was now dusk, and she did not notice anything out of the way in her son's rather swollen nose and lips.

I explained to Lafitte and L'Olonnois that we were now come into the neighborhood of possible treasure, and the sight of a few pearls, none of very great worth, which the old crone produced from a cracker box, was enough to set off Jimmy L'Olonnois, who was all for raiding the place.

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"What!" he hissed to me in an aside. "Did we not spare his life? Then the treasure should be ours!"

"Wait, brother," said I. "We shall see what we shall see." And I quieted Lafitte also, who was warlike at the very sound of the word pearl. "Them's what they take from the Spanish ships," said he. "Pearls is fitten for ladies fair. An' here is pearls."

"Wait, brother," I demanded of him. For I was revolving something in my mind. I presently accosted the clammers.

"Listen," said I, "you say business is bad."

"It certainly and shorely is," assented the old dame, fishing a black pipe out of her pocket, and proceeding to feed it from another pocket, to the discomfort of the soiled Angora cat.

"Well, now, let me make you a proposition," said I, taking a glance at the heap of fresh shell which lay beyond the racks of trolling lines and their twisted wire hooks, by means of which dragging apparatus the mussels are taken—shutting hard on the wire when it touches them as they lie feeding with open mouths—"you've quite a lot of shell there, now."

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"Yes, but what's in it? Button factories all shut down with a strike, and no market: and as for pearls, they ain't none. Blame me for carryin' a grouch?"

"Not in the least. But what will you take for your shells, and agree to open them for us, at wages of five dollars a day?"

"Both of us?" he demanded shrewdly. I smiled and nodded. "It's more than you average, twice over," said I, "and you say the stream is no good. Now I, too, am a student of the great law of averages, because I am or was a director in a great life insurance company. You say the luck is bad. Like other adventurers, I say that under the law of averages, it is time for the luck to change."

"The luck's with you," growled the clammer, "it's ag'in me." Unconsciously, he put a finger to his swollen nose. "What'll you gimme?" he demanded.

"One hundred dollars bonus and ten dollars a day," said I promptly; and he seemed to know I would not better that.

"Who are ye?" he queried: "a buyer?"

"No, a pirate."

"I believe ye. I never saw such a outfit."

"Will you trade?" I asked; "and how long will it take to open the lot?"

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"Nigh all day, even if we set up all night and roasted." He nodded to a wide grating; and the ashes underneath showed that in this way the poor clams, like the Incas of old, were sometimes forced to give up their treasures by the persuasion of a fire under them.

"Very well," I said. "We'll call it a day. That's a hundred and ten dollars for you by this time tomorrow. I invoke the aid of capital and of chance, both, against you. You will very likely lose: but if so, it would not be the first time the producer of wealth has lost it. But I make the wager fair, as my reason tells me I should."

"Ye're a crazy bunch, and I think ye're out of the state asylum over yonder," broke in the old woman, "but what the hell do we care whether ye're crazy or not? Ye look like ye had the money."

Jake, we'll take him up."

"All right," said Jake. "We'll go ye."

"To-morrow morning, then," said I; and our party rose to return to our camp, where Partial greeted us with warmth; he having assigned to himself the duty of guard. And so, as Pepys would say, to bed; although Lafitte and L'Olonnois scarce could sleep.

"Let him attempt to make a run for it, after we have hove him to, and we will board him and give no quarter!" This was almost the last of the direful speech I heard from L'Olonnois, as at last I turned myself to a night of deep and peaceful slumber. [Pg 74]

CHAPTER IX

[Pg 75]

IN WHICH WE TAKE MUCH TREASURE

"**Y**OU must be awful rich, Black Bart," said L'Olonnois to me as we sat on the grass, at breakfast, the following morning.

"No, Jimmy," I replied, putting down my coffee cup, "on the contrary, I am very poor."

"But you have all sorts of things, back there where you live; and last night you said you would pay that man a hundred dollars, just to open a lot of clam shells. Now, a hundred dollars is a awful sight of money."

"That depends, Jimmy," I said.

"N' we'd ought to *take* them pearls," broke in Lafitte. "Didn't we lick him?"

"We did, yes; twice." And in my assent I felt, again, a fierce satisfaction in the first conquest of our invader, that of body to body, eye to eye; rather than in the one where I brought intellect to aid in war. "But there are two ways of being a pirate. Let us see if we can not win treasure by taking a chance in logic, and so be modern pirates."

They did not understand me, and went mute, but at last Jimmy resumed his catechism. "Who owns the place where you live, Black Bart?"

"I do." [Pg 76]

"But how much?"

"Some five or six miles."

"Gee! That must be over a hundred acres. I didn't know anybody owned that much land. Where'd you get it?"

"In part from my father."

"What business was he in?"

"He was a pirate, Jimmy, or at least, they said he was. But my mother was not.—I will tell you," I added suddenly: "my father owned a great deal of timber land long ago, and iron, and oil, and copper, when nobody cared much for them. They say, now, he stole some of them, I don't know. In those days people weren't so particular. The more he got, the more he wanted. He never was a boy like you and me. He educated me as a lawyer, so that I could take care of his business and his property, and he trained me in the pirate business the best he could, and I made money too, all I wanted. You see, my father could never get enough, but I did; perhaps, because my mother wasn't a pirate, you see. So, when I got enough, my father and mother both died, and when I began to see that, maybe, my father had taken a little more than our share, I began trying to do something for people ... but I can't talk about that, of course."

"Well, why not?" demanded Lafitte. "Go on." [Pg 77]

"A fellow doesn't like to."

"But what did you do?"

"Very little. I found I could not do very much. I gave some buildings to schools, that sort of thing. No one thanked me much. A good many called me a Socialist."

"What's that—a Socialist?"

"I can't tell you. Nobody knows. But really, I suppose, a Socialist is a man born before the world got used to steam and electricity. Those things made a lot of changes, you see, and in the confusion some people didn't get quite as square a deal as they deserved; or at least, they didn't think they had. It takes time, really, as I suppose, to settle down after any great change. It's like moving a house."

"I see," said Jimmy sagely. "But, Black Bart, you always seemed to me like as if, now, well, like you was studyin' or something, somehow. Ain't you never had no good times before?"

"No. This is about the first really good time I ever had in all my life. You see, you can't really understand things that you look at from a long way off—you've got to get right in with folks to know what folks are. Don't you think so?"

"I know it!" answered Jimmy, with conviction. And I recalled, though he did not, the fact that he bathed daily, Lafitte weekly, yet no gulf was fixed between their portions of the general humanity. [Pg 78]

"It must be nice to be rich," ventured Lafitte presently. "I'm going to be, some day."

"Is that why you go a-pirating?" I smiled.

"Maybe. But mostly, because I like it."

"It's a sort of game," said L'Olonnois.

"All life is a sort of game, my hearties," said I. "What you two just have said covers most of the noble trade of piracy and nearly all of the pretty game of life. You are wise as I am, wise as any man, indeed."

"What I like about you, Black Bart," resumed L'Olonnois, naively, "is, you seem always fair."

I flushed at this, suddenly, and pushed back my plate. "Jimmy," said I at last, "I would rather have heard that, from you, than to hear I had made a million dollars from pearls or anything else. For that has always been my great hope and wish—that some day I could teach myself always to be fair—not to deceive anybody, most of all not myself; in short, to be fair. Brother, I thank you, if you really believe I have succeeded to some extent."

"Why ain't you always jolly, like you was havin' a good time, then?" demanded my blue-eyed inquisitor. "Honor bright!"

"Must it be honor bright?" [Pg 79]

"Yes."

"Then I will tell you. It is because of the first chapter of Genesis, Jimmy."

"What's that?"

"Fie! Fie! Jimmy, haven't you read that?" He shook his head.

"I've read a little about the fights," he said, "when Saul 'n' David 'n' a lot of 'em slew them tens of thousands. But Genesis was dry."

"Do you remember any place where it says 'Male and female created He them'?"

"Oh, yes; but what of it? That's dry."

"Is it, though?" I exclaimed. "And you with an Auntie Helena, and a brother Black Bart. Jimmy L'Olonnois, little do you know what you say!"

"Well, now," interrupted the ruthless soul of Jean Lafitte, "how about them pearls?"

"That's so," assented Jimmy. "Pearls is booty."

"Very well, then, shipmates," I assented, "as soon as we have washed the dishes, we will see what can be done with the enemy yonder."

We found our two clammers, the young man and his crone of a mother, up betimes and hard at work, as evil-looking a pair as ever I saw. The man's face was still puffed and discolored, where my fists had punished him, and his disposition had not improved overnight. His hag-like dam also regarded us with suspicion and disfavor, I could note, and I saw her glance from me to her son, making mental comparisons; and guessed she had heard explanations regarding black eyes which did not wholly satisfy her. [Pg 80]

They had already roasted open and examined quite a heap of shells by the time we arrived, and I inquired, pleasantly, if they had found anything. The man answered surlily that they had not; but something made me feel suspicious, since they had made so early a start. I saw him now and then wipe his hands on his overalls, and several times noted that as he did so, his middle finger projected down below the others, as though he were touching for something inside his pocket, which lay in front, the overalls being made for a carpenter, with a narrow pocket devised for carrying a folded foot-rule. But I could see nothing suggested in the pocket.

"That's too bad," I said pleasantly. "It looks as though I were going to lose my hundred, doesn't it? Still, the day is long."

I busied myself in watching the deft work of the two as they opened the shells started by the heat, sweeping out the fetid contents, and feeling in one swift motion of a thumb for any hidden secretion of the nacre. Nothing was found while I was watching, and as I did not much like the odor, I drew to one side. I found L'Olonnois and Lafitte standing apart, in full character, arms folded and scowling heavily. [Pg 81]

"If yonder villain plays us false," said Lafitte between his clenched teeth, "he shall feel the vengeance of Jean Lafitte! And I wouldn't put it a blame bit a-past him, neither," he added,

slightly out of drawing for the time.

"You are well named, Lafitte," I smiled. "You are a good business man. But the day is long."

It was, indeed, long, and I put in part of it wandering about with Partial, hunting for squirrels, which he took much delight in chasing up trees. Again, I lay for a time reading one of my favorite authors, the wise stoic, Epictetus, tarrying over one of my favorite passages:

"Remember that you are an actor of just such a part as is assigned you by the Poet of the play; of a short part, if the part be short, of a long part if the part be long. Should He wish you to act the part of a beggar, ('or of a pirate,' I interpolated, aloud to myself, and smiling) take care to act it naturally and nobly; and the same if it be the part of a lame man, or a ruler, or a private man. For this is in your power—to act well the part assigned to you; but to choose that part is the function of another."

I lay thoughtful, querying. Was I a rich man, or a poor man? Was I a ruler, or a private man, or a lame man?... I asked myself many questions, concluding that all my life I had, like most of us all, been more or less a lame man and a private man after all, and much like my fellow.... It was a great day for me; since each day I seek to learn something. And here now was I, blessed by the printed wisdom of age and philosophy, and yet more blessed by the spoken philosophy of unthinking Youth.... I lay flat, my arms out on the grass, and looked up at the leaves. I felt myself a part of the eternal changeless scheme, and was well content. It has always been impossible for me to care for the little things of life—such as the amassing of money—when I am alone in the woods. I pondered now on the wisdom of my teachers, Epictetus, Jimmy, John and the author of the Book of Genesis.

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I arose at last with less of melancholy and more of resolve than I had known for years. The world swam true on its axis all around me; and I, who all my life had been in some way out of balance in the world, now walked with a strange feeling of poise and certainty.... No, I said to myself, I would argue no more with Helena. And meantime since the Poet of the play had assigned me the double rôle of pirate and boy, I was resolved to act both "naturally and nobly."

I could not have called either of my associates less than natural and noble in his part, viewed as I found them when at length I sought them to partake of a cold luncheon. They stood apart, gloom and stern dignity themselves, offering no speech to the laboring clammers, who, by this time, were but masses of evil odors and ill-temper in equal parts.

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"I think he's holdin' out on us!" hissed Jean Lafitte, as I approached. "Time and again I seen the varlet make false moves. Let him have a care! The eye of Jean Lafitte is upon him!"

For my own part, I cared little for anything beyond the sport in my pearl venture, but no man likes to be "done," so I joined the guard over the pearl fishing. I could see little indication of success on the part of the two clammers, who went on in their work steadily, exchanging no more than a monosyllable now and then, but who were animated, it seemed to us, by the same excitement which governs the miner washing gravel in his pan. They scarce could rest, but went on from shell to shell, opening each as eagerly as though it meant a fortune. This of itself seemed to me both natural and yet not wholly natural; for it was now late in the day's work. Why should they go on quite so eagerly in what six hours of stooping in the sun should have made monotonous routine?

They showed me a few pieces they had saved, splinters and slugs of nacre, misshapen and of no luster, and sneered at the net results, worth, at most, not so much as the day's wages I was paying either. I cared nothing for the results, and smiled and nodded as I took them.

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Thus the day wore on till mid-afternoon, when, such had been the zeal of the clammers, the heap of bivalves was exhausted. They stood erect, straightening their stiffened backs, and grinned as they looked at me.

"Well," said the old hag, "I reckon ye're satisfied now that we know this business better'n you do. He told ye there wasn't no pearl in this river."

"No;" added her hopeful son, "an' come to think of it, how'd I ever know you had a hundred dollars? I ain't seen it yet. But we've done, so let's see it now."

I quietly opened my pocketbook and took several bills of that yellow-backed denomination, and selected one for him. He took it at first suspiciously, then greedily, and I saw his eyes go to my wallet. "I forgot," said I, and took out two bills of five dollars each, which I handed to him.

"By golly!" said he, "so'd I forgot!"

"Why did you forget about your wages?" I asked, and looked at him keenly. He turned his eyes aside.

"This fresh-water pearl fishing," said I, "has many points of likeness to the ocean pearl fishing in Ceylon."

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"You been there?" he queried. "And why is it like them?"

"In several ways. It is, in the first place, all a gamble. The pearl merchants buy the oysters as I bought my mussels, by the lump and as a chance, based on the law of average product. They rot the oysters as you do the mussels. The smell is the same: and many other things are the same.

For instance, it is almost impossible to keep the diver from stealing pearls, just as it is hard to keep the Kafirs from stealing the diamonds they find in the mines."

I still was looking at him closely, and now I said to him mildly, and in a low tone of voice, "It would be of no use—I should only beat you again; and I would rather spare your mother. You see," I added in a louder tone of voice, "the natives put pearls in their hair, between their toes, in their mouths—although they do not chew tobacco as you do. One who merely put one in the pocket of his overalls—if he wore overalls—would be called very clumsy, indeed, especially if he had been seen to do it."

Involuntarily, he clapped a hand on his pocket. What would have been his next act I do not know, for at that moment I heard a voice call out sharply, "Halt! villain. Throw up your hands, or by heavens you die!" Turning swiftly, I saw Lafitte, his pistol barrel rested in very serviceable fashion in the crotch of a staff, the same as when he first accosted me on my stream, glancing along the barrel with an ominous gray eye again gone three-cornered. [Pg 86]

Before I could even cry out to him his warning was effective. I saw my clam fisher go white and put his hands over his head, the while his dam ran screaming toward the tent—Jimmy L'Olonnois at her heels, sword in hand, and warning her not to get a gun, else her life's blood would dye the strand.

Here, now, was a pretty pickle for a sworn servant of the law to aid in making! A wrong move might mean murder done by these imaginative youths, and I no less than accessory, to boot; for, surely, I had given them aid and violent counsel in this drama which we all were playing so naturally, if not so nobly. I hastened over to Lafitte and called loudly to L'Olonnois, and commanded Partial to drop the renewed encounter with the clammers' dog, which now, also, swiftly threatened us. So, in a moment or two, I restored peace.

I held out my hand to the clammer. "I didn't know you seen me," said he simply; and placed in my hand three pearls, either of them worth more than all I had paid him, and one of them the largest and best I had ever seen—it is the pearl famous as the "*Belle Helène*," the finest ever taken in fresh waters in America, so it is said by Tiffany's. [Pg 87]

I looked at him quietly, and handed him back all but the one pearl. "I am sorry you were not a better sport," said I, "very sorry. Didn't I play fair with you?"

"No," said he. "Some folks have all the luck. You come along here, rich, with all sorts of things, you and them d—d kids, and you'd rob a man like me out of what little he can make."

I was opening my wallet again. "I am sorry to hear you say that," said I, handing him two bills of a hundred dollars each. "Sorry, because it has cost you twenty-eight hundred dollars."

"My God, man, what do you mean?" he gasped, even his fingers slow to take both money and contempt.

"That the pearl is worth to me that much, since I have purpose for it. I have more money than I want, and fewer pearls like this than I want. It would have given me the keenest sort of pleasure to give you and your mother a few thousand dollars, two or three, to set you up with a little launch and an outfit enough to give you a good start—and, perhaps, a good partner. As it is, you are lucky my pirate brother has not blown a hole through you, and that my other brother has not shed the blood of your parent, if she have any. You had a good chance, and like many another man who isn't good enough to deserve success, you lost it. Do you know why you failed?" [Pg 88]

"It's the luck," said he. "I never had none."

"No," said I, "it is not that. So far as luck goes, you are lucky you are alive. Little do you know our desperate band. Little do you know you have escaped the wrath of Lafitte, of L'Olonnois, of Black Bart. Luck! No, that is not why you failed."

"What then?" he demanded, still covetous, albeit rueful, too, at what he vaguely knew was lost opportunity.

"It was because you did not play the part of a clammer naturally and nobly," I replied. "My friend, I counsel you to read Epictetus—and while you are at that," I added, "I suggest you read also that other classic, the one known as *The Pirate's Own Book*."

So saying, since he stood stupefied, and really not seeing my hand, which I reached out to him in farewell, I called to Partial, and followed by the two stern and relentless figures, made our way back to the spot where the good ship *Sea Rover* lay straining at her hawser.

"What ho! messmates!" I cried. "Fortune has been kind to our bold band this day. We have taken large booty. Let us up anchor and set sail. Before yon sun has sunk into the deep we shall be far away, and our swift craft is able to shake off all pursuit." [Pg 89]

"Whither away, Black Bart,—Captain, I mean!" said Jean Lafitte (and I blushed at this title and this hard-won rank, as one of the proudest of my swiftly-following accomplishments in happiness).

"Spang! to the Spanish Main," was my reply.

A moment later, the waves were rippling merrily along the sides of the *Sea Rover* as she headed out boldly into the high seas.

IN WHICH I SHOW MY TRUE COLORS

THERE were many lesser adventures in which Lafitte, L'Olonnois and I shared on our voyage through the long waterways leading down to the great river, but of these I make small mention, for, in truth, one boasts little of one's deeds in piracy after the fact, or of inciting piracy and making accessories before the fact, the more especially if such accessories be small but bloodthirsty boys. These latter, let me plead in extenuation of my own sins, already were pirates, and set upon rapine. For my own part, seeing their resolution to take green corn and other vegetables, aye, even fowls, as part of the natural returns of their stern calling, I made no remonstrances, not the first leader unable to restrain his ruthless band, but I eased my own conscience by leaving—quite unknown to them,—sundry silver coins in cleft sticks, prominently displayed, in the hope that irate farmers might find them when, after our departure, they visited the scenes of our marauding. And to such an extent did this marauding obtain that, by the time we had reached the Mississippi River, I was almost wholly barren of further silver coins.

Many things I learned as we voyaged; as that my dog Partial would, when asked, roll over and over upon the ground, or sit up and bark—things taught him by no man known in his history, so far as Lafitte could recall it. And things I learned regarding birds and small animals of which my law books had told me nothing. As to mosquitoes, I learned that, whereas they do not hurt a young pirate, they do an old one; and I half resolved to discontinue my book regarding them. Perhaps it was not of first importance. [Pg 91]

But two things grew on me in conviction. First, I loved Helena Emory more and more each day of my life; and second, that I must see her at the first moment possible—in spite of all my resolutions to put her out of my life forever! And, these two things being assured, when we saw the rolling yellowish flood of the Father of the Waters at last sweeping before us, I realized that, bound as I was in honor to hold on with my faithful band, our craft, the *Sea Rover*—sixteen feet long she was, and well equipped with Long Toms and deck cannonades—would have no chance to overtake the *Belle Helène*, fastest yacht on the Great Lakes, who might, so far as I could tell, at that very moment be cleaving through the Chicago canal, to enter the great river hundreds of miles ahead of us.

Wherefore, leaving my bold mates in bivouac one day, I made journey to the nearest town. There, I sent certain messages to anxious parents, and left for them our probable itinerary as tourists traveling by private conveyance. I could not set our future dates and ports more closely together; for, before I left town, I had purchased a sturdy power boat of our own, capable of doing her ten or twelve miles under her own petrol. I was in no mind to fall farther and farther back of the *Belle Helène* each day; and I counted upon our piratical energy to keep us going more hours a day than Cal Davidson—curses on him!—would be apt to travel. [Pg 92]

I gave orders for immediate fitting of my new craft, and delivery on the spot; and within the hour, although regarded with much suspicion by the town marshal and many leading citizens, I set out for our bivouac, with the aid of the late owner of the boat, to whom I gave assurance that no evil should befall him. When we chugged along the shore, and slackened opposite our camp, I heard the stern voice of Lafitte hail us: "Ship ahoy!" (Perhaps he saw me at the stern sheets.)

"Aye! Aye! mate!" I answered, through my cupped hands. "Bear a hand with our landing line." Whereat my hardy band came running and made us fast.

"What has gone wrong, Black Bart?" demanded L'Olonnois, uncertain of my status. "Hast met mishap and struck colors?" [Pg 93]

"By no means!" I rejoined. "This is a prize, our first capture. And since she has struck her colors, let us mount our own at her foremast and ship our band to a bigger and faster craft."

The late owner, who bore the name of Robinson, looked on much perplexed, and, I think, in some apprehension, for he must have thought us dangerous, whether sane or mad.

"Who'll run her?" he at length demanded of me, looking from me to my two associates. Then forth and stood Jean Lafitte; and answered a question I confess I had not yet myself asked: "Ho! I guess a fellow who can run a gasoline pump in a creamery can handle one of them things. So think not, fellow, to escape us!"

I reassured Robinson, who was apparently ready to make a run for it; and I explained to Lafitte and L'Olonnois my plan.

"We'll by no means discard our brig, the original *Sea Rover*," said I, "and we'll tow her along as our tender. But we'll christen the prize the *Sea Rover* instead, and hoist our flag over her—and paint on her name at the first point of call we make. Now, let us hasten, for two thousand miles of sea lie before us, and Robinson is also five miles from home."

But Robinson became more and more alarmed each moment. He had my money, I his bill of sale, but ride back to town with us he would not. Instead, he washed his hands of us and started back afoot—to get the town marshal, I was well convinced. It mattered little to us; for once more did [Pg 94]

sturdy Jean Lafitte more than make good his boast. With one look at the gasoline tank to assure himself that all was well, he made fast the painter of the old *Sea Rover*, and even as L'Olonnois with grim determination planted the Jolly Rover above our bows, and as I tossed aboard the cargo of our former craft, Lafitte cranked her up with master hand, threw in the gear, and with a steady eye headed her for midstream, where town marshals may not come.

I looked at my mates in admiration. They could do things I could not do, and they faced the future with no trace of hesitation. I caught from them a part of this resolution I so long had lacked. I added this to my determination to see Helena Emory once more and soon as wind and wave would allow. So that, believe me, the blood rose quickly in my veins as I saw now we had faster travel ahead of us.

"Square away the main braces, my hearties!" I called. "Break out the spinnaker and set the jibs. It's a wet sheet and a flowing sea, and let any stop us at their peril!"

"Aye! Aye! Sir," came the response of Jean Lafitte in a voice almost bass, and "Aye! Aye! Sir," piped the blue-eyed Lieutenant L'Olonnois. The stanch craft leaped ahead, wallowing in cross seas till we reached the mid-current of the Mississippi's heavy flood, then riding and rising gamely as she met wave after wave that came up-stream with the head wind. The eyes of Lafitte gleamed. L'Olonnois, hand over eyes, stood in our bows. "Four bells, and all's well!" he intoned in a vigorous voice.

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It was my own heart made answer, in the sweetest challenge it ever had given to the world: "All's well!" And far ahead I, too, peered across the wave, seeking to make out the hull of fleeing craft that bore treasure I was resolved should yet be mine.

"More sail, Officer!" I called to Jean Lafitte. He grinned in answer.

"You're in a hurry, Black Bart. What makes you?" And even L'Olonnois turned a searching gaze upon me.

"Then I'll show you my true colors," said I. "I am more careless of taking treasure than of capturing a certain maiden who flees before us yonder on a swift craft, speedier than our own. Lay me alongside of her, this week, next month, this winter, and my share of the other booty shall be yours!"

"Black Bart," said Lafitte, "I knew something was sort of botherin' you. So, it's you for the fair captive, huh?"

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CHAPTER XI

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IN WHICH MY PLOT THICKENS

WE sped on now steadily, day by delightful day, and ever arose in my soul new wonders at the joy of life itself, things that had escaped me in my plodding business life. Now and again, I took from my pocket the little volume which always went with me on the stream when I angled, and which I confess sometimes charmed me away from the stream to some shaded nook where I might read old Omar undisturbed—as now I might, with L'Olonnois at the masthead and Lafitte at the wheel. And always these wise, reckless, joyous pages of the old philosopher spelled to me "Haste! Haste!"

"Whether at Naishápúr or Babylon,
Whether the Cup with sweet or bitter run,
The Wine of Life keeps oozing drop by drop.
The Leaves of Life keep falling one by one."

"Come, fill the Cup, and in the fire of Spring
Your Winter-garment of Repentance fling:
The Bird of Time has but a little way
To flutter—and the Bird is on the Wing!"

What truth, what absolute truth of the red-hot spur lay in those words, lesson direst to me! What had my life been, plodding in books to learn to keep by forms of law the booty my father had stolen? Away with it, then, for now the Bird of Time was on the wing! Let me forget the wasted years, spent in adding dollar to dollar; for what could the highest pile of dollars mean to a man who had missed what Lafitte and L'Olonnois and Omar had in their teaching? The booty of the world, the pearls of price, the casks of the Wine of Life, are his only who takes them. They can not be bought, can not be given. "Oh, haste! Jean Lafitte, for my new knowledge indeed eats at my soul. Hasten, for the Bird of Life is on the wing, L'Olonnois." So I spoke to them; and they, feeling it all a part of the play, gravely answered in kind, to what end that any who sought to stay Black Bart and his crew did so at peril of their blood.

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We came, I knew not after how many days forgotten in detail—after passing, each avoided as a pestilence, many cities prosperous in commerce—alongside the river port of the city of St. Louis, crowded with motley and misfit shipping of one sort or other, where our craft might moor without

fear of exciting any suspicion, in spite of our ominous name; for I had the precaution to lower our flag of the skull and cross-bones.

I sought out the man most apt to know of any considerable vessels docking there, and made inquiry for any power yacht one hundred and twenty-five feet long, white and black ventilators, white hull with blue line, flying the burgee *Belle Helène*, or some such name. None could advise me for a time, and I looked in vain, as I had in every dock in six hundred miles, for the trim hull of my yacht. At last one old mariner, in rubber boots, himself skipper of a house-boat south-bound for a winter's trapping, admitted that he had seen such a craft three days before!

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"Did she dock?" I demanded.

"Sure she did, and lay over night. I remember it well enough, for I saw her tie up; and that evening her owner went ashore and up-town, and with him his bride, I reckon—handsomest girl in all the town. They must have been married, for he was lookin' like he owned her. That was lemme see, two days ago or maybe four. They came aboard her next morning, all three—there was a old party along, girl's mother likely—around eleven o'clock, and in a little while cast off and went on down-river. As fine a boat as ever made the river run—still as a mouse she was, but quick as a cat, and around Ste. Genevieve, I reckon, before I got back to my own scow after helping them off here. No wonder her owner was proud. He stood on the quarter-deck like a lord. Why shouldn't he, ownin' a boat an' a girl like that?"

"He doesn't own either!" I retorted hotly.

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"Why, how do you know he don't?" demanded my sea-going man.

"Who should know, if not myself?"

"Sho! You talk like you owned her!"

"I do own her!"

"It looks like it. Which do you mean—her the yacht, or her the girl?"

"Both—no! That is, well at least I own the boat."

"That may all be, or it all mayn't," he replied, openly scoffing; "at least so far's the boat goes. Anybody kin buy anything that has the price. But as to the girl, you'd have to prove it, if I was him. And if he didn't look like he owned her, or was goin' to, I'll eat your own gas tank there, an' them two kids in it fer good measure."

Of course I could not argue or explain, and therefore turned away. But all the answer of my soul came from the lips of L'Olonnois, who, propped up against the cockpit combing, was reading aloud to Lafitte from *The Pirate's Own Book* as I approached. "Hah! my good man!" exclaimed the pirate chieftain as he looked at his blade, "unhand the maid, or by Heaven! your life's blood shall dye the deck where you stand!"

"Ah, ha! Cal Davidson," said I to myself through my set teeth; "little do you think that you are discovered in your sins, and little do you know that the avenger is on your track. But have a care, for Black Bart and his band pursues you!"

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And, seeing that we had now laid in abundance of ship's stores, including four drums of gasoline; and since the trail of Cal Davidson was, at least, no wider than the banks of the river down which he had fled, it looked ill enough for the chances of that robber when the stanch *Sea Rover*, her flag again aloft and promising no quarter, chugged out into midstream and took up a pursuit which was to know no faltering until at last I had learned the truth about the fair captive of the *Belle Helène*. For indeed, indeed, Omar, and you, too, stout Lafitte and hardy L'Olonnois, the Bird of Life was on the wing.

CHAPTER XII

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IN WHICH WE CLOSE WITH THE ENEMY

CAL Davidson took on five drums of petrol at Cairo, and a like amount of champagne at Memphis, and no man may tell what other supplies at this or that other point along the river. He evidently suspected no pursuit, or, if he did, was a swaggering varlet enough, for, according to all accounts which we could get, he loitered and lingered along, altogether at his leisure, with due attention to social matters at every port; for if he had not a wife at every port, at least, he had an acquaintance of business or social sort, so that, one might be sure, there were few dull moments for him and his party, whether afloat or ashore. He must have attended a dinner-party and two theaters at Memphis, and have sailed only after making three thousand dollars out of a combination in champagne present and cotton future, whose disgusting details I did not seek to learn. Trust Davidson to make money, and to make the most of life also as he went along. He always had the best of everything; and surely now he had, for the leisurely, ease-seeking *Belle Helène*, not actuated by any vast motive beyond that of the bee and the honey flower, slipped on down and ahead with perfect ease, while we, grimy, slow, determined, plowed

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on in her wake losing miles each hour the graceful *Belle Helène* chose to show us her light disdainful heels, serenely indifferent because wholly ignorant of our existence.

But we held to the chase as true pirates, not loitering at any port, and—since now I, also, had learned something of the intricacies of our engine, and could take a trick while the others slept—running twice the hours daily the haughty yacht would deign to log. I knew that Cal Davidson would stop to shoot and to visit, and knew that he could, by no human means, be induced to pass any telegraph point where the daily standing of the baseball clubs could be learned—he counted that day lost in which he did not learn the scores. As for myself, I have never been able to understand how any grown man or any one ungrown can take any interest whatever in the deeds of hired ball-playing Hessians, who have back of them neither patriotism nor even a municipal pride. But, for once, I was joyed that the organized business sense of a few men had put an otherwise able citizen under tribute, because now, though the *Belle Helène* must pause at least daily, the *Sea Rover* need do no such thing.

Nor did we. We were hot on the trail of the enemy as he flew south along the Chickasha Bluffs, hot as he left Memphis behind, and taking the widening waters which now wandered through low forest lands, reached out for the next city of size, historic Vicksburg on her seventy hills. And hot and eager, more than ever, were we when, chugging around the head of that vast arm of the river, where it curves like a boy of some southern sea, with its heights rising beyond and afar, we saw what caused me to exclaim aloud, “At last! There she lies, my hearties!”

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I pointed on ahead. To my eyes, who had designed her, every line of that long, graceful, white hull was familiar. The jaunty rake of her air-shafts, like stacks of a liner, the sweep of her clean freeboard up to her shining rail, the ease of her bows, the graceful boldness of her overhang—all were familiar enough to me. She was my boat, and once I was wont to enjoy her. And on board her now was the woman who had taken away from me all desire to keep a yacht in commission, to keep open a house in town, or an office, or to frequent my clubs, or to meet my friends. Was she there, this woman; and was she still?—but I dared not ask that question.

“Full speed ahead, Jean!” I called. “That’s the *Belle Helène*! Yonder lies the enemy!”

And then the inevitable happened. Perhaps it was too much gas, perhaps too much lubricant, perhaps a spark plug was carrying too much carbon. At any rate, the engine of the *Sea Rover* chose that time to chug and cease to revolve!

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It was more than a mile to the foot of that vast curve; and even as I leaped at the grimy oily motor, I saw a white dingey with blue trim make out from the wharf and leisurely pull alongside the landing stair of the yacht. It held two figures only, that of the deck-hand who rowed, and that of the large white-flanneled man who now disembarked from the dingey and went aboard the yacht. He was waving a paper over his head, so that I inferred the Giants must have won that day. And then, as we tugged and hurried with our arbitrary motor, I saw the *Belle Helène*, with a slight smiling salute to friends ashore, swing daintily about and head out and down the river! The faint and infallible rhythm of her perfect enginery came throbbing to us across the water ... I stood up. I hailed, I waved, I shouted, and I fear even cursed. Perhaps they thought some drunken fisherman was disporting himself; but certainly, a few moments later, we were rocking on the roll of the river, and the yacht was out of sight and sound around the next great bend.

“It shall go hard but we overhaul yon varlet yet,” said L’Olonnois grimly.

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“Aye,” assented Lafitte; “we’ve busted a plug, an’ he has showed us a clean pair of heels, but it’s a long chase if the *Sea Rover* does not overhaul him. We’ll have to overhaul our engine first, though,” he added thoughtfully.

But the overhauling of our engine meant a voyage under sweeps to a precarious landing among divers packets, house-boats and launches, on Vicksburg waterside, and a later visit to a specialist in diseases of the carburetor; so that, when at last the *Sea Rover* was ready for the sea again, her chase might have been a hundred miles ahead an she liked.

“Gee!” exclaimed Jean Lafitte, as we were about to cast off. “Looky here, de Cubs licked de G’int’s five to one to-day.” He pointed to figures in a newspaper which he had obtained. So then it might have been excitement of rage, and not of joy, which had animated Cal Davidson when he went aboard.

“Never mind then,” said I, “for that gives us a day’s start.”

“How do you mean?” demanded Jean.

“It means that yonder varlet will not leave Natchez to-morrow until late evening, after the wires are in from the northern ball games,” I replied. “Of course he’ll stop there next.” I felt now that the Lord had, by implanting this insane lust of petty baseball news in his soul, delivered my enemy into my hand.

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Now I wist not how or at what dignified speed the *Belle Helène* swept on down that mighty river through the rich southern lands; nor do I scarce half remember the painstaking persistent run we made with the grimy *Sea Rover* in pursuit, hour after hour, night or day. We had no licensed pilot or licensed engineer, we bore no lights as prescribed by law, and heeded no channels as prescribed by government engineers. Pirates, indeed, we might have been as we plowed on down in the wake of our quarry, along the ancient highway famous in fast packet days. We cared nothing for law, order, custom, conventions, precedents—the very things which had enslaved me

all my life I now cast aside. Through bend after bend, along willow-lined flats and bluffs crowned with stately, moss-draped live-oaks, we swept on and on; and always I strained my eyes to see, my ears to hear, on ahead some sign of the *Belle Helène*; always strained my heart for some sign from her. Why, even I looked in the water for some bottle bearing a memory from yon captive maid to me. Captive? Why, certainly she must be captive; and certainly she must know that I, Black Bart the Avenger, was upon the trail.

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We made the pleasant city of Natchez in the evening of the sweetest day on which, as I thought, the sun had ever set. Her lofty hills—for here the great eastern fence of hills which bound the Vermont Delta on the eastward sweep in to close the foot of the Delta's V, and run sheer to the river's brink—rose upon our left. The low tree-covered lands on the Louisiana side lay at our right, and over them hung, center of a most radiant evening curtain, painted in a thousand colors by the mighty brush of nature, the round red orb of day, now sinking to his rest.

I did not begrudge the sun his rest that day. For now, just at the edge of this beautiful picture there hung, at the dry point where the old keel boats used to land at old Natchez, under the hill where the pirates of those days sought relaxation from labors in the joys of combat or of wine, I caught sight of the long, low, graceful hull of the *Belle Helène*!

"Avast! Jean Lafitte," I cried. "Shorten all sail, and bear across, west-by-west."

"Aye! Aye! Sir," came the response from my bold crew.

"Why don't we run in and board her?" demanded L'Olonnois. However, seeing that I had laid hold of the steering line where I sat, and was heading the *Sea Rover* across the Louisiana side, away from the city's water-front, he subsided.

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"We'll cast anchor yonder where the holding ground is good," I explained. "To-night we'll send off the long boat with a boarding party. And marry!" I added, "it shall go hard, but we'll hold yon varlet to his accounting!"

CHAPTER XIII

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IN WHICH WE BOARD THE ENEMY

SLOWLY the vast painting of the sky softened and faded until, at length, its edges blended with the shadows of the forest. There came into relief against the sky-line the etched outlines of the trees crowning the bluff on the eastern side of the great river. The oncoming darkness promised safety for a craft unimportant as ours as we now lay in the shadows of the western shore. Meantime, as well as the failing light allowed, we let nothing on board the *Belle Helène* go unobserved.

The yacht lay—with an audacity of carelessness which I did not like to note—hardly inside the edge of the regular shipping channel, but swung securely and gracefully at her cable, held by an anchor which I had devised myself, heavy enough for twice her tonnage. On the deck I could see an occasional figure, but though I plied my binoculars carefully, not the figure which I sought. A man leaned against the rail, idly, smoking, but this I made out to be the engineer, Williams, come up to get the evening air. Billy, the deck-hand, John, my Chinese cook, and Peterson, the boat-master, were at the time out of sight, as well as Cal Davidson, who had her under charter.

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We lay thus, separated by some distance of the river's flood, each craft at anchor, only one observed by the other. But to my impatient gaze matters seemed strangely slow on board the *Belle Helène*. I was relieved when at last the rather portly but well groomed figure of my friend Davidson appeared on deck. He made his way aft along the rail, and I could see him bend over and call down the companionway of the after staterooms. Then, an instant later, he was joined on the after deck by two ladies. The sight of one of these caused my heart to bound.

They stood for a moment, no more than dimly outlined, but I could see them well enough. The older lady, with the scarf about her head, was Aunt Lucinda. The slighter figure in white and wearing no head covering, was she, Helena Emory! It was Helena! It was Helena!

She turned toward Davidson. I could hear across the water the sound of laughter. A sudden feeling of anger came into my soul. I shifted my position in the *Sea Rover*, and stepped on Partial's tail, causing him to give a sharp bark and to come and lick my hand in swift repentance. I feared for the time that his sound might attract attention to our boat, which, if examined closely, might seem a trifle suspicious. True pirates, and oblivious of all law, we had not yet hoisted our riding lights, though for all I know our black flag still was flying.

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The three figures passed forward along the deck slowly and disappeared down the front companion-stair which led to the cozy dining-room. I could see them all sitting there, about my own table, using the very silver and linen which I had had made for the *Belle Helène*, attended by John, my Chinese cook and factotum, whom I had especially imported, selected from among a thousand other Chinese by myself at Hankow. I knew that Davidson would have champagne and a dozen other wines in abundance, everything the market offered. A pleasant party, this of three, which was seating itself at my table over yonder, while I, in a grimy, dingy, little tub lay looking

at them, helpless in the gloom! Ah, villain, shrewd enough you were when you planned this trip for Aunt Lucinda's health! Well enough you knew that of all places in the world none equals a well equipped private yacht for the courting of a maid. Why, if it be propinquity that does it, what chance had any man on earth against this man, enjoying the privilege of propinquity of propinquities, and adding thereto the weapons of every courtesy, every little pleasure a man may show a maid? Trust Cal Davidson for all that! I well-nigh gnashed my teeth in anger.

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I scarce know how the time passed, until at last I saw them, in the illumination of the deck lights, at length come on deck again. They stood looking out over the river, or toward the lights of Natchez-under-the-Hill, and at length idly walked aft once more. The two ladies seated themselves on deck chairs under the awning of the rear deck. I could not see them now, but heard the tinkle and throb of a guitar come across the water, touched lightly with long pauses, as under some suspended melody not yet offered in fulness. Now and again I could hear a word or so, the rather deep voice of Aunt Lucinda, the bass tones of Davidson, but strain my ears as I might, I could not hear the sound of that other voice, low and sweet, an excellent thing in woman.

At length the little party seemed to be breaking up. I saw Davidson, half in shadow, outlined by the deck lights as he rose, and passed forward. Then I heard the falls run, and a soft splash as the dingey was launched overside. Cal Davidson was going ashore. He could no longer resist his anxiety over the baseball score! A moment later I heard the dip of the oars. Some one turned on the search-light, so that a wide shaft of light swung along the foot of Natchez Hill, toward which the dingey was headed. The shadows on the deck of the *Belle Helène* seemed darker now, by contrast, but I believed that Williams, the engineer, now had left the rail on which he was leaning over his folded arms.

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I turned now to my wondering companions, who, seeing me so much interested, had remained for a long time practically silent. Fall now, curtain of romance, for we be but three pirates here! Up anchor, then, and back across the stream toward our quarry quickly, my bold mates, for now there lies at hand a dangerous work of the boarding party!

Thus I might have spoken aloud; for, at least, I hardly needed to do more than motion to Jean Lafitte, and as we resumed our softly chugging progress, having broken out our shallow anchorage, he steered the boat to the motion of my hand. We passed close alongside the *Belle Helène* and I examined her keenly as we did so. Then, apparently unnoticed, we dropped downstream a bit, and found another anchorage.

"Clear away the long boat for the boarding party," I now whispered hoarsely. I spoke to companions now in full character. Belted and armed, Lafitte and L'Olonnois rose ready for any bold emprise, each with red kerchief pulled about his brow. And now, to my interest, I observed that each had resumed the black mask which they had worn earlier in our long voyage, sign of the desperate character of each wearer.

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"Whither away, Black Bart?" demanded L'Olonnois fiercely. "Lead, and we follow."

"You had better put on a mask, Black Bart," added Jean Lafitte, and handed me a spare one of his own manufacture. I hesitated, but then, seeing that part of my success lay in our all remaining somewhat piratical of character, I hastily slipped it above my eyes, and pulled down my hat brim. "She will not know me now," said I to myself. And truly enough we seemed desperate folk, fierce as any who ever lay in keel boat off the foot of Natchez bluff, even in the bloodiest times of Mike Fink the Keel-boatman or of Murrell the southern bandit king.

Partial, without invitation, climbed into the skiff with us. "Cast off," I ordered. "Oars!" And my young men—whom by this time I had trained in many ways nautical—obeyed in good seaman fashion. A moment later we lay almost under the rail of the *Belle Helène*. No one hailed us. We seemed taken only for some passing skiff.

"Listen!" I whispered, "there is risk in what we are going to do."

I looked at my blue-eyed pirate, L'Olonnois, who sat closer to me. On his face was simple and complete happiness. At last, his adventure had come to him and he was meeting it like a man.

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"What is it, Black Bart?" I heard Jean Lafitte whisper hoarsely.

"We are to board and take yonder ship," I replied softly. "If we are to succeed, you must do precisely as I tell you. Leave the main risk to me, that of the law. I'll take possession on the ground that she is my boat, that her charter money is not paid, and that yonder varlet is making away with her out of the country. She holds much treasure, let me assure you of that, my men—the greatest treasure that ever came down this river.

"Now, listen. You, Lafitte, as soon as we get aboard, are to run and close the hatch of the engine-room. That will pen Williams, the engineer, below, where he can make no resistance. As soon as that is done, run to those doors forward which lead down to the dining-room companionway and shut those doors and latch them. That will take care of John, the cook. The deck-hand is away with the varlet. That leaves only the shipmaster and the women captives.

"While you are busy in this way, Lafitte, I will hunt for Peterson, the master, who very likely is sitting quiet on the forward deck somewhere. The main danger lies with him. While I attend to him, you, L'Olonnois, run aft. You will find there two ladies, one very old and ugly, the other very young and very beautiful. See that they do not escape, and hold them there until I come aft to meet you.

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"All this must go through as we have planned. Once the maiden is in our power, and the ship our own, we will head down-stream for the open sea. Are you with me, my bold mates?"

"Lead on, Black Bart!" I heard L'Olonnois hiss; and I saw Jean Lafitte tighten his belt.

"All ready, then," said I. "I'll go forward and make fast the painter when we reach the landing stair. Follow me quickly. Leave Partial in the boat. Gently now."

Swiftly but silently, we swept in under the lee of the *Belle Helène*. The landing ladder had not been drawn up after Davidson's departure, so that the boarding party had easy work ahead.

I sprang upon the deck, my footfalls deadened by the rubber matting which lay along all the decks. I turned. Above the rail behind me rose the face of Lafitte, masked. The long blade of a Malay kris was in his teeth. In one hand he held a pistol, using the other as he climbed. He scraped out of his belt as he came aboard I know not how many pistols which fell into the water, but still, God wot! had abundant remaining. Nor did L'Olonnois, close behind him, his Samurai sword between his teeth, present a spectacle less awesome. I breathed a sudden prayer that these might meet with no resistance, else I could only fear the direst consequences!

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I made a quick motion with my hand, even as I sprang forward in search of Peterson. The dull thud of the engine-room hatch, an instant later, assured me that Lafitte had performed the most important part of the work assigned to him. Forsooth, ere long, he had done all his work as laid out for him. It chanced that, as he sprang to the doors of the forward saloon, he met John, the Chinaman. Reaching for him with one hand, he closed the doors with the other, with such promptness and precision that the cue of John was caught in the door and he was imprisoned below, where he howled in much grief and perturbation, unable to escape without the sacrifice of his cue.

Meantime, I found Peterson, my old skipper, much as I had expected. He was a middle-aged, placid, well-poised man, a pessimist in speech, but a bold man in soul. He was fond of an evening pipe, and he sat now smoking and looking down the illuminated lane made by our search-light. He turned toward me, a sudden curiosity upon his face as he saw that I was a stranger on the boat, though not a stranger to himself.

"Sir—Mr. Harry—" he began, half rising.

I reached out my left hand and caught him by the shoulder. In my right hand I held a pistol, and this, somewhat gaily, I waved before Peterson's face. "Halt," said I, "or I will blow you out of the water"—a phrase which I had found sufficient in earlier circumstances.

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The old man smiled pleasantly and in mock fashion put up both his hands. Had it been anyone else, he probably would have knocked me down. "All right, Mr. Harry," said he, "you will have your joke. But tell me, what's up? We weren't expecting you here. Mr. Davidson's gone ashore."

"Just a lark, Peterson," said I. I had slipped down the mask so that he could see me plainly. "By George, sir!" said he, "I am glad to see you, back on the old boat again. Where have you been?"

"Just come on board, Peterson," said I. "I am going to run her now myself.

"Money not paid over, Peterson," said I. It stretched my conscience a bit, although the truth was I had Davidson's uncashed check in my pocket at the time.

"We've all had our pay regular," he rejoined. "Why, what's wrong?"

"But I haven't had mine, Peterson," said I. "When the charter money isn't paid and an owner has reason to suppose that his boat is going to be run out of the country, he has to act promptly, you understand. So I have taken my own way. The *Belle Helène* is in my charge now, and you will report to me for orders."

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"What's that squalling?" demanded Peterson, who was a trifle hard of hearing.

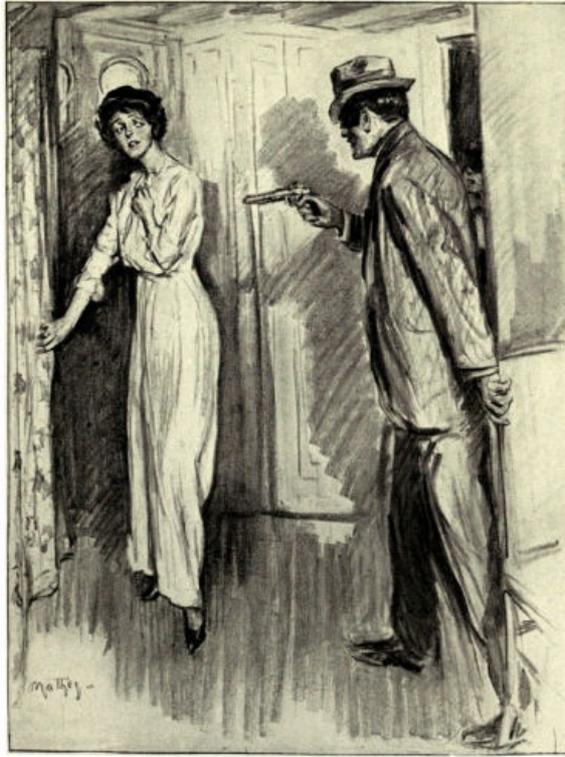
"Something seems wrong with John, the cook," I answered. "I only hope he has not made any resistance to my men, who, I promise you, are the most desperate lot that ever cut a throat. For instance, they have locked Williams down in the engine-room. Go over there, Peterson, and quiet him. But tell him that, if he shows a head above the hatch, he is apt to have his brains blown out. Keep quiet now, all of you, until I get this thing in hand."

"But the boat's under charter to Mr. Davidson," demurred Peterson.

"Charter or no charter, Peterson," said I, "I'm in command here, and it's no time to argue."

At this time we heard cries of a feminine sort from the after deck, so I knew that L'Olonnois, as well, had performed the duty assigned to him.

"Stay here, Peterson," said I. "It's all right, and I'll take care of you in every regard. Wait a moment."



“Who are you?” she demanded

I hurried aft. L’Olonnois stood in the shadow, his back against the saloon door, facing his two prisoners. I also faced them now. The deck lights gave ample illumination, so that I could see her—Helena—face to face and fairly. She turned to me; but now I had pulled up my mask again, and she could have no more than a suspicion as to my identity.

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“Who are you?” she demanded. “What right have you here?”

For half a moment I paused. Then I felt a sense of relief as I heard at my elbow the piping voice of L’Olonnois in reply.

“Lady,” said he, standing with folded arms, his bared blade gripped in his good right hand and showing at a short up-cast angle, “it ill beseems a gentleman to give pain to one so fair, but prithee have a care, for, by heavens! resistance is useless here.”

CHAPTER XIV

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IN WHICH IS ABOUNDING TROUBLE

I LOOKED at Helena Emory, glad that she did not at first sight recognize the intruder who had elicited her wrath,—for she seemed almost more angry than perturbed, such being her nature. I thought she had never been half so beautiful as now, never more alive, more vibrantly and dynamically feminine than now. She had not even a scarf about her head, so that all its Greek clarity of line, all its tight-curling dark hair—almost breaking into four ringlets, two at each white temple—were distinct to me as I looked at her, even in the half light. Her face, with its wondrous dark eyes, was full toward me, meeting this danger for such as it might be; so that, again, I saw the sweet full oval of her brow and cheek and chin, with just these two dark incipient curls above. I could not see the twin dark tendrils at the white nape of her neck, but I knew they were there, as beautiful as ever. Her mouth was always the sweetest God ever gave any woman—and I repeat, I have seen and studied all the great portraits, and found none so wholly good as that of Helena, done by Sargent in his happiest vein. Now the red bow of her lips parted, as she stood, one slender hand across her bosom, panting, but not in the least afraid, or, at least, meeting her fear boldly, as one high-born should.

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She was all in white, with not the slightest jewel or ornament of any kind. I saw that even the buckle at her waist was covered in white. Her boots and her hair were dark; for Helena knew the real art of dressing. She stood fairly between me and the deck light, so that all her white figure was frank in its gentle curves; erect now, and bravely drawn to all her five feet five, so that she might meet my gaze—albeit through a mask—as fully as a lady should when she has met affront.

I always loved Helena, always, from the first time I met her. I had bidden adieu to life when, after

many efforts to have her see me as I saw her, I turned away to the long hard endeavor to forget her. But now I saw my attempts had all been in vain. If absence had made my heart more fond, the presence of her made it more poignantly, more imperiously, fonder than before. My whole body, my whole soul, unified, arose. I stretched out my arms, craving, demanding. "Helena!" I cried.

My voice was hoarse. Perhaps she did not know me, even yet. Her answer was a long clear call for help.

"Ahoy!" she sang. "On shore, there—Help!"

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Her call was a signal for present trouble. Partial, my dog, abandoned in the long boat, began barking furiously. There came an answering hail which assured me that yon varlet, Davidson, had heard. I was conscious of the sound of a scuffle somewhere forward. Below, at my side, Aunt Lucinda gave voice to a long shrill wail of terror. John, my Chinaman, his cue still held fast in the jammed edges of the door, chimed in dismally. Midships I heard a muffled knocking at Williams', the engineer's, hatch.

I forgot I was standing masked, with a naked weapon in my hand. I dropped my mask, dropped my weapon, and turned quickly toward Helena.

"Be silent!" I commanded her.

She stood for one instant, her hands at her cheeks. Then, "Ahoy!" rang out her voice once more in sheer disobedience, and "You!" she said to me, furious.

"Yes, I," was my answer, and my own fury was now as cold as hers. "Go below," I ordered her. "I am in command of this boat. Quick!"

I had never spoken thus to her in all my life, but almost to my surprise she changed now. As though half in doubt, she turned toward the stair leading down to the ladies' cabin where Aunt Lucinda was shrieking in terror.

"Guard the door," I called to L'Olonnois as I turned away. I heard it slam shut and the click of the lock told me my prisoners were safe, so I hastened forward.

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"Good Lord, Mr. Harry!" cried my skipper, Peterson, when he saw me. "Come here, take this little devil—away—I'm afraid he'll knife me."

I hurried to him for he struggled in the dark with Jean Lafitte.

"To the rescue, Black Bart!" called Jean Lafitte. "Catch his other arm. I've got this one, and if he moves, by Heaven I'll run him through."

"Run me through, you varmint—what do you mean?" roared Peterson. "Ain't it enough you pull a gun on me and try to poke out my eye, and twist off my arm, without sticking me with that bread-slicer you got? Mr. Harry—for Heaven's sake—"

"There now, Jean Lafitte," I said, "enough. He has begged for quarter."

"No, I ha'int," asserted Peterson venomously. "I'll spank the life outen him if I ever get the chance—" I raised a hand.

"Enough of all this noise," I said. "I am in charge now, Peterson. Go to the wheel. Break out the anchor and get under way. At once, man! I have no time to argue."

Peterson had never in his life heard me speak in this way before, but now, for what reason I do not know—perhaps from force of habit, perhaps because he knew I was owner of the boat, perhaps in awe of the naked kris of Jean Lafitte, still presented menacingly at his abdomen—the old skipper obeyed.

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I heard the faint jangle of bells in the engine-room below. Obviously, Williams, the engineer, was responsive to his sense of duty and routine. The power came pulsing through the veins of the *Belle Helène* and I heard her screws revolve. I, myself, threw in the donkey winch as she forged ahead, and so broke out the anchor. It still swung, clogging her bows as she turned in the current. The bells again jangled as she got more speed and as the anchor came home. Our search-light swept a wide arc along the foot of Natchez Hill, as our bows circled about and headed down the great river. And now we picked in full view, hardly sixty fathoms distant, the dingey, pulled furiously toward us. My friend, the varlet Cal Davidson, half stood in the stern of the stubby craft and waved at us an excited hand.

"Ahoy there, Peterson!" he cried. "Stop! Hold on there! Wait! Where are you going there!"

Peterson turned toward me an inquiring gaze, but I only pointed a hand down-stream, and he obeyed me! I reached my hand to the cord and gave Peterson, Davidson, Natchez and all the world, the salute of a long and vibrant whistle of defiance. It came back to us in echoes from the giant bluffs, swept across the lowlands on the opposite side.

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"Full speed ahead, Peterson," said I quietly.

"Where are we going, Mr. Harry?" he demanded anxiously.

"I don't know," said I. "It all depends—maybe around the world. I don't know and I don't care."

"I'm scared about this—it don't look right. What's come into you, Mr. Harry?" asked the old man solicitously.

"Nothing, Peterson," said I, "except that the bird of time is on the wing. I am a pirate, Peterson ___"

"I never knew you so far gone in drink before, Mr. Harry," said he, as he threw over the wheel to pick up the first starboard channel light.

"Yes, I have been drinking, Peterson," said I. "I have been drinking the wine of life. It oozes drop by drop, and is all, too soon, gone if we delay. Full speed ahead, Peterson. I am in command."

"Jean!" I called to my able lieutenant. "Reach over into the long boat and bring Partial on board. He is my friend. And bring also our flag. Run it aloft above our prize."

"Aye, aye, Sir," came the reply of Jean Lafitte. And a few moments later our long boat was riding astern more easily. Jean Lafitte on his return busied himself with our burgee. And at that moment, Partial, overjoyed at also having a hand in these affairs, barked joyously at his discovery of the neglected end of the cook's cue projecting through the hinges of the door. On this he laid hold cheerfully, worrying it until poor John shrieked anew in terror; and until I freed him; and ordered tea. [Pg 128]

I next went over to the hatches of the engine-room, and having opened them, bent over to speak to Williams, the engineer.

"It's all right, Williams," said I. "I am going to take her over now and run her perhaps to the Gulf. We hadn't time to tell you at first. There has been a legal difficulty. Peterson is on deck, of course."

"All right, Mr. Harry," said Williams, who recognized me as he leaned out from his levers to look up through the open hatch. "At first I didn't know what in hell was up. It sounded like a mutiny ___"

"It was a mutiny, Williams," said I, "and I am the head mutineer. But you're sure of your pay, so let her go."

He did let her go, smoothly and brilliantly, so that before long she was at her top speed, around fifteen knots an hour. I was familiar with every detail of the *Belle Helène*, and now I looked in both the generating plant and the storage batteries, so that four thousand candle-power of electric light blazed over her from bow to fantail. The steady purr of the *Belle Helène's* double sixties—engines I had had made under my own care—came to me with a soothing rhythm where I stood near by the wheel. Her search-light made a vast illumination far ahead. Brilliant enough must have seemed the passing spectacle of our stanch little ship to any observer, as we now swept on down the tawny flood of the great river. Who would deny me the feeling of exultation which came to me? Was I not captor and captain of my own ship? [Pg 129]

I turned to meet L'Olonnois, my blue-eyed pirate. He stood at my side as one glorified. The full swing of romance had him, the full illusion of this,—imagination's most ardent desire—now gripped him fully. He was no boy, but a human being possessed of all his dreams. His second self, once oppressed, now free, stood before me wholly satisfied. I needed not to ask whether he had been faithful to his trust.

"I locked the door on 'em, Black Bart," said he, "and bade them cease a idle remonstrancing. 'Little do you know,' say I to them, 'that Black Bart the Avenger is now on the trail. Let any oppose him at their peril,' says I to them. She give me candy, the fair captive did, but I spurned her bribe. 'Beware,' says I to her. 'Little do you know what lies before you.'" [Pg 130]

CHAPTER XV

[Pg 131]

IN WHICH IS CONVERSATION WITH THE CAPTIVE MAIDEN

JEAN LAFITTE, who had so well executed the work assigned him in the boarding party's plans, proved himself neither inefficient nor unobservant. He approached me now, with a salute, which probably he copied from Peterson.

"How now, good leftenant?" said I.

"If you please, Black Bart," he began, "how are we headed, and what are our plans?"

"Our course on this river, Jean Lafitte, will box the compass, indeed box an entire box of compasses, for no river is more winding. Yet in time we shall reach its end, no doubt, since others have."

"And what about our good ship, the *Sea Rover*, that we have left behind?"

"By Jove! Jean Lafitte," I exclaimed, "that is, indeed, a true word. What, indeed? We left her riding at anchor just off the channel edge, and so far as I recall, she had not her lights up, in accordance with the law."

"Shall we put about and take her in tow, Black Bart?"

"By no means. That is the very last of my intentions."

"What'll become of her, then?"

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"That is no concern of mine."

"But nobody'll know whose she is, and nobody can tell what may happen to her——"

"Quite true. She may be stolen, or sunk. Why not?"

"But she cost a lot of money."

"On the contrary, she cost only twelve hundred dollars."

"Twelve hundred dollars!" Jean drew a long deep breath. "I didn't know anybody had that much money in the world. Besides, look what you spent for them pearls. Ain't you poor, then, Black Bart?"

"On the contrary, I have that much more money left, very likely. And I do not, to say truth, care a jot, a rap or a stiver, what becomes of the derelict *Sea Rover* now. Have we not taken a better ship for our own?"

"Yes, but suppose yon varlet boards the *Sea Rover*, an' chases us the way we done him?"

"Again, by Jove! Jean Lafitte; an idea. But suppose he does? Much good it will do him. For, look you, good lieutenant, the *Belle Helène* will not stop to send any man ashore for baseball scores. Such was not the practise of the old buccaneers, nor shall it be ours; whereas, no matter what the haste, yon varlet could in nowise refrain from that same folly which hath lost him his ship to us. Each hour will only widen the gap between us. Let him take our tub if he likes, and do as he likes, for 'twill be a long day before he picks up our masts over his horizon, Jean Lafitte."

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"Aye, aye, Sir!" rejoined my lieutenant, and withdrew. I could see he was not overjoyed at the abandonment of our earlier ship that had brought us so far in safety. All this luxury of the *Belle Helène* had the effect of oppressing a pirate who so short a time ago had started out on the high seas in a sixteen foot yawl, and who had seen that yawl, in a manner of speaking, grown into a schooner, the schooner comparatively grown into a full-fledged four-decker, richly fitted as any ship of the royal navy.

But these, all, were lesser things to me, for on my soul was a more insistent concern. I turned now, seeing that Peterson, wholly reconciled to the new order of affairs, was speeding the boat onward as though I never had left her; so that I knew she was safe in his hands, although I set Lafitte to watch him. Followed by my faithful friend Partial, who expressed every evidence of having enjoyed a most interesting evening, I presently made my way aft.

As I approached the door of the after-cabin suite, occupied by the ladies, I made my presence known at first discreetly, then more pointedly, and, at length, by a knocking on the door.

"Below, there!" I called, boldly as I could; for eager as I was to see Helena Emory, there were certain things about the interview which might be difficult. Lovers who have parted, finally, approach each other, even by accident, thereafter, with a certain reluctance. (Lovers, did I say? Nay, never had she said she loved me. She had only said she wished she did, wished she could.)

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No answer came at first. Then, "Who is it?" in the voice of Aunt Lucinda.

"It is I, Mr. Henry——" but I paused: "—It is I, Black Bart the Avenger," I concluded. "May I come in?"

Silently the door opened, and I entered the little reception-room which lay between the two staterooms of this cabin. Before me stood Helena! And now I was close to her, I could see the little curls at her temples, could see the double curves of her lips, the color in her cheek. Ah! she was the same, the same! I loved her—I loved her not the same, but more and more, more!

She held her peace; and all I could do was to stand and stare and then hold out my hand. She took it formally, though her color heightened. I saluted Aunt Lucinda also, who glared at me. "How do you do?" I said to them both, with much originality and daring.

"Black Bart!" snorted Aunt Lucinda. "Black Bart! It might be, from these goings on. What does it all mean?"

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"It means, my dear Mrs. Daniver," said I, "that I have taken charge of the boat myself."

"But how?" demanded Helena. "We did not hear you were coming. And I don't understand. Why, that rascally little nephew of mine, in the mask, frightened auntie nearly to death. And he said the most extraordinary *things*!

"Where is Mr. Davidson?" she added. "He didn't tell us a word of this."

"He didn't know a word of it himself," I answered. "Let me tell you, no self-respecting pirate—and as you see, I am a pirate—is in the habit of telling his plans in advance."

"A pirate!"

I bowed politely. "At your service. Black Bart—my visiting cards are mislaid, but I intend ordering some new ones. The ship's cook, John, will soon be here with tea. These events may have been wearying. Meantime, allow me to present my friend Partial."

Partial certainly understood human speech. He now approached Helena slowly and stood looking up into her face in adoration. Then, without any command, he lay down deliberately and rolled over; sat up, barked; and so, having done all his repertory for her whom he now—as had his master before him—loved at first sight, he stood again and worshiped.

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"Nice doggie!" said Helena courteously.

"Have a care, Helena!" said I. "Love my dog, love me! And all the world loves Partial."

The color heightened in her cheeks. I had never spoken so boldly to her before, but had rather dealt in argument than in assertion; which I, later, was to learn is no way to make love to any woman.

"When do we get back to Natchez?" she demanded.

"We do not get back to Natchez."

"Oh? Then I suppose Mr. Davidson picks us up at Baton Rouge?"

"Yon varlet," said I, "does not pick us up at Baton Rouge."

"New Orleans?"

"Or at New Orleans—unless he is luckier than I ever knew even Cal to be."

"Whatever do you mean?" inquired Aunt Lucinda in tones ominously deep.

"That the *Belle Helène* is much faster than the tug we left behind at Natchez, even did he find it. He will have hard work to catch us."

"To catch us?"

"Yes, Helena, to catch us. Of course he'll follow in some way. I have, all the way from above Dubuque. Why should not he?"

The ladies looked from me to each other, doubting my sanity, perhaps.

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"I don't just understand all this," began Helena. "But since we travel only as we like, and only with guests whom we invite or who are invited by the boat's owner, I shall ask you to put us ashore."

"On a sand-bar, Helena? Among the alligators?"

"Of course I mean at the nearest town."

"There is none where we are going, my dear Miss Emory. Little do you know what lies before you! Black Bart heads for the open sea. Let yon varlet follow at his peril. Believe me, 'twill cost him a very considerable amount of gasoline."

"What right have you on this boat?" she demanded fiercely.

"The right of any pirate."

"Why do you intrude—how dare you—at least, I don't understand——"

"I have taken this ship, Helena," said I, "because it carries treasure—more than you know of, more than I dreamed. My father was a pirate, I am well assured by the public prints. So am I. 'Tis in the blood. But do not anger me. Rather, have a cup of tea." John, my cook, was now at the door with the tray.

"Thank you," rejoined Helena icily. "It would hardly be courteous to Mr. Davidson—to use his servants and his table in this way in his absence. Besides——"

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"Besides, I recalled that your Aunt Lucinda's neuralgia is always benefited by a glass or so of ninety-three at about ten thirty of the evening. John!"

"Lessah!"

"Go to the left-hand locker in B; and bring me a bottle of the ninety-three. I think you will find that better than this absurd German champagne which I see yon varlet has been offering you, my dear Mrs. Daniver. But—excuse me——"

Helena looked up, innocently.

"—A moment before there were six empty bottles on the table there. And I saw you writing. How many have you thrown overboard through the port-hole?"

"I didn't know you were so observant," replied Helena demurely. "But only three."

"It is not enough," said I. "Go on, and write your other messages for succor. Use each bottle, and we shall have more emptied for you, if you like. You shall have oil bottles, vinegar bottles, water bottles, wine bottles, all you like. Yon varlet might run across one, floating, it is true. I hope he

will. Methinks 'twould bid him speed. But all in vain would be your appeal, for swift must be the craft that can come up with Black Bart now. And desperate, indeed, must be the man would dispute his right to tread these decks."

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"I hope you are enjoying yourself," said Helena scornfully. "Don't be silly."

"Will you have tea, Helena?" I asked.

"Poor, dear Mr. Davidson!" sniffed Aunt Lucinda, taking a glance out the port into the black night. "I wonder where he is, and what he will say."

"I can tell you what he will say, my dear Mrs. Daniver," said I; "but I would rather not."

"Well, I'll tell you what *I* say," snorted Aunt Lucinda. "I think this joke has gone far enough."

"It is no joke, madam. I was never so desperately in earnest in all my life."

"Then put us ashore at Baton Rouge."

"I can not. I shall not."

"What do you mean? Do you know what this looks like, the way you are acting, running off with Mr. Davidson's yacht, and this—"

"Yes, madam?"

"Why, it's robbery, and it's, it's, why it's abduction, too. You ought to know the law."

"I do know the law. It is piracy. Have we not told you that resistance would be worse than useless? Haven't I told you I've captured this ship? Little do you know the fate that lies before you, madam, at the hands of my ruthless men if I should prove unable to restrain them! And have a care not to offend Black Bart the Avenger, himself! If you do, Aunt Lucinda, he may cut off your evening champagne."

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I heard a sudden suppressed sound, wondrous like a giggle; but when I turned, Helena was sitting there as sober as Portia, albeit I thought her eyes suspiciously bright.

"Well," said she, at length, "we can't sit here all night and talk about it, and I've used up all my note-paper and bottles. I'll tell you what I suggest, since you have seen fit to intrude on two women in this way. We will hold a parley."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"At what hour?"

"After breakfast."

"Why not at breakfast?"

"Because we shall eat alone, here,—auntie and I—in our cabin."

"Very well then, if it seems you are so bitter against the new commander of the ship that you will not sit at the captain's table—as we did the second time we went to Europe together, we three—don't you remember, Helena?"

"Never—at your table, sir!" said Helena Emory, her voice like a stab. And when I bethought me what that had meant before now, what it would mean all my life, if this woman might never sit at board of mine, never eat the fruit of my bow and spear, never share with me the bread of life, for one instant I felt the cold thrust of fate's steel once more in my bowels. But the next instant a new manner of feeling took its place, an emotion I never had felt toward her before—anger, rage!

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"It is well," said I, pulling together the best I could. "And now, by my halidom! or by George! or by anything! you shall be taken at your word. You breakfast here. Be glad if it is more than bread and water—until you learn a better way of speech with me."

Again I saw that same sudden change on her face, surprise, almost fright; and I swear she shrank from me as though in terror, her hand plucking at Aunt Lucinda's sleeve; whereas, all Aunt Lucinda could do was to pluck at her niece's sleeve in turn.

"As to the parley, then," said I, pulling, by mistake, my mask from my pocket instead of my kerchief, "we shall hold it, to-morrow, at what time and in what place I please. It ill beseems a gentleman to pain one so fair, as we may again remark; but by heaven! Helena, no resistance!"

"Wait! What do you really mean?" She raised a hand. "I've told you I just can't understand all this. I always thought you were a—a—gentleman."

"A much misused word," was my answer. "You never understood me at all. I am not a gentleman. I'm a poor, miserable, unhappy, drifting, aimless and useless failure—at least, I was, until I resolved upon this way to recoup my fortunes, and went in for pirating. What chance has a man who has lost his fortune in the game to-day—what chance with a woman? You ask me, who am I? I am a pirate. You ask what I intend to do? What pirate can answer that? It all depends."

[Pg 142]

"On what?"

"On you!" I answered furiously. "What right had you to ruin me, to throw me over——"

She turned a frightened glance to Aunt Lucinda, whom I had entirely forgotten. It was my turn to blush. To hide my confusion I drew on my mask as I bowed.

I met John coming down with the ninety-three. As he returned on deck a moment later, I pushed shut the doors and sprung the outside latches; so that those within now were prisoners, indeed. And then I stood looking up at the stars, slowly beginning to see why God made the world.

CHAPTER XVI

[Pg 143]

IN WHICH IS FURTHER PARLEY WITH THE CAPTIVE MAIDEN

CAL Davidson's taste in neckwear was a trifle vivid as compared with my own, yet I rather liked his shirts, and I found a morning waistcoat of his which I could classify as possible; beside which I obtained from John the cook a suit of flannels I had given him four years ago, and which he was saving against the day of his funeral and shipment back to China. So that, on the whole, I did rather well, and I was not ill content with life as I sat, with the *Pirate's Own Book* in my lap, and Partial's head on my knee, looking out over the passing panorama of the river. The banks now were low, the swamps, at times, showing their fan-topped cypresses close to where we passed; and all the live oaks carried their funereal Spanish moss, gray and ghostlike.

We sometimes passed river craft, going up or down, nondescript, dingy and slow, for the most part. Sometimes we were hailed gaily by monkey-like deck-hands, sometimes saluted by the pilot of a larger boat. At times we swept by busy plantation landings where the levees screened the white-pillared mansion houses so that we could only see the upper galleries. And now at these landings, we began to see the freight, made up as much of barrels as of bales. We were passing from cotton to cane. But though it still was early in the fall, the weather was not oppressive, and the breeze on the deck was cool. I had very much enjoyed my breakfast, and so had my shipmates L'Olonnois and Lafitte, to whom each moment now was a taste of paradise revealed. I envied them, for theirs, now, was that rare, fleeting and most delectable of all human states, the full realization of every cherished earthly dream. It made me quite happy that they were thus happy; and as to the right or wrong of it, I put that all aside for later explanation to them.

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I looked up to see Peterson, who touched his cap.

"Yes, Peterson?"

"We're on our last drum of gasoline, Mr. Harry," said he. "Where'll we put in—Baton Rouge?"

"No, we can't do that, Peterson," I answered. "Can't we make it to New Orleans?"

"Hardly. But they carry gas at most of these landings now—so many power boats and autos nowadays, you see."

"Very well. We'll pass Bayou Sara and Baton Rouge, and then you can run in at any landing you like, say twenty miles or so below. Can you make it that far?"

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"Oh, yes, but you see, at Baton Rouge——"

"You may lay to long enough to mail these letters," said I, frowning; "but the custom of getting the baseball scores is now suspended. And send John here."

The old man touched his cap again, a trifle puzzled. I wondered if he recognized Davidson's waistcoat—he asked no more questions.

"John," said I to my Chinaman, "carry this to the ladies;" and handed him a card on which I had inscribed: "Black Bart's compliments; and he desires the attendance of the ladies on deck for a parley. At once."

John came back in a few moments and stood on one foot. "She say, she say, Misal Hally, she say no come."

"Letter have got, John?"

"Lessah have got."

"Take it back. Say, at once."

"Lessah. At wullunce."

"Lessah," he added two moments later. "Catchee lettah, them lady, and she say, she say, go to hellee!"

"What! What's that, John? She said nothing of the sort!"

"Lessah, said them. No catchee word, that what she mean. Lady, one time she say, she say, go topside when have got plenty leady for come."

[Pg 146]

"Go back to your work, John," said I. And I waited with much dignity, for perhaps ten minutes or so, before I heard any signs of life from the after suite. Then I heard the door pushed back, and saw a head come out, a head with dark tendrils of hair at the white neck's nape, and two curls at the temple, and as clean and thoroughbred a sweep of jaw and chin as the bows of the *Belle Hélène* herself. She did not look at me, but studiously gazed across the river, pretended to yawn, idly looked back to see if she were followed; as she knew she was not to be.

At length, she turned as she stepped out on the deck. She was fresh as the dew itself, and like a rose. All color of rose was the soft skirt she wore, and the little bolero above, blue, with gold buttons, covered a soft rose-colored waist, light and subtle as a spider's web, stretched from one grass stalk to another of a dewy morning. She was round and slender, and her neck was tall and round, and in the close fashion of dress which women of late have devised, to remind man once more of the ancient Garden, she seemed to me Eve herself, sweet, virginal, as yet in a garden dew-sweet in the morning of the world.

She turned, I say, and by mere chance and in great surprise, discovered me, now cap in hand, and bowing. [Pg 147]

"Oh," she remarked; very much surprised.

"Good morning, Eve," said I. "Have you used Somebody's Soap; or what is it that you have used? It is excellent."

A faint color came to her cheek, the corners of her bowed lips twitched. "For a pirate, or a person of no culture, you do pretty well. As though a girl could sleep after all this hullabaloo."

"You have slept very well," said I. "You never looked better in all your life, Helena. And that is saying the whole litany."

"You are absurd," said she. "You must not begin it all again. We settled it once."

"We settled it twenty times, or to be exact, thirteen times, Helena. The only trouble is, it would not stay settled. Tell me, is there any one else yet, Helena?"

"It is not any question for you to ask, or for me to answer." She was cold at once. "I've not tried to hear of you or your plans, and I suppose the same is true of you. It is long since I have had a heartache over you—a headache is all you can give me now, or ever could. That is why I can not in the least understand why you are here now. Auntie is almost crazy, she is so frightened. She thinks you are entirely crazy, and believes you have murdered Mr. Davidson." [Pg 148]

"I have not yet done so, although it is true I am wearing his shoes; or at least his waistcoat. How do you like it?"

"I like the one with pink stripes better," she replied demurely.

"So then—so then!" I began; but choked in anger at her familiarity with Cal Davidson's waistcoats. And my anger grew when I saw her smile.

"Tell me, are you engaged to him, Helena?" I demanded. "But I can see; you are." She drew herself up as she stood, her hands behind her back.

"A fine question to ask, isn't it? Especially in view of what we both know."

"But you haven't told me."

"And am not going to."

"Why not?"

"Because it is the right of a middle-aged woman like myself——"

"—Twenty-four," said I.

"—To do as she likes in such matters. And she doesn't need make any confidences with a man she hasn't seen for years. And for whom she never—she *never*——"

"Helena," said I, and I felt pale, whether or not I looked it, "be careful. That hurts."

"Oh, is it so?" she blazed. "I am glad if it does hurt." [Pg 149]

I bowed to her. "I am glad if it gives you pleasure to see me hurt. I am. *Habeo!*"

"But it was not so as to me," I added presently. "Yes, I said good-by to you, that last time, and I meant it. I had tried for years, I believe, with every argument in my power, to explain to you that I loved you, to explain that in every human likelihood we would make a good match of it, that we—we—well, that we'd hit it off fine together, very likely. And then, I was well enough off—at first, at least——"

"Oh, don't!" she protested. "It is like opening a grave. We buried it all, Harry. It's over. Can't you spare a girl, a middle-aged girl of twenty-four, this resurrection? We ended it. Why, Harry, we have to make out some sort of life for ourselves, don't we? We can't just sit down and—and——"

"No," said I. "I tried it. I got me a little place, far up in the wilderness with what remained of my shattered fortunes—a few acres. And I sat down there and tried that 'and—and' business. It

didn't seem to work. But we don't get on much in our parley, do we?"

"No. The most charitable thing I can think of is that you are crazy. Aunt Lucinda must be right. But what do you intend to do with us? We can't get off the boat, and we can't get any answer to our signals for help." [Pg 150]

"So you have signaled?"

"Of course. Waved things, you know."

"Delightful! The passing steamers no doubt thought you a dissipated lot of northern joy-riders, bound south on some rich man's yacht."

"Instead of two troubled women on a stolen boat."

"Are you engaged to Cal Davidson, Helena?"

"What earthly difference?"

"True, none at all. As you say, I have stolen his boat, stolen his wine, stolen his fried potatoes, stolen his waistcoats. But, bear witness, I drew the line at his neckties. Nowhere else, however!" And as I added this I looked at her narrowly.

"Will you put us ashore?" she asked, her color rising.

"No."

"We're coming to a town."

"Baton Rouge. The capital of Louisiana. A quaint and delightful city of some sixty thousand inhabitants. The surrounding country is largely devoted to the sugar industry. But we do not stop. Tell me, are you engaged?"

But, suddenly, I saw her face, and on it was something of outraged dignity. I bent toward her eagerly. "Forgive me! I never wanted to give you pain, Helena. Forget my improper question." [Pg 151]

"Indeed!"

"I've been fair with you. And that's hard for a man. Always, always,—let me tell you something women don't understand—there's the fight in a man's soul to be both a gentleman and a brute, because a woman won't love him till he's a brute, and he hates himself when he isn't a gentleman. It's hard, sometimes, to be both. But I tried. I've been a gentleman—was once, at least. I told you the truth. When they investigated my father, and found that, acting under the standard of his day, he hadn't run plumb with the standards of to-day, I came and told you of it. I released you then, although you never had promised me, because I knew you mightn't want an alliance with—well, with a front page family, you know. It blew over, yes; but I was fair with you. You knew I had lost my money, and then you——"

"I remained 'released'."

"Yes, it is true."

"And am free, have been, to do as I liked."

"Yes, true."

"And what earthly right has a man to try both rôles with a woman—that of discarded and accepted? You chose the first; and I never gave you the last. It is horrible, this sort of talk. It is abominable. For three years we have not met or spoken. I've not had a headache since I told you. Don't give me a headache now. And it would make my head ache, to follow these crazy notions. Put us ashore!" [Pg 152]

"Not till I know the truth," said I.

"About what?"

"Well, for instance, about the waistcoat with pink stripes."

"You are silly."

"Yes. How do you like my suit?"

"I never saw Mr. Davidson wear that one," said she.

"For good reasons. It is my own, and four years old. You see, a poor man has to economize. And you know, since I lost my fortune, I've been living almost from hand to mouth. Honestly, Helena, many is the time when I've gone out fishing, trying to catch me a fish for my supper!"

"So does a poor girl have to economize," said she.

"You are most sparing of the truth this morning, Helena, my dear," I said.

"How dare you!" she blazed now at the tender phrase. "Fine, isn't it, when I can't get away? If I could, I'd go where I'd never see or hear of you again. I thought I had."

"But you have not. You shall hear and see me daily till I know from your own lips the truth about [Pg 153]

you and—and every and any other man on earth who—well, who wears waistcoats with pink stripes.”

“We’ll have a long ride then,” said she calmly, and rose.

I rose also and bowed.

CHAPTER XVII

[Pg 154]

IN WHICH IS HUE AND CRY

WE ran by the river-front of Baton Rouge, and lay to on the opposite side while our dingey ran in with mail. I sent Peterson and Lafitte ashore for the purpose, and meantime paced the deck in several frames of mind. I was arrested in this at length by L’Olonnois, who was standing forward, glasses in hand.

“Here they come,” said he, “and a humpin’ it up, too. Look, Jean Lafitte is standin’ up, wavin’ at us. Something’s up, sure. Mayhap, we are pursued by the enemy. Methinks ’tis hue and cry, good Sir.”

“It jolly well does look like it, mate,” said I, taking his glasses. “Something’s up.”

I could see the stubby dingey forced half out the water by Peterson’s oars, though she made little speed enough. And I saw men hurrying on the wharf, as though about to put out a boat.

“What’s wrong, Peterson?” I shouted as he came in range at last.

“Hurry up!” It was Lafitte who answered. “Clear the decks for action. Yon varlet has wired on ahead to have us stopped! They’re after us!” So came his call through cupped hands.

I ran to the falls and lowered away the blocks to hoist them aboard, even as I ordered speed and began to break out the anchor. We hardly were under way before a small power boat, bearing a bluecoated man, puffed alongside. [Pg 155]

“What boat is this?” he called. “*Belle Helène*, of Mackinaw?”

In answer—without order from me,—my bloodthirsty mate, L’Olonnois, brought out the black burgee of the Jolly Rover, bearing a skull and cross-bones. “Have a look at that!” he piped. “Shall we clear the stern-chaser, Black Bart?”

“Hold on there, wait! I’ve got papers for you,” called the officer, still hanging at our rail, for I had not yet ordered full speed.

“He hollered to me he was going to arrest us, Mr. Harry,” explained Peterson, much out of breath. “What’s it all about? What papers does he mean?”

“The morning papers, very likely, Peterson,” said I. “The baseball scores.”

“Will you halt, now?” called the officer.

“No,” I answered, through the megaphone. “You have no authority to halt us. What’s your paper, and who is it for?”

“Wire from Calvin Davidson, Natchez, charging John Doe with running off with his boat.”

“This is not his boat,” I answered, “but my own, and I am not John Doe. We are on our way to the coast, and not under any jurisdiction of yours.” [Pg 156]

He stood up and drew a paper from his pocket, and began to read. In reply I pulled the whistle cord and drowned his voice; while at the same time I gave the engineer orders for full speed. Shaking his fist, he fell astern.

None the less, I was a bit thoughtful. After all, the Mississippi River, wide as it was, ran within certain well defined banks from which was no escaping. We were three hundred miles or more from the high seas, and passing between points of continuous telegraphic communication; so that a hue and cry down the river might indeed mean trouble for us. Moreover, even as I turned to pick up the course—for I had myself taken the wheel—I saw the figure of Aunt Lucinda on the after deck. She was on the point of heaving overboard a bottle—I heard it splash, saw it bob astern. “Now, the devil will be to pay,” thought I. But, on second thought, I slowed down, so that distinctly I saw the officer, also slowing down, stoop over and take the bottle aboard his launch.

“Ahoy, the launch!” I hailed. He put a hand at his ear as I megaphoned him. “Take this message for Mr. Calvin Davidson,” I hailed. He nodded that he heard. “—That to-night John Doe will wear his waistcoat, the one with the pink stripes. Do you get me?”

Apparently he did not get me, for he sat down suddenly and mopped his face. We left him so. And for aught I could know, he took back ashore material for a newspaper story, which bade fair to be better for the newspapers than for us on board the *Belle Helène*; for, up and down the river, the wires might carry the news that a crazy man had been guilty of piracy, highway robbery, [Pg 157]

abduction, I know not how many other crimes; and to arrest him on his mad career they might enlist all the authorities, municipal, county, state and even national. "John Doe," said I to myself, "if I really were you, methinks I should make haste." None the less I smiled; for, if I were John Doe only, then Calvin Davidson had no idea who had stolen his chartered yacht, and who was about to disport in his most cherished waistcoat! The situation pleased me very much. "L'Olonnois," said I, "come hither, my hearty."

"Aye, aye, Sir," replied that worthy. "What is it, Black Bart?"

"Nothing, except I was just going to say that I enjoy it very much, this being a pirate."

"So do I," said he. "An' let any pursue us at their peril!"

CHAPTER XVIII

[Pg 158]

IN WHICH IS DISCUSSION OF TWO AUNTIES

L'OLONNOIS was still all for training the stern-chaser Long Tom (the *Belle Helène's* brass yacht cannon) on the enemy, and came to me presently breathing defiance. "'F I only had any chain shot in the locker," said he, "beshrew me, but I would pay him well for this! He's got my Auntie Helen's auntie scared silly."

"And how about your Auntie Helena herself?" I asked of him. Thus far, he had been guilty of no nepotism whatever, and had treated his auntie as any other captive maiden, perchance fallen into his ruthless hands.

"Well, she ain't so scared as she is mad, near's I can see," was his reply. "She sat there when I first drove 'em down-stairs, lookin' at me, an' she says, 'Jimmy,' says she, 'what's all this foolishness?' An' she reaches out her hand, an' she offers me candy—she makes awful nice fudges, too. She knew that wasn't fair! But I says to her. 'Woman, cease all blandishments, for now you are in our power!' An' I liked that, fer I been in her power long enough. Then she set down, an' near's I can tell, she got to thinking things over. I know her—she'll try to get away."

"She has tried to do so, my good lieutenant, is trying now. She and her Auntie Lucinda have thrown over I know not how many bottles carrying messages. It were only by mere chance you varlet could escape coming over some of them. Add this to the fact that you varlet has got the king's navy after us, and marry! methinks we have full work cut out for us. Not that stout heart should falter, good lieutenant, eh?"

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"We follow Black Bart the Avenger," said L'Olonnois, folding his arms and frowning heavily. "But say," he added, "what seems funny to me is, you and my Auntie Helen must of known each other before now."

"Not at all, not at all—that is, but casually, and long years since. It had long since escaped my mind." I felt myself flushing sadly.

"I'll tell her that—I knew she was mistaken. I was sure she was."

"No! No! Jimmy, you'll tell her nothing of the kind. I only meant——"

"Well, she remembers you, I'm almost sure, an' so does Aunt Lucinda. Aunt Lucinda, why I've heard her back home tell Auntie Helena about as good fish in the sea, an' she mustn't bother over a man that's poor. Was it you, Black Bart? And are you poor?"

"As I stand before you now, Jimmy L'Olonnois, I'm the poorest beggar in the world," said I. "I have risked my all on one hazard. If I win, I shall be rich beyond compare. If I fail, I shall be poor indeed."

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"She knows that. She knows you're poor, all right. I heard Aunt Lucinda tell her often. She said you was rich once, an' lost it all, speculatin' in a mine or something; an' what was the use marryin' a man who hadn't anything? I don't know, but I think that was why Aunt Lucinda worked up this trip with Mr. Davidson. He's got money to burn—look at this yacht, an' everything—an' I know him and Auntie Lucinda, anyhow, have got it doped out that him an' Auntie Helen's goin' to get married—even if they ain't now, so far's I know. Anyhow, our takin' the ship has broke up something. But say, now, Black Bart——"

"Well, my good lieutenant——"

"I got a idea!"

"Indeed?"

"Yep. Looka here, now—why don't *you* just do like the pirate book says?"

"How is that?"

"Marry the captive maid your own self?"

I felt my color rise yet more.

"Why, now, that happened right along in them days—pirate chief, he takes a beautiful maiden captive, an' after makin' all his prisoners walk the plank but just her, he offers his hand an' fortune. An' lots of times, somehow, the beautiful maiden she married the ruthless pirate chief, an' they lived happy ever after. Why don't you?"

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"I hadn't thought of that, Jimmy," I said, most mendaciously; "but the idea has some merit. In fact, we've already started in by taking the beautiful maiden captive, and, mayhap, yon varlet yet shall walk the plank, or swear a solemn oath never to wear such waistcoats as these again. But one thing lacks."

"What?"

"The maiden's consent!"

"No, it don't! They never ast 'em—they just married 'em, that was all. An' every time, they lived happy ever after. An' they founded families that——"

"Jimmy!" I raised a hand. "That will do."

"Well, anyhow, I wouldn't pay any attention to Aunt Lucinda about it. She's strong for yon varlet, for he's got the dough."

"And isn't your Auntie Helena also—but no, on second thought, I will not ask you that——"

"Why no, sure not—it's better to demand it of her own fair lips, an' not take no for a answer. They always live happy ever after."

—"Of course, Jimmy."

—"And so would you."

"I know it! I know it!"

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"Well, then, why just don't you?"

"Good lieutenant, Black Bart will take your counsel into full advisement. Later, we shall see. Meantime, we must have a care for our good ship's safety, for none may tell what plans yon varlet may be laying to circumvent us."

So saying, I sought out Peterson and asked him for his maps and charts.

There was, as I found by consulting these, a deep bayou, an old river bed, that ran inland some thirty miles, apparently tapping a rich plantation country which was not served by the regular river boats.

"Do you know anything about this old channel, Peterson?" I inquired.

"Nothing at all except from hearsay and what you see here," he replied. "I don't know whether or not it has a bar at either end, but likely enough it has at both, though we might crowd through."

"And how about the gasoline supply?"

"Enough to get us in, at least. And, I say, here's a sort of plantation post-office marked. There's just a bare chance we could get a drum or so in there. I don't think we can, though."

"What's she drawing now as she runs, Peterson?"

"Four feet two inches. She's a shade low by the stern. We've quite a lot of supplies aboard, this early in the cruise. But I don't suppose we've got enough."

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"Well, Peterson," said I, "water leaves no trail. If there's no one watching when we open up this next bend, run for the bayou, and we'll see if we can get under cover. Of course, it's all a mistake about Mr. Davidson's wiring on to have us stopped—though we can't blame him, since he hasn't any idea who it is that has run away with the boat. But now, it suits me better to double in here, and let the chase try to find us on the main river; if there is any chase. You see, I don't want to disturb the ladies unduly, and they might not understand it all if we were overhauled and asked to explain our change in the ownership."

"Quite right, sir, and very good. I catch the idea. But, sir——"

He hesitated.

"Yes?"

"Well, sir, if I might be so bold, what are your plans about the two ladies?"

"I have none which will effect your navigation of the boat, Peterson."

The old man flushed a shade. "Excuse me, Mr. Harry. I know you'll do nothing out of the way. But the old hen—I beg pardon——"

"You mean the revered aunt, Peterson."

"Yes, sir, the revered aunt. Well, sir, the revered aunt, dash her!——"

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"Yes, dash her starry toplights, Peterson; and even if need be, shiver her timbers! Go on——"

"Why, she's been tryin' to pull off a weddin' on this boat ever since we left Mackinaw."

"Why not? You mean that Mr. Davidson and the revered aunt were getting on well?"

"Oh, no, bless your heart, no! It was the young lady, Miss Emory. And she——"

I raised my hand. "Never mind, Peterson. We can't discuss that at all. But now, I'm minded to give my friend Mr. Davidson a little game of follow-my-leader. And just to show how we'll do that, we'll begin with a preliminary go at hide-and-seek. Take the chance, Peterson, and run into the bayou. I'll put off the small boat for soundings. If we can get gas, and can get in, and can get out unnoticed, maybe we can run by New Orleans in the night, and none the wiser."

"And where then, Mr. Harry?"

"Peterson, the high seas have no bridges, and if they had, I should not cross them yet. Perhaps if I did, I then should burn them behind me."

"She's a mortal fine young woman, Mr. Harry, a mortal fine one. I'll be sworn he makes a hard run for her. But so can we—eh, Mr. Harry? He'll like enough pocket us in here, though."

I made no answer to this. The old man left me to take the wheel, and I noted his head wag from side to side. [Pg 165]

CHAPTER XIX

[Pg 166]

IN WHICH I ESTABLISH A MODUS VIVENDI

AS good fortune would have it, we swung in, opposite the screened mouth of Henry's Bayou, at a time when the stream was free of all craft that might have observed us, although far across the forest we could see a black column of smoke, marking a river steamer coming up.

"Quick with that long boat, Lafitte," I ordered; and he drew our old craft alongside as we slowed down. "Get over yonder and sound for a bar. Take the boat hook. If you get four feet, we'll try it."

My hardy young ruffian was nothing if not prompt, nor was he less efficient than the average deck-hand. It was he who did the sounding while Willie, our factotum, pulled slowly in toward the mouth of the old river bed. I watched them through the glasses, noting that rarely could Lafitte find any bottom at all with the long shaft of the boat hook. "She's all right, Peterson," said I. "Follow on in, slowly—I don't want that steamer yonder to catch us."

"*Why* don't you?" A voice I should know, to which all my body would thrill, did I hear it in any corner of the world, spoke at my elbow. I started for a half instant before I made reply, looking into her dark eyes, sensible again of the perfume most delirium-producing for a man: the scent of a woman's hair. [Pg 167]

"Because, Helena," said I, "I wish our boat to lie unnoticed for a time, till the hue and cry has lulled a bit."

"And then?" She bent on me her gaze, so difficult to resist, and smiled at me with the corners of her lips, so subtly irresistible. I felt a rush of fire sweep through all my being, and something she must have noted, for she gave back a bit and stood more aloof along the rail.

"And then," said I savagely, "this boat runs by all the towns, till we reach the Gulf, and the open sea."

"And then?"

"And then, Helena, we sail the ocean blue, you and I."

"For how long?"

"Forever, Helena. Or, at least, until——"

"Until when?"

"Until you say you will marry me, Helena."

She made no answer now at all beyond a scornful shrug of her shoulders. "Suppose I can not?" she said at last.

"If you can not, all the same you must and shall!" said I. "You shall be prisoner until you do." [Pg 168]

"Is there no law for such as you?"

"No. None on the high sea. None in my heart. Only one law I know any more, Helena—I who have upheld the law, obeyed it, revered it."

"And that?"

"The law of the centuries, of the forest, of the sea. The law of love, Helena."

"Ah, you go about it handsomely! If you wished me to despise you, to hate you, this would be very fit, what you say."

"You may hate me, despise me, Helena. Let it be so. But you shall not ignore me, as you have these three years."

"It was your fault; your wish—as well as my wish. We agreed to that. Why bring it up again? When the news came that you had quit your profession, and just at the time you had lost all your father's fortune and your own, had turned your back and run away, when you should have stayed and fought—well, do you think a girl cares for that sort of man? No. A man must do something in this world. He mustn't quit. He's got to *fight*."

"Not even if he has nothing to work for?"

"No, not even then. There are plenty of girls in the world——"

"One."

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—"And a man mustn't throw away his life for any one woman. That isn't right. He has his work to do, his place to make and hold. That's what a woman wants in a man. But you didn't. Now, you come and say we must forget all the years of off-and-on, all the time we—we—wasted, don't you know? And because I am, for a little while, in your hands, you talk to me in a way of which you ought to be ashamed. You threaten me, a woman. You even almost compromise me. This will make talk. You speak to me as though, indeed, you were a buccaneer, and I, indeed, in your power absolutely. If I did not know you——"

"You do not. Forget the man you knew. I am not he."

She spread out her hands mockingly, and yet more I felt my anger rise.

"I am another man. I am my father, and his great grandfather, and all his ancestors, pirates all. I know what I covet, and by the Lord! nothing shall stop me, least of all the law. I shall take my own where I find it."

"And now listen!" I concluded. "I am master on this ship, no matter how I got it. Late poor, as you say, I shall be richer soon, for I shall take, law or no law, consent or no consent, what I want, what I will have. And that is you!"

"Each day, at eleven, Helena," I concluded, "I shall meet you on the after deck, and shall try to be kind, try to be courteous——"

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"Why, Harry——"

"Try to be calm, too. I want to give you time to think. And I, too, must think. For a time, I wondered what was right, in case you had really pledged yourself to another man."

"Suppose I had?" she asked, sphinx-like.

"I will try to discover that. Not that it would make any difference in my plans."

"You would take what was another's?" She still gazed at me, sphinx-like.

"Yes! By the Lord, Helena, my father did, and his, and so would I! So would I, if that were you! Let him fend for himself."

She turned from the rail, her color a little heightened, affected to yawn, stretched her arms.

We were now passing over the bar, slowly, feeling our way, our skiff alongside, and the shelter of the curving, tree-covered bayou banks now beginning to hide us from view, though the bellowing steamer below had not yet entered our bend.

"Who is that boy?" she inquired lazily.

"That, madam, is no less than the celebrated freebooter, Jean Lafitte, who so long made this lower coast his rendezvous."

"Nonsense! And you're filling his head with wild ideas."

"Say not so; 'twas he and your blessed blue-eyed pirate nephew, the cutthroat L'Olonnois, who filled my head with wild ideas."

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"How, then?"

"They took me prisoner, on my own—I mean, at the little place where I stop, up in the country. And not till by stern deeds I had won their confidence, did they accept me as comrade, and, at last, as leader—as I may modestly claim to be. And do not think that you can wheedle either of them away from Black Bart. L'Olonnois remembers you spanked him once, and has sworn a bitter vengeance."

"Why did you happen to start sailing down this way?"

"Because I learned Cal Davidson had started—with you."

"And all that way you had it in mind to overtake us?"

"Yes; and have done so; and have taken his ship away from him, and for all I know his bride."

"He was your friend."

"I thought so. I suppose he never knew that you and I used to—well, to know each other, before I lost my money."

"He never spoke of that."

"No difference, unless all for the better, for I shall, now, never give you up to any man on earth."

"And I thought you the best product of our civilization, a man of education, of breeding."

[Pg 172]

"No, not breeding, unless savagery gives it. I'm civilized no longer. When you stand near me, and your hair—go below, Helena! Go at once!"

She turned, moved slowly toward her door.

I finished calmly as I could. "To-morrow, at eleven, I shall give you an audience here on the deck. We shall have time. This is a wilderness. You can not get away, and I hope no one will find you. That is my risk. And oh! Helena," I added, suddenly, feeling my heart soften at the pallor of her face—"Oh, Helena, Helena, try to think gently of me as you can, for all these miles I have followed after you; and all these years I have thought of you. You do not know—you do not know! It has been one long agony. Now go, please. I promise to keep myself as courteous as I can. You and I and Aunt Lucinda will just have a pleasant voyage together until—until that time. Try to be kind to me, Helena, as I shall try to be with you."

Silent, unsmiling, she disappeared beyond her cabin door, nor would she eat dinner even in her cabin, although Aunt Lucinda did; and found the ninety-three was helping her neuralgia.

I know not if they slept, but I slept not at all. The shadows hung black about us as we lay at anchor four miles inland, silent, and with no lights burning to betray us. Now and again, I could hear faint voices of the night, betimes croakings, splashings in the black water about us. It was as though the jungle had enclosed us, deep and secret-keeping. And in my heart the fierce fever of the jungle's teachings burned, so that I might not sleep.

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But in the morning Helena was fresh, all in white, and with no more than a faint blue of shadow beneath her eyes. She honored us at breakfast, and made no manner of reference to what had gone on the evening before. This, then, I saw, was to be our *modus vivendi*; convention, the social customs we all had known, the art, the gloss, the veneer of life, as life runs on in society as we have organized it! Ah, she fought cunningly!

"Black Bart," said L'Olonnois, after breakfast as we all stood on deck—Helena, Auntie Lucinda and all—"what's all them things floatin' around in the water?"

"They look like bottles, leftenant," said I; "perhaps they may have floated in here. How do you suppose they came here, Mrs. Daniver?" I asked.

"How should I know?" sniffed that lady.

"Well, good leftenant, go overside, you and Jean, and gather up all those bottles, and carry them with my compliments to the ladies at their cabin. You can have the satisfaction of throwing them all overboard later on, Mrs. Daniver. Only, remember, that there is no current in the bayou, and they will stay where they fall for weeks, unless for the wind."

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"And where shall we be, then?" demanded Auntie Lucinda, who had eaten a hearty breakfast, and I must say was looking uncommon fit for one so afflicted with neuralgia.

"Oh, very likely here, in the same place, my dear Mrs. Daniver," said I, "unless war should break out meantime. At present we all seem to have a very good *modus vivendi*, and as I have no pressing engagements, I can conceive of nothing more charming than passing the winter here in your society." Saying which I bowed, and turning to Helena, "At eleven, then, if you please?"

CHAPTER XX

[Pg 175]

IN WHICH I HAVE POLITE CONVERSATION, BUT LITTLE ELSE

I HAD myself quite forgotten my appointed hour of eleven, feeling so sure that it would not be remembered, as of covenant, by the party of the second part, so to speak, and was sitting on the forward deck looking out over the interesting pictures of the landscape that lay about us. It was the morning of a Sabbath, and a Sabbath calm lay all about us—silence, and hush, and arrested action. The sun itself, warm at a time when soon the breezes must have been chill at my northern home, was veiled in a soft and tender mist, which brought into yet lower tones the pale greens and grays of the southern forest which came close to the bayou's edge. The forest about us not yet fallen before the devastating northern lumbermen—men such as my father had been, who cared nothing for a tree or a country save as it might come to cash—was in part cypress, in part cottonwood, but on the ridge were many oaks, and over all hung the soft gray Spanish moss. The bayou itself, once the river, but now released from all the river's troubling duties, held its

unceasing calm, fitted the complete retirement of the spot, and scarce a ripple broke it anywhere. Over it, on ahead, now and then passed a long-legged white crane, bound for some distant and inaccessible swamp; all things fitting perfectly into this quiet Sabbath picture. [Pg 176]

My cigar was excellent, I had my copy of Epictetus at hand, and all seemed well with the world save one thing. Here, at hand, was everything man could ask, all comforts, many luxuries; and I knew, though Helena did not, that the safe increase of my fortune—that fortune which some had called tainted, and which I myself valued little, soon as I had helped increase it by the exercise of my profession—was quite enough to maintain equal comfort or luxury for us all our lives. But she was obstinate, and so was I. She would not say whether she loved Cal Davidson, and I would never undeceive her as to my supposed poverty. Why, the very fact that she had dismissed me when she thought my fortune gone—that, alone, should have proved her unworthy of a man's second thought. Therefore, ergo, hence, and consequently, I could not have been a man; for I swear I was giving her a second thought, and a thousandth; until I rebelled at a weakness that could not put a mere woman out of mind.

And then, I slowly turned my head, and saw her standing on the after deck. Her footfall was not audible on the rubber deck-mats, and she had not spoken. I resolved, as soon as I had leisure, to ask some scientific friends to explain how it was possible that with no sound or other appeal to any of the sensorial nerves, I could, at a distance of seventy-five feet, become conscious of the presence of a person no more than five feet five, who had not spoken a word, and was standing idly looking out over the ship's rail, in quite the opposite direction from that in which I sat. And then the ship's clock struck six bells, and recalled the appointment at eleven. Hastily I dropped Epictetus and my cigar, and hurried aft. [Pg 177]

"Good morning again, Helena," said I.

She stood looking on out over the water for a time, but, at length, turned toward me, just a finger up as to stifle a yawn. "Really," said she, "while I am hardly so situated that I can well escape it or resent it, it does seem to me that you might well be just a trifle less familiar. Why not 'Miss Emory'?"

"Because, Helena, I like 'Helena' better."

A slow anger came into her eyes. She beat a swift foot on the deck.

"Don't," I said. "Don't stamp with your feet. It reminds me of a Belgian hare, and I do not like them, potted or caged."

"I might as well be one," she broke out, "as well be one, caged here as we are, and insulted by a —a—" [Pg 178]

"A ruthless buccaneer——"

"Yes, a ruthless buccaneer, who has remembered only brutalities."

"And forgotten all amenities? Why, Helena, how could you! And after all the cork-tipped cigarettes I have given you, and all the ninety-three I have given your Auntie Lucinda—why look at the empty message bottles she and you have thrown out into the helpless and unhelping bayou—a perfect fleet of them, bobbing around. Shan't I send the boys overboard to gather them in for you again?"

"A fine education you are giving those boys, aren't you, filling their heads with lawless ideas! A fine debt we'll all owe you for ruining the character of my nephew Jimmy. He was such a nice nephew, too."

"Your admiration is mutual, Miss Emory—I mean, Helena. He says you are a very nice auntie, and your divinity fudges are not surpassed and seldom equaled. It is an accomplishment, however, of no special use to a poor pirate's bride; as I intend you shall be."

She had turned her back on me now.

"Besides, as to that," I went on, "I am only affording these young gentlemen the same advantages offered by the advertisements of the United States navy recruiting service—good wages, good fare, and an opportunity to see the world. Come now, we'll all see the world together. Shall we not, Miss Emory—I mean, Helena?" [Pg 179]

"We can't live here forever, anyhow," said she.

"I could," was my swift answer. "Forever, in just this quiet scene. Forever, with all the world forgot, and just you standing there as you are, the most beautiful girl I ever saw; and once, I thought, the kindest."

"That I am not."

"No. I was much mistaken in you, much disappointed. It grieved me to see you fall below the standard I had set for you. I thought your ideals high and fine. They were not, as I learned to my sorrow. You were just like all the rest. You cared only for my money, because it could give you ease, luxury, station. When that was gone, you cared nothing for me."

I stood looking at her lovely shoulders for some time, but she made no sign.

"And therefore, finding you so fallen," I resumed, "finding you only, after all, like the other worthless, parasitic women of the day, Miss Emory—Helena, I mean—I resolved to do what I could to educate you. And so I offer you the same footing that I do your nephew—good wages, good fare, and an opportunity to see the world."

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No answer whatever.

"Do you remember the Bay of Naples, at sunset, as we saw it when we first steamed in on the old *City of Berlin*, Helena?"

No answer.

"And do you recall Fuji-yama, with the white top—remember the rickshaw rides together, Helena?"

No answer.

"And then, the fiords of Norway, and the mountains? Or the chalk cliffs off Dover? And those sweet green fields of England—as we rode up to London town? And the taxis there, just you and I, Helena, with Aunt Lucinda happily evaded—just you and I? Yes, I am thinking of forcing Aunt Lucinda to walk the plank ere long, Helena. I want a world all my own, Helena, the world that was meant for us, Helena, made for us—a world with no living thing in it but yonder mocking-bird that's singing; and you, and me."

"Could you not dispense with the mocking-bird—and me?" she asked.

"No," (I winced at her thrust, however). "No, not with you. And you know in your heart, in the bottom of your trifling and fickle and worthless heart, Helena Emory, that if it came to the test, and if life and all the world and all happiness were to be either all yours or all mine, I'd go anywhere, do anything, and leave it all to you rather than keep any for myself."

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"Go, then!"

"If I might, I should. But male and female made He them. I spoke of us as units human, but not as the unit *homo*. Much as I despise you, Helena, I can not separate you from myself in my own thought. We seem to me to be like old Webster's idea of the Union—'one and indivisible.' And since I can not divide us in any thought, I, John Doe, alias Black Bart, alias the man you once called Harry, have resolved that we shall go undivided, sink or swim, survive or perish. If the world were indeed my oyster, I should open it for us both; but saying both, I should see only you. Isn't it odd, Helena?"

"It is eleven-thirty," said she.

"Almost time for luncheon. Do you think me a 'good provider,' Helena?"

"Humph! Mr. Davidson was. While your stolen stores last in your stolen boat, I suppose we shall not be hungry."

"Or thirsty?" She shrugged.

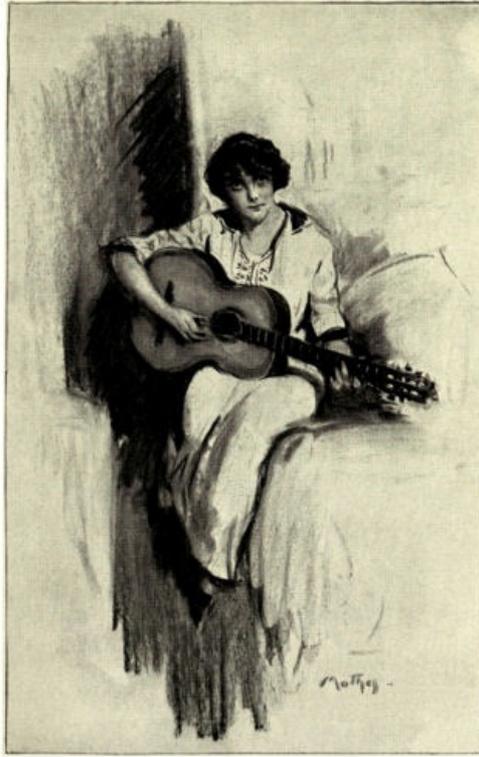
"Or barren of cork-tips of the evening? Or devoid of guitar strings?"

"I shall need none."

"Ah, but you will! It belikes me much, fair maid, to disport me at ease this very eve, here on the deck, under the moon, and to hear you yourself and none other, fairest of all my captives, touch the lute, or whatever you may call it, to that same air you and I, fair maid, heard long ago together at a lattice under the Spanish moon. A swain touched then his lute, or whatever you may call it, to his Dulcinea. Here 'tis in the reverse. The fair maid, having no option, shall touch the lute, or whatever you call it, to John Doe, Black Bart, or whatever you may call him; who is her captor, who feels himself about to love her beyond all reason; and who, if he find no relief, presently, in music—which is better than drink—will go mad, go mad, and be what he should not be, a cruel master; whereas all he asks of fate is that he shall be only a kind captor and a gentle friend."

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Her head held very high, she passed me without a word and threw open the door of her suite.



It was a love song of old Spain

... And that night, that very night, that very wondrous, silent, throbbing night of the Sabbath and the South, when all the air was as it seemed to me in saturation, in a suspense of ecstasy, to be broken, to be precipitated by a word, a motion, a caress, a note ... that night, I say, as I sat on the forward deck alone, I heard, far off and faint as though indeed it were the lute of Andalusia, the low, slow, deep throb of a guitar!... My whole heart stopped. I was no more than a focused demand of life. Reason was gone from me, not intellect but emotion—that is its basic thing after all, emotion born on earth but reaching to the stars.... I listened, not hearing.... It was the air we had heard long ago, a love song of old Spain, written, perhaps, before DeSoto and his men perished in these very bayous and forests that now shielded us against all tumult, all turmoil, all things unhappy or unpleasant. The full tide of life and love swept through my veins as I listened.

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I rose, I hastened. At her door I paused. "Helena!" I called raucously. "Helena." And she made no reply. "Helena," I called again. "It was the same old air. This is Spain again! Ah, I thank you for that same old air. Helena, forgive me. May I come in—will you come out?"

I halted. A cold voice came from the companionway door. "You have a poor ear for music, John Doe. It is not the same. Do you think I would take orders from you, or any other man?"

I stood irresolute a moment, and then did what I should not have done. I pulled open her door. "Come out," I demanded. But then I closed the door and went away. She was sitting, her head bowed on the instrument she had played. And when she looked up, startled at my rudeness, I saw her eyes wet with tears.

CHAPTER XXI

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IN WHICH WE MAKE A RUN FOR IT

"**G**ADZOOKS! Black Bart," remarked L'Olonnois at the breakfast table the next morning, "and where is the captive maiden?"

"I do not know," was my answer. "Better go find out, Jimmy."

He departed, but presently, returned somewhat troubled.

"My Auntie Helen," said he, "I mean the captive maid, why, she says she's got a headache and don't want no breakfast."

"Not even a grapefruit and a cup of coffee?" I demanded, anxiously and, it must be admitted, somewhat guiltily; for I knew that the soul of Helena was grieved and whatever the trouble, the fault was my own. Surely I had placed the poor captive in a most difficult position, and loving her as I did, how could I continue to give her discomfort? My resolution almost weakened. I was

considerably disturbed.

And yet as I faced the alternative of setting her free, and once more taking up the aimless and unhappy life I had led these last three years without sight of her, something—I suppose the great selfishness which lies under love—rose up and said me nay; and I began to make excuses in favor of my desire, as that, surely, soon she would come to a more reasonable way of thought. And in one thing, at least, I was honest with myself, deceitful as are lovers with themselves, and arguing ever in their own favor—I did not know why Helena had wept, and it was perhaps my right to know.

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One selfishness with another, I resolved to go on with this matter, though knowing full well how difficult would be my battle with her, how unequal; for I was armed only with a great love, backed by no art at all, whereas, she merely would continue to unmask against me new batteries of defense—severe politeness, formality with me; laughter and scornfulness of me; anger, pitifulness, at last even tears; and always the dread assault of her eyes, and the scent of her hair and the sweet wistfulness of her mouth,—all, all the charms of all women united in her one self, to attack, to assail, to harass, and to make wholly wretched the man who loved her more than anything in life, and who was driven almost to using any means, so only that she might not be away, not be out of sense and sight; as out of mind and out of heart she never more might be. So that, all in all, it were, indeed, hard question whether she or I were the more wretched. Surely grapefruit and toast and coffee seemed to me but inventions of the powers of darkness at that breakfast.

Not so my hardy mates, however, who ate with the keen appetite of youth, from fruit through bacon and toast and back again, both talking all the while. Nor, as the event proved, altogether unwisely. Indeed, it was stout Jean Lafitte who resolved my doubts, and by suggesting the simple medicine of action rather than meditation, sufficed for the removal of one of my two minds.

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“What ho! Black Bart,” said he, after his third helping of bacon, “why does our good ship lie here idle at her anchor?” Question direct, like Jean himself, and demanding direct answer.

“Ask Captain Peterson,” said I. “He perhaps can tell where we can get more gasoline.”

“No, he can’t. I asked him this morning.”

“Then ’twould seem we must lie here all winter, unless discovered by some relief expedition.”

“Why don’t we start a relief expedition of our own?” demanded he.

“And how?”

“Why, me and Willy, the deck-hand, we’ll take the long boat an’ go out an’ explore this region roundabout. Somebody may have gasoline somewhere, and if so, we can git it, can’t we?”

“Your idea is excellent, Jean Lafitte,” said I. “Within the hour you shall set forth to see whether or not there is any settlement on this bayou. And that you may not need use violence when secrecy is our wish, here is a fat purse for our stores. And hasten, for of a truth, Jean Lafitte, I am most awearry of this very morning, and I long to see the white seas roll once more.”

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It was determined, therefore, that we should fare onward—in case we could fare at all—with our ship’s company as it now was; for, of course, none but myself knew what was afoot between Black Bart and his captive. And well enough I knew that in keeping Helena Emory thus close to me, I was breeding sleepless nights and anxious days.

This day itself was anxious enough, nor could all of Epictetus teach me calm philosophy, distracted as I was over this situation, complex as it was. As to the fortune of the long boat, we knew nothing until, at three of the afternoon, I saw a white speck of a sail round the bend of our bayou, and saw that was hoisted, spirit fashion, over our boat, which now, with following wind, rapidly drew in toward us.

“It’s all right,” called out Jean Lafitte, when he came within hail; and I saw now that he, indeed, had a boat’s load of gasoline in tanks, cans and all manner of receptacles.

“Town and a store, down there five miles,” he explained as I caught his gunwale with boat hook. “You can git anything there. Now, the Giants an’ the Cubs, why, they tied in the ’leventh inning yesterday. An’ say——”

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“Enough,” said I, “let me hear nothing of the cursed Giants or the yet more accursed Cubs, for I have more serious work afoot! Tell me, is there a bar cutting off the other end of the bayou; and how long is the bayou?”

“Sixteen miles,” answered the useful Lafitte, “an’ she seems like good water all the way. They say there’s seven foot on the bar, and the wood boats run in and out.”

“Good! And did you tell them who you were, and why you wanted gasoline?”

“No. I only said our automobeel was broke down, an’ we wanted the baseball scores. That was all. They ast who was we. I said you was John Doe—you see, I didn’t want to tell your real name, so I didn’t say Black Bart.”

“And you didn’t mention our boat?”

"Of course not! Whose business is it what pirates does? They strike hardest when least expected. To-night we can run in an' rob the store, easy."

"Jean!" I cried, horrified, "what do you mean? Let me hear no more such talk, or by my halidom! back you go to your home by first train. I'll not be responsible for the ruin of any boy's morals in this way."

"Well what do you think about that, Jimmy!" said Jean, somewhat cast down and much mystified. [Pg 189]
"Ain't we pirates, an' don't pirates live on booty?"

"Booty enough you have in your boat, Jean," said I, "and let us get it aboard and in our tanks, for to-night we sail."

"For to rob the store?" anxiously.

"No, once more for the Spanish Main, my hearties! I seek a greater treasure; and plenty of danger, believe me, lies between here and there."

"When'll we start?" queried L'Olonnois eagerly.

"To-night, at six bells. Make all ready," was my reply.

And that very night, with our search-light half covered, and at slow speed and with the sounding lead going, Peterson felt his way out from our moorings and along the full length of Henry's Bayou, silently as he might. We saw few signs of life beyond now and then a distant light in some negro cabin, and with all the lights doused we swept by like a ghost in the night, along the front of the plantation at whose store my men had got their gasoline. At last we broke open the lower end of the bayou, which, coming in from the main stream in a long open reach, showed like a lane of faint light in the forest; and to my great relief presently, felt the current of the great stream pick us up, and saw the channel lights ahead, so that we knew we might for a time, at least, advance in safety. [Pg 190]

In all this work, my two faithful lieutenants were awake and alert; but I saw nothing of Helena that day, nor had message either from her or her aunt in the full round of twenty-four hours since last we met. Had she sought deliberately to repay me for the grief I caused her, Helena could have devised no better plan than her silence and her absence from my sight, after what time I had seen her weep.

Suddenly a thought of more practical sort came to my mind. "Jimmy," I called.

"Aye, aye, Sir;" and L'Olonnois saluted.

"You remember all those bottles floating around in the bayou—did you take them all up?"

"Aye, aye, Sir, an' she throwed a lot more in, out o' the cabin window. I was shootin' at 'em with the twenty-two, an' busted some."

"But not all?"

"Oh, no, some was left."

"And we sailed away, leaving there, no doubt, the full story of our voyage."

"Like enough," said L'Olonnois. "I didn't think of that."

"Nor I. For once, the vigilance of Black Bart faltered, L'Olonnois, and he must yet, mayhap, make better amends for his fault. Full speed ahead, now, Peterson," I added later as I went forward. [Pg 191]
"Run for New Orleans and with all you can get out of her."

"Very good, Mr. Harry," said the old man; and I could feel the throb of her whole superstructure, from stack to keelson, when he called on the double-sixties of the *Belle Helène* for all their power. Nor did any seek to stay us in our swift rush down the river.

CHAPTER XXII

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IN WHICH I WALK AND TALK WITH HELENA

IT was nine of as fine a winter morning as the South ever saw when at last, having passed without pause all intervening ports, we found ourselves at the city of New Orleans. Rather, in the vicinity of that city; for when we reached the railway ferry above the town, I ran alongshore and we made fast the *Belle Helène* at a somewhat precarious landing place. I now called Peterson to me.

"It's a fine morning, Peterson," said I.

"Yes, sir, but I think 'tis going to rain." (Peterson was always gloomy.)

"You must go down-town, Peterson," said I. "The through train from the West is late and just now is coming into the ferry. You can take it easily. We have got to have still more gasoline, for there

is a long trip ahead of us, and I am not sure what may be the chance for supplies below the city."

"Are you going into the Gulf, Mr. Harry?"

"Yes, Peterson. You will continue to navigate the boat; and, meantime, you may be quartermaster also. I shall be obliged to remain here until you return."

The old man touched his cap. "Very good, sir, but I'm almost sure not to return."

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"Listen, Peterson," I went on, well used to his customary depression of soul, "go to the ship's furnisher, Lavallier and Thibodeau, toward the Old Market. Tell them to have all our supplies at slip K, below the railway warehouses, not later than nine this evening. We want four drums of gasoline. Also, get two thousand rounds of ammunition for the twelve gages, ducking loads, for we may want to do some shooting. We also want two or three cases of grapefruit and oranges, and any good fresh vegetables in market. All these things must be ready on the levee at nine, without fail. Here is my letter of credit, and a bank draft, signed against it—I think you will find they know me still."

The old man touched his cap again but hesitated. "I'm sure to be asked something," he said somewhat nervously.

"Say nothing about any change of ownership of this boat, Peterson, and don't even give the boat's name, unless you must. Just say we will meet their shipping clerk at slip K, this evening, at nine. Hurry back, Peterson. And bring a newspaper, please."

"Is any one else going down-town?" asked Peterson. "I may run into trouble."

"No, we shall all remain aboard."

He departed mournfully enough, seeing that the ferry boat now was coming across with the railway train. I continued my own moody pacing up and down the deck. Truth was, I had not seen Helena for more than twenty-four hours, nor had any word come from the ladies' cabin to give me hope I ever would see her again of her own will. My surprise, therefore, was great enough when I heard the after cabin door close gently as she came out upon the deck.

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When last I saw her she had been in tears. Now she was all smiles and radiant as the dawn! Her gown, moreover, was one I had never seen before, and she, herself, seemed monstrous pleased with it, for, by some miracle, fresh as though from the hands of her maid at home, she knew herself fair and fit enough to make more trouble for mankind.

"Good morning," said she, casually, as though we had parted but lately and that conventionally. "Isn't it fine?"

"It is a beautiful picture," said I, "and you fit into it. I am glad to see you looking so well."

"I wish I could say as much for you," said she. "You look like a forlorn hope."

"I am nothing better."

"And as though you had not slept."

"I have not, Helena."

"Why not?" her eyes wide open in surprise.

"Because I knew I had either hurt or offended you; and I would do neither."

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"You have done both so often that it should not cost you your sleep," said she slowly. "But if you really want to be kind, why can you not have mercy on a girl who has been packed in a hat box for a month? Let me go ashore."

"Can you not breathe quite as well where you are, Helena?"

"But I can't walk."

"Oh, yes, you can; and I will walk beside you here on deck."

"But I would like to pick flowers, over there by the embankment."

"The train is too close," said I, smiling grimly.

Her color heightened just a little, but she did not answer my suspicions. "Please let me walk with you over there," she said. "I used not to need ask twice."

"Our situation is now reversed, Helena."

"Please, let me walk with you, Sir!"

"I dare not. We might both forget ourselves and go off to New Orleans for a lark without Aunt Lucinda."

"Oh, I am going to call Aunt Lucinda, too."

"Pardon, but you are going to do nothing of the kind. Even with her as chaperon, did we get down there in the old city once more, like the children we once were, Helena, we would forget our duty, would, perhaps, forget our purpose here. Mademoiselle, I dare not take that risk."

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"Please, Sir, may I walk with you over yonder for just a little time?" she said, as though it were her first request. She was tying her quaint little white bonnet strings under her chin now. I raised a hand.

"You ask a man to put himself into the power of the woman he loves most in all the world. When a man needs resolution, dare he look into the eyes of that woman, feel her hand on his arm, have her walk close to him as they promenade?"

"Dear me! Is it so bad as that?"

"Worse, Helena."

"Then I am to continue a prisoner in that hat box?"

"Until you love me, Helena, as I do you."

"As I told you, that would be a long time."

"Yes! For never in the world can you love me as I do you. I had forgotten that."

"If only you could forget everything and just be a nice young man," said she. "It is such fun. This dear old town, don't you know? Now, with a nice young man to go about with Aunt Lucinda and me——"

"How would a man like Calvin Davidson do?" I demanded bitterly.

"Very well. He is nice enough."

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"I suppose so. He is rich, able to have his horses and cars—even his private yacht. He can order a dinner in any country in the world, or tell you the standing of any club, in either league, at any minute of the day or night. Could I say more for his education? He has two country places and a city house and a business which nets him a hundred thousand a year. How can he help being nice? I do not resemble Mr. Davidson in any particular, except that I am wearing one of his waistcoats. Also, Helena, I am wearing a suit of flannels which I have borrowed from John, his Chinese cook. You can readily see I am a poor man. How, then, can I be nice?"

"No one would see us here," said she, sublimely irrelevant, as usual. "There are some little yellow flowers over there on the bank. Maybe I could find some violets."

There was a wistfulness in her gaze which made appeal. I could not resist. "Helena," said I suddenly, "give me your parole that you will not try to escape, and I will walk with you among yonder flowers. You look as though just from a Watteau fan, my dear. It is fall, but seems spring, and the world seems made for flowers and shepherds and love, my dear. Do you give me your word?"

"If I do, may I walk alone?"

"No, with me."

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"I'll not try to take the train. On my honor, I will not."

I looked deep into her eyes and saw, as always, only truth there—her deep brown eyes, filled with some deep liquid light whose color I never could say—looked till my own senses swam. I could scarcely speak.

"I take your parole, Helena," I said. "You never lied to me or any other human being in the world."

"You don't know me," said she. "I used often to lie to mama, and frequently do yet to Aunt Lucinda. But not if I say I give my word—my real word."

"When will you give me your real word, Helena? You know what I mean—when will you say that you love me and no one else?"

"Never!" said she promptly. "I hate you very much. You have been presumptuous and overbearing."

"Why then should you promenade with me?"

"Fault of anything better, Sir!" But she took my hand lightly, smiling as I assisted her down the landing way.

"But tell me," she added as we made our way slowly up the muddy slope, "really, Harry, how long is this thing to last? When are we going back home?"

"How can you ask? And how can I reply, save in one way, after taking the advice of yonder pirate captain, your blue-eyed nephew? He says they always live happy ever after. Listen, Helena. Gaze upon this waistcoat! Forget its stripes, and imagine it to be sprigged silk of a day long gone by. Let us play that romance is not yet dead. These are not cuffs, but ruffles at my wrists—for all Cal Davidson's extraordinary taste in shirts. All the world lies before us, and it is yesterday once more. The Mediterranean, Helena, how blue it is—the Bermudas, how fine they are of a winter day! And yonder lies motley Egypt and her sands. Or Paris, Helena; or Vienna, the voluptuous, with her gay ways of life. Or Nagasaki, Helena—little brown folks running about, and all the world white in blossoms. All the world, Helena, with only you and I in it, and with not a care until,

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at least, we have eaten the last of our tinned goods of the ship's supplies; since I am poor. But if I could give you all that, would I be nice?"

"Would that suit you, Harry?" she asked soberly; "just gallivanting?"

"You know it would not. You know I want no vacation lasting all my life, nor does any real man. You know it was yourself that forced me out of my man's place and robbed me of my greatest right."

"Yes," said she, "a man's place is to fight and to work. It's the same to-day. But," she added, "you ran away; and you lost." [Pg 200]

"But am I not trying to recoup my fortune, Helena? You see, I have already acquired a yacht, although but a few weeks ago I started in the world with scarcely more than my bare hands. Could Monte Cristo have done more?"

"It isn't money a woman wants in a man."

"What is it, then?"

"I don't know," said she. "Oh, come, we mustn't go to arguing these things all over again! I'm weary of it. And certainly Aunt Lucinda and I both are weary of our hat box yonder. That's what I asked you, how long?"

"As long as I like, Helena, you and your Aunt Lucinda shall dwell there. What would you say to three years or so?"

She seemed not to hear. "I believe I've found a four leaf clover," said she.

"Much good fortune may it bring you."

"Let me try my fortune," said she, and began plucking off the leaves. "He loves me, he loves me not; he loves me, he loves me not."

"There!" she said, holding up the naked stem triumphantly; "I knew it."

"It would be a fairer test, had you a daisy, Helena," said I, "or something with more leaves; not that I know whose has been this ordeal. Suppose it were myself, and that you tried this one." I handed her a trefoil, but she waved it aside. [Pg 201]

"I will try to find you a four leaf clover for your own, after a while," said she, and bobbed me a very pretty courtesy. Angered, I caught at the stick I was carrying with so sudden a grip that I broke it in two.

"I did not know your hands were so strong, Harry," said she.

"Would they were stronger!" was my retort. "And were I in charge of the affairs of Providence, the first thing I would do would be to wring the neck of every woman in the world."

"And then set out to put them together again, Harry? Don't be silly."

"Oh, yes, naturally. But you must admit, Helena, that women have no sense of reason whatever. For instance, if you really were trying out the fortune of some man on a daisy's head, you would not accept the decree of fate, any more than you could tell why you loved him or loved him not. Why does a woman love a man, Helena? You say I must not be silly—should I then be wise?"

"No, you are much too wise, so that you often bore me."

"Nor should he be poor?"

"No."

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"Nor rich?"

"Certainly not. Rich men also usually are bores—they talk about themselves too much."

"Should he be a tall man?"

"Not too tall, for they're lanky, nor short, because they get fat. You see, each girl has her own ideal about such matters. Then, she always marries a man as different as possible from her ideal."

"Why does she marry a man at all, Helena?"

"She never knows. Why should she? But look—" she pointed out across the water—"the train is leaving the ferry boat. Isn't that Captain Peterson going aboard the train?"

"Yes, Helena, I've sent him down-town to get some light reading for you and your Aunt Lucinda—*Fox's Book of Martyrs*, and the *Critique of Pure Reason*—the latter especially recommended to yourself. I would I had in print a copy of my *magnum opus*, my treatment on native American *culicidæ*. My book on the mosquito is going to be handsomely illustrated, Helena, believe me."

She turned upon me with a curious look. "Harry," said she, "you've changed in some ways. If I were not so bored by life in yonder hat box, I might even be interested in you for a few minutes. You used always to be so sober, but now, sometimes, I wonder if I understand you. Honestly, you [Pg 203]

were an awful stick, and no girl likes a stick about her. What do girls care which dynasty it was that built the pyramids?—it's Biskra they want to see. And we don't care when or why Baron Haussmann built the Boulevard Haussmann in Paris—it's the boulevard itself interests us."

"It is the fate of genius to be cast aside," said I. "No doubt even I shall be forgotten—even after my book on the *culicidæ* shall have been completed."

"—So that," she went on, not noticing me, "there is that one point in your favor."

"Then there is a chance?"

"Oh, yes, for me to study you as you once did me—as one of the *culicidæ*, I presume. But if you would listen to reason, and end this foolishness, and set us all ashore, why, I would be almost willing to forgive you, and we might be friends again,—only friends, Harry, as we once were. Why not, Harry?"

"You wheedle well," said I, "but you forget that what you ask is impossible. I am Black Bart the Avenger, and the hand of every man is against me. I am too deep in this adventure to end it here. Why? I did not even dare go down-town for fear I might be arrested. Nothing remains but further flight, and when you ask me to fly and leave you here, you ask what is impossible."

She stood for a time silent, a trifle paler, her flowers fallen from her hand, clearly unhappy, but clearly not yet beaten. "Come," said she coldly, "we must not be brutal to Aunt Lucinda also. Let us go back."

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"Yes," said I, "now you have back your parole."

"I think I should like an artichoke for luncheon," said she. "Vinaigrette, you know." And she passed aft, her head hidden by her white parasol, but I knew with chin as high as though she were Marie Antoinette herself. Nor did I feel much happier than had I been her executioner.

CHAPTER XXIII

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IN WHICH IS A PRETTY KETTLE OF FISH

MISS Helena Emory had her artichoke for luncheon, and judging from my own, my boy John never had prepared a better, good as he was with artichokes; but we ate apart, the ladies not coming to our table. It was late afternoon before I saw Helena again, once more come on deck. She was sitting in a steamer chair with her face leaning against her hand, and looking out across the water at the passing shipping. She sat motionless a long time, the whole droop of her figure, the poise of her tender curved chin, wistful and unhappy, although she said no word. For myself, I did not accost her. I, too, looked up and down the great river, not knowing at what moment some discerning eye might spy us out, and I longed for nothing so much as that night or Peterson would come.

He did come at last, late in the afternoon, on an outbound train, and he hurried aboard as rapidly as he might. The first thing he did was to hand me a copy of an afternoon paper. I opened it eagerly enough, already well assured of what news it might carry.

On the front page, under a large, black head, was a despatch from Baton Rouge relaying other despatches received at that point, from many points between Plaquimine and Bayou Sara. These, in short, told the story of the most high-handed attempt at river piracy known in recent years. The private yacht of Calvin Davidson, a wealthy northern business man, on his way South for the winter, had been seized by a band of masked ruffians, who boarded her while the yacht's owner was temporarily absent on important business in the city of Natchez. These ruffians, abandoning their own boat, had at once gone on down-stream. They had been hailed by officers of Baton Rouge, acting under advice by wire from Mr. Davidson, on his way down from Natchez. The robber band had paid no attention to the officers of the law, but had continued their course. In some way the stolen craft had mysteriously disappeared that afternoon and night, nor had any word of her yet been received from points as far south as Plaquimine. A bottle thrown overboard by one of the prisoners taken on the yacht contained a message to Mr. Davidson, with the request that he should meet the sender at New Orleans; but there was no signature to the note.

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Many mysterious circumstances surrounded this sensational piece of piracy, according to the journalistic view-point. On board the *Belle Hélène* were two ladies, the beautiful young heiress, Miss Helena Emory, well known in northern social circles, and her aunt, Mrs. Lucinda Daniver, widow of the late Commodore Daniver, United States Navy. Mr. Davidson himself was unable to assign any reason for this bold act of this abduction, although he feared the worst for the comfort or even the safety of the two ladies, whose fate at this writing remained unknown. The greatest mystery surrounded the identity of the leader of this bold deed, whose name Mr. Davidson could not imagine. He was reported to suspect that these same river pirates, earlier in the day, attacked and perhaps made away with a friend of his whose name is not yet given. A cigarette case was found in the abandoned boat, which Mr. Davidson thought looked somewhat familiar to him, although he could not say as to its ownership. He could and did aver positively, however, that a photograph in a leather case on the abandoned boat was a portrait of none other than Miss

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Helena Emory, one of the captives made away with by the river ruffians. Mr. Davidson could assign no explanation of these circumstances.

Later despatches received at Baton Rouge, so the New Orleans journal said, might or might not clear up the mystery of the stolen yacht's disappearance, although the senders seemed much excited. One story from a down-river point, brought in by an excited negro, told of a dozen bottles found floating in the bayou. The negro, however, had broken them all open, and declared they had contained nothing but bits of paper, which he had thrown away. He also told a wild story that the plantation store at Hamlin's Landing, on Bayou Henry, had been looted in broad daylight, by a young man and a boy, apparently members of the pirate crew. The younger of the two ruffians was masked, and on being asked for pay for gasoline, refused it at the point of his weapons, declaring that pirates never paid.

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While no attention should be paid to rumors such as the latter, the despatches went on to say, it was obvious that a most high-handed outrage had been perpetrated. It was supposed that the swift yacht had been hurried forward, and had passed New Orleans in the night. Once out of the river, and among the shallow bays of the Gulf Coast, the ruffians might, perhaps, for some time evade pursuit, just as did the craft of Jean Lafitte, himself, a century ago. Meantime, only the greatest anxiety could pervade the hearts of the friends of these ladies thus placed in the power of ruthless bandits. Such an outrage upon civilization could, of course, occur only under the administration of the Republican party. The journal therefore hoped:—and so forth, and so forth.

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"Peterson," said I, after digesting this interesting information, "you've read this. What have you to say?"

Peterson was more despondent even than was his wont. "It looks mighty bad, Mr. Harry," said he, "and I don't profess to understand it."

"Did you order the supplies?"

"Oh, yes, but they may forget to send them after all."

"It is your intention to stick by me, Peterson?"

"Well, there must be some mistake," he said, "but I don't see what else I can do."

"There is a mistake, Peterson," said I. "This is more newspaper sensation. Mr. Davidson is excited over something he doesn't understand. If I had him here now I could explain it all easily. But, before the matter can be explained in this way, we must wait until this excitement dies down. Why, at this gait, it would hardly be safe for either of us to be recognized here in town. We might be arrested and put to a lot of trouble. The best thing we can do is to run on down the river and wait until Davidson gets down and until we get this thing adjusted. That is why I wanted the supplies to-night."

"But suppose we are discovered to-night?"

"We take that chance, but I fancy that I have certain legal rights, after all, and I own this boat. Fortune favors the bold. I shall make no attempt to hide, either now or then, Peterson. At the same time, while we will not run away from plain sight, there is no need to take unnecessary chances. Drop some white sail-cloth over the yacht's name on her bows, and on the fantail. Have one or two of the boys go overboard in slings and seem to be painting her sides. That will give the look that we are safe to lie here some time—which is the last thing the *Belle Helène* really would do, or will do. They think we've run past the city already, and they'll be watching at Quarantine, and along the Lake Borgne Canal. Most of the yachts go out that way, headed for Florida. We'll go the other way. It's an adventure, Peterson, and one which any viking, like yourself, ought to relish."

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"So I do, Mr. Harry," said he, "but I hardly knew which course to lay."

"Blood will tell, Peterson," said I. "Your ancestors were Danish pirates; mine were English pirates."

"For God's sake, Mr. Harry, don't talk that way. We mustn't go against the law."

"I'm not sure that we have as yet, Peterson, for the law says nothing about abduction of ladies in pairs, or for purposes truly honorable. Frankly, Peterson—and because you've been long in my employ—I'll tell you something. I intend to marry that young lady if she's not already married to Mr. Davidson."

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"Lord, Mr. Harry, she ain't—at least not since she come aboard the boat."

"In that case," said I, drawing a long breath, "this is not such a bad world after all."

"Not at all, Mr. Harry. I was going to say, as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, but of course I don't know about what she'll say. She looks to me like one of these girls that's been petted a good deal, and Mr. Harry, believe me, I always fight shy of a pet horse, or a pet boat, or a pet woman—they're always hard to handle, and they raise the devil when they get a chance. I hope you'll pardon me, sir."

"On the contrary, Peterson, I am grateful to you. You are on double pay from the time I took command. Moreover, I promise you the best cruise we ever had together. Once among the shallow bays on the coast down there, we can take care of ourselves while this chase cools down.

We're faster than anything on the Gulf, and draw less water than most of them of anything like our speed. You take care of the boat and I'll take care of the girl—or try to. I have attachment papers all made out, to file on the boat if need be—and I also have an attachment for the girl, when it comes to that."

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The old man shook his head. "I've got the easiest job," said he.

CHAPTER XXIV

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IN WHICH WE HAVE A SENSATION

WITH no more than these slight precautions which I have indicated, we lay all that afternoon in plain view of the world; and because all the world could not suspect us of such hardihood, all the world went by without suspecting that the stolen *Belle Helène* and her ruthless pirate crew were there in full sight and apparently inviting or defying apprehension. Sometimes a passing craft would salute us as we lay, and we returned the courtesy without fail. I know not whether more bottles were cast overboard by Aunt Lucinda, but if so, we heard of none. At last, after what seemed days to me, though no more than hours, the shade of twilight fell across the river, the outlines of the passing boats grew less distinct. Now and again we could hear the wail of railway whistle, or see the curved snake of the lighted train dashing across the alluvial lands toward the ferry. Here and there, beyond, pin points of red lights shone. At last the night fell full, and, gladly enough, I gave the order for the continuance of our journey.

We slipped down-stream gently and silently, yet speedily withal, seeking to time our arrival, as nearly as we might, to the hour assigned for the delivery of our supplies at the dock.

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"I'm none too easy in my mind," said my old skipper to me, as we stood together forward.

"Why not, Peterson?"

"It's them two boys," said he. "You talk of pirates—there's the bloodiest pair of pirates as ever was. I hardly know whether my own life's safe or not, to hear them talk."

"Never do you mind, Peterson," said I. "Those boys may be useful to us yet. The one with blue eyes has proved himself able to keep the ladies in their cabin, and as for the one who was going to run you through when we took the boat, he still may have to work to keep Williams down in the engine-room when we make our landing."

"It may come out all right," said the old man gloomily, "but sometimes I fear for the worst."

"You always do, Peterson, and that is no frame of mind for a healthy pirate. But here we are below the railway warehouse district, and I think nearly opposite slip K, where we land. Port your helm, and run in slow. We've got to have gasoline, although I must say my two bullies took aboard quite a store up there at the Bayou."

"Port it is, sir," said Peterson gloomily, still smoking. And he made as neat a landing as ever in his life.

A shadowy form arose amidst the blackness of the dock and came directly forward to take our line.

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"Who's that?" I demanded. "Are you from Lavallier and Thibodeau?"

"Yes, M'sieu," came the answer. "Those supply is here."

"All right. Help him get the stuff aboard, Peterson."

They went about their work. Just as turning I saw standing at my elbow, the slight form of L'Olonnois, his arms folded and hat drawn upon his brow.

"Bid the varlets hasten," he hissed to me. "Time passes."

"Back to your post, L'Olonnois," I rejoined. "See that the captives remain in their room."

Jean Lafitte, too, proved unable to restrain his curiosity, and this time his habit of close observation was of benefit in an unexpected way.

"Hist, Black Bart!" he whispered distinctly, clutching my arm. "What boat is that?"

He pointed in the dim light to a low lying, battered power boat moored in the same slip with us. Something in her look seemed familiar.

"I can't see her name," said Jean Lafitte, "but she looks a lot like our own old boat."

I hastily stepped on the wharf and got a closer look in the wavering beams of an arc light at the name on the boat's bows. There, in indistinct and shaky, but unmistakable characters, was the title painted by my young ruffians, weeks earlier—*Sea Rover!*

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"Jean Lafitte," I whispered, "you are right, and now indeed we must have a care. Yon varlet has

beaten us into New Orleans.”

“Let’s board her and take her,” hissed Jean Lafitte. “We can do it easy.”

“No, wait,” said I. “Perhaps we can think of a better plan. Wait till we get two drums of gasoline aboard. Then we’ll make a run for it, if yon varlet is here on the *Sea Rover*. Probably not, for every one seems gone to bed.”

“I’ll find out,” said Jean Lafitte boldly, and before I could stop him was gone, springing lightly on the deck of the *Sea Rover*.

“Hello in there,” he hailed. “Are you all asleep?”

A voice muttered something from the shallow cabin, I could not tell what. “We got a barrel of rum for you from Thibodeau’s,” said Jean Lafitte.

“No, you ain’t. Must be some mistake,” said a sleepy voice; and now a tousled head appeared, indistinct in the gloom. “Anyhow, I don’t know anything about it, and it’ll have to stay on the dock until morning. I’m only the engineer, I come from Natchez. Mr. Davidson, he’s up-town.”

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“Oh, all right,” said Jean Lafitte, apparently mollified, and soon was at my side again. So then, we had the information we sought. I was sure my own engineer, Williams, was busy as usual below, oiling and polishing his double sixties.

“Hurry now,” I whispered to Peterson. “Get that stuff aboard quick. Don’t forget the crates of fruit and vegetables.”

We were nearly done with this work, when for a moment all seemed on the point of going wrong with us. I heard shufflings and door slammings from the after cabin. “Help! Help!” sounded the voice of Aunt Lucinda, somewhat muffled. It chanced that my engineer, Williams, at that moment poked his head up his ladder to get a breath of fresh air.

“What’s that?” he demanded of me as I passed. “I thought I heard some one calling.”

“Oh, you did, Williams,” said I. “It was Mrs. Daniver. She suffers much with neuralgia and is in great pain. I shouldn’t wonder if I should have to go up-town and get a physician for her even yet. But, Williams, in any case we’ll be sailing soon, and I want you to overhaul the screen of the intake pipe for that port boiler. We’re getting into very sandy waters, and of course you don’t want anything to happen to your engines. Can you attend to that at once?”

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“Surely, sir,” said he, and went below again. I closed the hatch on him. Meantime I hurried aft, to see what could be done toward quelling any possible uproar. My blue-eyed lieutenant, L’Olonnois, had been as efficient in his way as Jean Lafitte. Now, in full character, he was enjoying himself immensely. When I saw him, he was standing with his feet spread wide apart in the center of the cabin floor, with drawn sword in his hand.

“Lady,” said he, addressing himself to Aunt Lucinda, “it irks me as a gentleman to be rude with one so fair, but let me hear one more word from you, and your life’s blood shall dye the deck, and you shall walk the plank at the morning sun. You deal with L’Olonnois, who knows no fear!”

Deep silence, broken presently by a little laugh; and I heard Helena’s voice in remonstrance. “Don’t be so silly, Jimmie!”

“Silly, indeed,” boomed the deep voice of Aunt Lucinda, catching sight of me at the door. “Yonder is the villain who put him up to this.”

“Oh, is that you?” said Helena, coming toward me. “Where are we, Harry?”

“In the port of New Orleans, Miss Helena,” was my answer, “a city of some three hundred thousand souls, noted for its manufacture of sugar, and its large shipments abroad of the staple cotton.”

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“May I come on deck?” she queried after a while.

“We are alongside the levee, and there is little to see. We shall be sailing now in a few moments.”

“But mayn’t I come up and see New Orleans, even for a minute as we pass by? I’ll be good.”

“You may come up under parole,” said I, throwing open the door. “But you must bring your aunt’s parole also. You must give no alarm, for we have every reason here for silence.”

She turned back and held some converse with Auntie Lucinda, and by what spell I know not, won the promise of the latter to remain silent and make no attempt at escape. A little later she was at my side in the dim light cast by a flickering and distant arc light at the street.

“I have your word, then?” I demanded of her.

“Yes. You can’t blame me for wanting to get out, to see what is going on.”

“A great deal may be going on here any moment,” said I. “In fact, if I could show you the evening newspapers—which I purpose doing to-morrow morning—it might seem to you that a great deal already has gone on. For one thing, Cal Davidson is in town ahead of us. That’s his boat yonder, rubbing sides with us. He doesn’t know we’re here. He himself is off up-town, at the Boston Club, probably, or perhaps some of the cafés—he knows a thousand people here.”

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"So do I, Harry," said she. "To think of going by in this plight! And to think of leaving New Orleans without even one little supper at Luigi's, Harry—it breaks my heart."

"We are almost ready to sail, Helena. Suppose we see Luigi's some other time. Things are getting pretty close about us here."

"Any pirate should be a man of courage," said she; "he should be ever willing to take a chance."

"Very well; have I not taken several chances already?"

"And again, a pirate ought to be kind toward all women, oughtn't he, Harry? I asked you this afternoon, why couldn't we be friends again and stop all this foolishness. Let's forget everything and just be friends."

"What! Again, Helena? Have I not tried that and found it a failure?"

"You have no courage. You are no pirate. I challenge you to a test."

"What is it, Helena?"

"Let us go up-town and have a little supper at Luigi's, the way we used to, Harry, when we really were friends." [Pg 221]

"What, with Cal Davidson loose in the town and his boat lying here?"

"That is the adventure!"

"You would turn me over to the authorities?"

"No, but I would sell my parole for a mess of woodcock, Harry." She laid a hand upon my arm. "I can't tell you how much I want a little supper at Luigi's, Harry. I like the Chianti there. Between us we could afford thirty cents a bottle, could we not? Now, if I gave my parole—and of course, every one would be here at the boat just the same—But of course, I did not expect you would."

"Why did you not?"

"Because it is an adventure, because it will take something of real courage, I fancy, to meet a risk like that!"

"There would be some risk for us all," said I truly.

"There you go, balancing and not deciding. You are no pirate."

"What will you give me if I go, Helena?" said I.

"Nothing beyond thanking you. One thing, you must not think that I would trick or trap you."

"Many a criminal has been trapped by a woman whom he loves," said I slowly. "But you would not do that if I had your word, even though you hated me. And you do hate me very much, do you not?" [Pg 222]

"Yes, very much. But if you took me by New Orleans without a supper at Luigi's, I should hate you even more."

"Jean—Jean Lafitte," I called out in a low tone of voice.

"Aye, aye, Sir!" he saluted, as he came to the place where we stood, like some seasoned sailorman, regardless of youthful hours of sleep.

"I am going up-town with the captive maiden. Do you stand here on watch. We shall be gone about three hours."

"Hully gee!" ejaculated Jean Lafitte, but at once he saluted again. "'Tis well, Black Bart," said he.

"Tell Captain Peterson to let no one come on board this boat under any pretense; nor must any one leave it until I get back. If any one asks for me, say I'm up-town."

"Isn't Aunt Lucinda going, too?" demanded Helena.

"She certainly is not!"

"Is it—is it quite correct for me to go alone with you?"

"That is your part of the adventure, Helena," said I calmly. An instant later I had led her across the dingy warehouse dock, over dusty streets, to a crooked street-car line over which I could hear approaching one of the infrequent cars. [Pg 223]

CHAPTER XXV

[Pg 224]

IN WHICH WE MEET THE OTHER MAN, ALSO ANOTHER WOMAN

LUIGI'S place, as all men know, is situated upon a small, crooked and very dirty street, yet none the less, it is an abode of contentment for those who know good living. When Helena and I entered the door I felt as one again at home. Here were the sanded floors, the old water-bottles, the large chandelier with its cut glasses in the middle of the room, the small tables with their coarse clean linen. The same old French waiters stood here and there about, each with impeccable apron and very peccable shoes, as is the wont of all waiters. But the waiters at Luigi's are more than waiters; they are friends, and they never forget a face. Therefore, as always, I had no occasion for surprise when Jean, my waiter these many years at Luigi's, stepped forward as though it had been but last week and not three years ago when he had seen me. He called me by name, greeted me again to his city, and gently aided Helena with her wraps and gloves.

"And M'sieu can not long remain away from us, forever?" said he.

"It has been three years, Jean," said I, "more is the pity. But now, I can remain three hours—will that serve? At the end of that time we must away." [Pg 225]

Jean was human, yet discreet. He knew that when last he saw me I was a single man. Now he had doubts. He stood hovering about, a question on his tongue, smitten of admiration much as had been my dog, Partial, at his first sight of Helena. At last he made excuse to step close behind my chair under pretense of finding my napkin.

"*Enfin, M'sieu?*" said he, smiling.

"*Pas encore, Jean!*" I replied.

I saw a slow flush on Helena's cheek, but she gave no other sign that she had overheard. So I began forthwith making much ado about ordering our supper, which as usual really was much a matter of Jean's taste.

"We have to-night in the ice-boxes, M'sieu," said that artist, "some cock oysters which are dreams. Moreover, I have laid aside two canvasbacks, the best I ever saw—it was in the hope that some really good friend of mine would come in. Behold, I am happy—I must have been expecting you. Believe me, we have never had better birds than these. They are excellent."

"Perhaps the oysters, Jean," said I, "very small and dark. I presume possibly a very small *fillet* of trout this evening, and the sauce—you still can make it, Jean? Such *entrées* as you like, of course. But, since Mademoiselle—" and here I smiled—"and I, also, are very hungry this evening, we wish a woodcock after the canvasback, if you do not mind. Perhaps it is not too much?" [Pg 226]

"*Mais non!*" replied Jean. "You are of those who know well that to eat too much is not to dine well. But I shall bring you two oysters, *marinière*—a sauce my own wife invented. And yes, some small bird, *beccasine*, broiled lightly—perhaps you will enjoy it after the canvasback, although I assure you those are excellent indeed. We have few sweets here, as M'sieu knows, but cheese, if you like, and of course coffee; and always we have the red wine which I remember M'sieu liked so much."

"It is with you, Jean," said I. And Helena, turning, smiled upon him swiftly, in such fashion that he scarce touched the floor at all as he walked out for his radishes and olives.

"Isn't it nice?" said Helena. "Isn't it like the old times? I always loved this old town. It seems so homelike."

"Please do not use that word, Helena," said I. "I wish to be entirely happy to-night, in the belief that some time I shall know what home is." [Pg 227]

"Do you think Jean knew me also?" she demanded. "Certainly, I have been here also before."

"No one who has ever seen you, Helena, ever forgets you. But Jean is, of course, discreet."

"Suppose he knew that I was here to-night against my free will, and only under parole?"

"Jean is wise; he knows such things ought not to be, even if they are. And he understood me when I said, 'not yet.'"

"Yes," said she; "quite right. *Pas encore!*"

Jean returned, and as a special favor to an old patron asked us politely if we would enjoy a look through the kitchen and the ice-boxes. As usual, we accepted this invitation, and passed back through the green swing doors, following our guide along the row of charcoal fires, through a dingy room decorated with shining coppers and bits of glass and silver. These ice-boxes were such as to offer continual delight to any epicure, what with their rows of fat clean fishes and crabs and oysters, the birds nicely plucked, all the dainties which this rich market of the South could afford, from papabotte to terrapin. Helena herself selected two woodcock and approved the judgment of Jean in canvasback. Presently she turned to me, a flush of embarrassment upon her face. [Pg 228]

"Harry," she said, "I don't like to say anything, but you know—you've been telling me you were so poor. Now, a girl doesn't want to make it difficult—"

"Mademoiselle," said I, bowing, "I am quite able to foot the bill to-night. I had just sold some hay before I started from home."

"Well, I'm awfully hungry," she admitted; "besides, it's such a lark."

"Yes," said I; and presently, as we reached our table again, I showed her the afternoon papers, which as yet she had not seen. She read through the account of our escapade, her lips compressed; but presently she folded the paper and laid it down without comment.

"At any minute, you see," said I, "I may be apprehended and our little supper brought to an end. That is why I hastened with the order. I do not wish to hurry you in any way, however, and we shall use the full three hours. Although, of course, you see that the bird of time indeed is on the wing to-night, as well as those other birds on the broilers."

She only looked at me steadily and made no comment. "Once suspected here," said I, "all is over for me, and you are free again. It would be entirely easy for you to make some sign or movement which I, perhaps, could not detect. Perhaps, at any moment, some one may enter who knows you—as I've said, no one can look at you and forget you, Helena. But please let none of this affect your appetite. Our little supper is our little adventure. I hope you will enjoy both, my dear."

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"You did take some chance, did you not?" she said slowly.

"It might be a chance."

"But you will be so nervous you can't enjoy your spread."

"Not in the least, Helena. A nervous man has no business in the trade of piracy;—but, ah! the *fillet* of trout, Helena."

Jean was proud of his art, the chef proud also, and the chef knew we were here. A general air of comfort seemed to settle down upon our little corner of the restaurant, a quiet contentment. For the most part, folk came here who had no hurry and no anxiety, and it was a sort of club for many persons who knew how to eat and to live and to enjoy life quietly, as life should be enjoyed. None dreamed, of course, that aught but equal leisure existed for our little table, where sat a rather lank and shabby man in flannels, and a very especially beautiful young woman in half evening dress. At Luigi's, every one is polite to every one else, and the curiosity is but that of fraternity. Perhaps, some eyes were cast our way, I could not tell.

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Jean, in slow solemnity and pleasant ease, brought on many things not nominated in the bond. At length he arranged his duck-press on his little table near us, and having squeezed the elixir from the two dissected fowls, began to stir the juices into a sauce of his own, made with sherry wine and a touch of *filé*, many things which Jean knows best. He was just in the act of pouring this most delectable sauce over the two bits of tender fowl upon our hot plates, when, happening to look up, I saw some one entering the door.

"Jean, if you please," said I, deliberately pulling the coat-rack in front of our table, "Mademoiselle perhaps feels a slight draft. Would you fetch a screen?"

He turned. "Helena," said I, after a moment, "now our adventure has come."

"What do you mean?" said she. "Why do you do that?"—she nodded at the screen. "Why, I say?"

"I have your parole?"

"Yes."

"I am glad it is yes!" said I. "You could break it now and escape so easily. One little move on your part and my punishment is at hand."

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"Who was it?" she asked, suspecting.

"No one much," said I, "only our esteemed friend, Mr. Calvin Davidson, whose waistcoat I am now wearing. Some one is with him, I don't know who it is. A very nice-looking lady, next to the most beautiful woman in this room, I must say."

"Let me see," said she; and I allowed her to look through the crack in the screen.

"She certainly is very stunning," said I, "is she not? Tall, dark, a trifle superb—I wonder—I wonder sometimes, Helena, if Cal Davidson is true to Poll?"

"Nonsense!" was her retort. "But as you say, here is our adventure, or at least yours. How do you propose to get out of it?"

"I don't know yet," said I. "Just at present I do not wish this canvasback to get cold. We have remaining before us two hours or more, ample time to make any plan which may be needed. Coffee, I have found, is excellent for plans. Let us make no plans until we have had our coffee, after our little dinner. That will be an hour or so yet. Plenty of time to plan, Helena," said I. "And please do not slight this bird—it is delicious."

Her eyes still were sparkling. "I'm rather glad I came," said she.

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"So am I, and I shall be glad when we are back. But meantime I trust you, Helena, absolutely. I will even tell you more. Davidson's boat, the one which we left him instead of the *Belle Helène*, is lying in the same slip with ours, rubbing noses with our yacht yonder, as I showed you. Our men have talked with his. They do not yet suspect that we are the vessel which everybody wants to find. I am very thankful their engineer was so sleepy. I learned there at the wharf that Cal

Davidson was down-town at his club. He seems to have departed long enough to find excellent company, as usual. I am glad that he has done so, for in all likelihood he will not return to his own boat before to-morrow morning. He will prefer his room at the club to his bunk on the *Sea Rover*, if I know Cal Davidson. And by that time I hope to be far away."

"Does he know who you are—does he know who it was that took the *Belle Helène*?"

"I think not. But, very stupidly—being so anxious to see the original—I left a photograph of yourself on our old boat, the *Sea Rover*. Item, one cigarette case with my initials. Of course, Cal Davidson may guess the simple truth, or he may make a mystery of these things. It seems he prefers to make a mystery; and I am sure that suits me much better."

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"But knowing these things—knowing that his boat was lying right at the dock alongside of us—why did you stop?"

"I thought it was you, Helena, who suggested this little adventure at Luigi's! And I promise you I am enjoying it very much. It seems so much like old times."

"But that can't ever be over again, Harry."

"Naturally not. But often new times are quite as good as old ones. I can conceive of such a thing in our case. No, I shall use this privilege of your society to the limit, Helena, fearing I may not see you soon again, after once I have put you back in your hat box. You coaxed me to leave the boat, and I shall tell you when to return."

"Why not now?"

"No, at twelve o'clock. Not earlier."

"And you propose sitting here with me till then?"

"I could imagine no better pastime, were I condemned to die at sunrise. Tell me, do you wish me to call Mr. Davidson?"

"Of course I do not, since I gave you my word. Besides, I know that girl with him. It's Sally Byington. Some call her good-looking, but I am sure I don't know why."

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"Fie upon you! She is superb. In short, Helena, I am not sure but she is finer-looking than yourself!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes. Cal Davidson, whatever may be his taste in neckties or waistcoats, seems to me excellent in this other regard. Perhaps just a trifle flamboyant for Luigi's, but certainly stunning."

"Our relations are not such as to lead me to discuss our friends," she rejoined haughtily. "And, as you say, our duck is getting cold. I adore these canvasbacks. I would like to come back to-morrow and have another." She cut savagely into her fowl.

"Alas, Helena, to-morrow you will be far away. In time I hope to reconcile you to the simple life of piracy. Indeed, unless all plans go wrong, we may very likely have canvasbacks on the boat; although I can not promise you that John will be as good a chef as our friend here at Luigi's. All good buccaneers use their fair captives well."

"Indeed! And why do you not ask Sally Byington into your list of prisoners, since you fancy her so much."

"Nay, say not so, Helena. I trust I am somewhat catholic in taste regarding ladies, as any gentleman should be, yet after all, I am gentler in my preferences. Quite aside from that, I find one fair captive quite enough to make me abundant trouble."

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At about this time Jean approached behind the screen, bearing a copy of a late edition of an evening paper, which fortunately he seemed not closely to have scanned. I took it quickly and placed it with the front page down.

"Monsieur no doubt has heard of the great sensation?" commented Jean.

"No, what is that, Jean?"

"The papers have been full of nothing else. It seems a band of cutthroat river pirates have stolen a gentleman's yacht, and so far as can be told, have escaped with it down the river, perhaps entirely to the Gulf."

"That, Jean," said I, "is a most extraordinary thing. Are you sure of the facts?"

"Naturally—is it not all in the paper? This gentleman then has his yacht anchored at Natchez, and he goes ashore on important business. Comes then this band of river ruffians in the dark, and as though pirates of a hundred years ago, and led by Jean Lafitte himself, they capture the vessel!"

"*Mon Dieu!* Jean you do not say so?"

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"But assuredly I say so; nor is that all, Monsieur. On board this yacht was a young and beautiful lady of great wealth and beauty, as well—the fiancée, so it is said, of this gentleman who owns the yacht. What is the action of these pirates in regard to this beautiful young lady and her aunt,

who also is upon the yacht for the cruise? Do they place these ladies ashore? No, they imprison them upon the boat, and so, *pouf!* off for the gulf. Nor has any trace of them been found from that time till now. A rumor goes that the gentleman who owns the yacht is at this time in New Orleans, but as for that unfortunate young lady, where is she to-night? I demand that, Monsieur. Ah! And she is beautiful."

"Now, is not this a most extraordinary tale you bring, Jean? Let us hope it is not true. Why, if it were true, that ruffian might escape and hide for days or weeks in the bayous around Baratavia, even as Jean Lafitte did a hundred years ago."

"Assuredly he might. Ah, I know it well, that country. But Jean Lafitte was no pirate, simply a merchant who did not pay duties. And he sold silks and laces cheap to the people hereabout—I could show you the very causeway they built across the marsh, to reach the place where he landed his boats at the heads of one of the great bays—it is not far from the plantation of Monsieur Edouard Manning, below New Iberia. Believe me, Monsieur, the country folk hunt yet for the buried treasure of Jean Lafitte; and sometimes they find it."

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"You please me, Jean. Tell me more of that extraordinary person."

"Extraordinary, you may call him, Monsieur. And he had a way with women, so it is said—even his captives came to admire him in time, so generous and bold was he."

"A daredevil fellow I doubt not, Jean?"

"You may say that. But of great good and many kindnesses to all the folk in the lower parts of this state in times gone by. Now—say it not aloud, Monsieur—scarce a family in all Acadia but has map and key to some buried treasure of Jean Lafitte. Why, Monsieur, here in this very café, once worked a negro boy. He, being sick, I help him as a gentleman does those negro, to be sure, and he was of heart enough to thank me for that. So one day he came to me and told me a story of a treasure of a descendant of Lafitte. He himself, this negro, had helped his master to bury that same treasure."

"And does he know the place now? Could he point it out?"

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"Assuredly, and the master who buried it now is dead."

"Then why does not the negro boy go and dig it up again, very naturally?"

"Ah, for the best reasons. That old Frenchman, descendant of Jean Lafitte, was no fool. What does he in this burial of treasure? Ah! He takes him a white parrot, a black cat and a live monkey, and these three, all of them, he buries on top of the treasure-box and covers all with earth and grass above the earth. And then above the grave he says such a malediction upon any who may disturb it as would alone frighten to the death any person coming there and braving such a curse. I suggested to the negro boy that he should show me the spot. Monsieur, he grew pale in terror. Not for a million pounds of solid gold would he go near that place, him."

"That also is a most extraordinary story, Jean. Taken with this other fairy tale which you have told me to-night, you almost make me feel that we are back in the great old days which this country once saw. But alas!"

"As you say, Monsieur, alas!"

"Now as to that ruffian who stole the gentleman's yacht," I resumed. "Has he reflected? Has he indeed made his way to the Gulf? Why, he might even be hiding here in the city somewhere."

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"Ah, hardly that, and if so, he well may look out for the law."

"I think a sherbet would be excellent for the lady now, Jean," I ventured, whereat he departed. I turned over the paper and showed Helena her own portrait on the front page, four columns deep and set in such framing of blackfaced scare type as made me blush for my own sins.

"It is an adventure, Helena!" said I. "Had you not been far the most beautiful woman in this restaurant to-night, and had not Jean been all eyes for you, he otherwise would have looked at this paper rather than at you. Then he would have looked at us both and must have seen the truth."

"It is an adventure," said she slowly, her color heightening; and later, "You carried it off well, Harry."

I bowed to her across the table. "Need was to act quickly, for even this vile newspaper cut is a likeness of you. One glance from Jean, which may come at any moment later, Helena, and your parole will be needless further."

"I confess I wished to test you. It was wrong, foolish of me, Harry."

"You have been tested no less, Helena, to-night. And I have found you a gentle high-born lady, as I had always known you to be. *Noblesse oblige*, my dear, and you have proved it so to-night. Any time from now until twelve you need no more than raise a finger—I might not even see you do so—and you might go free. Why do you not?"

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"If the woodcock is as good as the canvasback," was her somewhat irrelevant reply, "I shall call the evening a success, after all."

But Helena scarcely more than tasted her bird, and pushed back after a time the broiled mushroom which Jean offered her gently.

"Does not your appetite remain?" I inquired. "Come, you must not break Jean's heart doubly."

She only pushed back her chair. "I am sorry," said she, "but I want to go back to the boat."

"Back to the boat! You astonish me. I thought escape from the *Belle Hélène* was the one wish of your heart these days."

"And so it is."

"Then, Helena, why not escape here and now?"

"What do you mean?"

"I do not mean for you to break your parole—I know you too well for that. But give me additional parole, my dear girl. Give me your word. Say that one word. Then we can rise here and announce to Mr. Davidson and all the world and its newspapers that no crime has been done and only a honeymoon has been begun. Come, Helena, all the world loves a lover. All New Orleans will love us if you will raise your finger and say the word."

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I looked toward her. Her head was bent and tears were dropping from her eyes, tears faithfully concealed by her kerchief. But she said no word to me, and at her silence my own heart sank—sank until my courage was quite gone, until I felt the return of a cold brutality. Still I endeavored to be gentle with one who deserved naught of gentleness.

"Do not hurry, Helena," I said. "We can return when you like. But the salad—and the coffee! And see, you have not touched your wine."

"Take me back," she said, her voice low. "I hate you. Till the end of the world I'll hate you."

"If I could believe that, Helena, it would matter nothing to me to go a mile farther on any voyage, a foot farther to shield myself or you."

"Take me back," she said to me again. "I want to go to Aunt Lucinda."

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"Jean," said I, a moment later when he reappeared. "Mademoiselle wishes to see one more ice-box in the kitchen. We are in search of something. May we go again?"

Jean spread out his arms in surprise, but pushed open the green door. We thus passed, shielded by our screen and unobserved. Once within, I grasped Jean firmly by the shoulder and pressed a ten dollar bill into his hand, with other money for the reckoning.

"Take this, Jean, for yourself. We do not care to pass out at the front, for certain reasons—do you comprehend? It is of Mademoiselle."

"It is of Mademoiselle? Ah, depend upon me. What can I do?"

"This. Leave us here, and we will walk about. Meantime go out the back way to the alley, Jean, and have a taxicab ready at the mouth of the alley. Come quick when it is arranged and let us go, because we must go at once. At another time, Jean, we will return, I trust more happily. Then we shall order such a dinner as will take Luigi himself a day to prepare, my friend!"

"For Mademoiselle?"

"For Madame, Jean, as I hope." And now I showed him the portrait on the front page of the newspaper he had brought me. "Quick," I said, "and since you have been faithful, some day I will explain all this to you—with Madame, as I hope."

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CHAPTER XXVI

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IN WHICH WE BURN ALL BRIDGES

"**B**UT, Monsieur," began Jean, a few moments later, as he entered from the alley door.

"*Eh bien?* What then, Jean?" I demanded hastily, already leading Helena toward the door.

"This! This!" And he waved in my face a copy of the same paper which had lain on our table. "The streets are full of it. And I see, I behold—I recognize! It is Mademoiselle—that is to be Madame!"

My face flushed hotly. "As I hope, Jean." That was all I said. "Now, please, out of our way. Is the taxi there?"

He stepped aside. I heard his voice, eager, apologetic, but knew that now no time must be lost. Vague sounds of voices came to us from the main room of the café, ordinarily so quiet. I felt, rather than knew, that soon the news would be about town. The throb of the taxi was music to my ears when I found it in the dark.

"Stop for nothing," said I to the driver, as I closed the door. "Slip K, on the river-front, below the warehouses. Stop at the car tracks where they turn. And go fast—I must catch a boat that is just leaving."

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"What boat—from there—are you sure, sir?" asked he, touching his cap.

"Of course I'm sure. Go on! Don't stop to talk, man!"

He made no answer to this, but turned to his wheel. We shot out into Royal Street, turned down it, spun into a narrow way past the old Cathedral, crossed Jackson Square in the full moonlight, passed the Old Market, and threaded dark and dirty thoroughfares parallel to the river. None sought to stay us, though many paused in the gently squalid life of that section, to look after our churning car, a thing not usual there so far from depot or usual landing place.

Helena sat silent, looking fixedly ahead through the glass at the driver's back; nor did I find words myself. In truth, I was as one now carried forward on the wings of adventure itself, with small plans, and no duty beyond taking each situation as it might later come. A dull feeling that I had sinned beyond forgiveness came upon me, a conviction that my brutality to one thus innocent and tender had passed all limits of atonement. She could never forgive me now, I felt; and what was almost as intolerable in the reflection, I could not forgive myself, could not find any specious argument longer to justify myself in thus harrying the sensibilities of a woman such as this one who now sat beside me in this mad midnight errand, proud, pale and silent. Slowly I sought to adjust myself to the thought of defeat, to the feeling that my presumption now had o'er-leaped itself. Yes, I must say good-by to her, must release her; and this time, as I well knew, forever.

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But, though I turned toward her half a dozen times in these few minutes, she made no response to what she must have known was my demand upon her attention. I gathered her gloves for her, and her flowers, but she only took them, her lips parting in courtesy, not in warmth, and no sound came to my ears, straining always to hear her voice, a pleasant sound in a world of discords ever. I even touched her arm, suddenly, impulsively. "Helena!" But she, not knowing that I meant to give her liberty, though over a dead heart, shrank as though I had added physical insult to my verbal taunts. Anyway I turned, I was fast in the net of circumstance, fanged by the springs of misapprehension.... Well, then, but one thing remained. She had said it was a man's place to fight, and so now it would be! I must go on, and take my punishment until justice had been done. Justice and my own success I no longer confused in my own mind; but in my soul was the grim resolution that justice should first be done to one human soul, even though that chanced to be my own. After that, I should get her again in the hands of her friends and myself; indeed, disappear beyond all seeking, in parts of the world best known to myself. If I myself were fair, why should not fairness as well be given to me?

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And with no more than this established, and nothing definite in plan, either, for the present, I mechanically opened the door of the taxi for her when the driver pulled up and bent a querying face about to ask whether or not we now were opposite Slip K. I noted that he did not at once drive away. Evidently he sat for some moments gazing after us as we disappeared in the gloom of the river-front. His tale, as I afterward learned, enabled the morning papers to print a conclusive story describing the abduction of Miss Emory and her undoubted retention on the stolen yacht, which, after lying at or near New Orleans, some time that night, once more mysteriously had disappeared.

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No doubt remained, according to this new story, that the supplies put aboard at Slip K by Lavallier and Thibodeau had gone to this very craft, the stolen yacht! With this came many wild and confusing accounts and descriptions, including a passionate interview with Mr. Calvin Davidson, of New York, who had announced his intention of overhauling these ruffians, at any cost whatsoever; and much counsel to the city officials, mingled with the bosom-beating of one enterprising journal which declared it had put in commission a yacht of its own, under charge of two of its ablest reporters, who had instructions to take up the chase and to remain out until the mystery had been solved and this beautiful young woman had been rescued from her horrible situation and restored again to her home. There were more portraits of Helena—furnished, most like, from Cal Davidson's collection; one also of Aunt Lucinda (from a photograph of far earlier days); and lastly, a half-page portrait of myself, the unnamed ruffian who was the undoubted leader in this abduction—the portrait being drawn by a staff artist "from description of eye-witnesses." As I later saw this portrait I rejoiced that I was long ignorant of its existence: and had I known that night that yonder chauffeur to whom I had given undue largess had such treason as that portrait in his soul, I know not what I might have done with him.

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But of this misinformation, of course, I was at the time ignorant, as was all the city ignorant of the truth. What happened was otherwise, nor was the truth learned even by the great metropolitan journals of the North, which now recognized the existence of a "big story", and added their keener noses to the trail. The great fact overlooked by them all was that they pursued no criminal, but a man of education, I may fairly say of brains.

In my law practise many baffling cases came to me, because I most liked, precisely, that sort of case. Once, for instance, a family of my town well-nigh was disrupted by a series of anonymous letters, done in typewriting, accusing an honorable man of dishonorable conduct. The letters left the man's wife in an agony of loyalty and suspicion alike. He brought me the letters, and to me the case was simple from the start. I got the repair slips of a certain typewriter house, and compared them until I found a machine with a bent letter M—knowing as I did that each machine has its own individuality as ineradicable and as inescapable as any personal handwriting. So at

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last I went to a small outlying city, and going into a business house there asked to see the stenographer in private. "My dear Miss —," I said to her, "why do you persist in sending these letters to Mr. —?" I laid them before her, and she wept and confessed, very naturally.

That was merely jealousy of a discharged employee; and it was easy as a case—easier I always thought, than the probate case I won over a contested signature charge filed by certain heirs under a will. In this case I merely went to the dead man's earlier home and learned his history. Time out of mind he, a thrifty and respected German, had held some petty county office or other; and by going over old county warrants and receipts signed in forty years by my man, I discovered what I already knew—that a man's signature changes many times during his life, especially if he begins life as an uncultured immigrant and advances to a fair business success later in his life: so that his later signatures on records proved his signature in his will.

Again, liking these simple mysteries, I had long ago learned to laugh at the old and foolish assertion that murder will out, that not the most skilful criminal can long conceal a capital crime. It is not true. No one knows how many murders and other crimes go unsolved or even unknown. The trouble with murderers, as I knew well enough, was that they lacked mentality. And often I said to myself that were it in my heart to kill a man, I assuredly could do so, and all my life escape unsuspected of the crime.

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It may be that my fondness for these less obvious things in the law had rendered me a trifle different from my fellow men. I could never approach any question in life without wanting to go all about it and to the bottom and top, like a cooper with his barrel. I was thus actuated, without doubt, in my relations years since with Helena Emory—I knew the shrewdness and accuracy of my own trained mind. I confess I exulted in the infallible, relentless logic of my mind, a mind able and well trained, especially well trained in reason and argument. So, when I put the one great brief of all my life before Helena, my splendid argument why should she love me, I did so, at first, in the conviction that it must be convincing. Had I not myself worked it out in each detail, had not my calm, cool, accurate reason guarded each portal? Was it, indeed, not a perfect brief—that one I held in my first lost case—the lost case which sent me out of my profession, left me a stranded hulk of a man?

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But then, when these two pirate youngsters had found me and touched me with the living point of some new flame of life, so that I knew a vast world existed beyond the nature of the intellect, the old ways clung to me, after all. Even as I swore to lay hold on youth and on adventure (and on love, if, in sooth, that might be for me now), I could not fight as yet wholly bare of the old weapons that had so long fitted my hand. So, even on that very morning when we set forth from my farm to be pirates, my mind ran back to its old cunning, and I recalled my earlier boast to myself that if I ever cared to be a criminal I knew I could be able to cover my tracks.

Those writing-folk, therefore, who now wasted thousands of dollars in pursuit of trace and trail of Black Bart, wealthy ex-lawyer, knew nothing of their man, and guessed nothing of his caliber or of his methods. They even failed to look in plain sight for their trail maker. And having done so, they forgot that water leaves no trail. Yet that simple thought had come to my mind as I had sat at breakfast in my own house, some weeks before this time! Even then I had planned all this.

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Absorbed as I had been in this pursuit of Helena, baffled as I had been by her, unhappy as I now was over her own unhappiness, fierce as was my love for her, still and notwithstanding, some trace of my old self clung to me even now when, her hand on my arm, I guided Helena in silence over the creaking planks of the dock, and saw, at last, dim beyond the edge, the boom of the Mississippi's tawny flood, rolling on and onward to the sea. Here was a task, a problem, a chase, an endeavor, an adventure! To it, I was impelled by my old training; into it I was thrust by all these fevers of the blood. Even though she did not love me, she was woman ... in the dark air of night, it seemed to me, I could smell the faint maddening fragrance of her hair.... No. It was too late! I would not release her. I would go on, now!

And with this resolution, formed when I caught sight of the passing flood, I found a sudden peace and calm, and so knew that I was fit for my adventure as yon other boy, L'Olonnois, was for his.

I paused at the edge of the wharf, at the side of our boat. We still were arm in arm, still silent, though she must have felt the beating of my heart.

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"Helena," I whispered, "yonder, one step, and your parole is over. Here it is not. That boat, just astern, is the one in which Cal Davidson chased us all the way from Natchez, in which I chased him all the way from Dubuque. His men do not know we are here, nor does he as yet. Now, what is it that you wish to do?"

She stood silent for some time, tightening her wrap at the throat against the river damp, and made no answer, though her gaze took in the dark hull of the low-lying craft made fast below us. When at last:

"One thing," she began, "I will not do."

"What is it?" I asked. We spoke low, but I well knew my men were aware of our coming.

"I shall ask no favor of you." And as she spoke, she stepped lightly on the rubbered deck of the *Belle Helène*.

"Halt! Who goes there?" called the hoarse voice of Jean Lafitte, the faithful: and I knew the joy of the commander feeling that loyalty is his.

"'Tis I, Black Bart," I answered, full and clear. "Cast off, my friends!"

At once the *Belle Helène* was full of activity. Peterson I met at the wheel. I heard the bells jangle below. I saw Jean, active as a cat, ready at the mooring-stub, waiting for the line to ease. Then with my own hand I threw on every light of the *Belle Helène*, so that she blazed, in the power of six thousand candles, search-light and all: so that what had been a passing web of gloom now became a rippling river. The warehouses started into light and shade, the shadows of the wharf fled, the decks of the grimy craft alongside became open of all their secrets.

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And now, revealed full in the flood of light as she stood at the side portal, Helena did what I had not planned. Freed of her parole she was—and she had asked no favor of me—so she had right to make attempt to escape; and I gently stepped before her even as Jean cast off and sprang aboard: and as I heard L'Olonnois' voice imperatively demanding silence of the pounding at the after cabin door. All at once, I heard what Helena heard—the rattle of wheels on the stone flagging of the street beyond. And then I saw her fling back her cloak and stand with cupped hands. Her voice was high, clear and unwavering, such voice as a pirate's bride should have, fearless and bold.

"Ahoy, there! Help! Help!" she cried.

Some sort of shout came from the street, we knew not from whom. A noise of an opening hatch came from the *Sea Rover* at our stern, and a man's tousled head came into view.

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"What's goin' on here," he demanded, as quaveringly as querulously.

I made no answer, but saw our bows crawl out and away, felt the sob of the screws, the arm of the river also, and knew a vast and pleasing content with life.

"L'Olonnois!" I called through the megaphone.

"Aye, aye, Sir!" I heard his piping rejoinder.

"Cast loose the stern-chaser and fire her at yon varlet if he makes a move." I knew our deck cannon was loaded with nothing more deadly than newspapers, but I also knew that valor feeds on action. Not that I had given orders to fire on the world in general. So, I confess, I was somewhat surprised, soon after the shout of approval which greeted my command, to hear the air rent by the astonishing reverberation of our Long Tom, which rolled like thunder all along the river-front, breaking into a thousand echoes in the night.

I heard the patter of feet along the deck, and had sight of Jean Lafitte tugging at a halyard. Not content with our defiance of law and order, he must needs break out the Jolly Rover with its skull and cross-bones. And as we swung swiftly out into midstream, ablaze in light from bow to stern, ghostlike in our swiftness and the silence of our splendid engines, I had reason to understand all the descriptive writing which, as I later learned, greeted the defiant departure of this pirate craft and its ruffian crew. Thus I bade all the world come and take from me what I had taken for my own.

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I stepped to the wheel with Peterson, expecting to find him pale in consternation. To my surprise he was calm, save for a new glitter in his eye.

"There's nothing on the river can touch her," said he, as he picked up his first channel light and called for more speed. "Let 'em come!"

A sudden recklessness had caught us all, it seemed, the old spirit of lawless man breaking the leash of custom. I shared it—with exultation I knew I shared it with these others. The lust of youth for adventure held us all, and the years were as naught.

I turned now to find Helena, and met L'Olonnois, his face beaming.

"Wasn't that a peach of a shot?" said he. "It would of blew yon varlet out of the water, if I'd had anything to load with except just them marbles. Are you looking for Auntie Helen? She has just went below."

CHAPTER XXVII

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IN WHICH WE REACH THE SPANISH MAIN

IT was as Peterson had said—nothing on the river could touch the *Belle Helène*. And it also was as I had not said but had thought—the water left no trail. By daylight we were far below the old battle-field, far below the old forts, far below La Hache, and among the channels of the great estuary whose marshes spread for scores of miles on either hand impenetrably. Quarantine lay yonder, the Southwest Passage opened here; and on beyond, a stone's throw now for a vessel logging our smooth speed, rolled the open sea. And still there rose behind us the smoke of no pursuing craft, nor did any seek to bar our way. So far as I knew, the country had not been warned by any wire down-stream from the city. We saw to it that no calling points were passed in daylight. As for the chance market shooter paddling his log pirogue to his shooting ground in the dawn, or the occasional sportsman of some ducking club likewise engaged, they saluted us gaily

enough, but without suspicion. Even had they known, I doubt whether they would have informed on us, for all the world loves a lover, and these Southerners themselves now traveled waters long known to adventure and romance.

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So at last, as the sun rose, we saw the last low marshy points widen, flatten and recede, and beyond the outlying towers of the lights caught sight of lazy liners crawling in, and felt the long throb of the great Gulf's pulse, and sniffed the salt of the open sea.

I had not slept, nor had Peterson, nor had Williams, my engineer. My men never demurred when hard duty was asked of them, but put manly pride above union hours, I fancy, resolved to show me they could endure as long as I. And I asked none to endure more. Moreover, even my pirate crew was seized of some new zest. I question whether either Jean Lafitte or Henri L'Olonnois slept, save in his day clothing, that night of our run from New Orleans; for now, just as we swept free of the last point, so that we might call that gulf which but now had been river, I heard a sound at my elbow as I bent over a chart, and turned to see both my associates, the collars of their sweaters turned up against the damp chill of the morning.

"Where are we now, Black Bart?" asked Jean Lafitte. I could see on his face the mystic emotion of youth, could see his face glorified in the uplifting thrill of this mystery of the sea and the dawn and the unknown which now enveloped us. "Where are we now?" he asked; but it was as though he feared he slept and dreamed, and that this wondrous dream of the dawn might rudely be broken by some command summoning him back to life's routine.

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"Surely your soul should tell you, Jean Lafitte," said I, "for yonder, as I may say, now rolls the Spanish Main. Its lift is now beneath our feel. You are home again, Jean Lafitte. Yonder are the bays and bayous and channels in the marshes, where your boats used to hide. And there, L'Olonnois, my hearty, with you, I was used to ride the open sea, toward the Isles of Spain, waiting for the galleons to come."

"I know, I know!" said my blue-eyed pirate softly and reverently; and so true was all his note to that inner struggling soul that lay both in his bosom and my own, that I ceased to lament for my sin in so allowing modern youth to be misled, and turned to him with open hand, myself also young with the undying youth of the world.

"Many a time, Black Bart," said L'Olonnois solemnly, "have we crowded on full sail when the lookout gave the word of a prize a-comin', while we laid to in some hidden channel over yonder."

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"Aye, aye, many a time, many a time, my hearty."

"—An' loosed the bow-chaser an' shot away her foremast."

"—At almost the first shot, L'Olonnois."

"—So that her top hamper came down in a run an' swung her broadside to our batteries."

"—And we poured in a hail of chain-shot and set her hull afire."

"—And then launched the boats for the boardin' parties," broke in Jean Lafitte, standing on one leg in his excitement; "—an' so made her a prize. An' then we made 'em walk the plank amid scenes of wassail—all but the fair captives."

I fell silent. But L'Olonnois' blue eyes were glowing. "An' them we surrounded with every rude luxury," said he, "finally retiring to the fortresses of the hidden channels of the coast, where we defied all pursuit. This looks like one of them places, though I may be mistook," he added judiciously. I shuddered to see how Jimmy's grammar had deteriorated under my care.

"Yes," said I, "we are now near to several of those places, scenes of our bold deeds. The south coast of Louisiana lies on our right, cut by a thousand bays and channels deep enough for hiding a pinnacle or even a stout schooner. Yonder, Jean, is Baratavia Bay, your old home. Here, under my finger, is Côte Blanche. Here comes the Chafalay, through its new channel—all this floating hyacinth, all this red water, comes from Texas soil, from the Red River, now discharging in new mouths. Yonder, west of the main boat channels that make toward the railways far inland, lie the salt reefs and the live-oak islands. Here is the long key they now call Marsh Island. It was not an island until you, stout Jean Lafitte, ordered the Yankee Morrison to take a hundred black slaves with spades and cut a channel across the neck, so that you could get through more quickly from the Spanish Main to the hidden bayous where your boats lay concealed—until the wagons from Iberia could come and traffic at the causeway for your wares. Do you not remember it well?"

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"Aye, that I do, Black Bart!" said he; and I was sure he did.

"And yonder channel, once just wide enough for a yawl, is to-day washed out wide enough for a fleet to pass through—though not deep enough. In that fact now lies our safety."

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"How do you mean, Black Bart?" demanded he.

"Why, that all this water over yonder west of us is so shallow that it takes a wise oyster boat to get through to Morgan City. The shrimpers who reap these waters, even the market shooting schooners who carry canvasbacks out of these feeding beds in the marshes, have to know the tides and the winds as well, and if one be wrong the boat goes aground on these wide shoals. Less than a fathom here and here and here on the chart soundings—less than that if an offshore wind blows."

"You mean we'll go aground?"

"No, I mean that any pursuer very likely would. The glass is falling now. Soon the wind will rise. If it comes offshore for five hours—and it will wait for five hours before it does come offshore—we shall be safe, inside, at one of your old haunts, Jean Lafitte; and back of us will lie fifty miles of barrier—yon varlet may well have a care."

"Yon varlet don't know where we have went," commented L'Olonnois in his alarming grammar.

"No, that is true. The water leaves no trail. Most Northerners go to Florida for the winter, and not to these marshes. Methinks they will have a long chase." [Pg 264]

"An' here," said Jean Lafitte, with much enthusiasm, "we kin lie concealed an' dart out on passin' craft that strike our fancy as prizes."

"We could," said I, "but we will not."

"Why not?" He seemed chilled by my reply.

"Oh, we shall not need to," I hastened to explain. "We have everything we need for a long stay here. We can live chiefly by hunting and fishing for a month or so, until——"

"Until the fair captive has gave her consent," broke in L'Olonnois, also with enthusiasm.

"Yes," said I, endeavoring a like enthusiasm. "Or, at least, until we find it needful to go inland to one of the live-oak islands. There are houses there. I know some of the planters over yonder."

"Let's make them places scenes of rapeen!" suggested Jean Lafitte anxiously. "They must have gold and jewels. Besides, I bear it well in mind, many a time have I and my stout crew buried chests of treasure on them islands. We c'd dig 'em up. Maybe them folks has a ready dug 'em up. Then why not search their strongholds with a stout party of our own hardy bullies, Black Bart?"

"No," said I mildly; "for several reasons I think it best for my hardy bullies to go and eat some breakfast and then go to sleep. If we go into the live-oak heights above Côte Blanche, I think we'll only ask for salt. I am almost sure, for instance, that my friend Edouard Manning, of Bon Secours plantation, would give me salt if I asked it. He has done so before. Beshrew me, it should go hard with him if he refused." [Pg 265]

"There's a barrel an' eight boxes o' sacks o' salt aboard," said the practical Jean Lafitte. "What'd you want so much salt for?"

"'Twas yon varlet's idea," said I, "when he laid in the ship's stores. But I had a mind that, to my taste, no salt is better than that made by the Manning plantation mines. But now," I added, "to your breakfast, after you have bathed."

"Peterson," said I, after they had left me, and pointing to the chart, "lay her west by south. I want to run inside the Timbalier Shoals."

"Very shallow there, Mr. Harry—just look at the soundings, sir."

"That's why I want to go. Hold on till you get the light at this channel here, southeast of the Côte Blanche. You'll get a lot of floating hyacinth, but do what you can. I'll take my trick, as soon as I get a bite to eat. By night we'll be over our hurry and we can all arrange for better sleep." [Pg 266]

"And then—I—ahem! Mr. Harry, what are your plans?" He was just a trifle troubled over all this.

"My plans, Peterson," said I, "are to anchor off Timbalier to-night, to anchor in this channel of Côte Blanche to-morrow—and to eat breakfast now." Saying which I left him gloomily shaking his head, but laying her now west by south as I had made the course.

"The glass is falling mighty fast, Mr. Harry," he called over his shoulder to me by way of encouragement.

CHAPTER XXVIII

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IN WHICH IS CERTAIN POLITE CONVERSATION

MY boy had ironed my trousers, that is to say, the trousers I had given him the year previous, and which he now had loaned to me, my extremity being greater than his own. He had laundered my collars—a most useful boy, my China boy. I had, moreover, delving in Cal Davidson's wardrobe, discovered yet another waistcoat, if possible more radiant even than the one with pink stripes, for that it was cross hatched with bars of pale pea green and mauve—I know not from what looms he obtained these wondrous fabrics. Thus bravely attired after breakfast, just before luncheon, indeed, it was, I felt emboldened to call upon the captive ladies once more. With much shame I owned that I had not seen Auntie Lucinda for nearly two days—and with much trepidation, also, for I knew not what new bitterness her soul, meantime, might have distilled into venom against my coming.

I knocked at the door of the ladies' cabin, the aftermost suite on the boat, and, at first, had no

answer. The door, naturally, on a boat of this size, would be low, the roof rising above decks no higher than one's waist; and as I bent to knock again, the door of the companion stairs was suddenly thrust open against my face, and framed in the opening thus made, there appeared the august visage of Auntie Lucinda herself.

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"Well, sir-r-r-r!" said she, after a time, regarding me sternly. I can by no means reproduce the awfulness of her "r's."

"Yes, madam?" I replied mildly, holding my nose, which had been smitten by the door.

She made no answer, but stood, a basilisk in mien.

"I just came, my dear Mrs. Daniver," I began, "to ask you——"

"And time you did, sir-r-r-r! I was just coming to ask *you*——"

"And time you did, my dear Mrs. Daniver—I have missed you so much, these several days. So I just called to ask for your health."

"You need not trouble about my health!"

"But I do, I do, madam! I give you my word, I was awake all night, thinking of—of your neuralgia. Neuralgia is something—something fierce, in a manner of speech—if one has it in the morning, my dear Mrs. Daniver."

"Don't 'dear Mrs. Daniver' me! I'm not your dear Mrs. Daniver at all."

"Then whose dear Mrs. Daniver are you, my dear Mrs. Daniver?" I rejoined most impudently.

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"If the poor dear Admiral were alive," said she, sniffing, "you should repent those words!"

"I wish the poor dear Admiral were here," said I. "I should like to ask an abler sailorman than Peterson what to do, with the glass falling as it is, and the holding ground none too good for an anchor. I thought it just as well to come and tell you to prepare for the worst."

"The worst—what do you mean?" She now advanced three steps upward, so that her shoulders were above the cabin door. Almost mechanically she took my hand.

"The worst just now is nothing worse than an orange with ice, my dear Mrs. Daniver. And I only wanted you to come out on deck with—Miss Emory—and see how blue the sea is."

She advanced another step, being fond of an iced orange at eleven-thirty. But now she paused. "My niece is resting," said she, feeling her way.

"No, I am not," I heard a voice say. Inadvertently I turned and almost perforce glanced down the cabin stair. Helena, in a loose morning wrap of pink, was lying on the couch. She now cast aside the covering of eider-down, and shaking herself once, sprang up the stairs, so that her dark hair appeared under Auntie Lucinda's own. Slowly that obstacle yielded, and both finally stood on the after deck. The soft wind caught the dark tendrils of Helena's hair. With one hand she pushed at them. The other caught her loose robe about her softly outlined figure.

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"Helena!" remarked her aunt, frowning.

"I want an orange," remarked Miss Emory, addressing the impartial universe, and looking about for John.

"And shall have it. But," said I, finding a soft rug at the cabin-top, "I think perhaps you may find the air cool. Allow me." I handed them chairs, and with a hand that trembled a bit put the soft covering over Helena's shoulders. She drew it close about her with one hand, and her dark hair flowing about her cheeks, found her orange with the other when John came with his tray.

It was a wondrous morning in early fall. Never had a southern sky been more blue, never the little curling waves saucier on the Gulf. The air was mild, just fresh enough for zest. Around us circled many great white gulls. Across the flats sailed a long slow line of pelicans; and out yonder, tossing up now and then like a black floating blanket, I could see a great raft of wild duck, taking their midday rest in safety. All the world seemed a million miles away. Care did not exist. And—so intimate and swiftly comprehensive is the human soul, especially the more primal soul of woman—already and without words, this young woman seemed to feel the less need of conversation, to recognize the slackening rein of custom. So that a rug and a wrapper—granted always also an aunt—seemed to her not amiss as full equipment for reception of a morning caller.

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"A very good orange," said she at last.

"Yes," said her aunt promptly; "I'm sure we ought to thank Mr. Davidson for them. He was *such* a good provider."

"Except in waistcoats," I protested, casually indicating his latest contribution to my wardrobe. "Quantity, yes, I grant that, but as to quality, never! But why speak ill of the absent, especially regarding matters of an earlier and bygone day? Yon varlet no longer exists for us—we no longer exist for him. We have passed, as two ships pass yonder in the channel. I know not what he may be doing now, unless carrying roses to Miss Sally Byington. Certainly he can not know that I, his hated rival, am safe from all pursuit behind the Timbalier Shoals, and carrying oranges to a young lady in my belief almost as beautiful as the beautiful Sally."

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Aunt Lucinda turned upon me a baleful eye. "You grow flippant as well as rude, sir! As though you knew anything of that Byington girl. I doubt if you ever saw her."

"Oh, yes—last night. Miss Emory and I both saw her, last night, at Luigi's. As for yon varlet's providing, while I would not too much criticize a man whose waistcoats I wear even under protest, it is but fair to say that these oranges and all the fresh things taken on at New Orleans, are of my providing, and not his. He was so busy providing other things for Miss Sally Byington."

"I don't think she is so beautiful," said Helena, ceasing with her orange. "Her color is so full. Very likely she'll be blowsy in a few years."

"How can you say so!" I rebuked, with much virtuous indignation. But at the time I felt my heart leap at sight of Helena herself, the lines of her slim graceful figure defined even under the rug she had drawn about her neck, the wind-blown little neck curls and the long fuller lock now plain against her fresh face, blown pale by the cool salt air that sang above us gently. I could no longer even feign an interest in any other woman in the world. So very unconsciously I chuckled to myself, and Helena heard me.

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"You don't think so yourself!" she remarked.

"Think what?"

"That she is so beautiful."

"No, I do not. Not as beautiful as——"

"Look at the funny bird!" said Helena suddenly. Yet I could see nothing out of the ordinary in the sea-bird she pointed out, skimming and skipping close by.

"Sir," demanded Aunt Lucinda, also suddenly, "how long is this to last?"

"You mean the orange-dish, Mrs. Daniver?" I queried politely. "As long as you like. I also am a good provider, although to no credit, as it seems."

"You know I do not mean the oranges, sir. I mean this whole foolish business. You are putting yourself liable to the law."

"So did Jean Lafitte, over yonder in Barataria," said I, "but he lived to a ripe old age and became famous. Why not I as well?"

"—You are ruining those two boys. I weep to think of our poor Jimmy—why, he lords it about as though he owned the boat. And such language!"

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"He shall own a part of her if he likes, if all comes out well," said I. "And as for Jean Lafitte, Junior, rarely have I seen a boy of better judgment, cooler mind, or more talent in machinery. He shall have an education, if he likes; and I know he will like."

"It is wonderful what a waistcoat will do for the imagination," remarked Helena, wholly casually. I turned to her.

"I presume it is Mr. Davidson who is to be the fairy prince," added Aunt Lucinda.

"No, myself," I spoke quietly. Aunt Lucinda for once was almost too unmistakable in her sniff of scorn.

"I admit it seems unlikely," said I. "Still, this is a wonderful age. Who can say what may be gained by the successful pirate!"

"You act one!" commented Aunt Lucinda. "It is brutal. It is outrageous. It is abominable. No gentleman would be guilty of such conduct."

"I grant you," said I, but flushed under the thrust. "But I am no longer a gentleman where that conflicts with the purpose of my piracy. I come of a family, after all, madam, who often have had their way in piracy."

"And left a good useful business to go away to idleness! And now speak of doing large things! With whose money, pray?"

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"You are very direct, my dear Mrs. Daniver," said I mildly, "but the catechism is not yet so far along as that."

"But why did you do this crazy thing?"

"To marry Helena, and with your free consent as her next friend," said I, swiftly turning to her. "Since I must be equally frank. Please don't go!" I said to Helena, for now, very pale, she was starting toward the cabin door. But she paid no heed to me, and passed.

"So now you have it, plainly," said I to Mrs. Daniver.

She turned on me a face full of surprise and anger mingled. "How dare you, after all that has passed? You left the girl years ago. You have no business, no fortune, not even the girl's consent. I'll not have it! I love her." The good woman's lips trembled.

"So do I," said I gently. "That is why we all are here. It is because of this madness called love. Ah, Mrs. Daniver, if you only knew! If I could make you know! But surely you do know, you, too, have

loved. Come, may you not love a lover, even one like myself? I'll be good to Helena. Believe me, she is my one sacred charge in life. I love her. Not worthy of her, no—but I love her."

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"That's too late." But I saw her face relent at what she heard. "I have other plans. And you should have told her what you have told me."

"Ah, have I not?" But then I suddenly remembered that, by some reversal of my logical mind, here I was, making love to Auntie Lucinda, whom I did not love, whereas in the past I had spent much time in mere arguing with Helena, whom I did love.

"I'm not sure that I've ever made it plain enough to her, that's true," said I slowly. "But if she gives me the chance, I'll spend all my life telling her that very thing. That, since you ask me, is why we all are here—so that I may tell Helena, and you, and all the world, that very thing. I love her, very much."

"But suppose she does not love you?" demanded Mrs. Daniver. "I'll say frankly, I've advised her against you all along. She ought to marry a man of some station in the world."

"With money?"

"You put it baldly, but—yes."

"Would that be enough—money?" I asked.

"No. That is not fair—"

"—Only honor between us now."

"It would go for to-day. Because, after all, money means power, and all of us worship power, you know—success."

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"And is that success—to have money, and then more money—and to go on, piling up more money—to have more summer places, and more yachts like this, and more city houses, and more money, money, money—yes, yes, that's American, but is it all, is it right, is it the real ambition for a man! And does that bring a woman happiness?"

"What would you do if you had your money back?" asked Mrs. Daniver. "You had a fortune from your father."

"What would I do?" I rejoined hotly. "What I did do—settle every claim against his honor as much as against his estate—judge his honor by my own standards, and not his. Pay my debts—pay all my debts. It's independence, madam, and not money that I want. It's freedom, Mrs. Daniver, that I want, and not money. So far as it would be the usual money, buying almost nothing that is worth owning, I give you my solemn oath I don't care enough for it to work for it! So far as it would help me be a man, help me to build my own character, help me build manhood and character in my country—yes, I'd like it for that. But if money were the price of Helena herself, I'd not ask for it. The man who would court a girl with his money and not his manhood—the woman who marries for money, or the man who does—what use has God Almighty got for either of them? It's men and women and things worth doing who make this world, Mrs. Daniver. I love her, so much, so clearly, so wholly, that I think it must be right. And since you've asked me, I've taken my man's chance, just to get you two alone, where I could talk it over with you both."

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"It's been talked over, Harry," said she, rather uncomfortably. "Why not let the poor child alone? Has it occurred to you how terribly hard this is for her?"

"Yes. But she can end it easily. Tell me, is she engaged to Davidson?"

"What difference?"

"None."

"Why ask, then?"

"Tell me!"

"Well then, no, not so far as I know."

"You are sorry?"

"I had hope for it. It was all coming on so handsomely. At Natchez he was—he was, well, you know—"

"Almost upon the point?"

"Quite so. I thought, I believed that between there and—"

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"Say between there and Baton Rouge—"

"Well, yes—"

"He would come to the main point?"

"Yes."

"And he did not?"

"You can best answer. It was at Natchez that you and those ruffianly boys ran off with Mr. Davidson's boat!"

"That's all, your Honor," I remarked. "Take the witness, Mr. Davidson!"

"But what right you have to cross-question me, I don't know!" commented Mrs. Daniver, addressing a passing sea-gull, and pulling down the corners of her mouth most forbiddingly.

"My disused and forgotten art comes back to me once in a while, my dear Mrs. Daniver," I answered exultantly. "Pray, do you notice how beautiful all the world is this morning? The sky is so wonderful, the sea so adorable, don't you see?"

"I see that we are a long way from home. Tell me, are these sharks here?"

"Oodles," said I, "and very large. No use trying to swim away. And yonder coast is inhabited only by hostile cannibals. Baratavia itself, over yonder, is to-day no more than a shrimp-fishing village, part Chinese, part Greek and part Sicilian. The railway runs far to the north, and the ship channel is far to the east. No one comes here. It is days to Galveston, westward, and between lies a maze of interlocking channels, lakes and bayous, where boats once hid and may hide again. Once we unship our flag mast, and we shall lie so saucy and close that behind a bank of rushes we never would be seen. And we do not burn coal, and so make no smoke. Here is my chosen hiding ground. In short, madam, you are in my power!"

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"But really, how far——"

"Since you ask, I will answer. Yonder, to the westward, a bayou comes into Côte Blanche. Follow that bayou, eighty miles from here, and you come to the house of my friend, Edouard Manning, the kindest man in Louisiana, which is to say much. I had planned to have the wedding there."

"Your effrontery amazes me—I doubt your sanity!" said Aunt Lucinda, horrified. "But what good will all this do you?"

She had a certain bravery all her own, after all. Almost, I was on the point of telling her the truth; which was that I had during the long night resolved once more to offer my hand to Helena, and if she now refused me, to accept my fate. I would torture her no more. No, if now she were still resolute, it was my purpose to sail up yonder bayou, to land at the Manning plantation, and there to part forever from Helena and all my friends. I knew corners of the world far enough that none might find me.

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But I did not tell Aunt Lucinda this. Instead, I made no answer; and we both sat looking out over the rippling gulf, silent for some time. I noted now a faint haze on the horizon inshore, like distant cloud-banks, not yet distinct but advancing. Aunt Lucinda, it seemed, was watching something else through the ship's glasses which she had picked up near by.

"What is that, over yonder?" asked she—"it looks like a wreck of some kind."

"It is a wreck—that of a lighthouse," I told her. "It is lying flat on its side, a poor attitude for a lighthouse. The great tidal wave of the gulf storm, four years ago, destroyed it. We are now, to tell the truth, at the edge of that district which causes the Weather Bureau much uncertainty—a breeding ground of the tropical cyclones that break between the Indies and this coast."

"And you bring us here?"

"Only to pass to the inner channels, madam, where we should be safer in case of storm. To-night, we shall anchor in the lee of a long island, where the lighthouse is still standing, in its proper position, and where we shall be safe as a church."

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"Sharks! Storms! Shipwrecks!" moaned she.

—"And pirates," added I gently, "and cannibals. Yes, madam, your plight is serious, and I know not what may come of it all—I wish I did."

"Well, no good will come of it, one thing sure," said Aunt Lucinda, preparing to weep.

And indeed, an instant later, my mournful skipper seemed to bear her out. I saw Peterson standing expectant, a little forward, now.

"Well, Peterson?" I rose and went to him.

"I beg pardon, sir, Mr. Harry," said he somewhat anxiously, "but we've bent her port shaft on a cursed oyster reef."

"Very well, Peterson. Suppose we run with the starboard screw."

"And the intake's clogged again with this cursed fine sand we've picked up."

"After I warned Williams?"

"Yes, sir. And that's not the worst, sir."

"Indeed? You must be happy, Peterson!"

"We can't log over eight knots now, and it's sixty miles to our light back of the big key."

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"Excellent, Peterson!"

"And the glass is falling mighty fast."

"In that case, Peterson," said I, "the best thing you can do is to hold your course, and the best thing I can do is to get ready for lunch."

"The best thing either of us can do is to get some sleep," said he, "for we may not get much to-night. She'll break somewhere after sunset to-night, very likely."

"Peterson," said I, "let us hope for the worst."

All the same, I did not wholly like the look of things, for I had seen these swift gulf storms before. A sudden sinking of the heart came over me. What if my madness, indeed, should come to mean peril to her? Swiftly I stepped back to the door of the ladies' cabin, where Mrs. Daniver now disappeared. "Helena!" I cried.

"Yes?" I heard her answer as she stepped toward the little stair.

"Did you say 'Yes'?" I rejoined suddenly.

"No, I did not! I only meant to ask what you wanted."

"As though you did not know! I wanted only to call you to get ready for luncheon. One of the owners of this waistcoat has provided a pompano, not to mention some excellent endive. And the weather is fine, isn't it?"

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CHAPTER XXIX

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IN WHICH IS SHIPWRECK

IT must be understood that our party on the *Belle Hélène* was divided into two, or rather, indeed, three camps, each somewhat sharply defined and each somewhat ignorant of the other's doings in detail. The combination of either two against the other, in organized mutiny, might very well prove successful, wherefore it was my task to keep all apart by virtue of the authority which I had myself usurped. The midship's cabin suite, of three rooms, was occupied by myself and my two bold young mates—when the latter were not elsewhere engaged. We made what might be called the ruling classes. Forward of our cabin, and accessible only from the deck, was the engine-room where Williams worked, and off this were two bunks, well ventilated and very comfortable, occupied by Williams and Peterson. Forward of this, and also accessible only from the deck, lay the dining saloon, with its fixed table, its cupboards, dish racks and wine-room. In her bows and below the saloon was the cook's gallery, a dumb-waiter running between; and the sleeping quarters of John, the cook, and Willy, the deck-hand, were in the forecabin below. This left the two captives all the after part of the ship pretty much to themselves, and as the after-suite of cabins was roomy and fitted with every modern nautical luxury, they lacked neither freedom nor comfort, so far as these may obtain on shipboard. Obviously, I said little to the ship's crew, except to Peterson, and my two mates had orders to keep to their own part of the ship, under my eye.

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Thus, like ancient Gaul, divided into three parts, we sailed on our wholly indefinite voyage; and all I could do was to live from day to day, or hour to hour. I was content, for Helena was there. Indeed, I question if, these last three years, her image had not been always present in my consciousness; such are the fevers of our unreasoning blood, such the power of that madness known as love.

But, thus divided as was our company, I had none such excellent opportunity for often seeing Helena, as might at first be supposed. She and her aunt refused to join us at any meal in the dining saloon; although, now and then, they came for breakfast to what Auntie Lucinda with scorn called the "second table". It was not feasible for me, often, to do more than call of a morning to inquire if all was well with them; and conversation through a lead-glass transom is not what one would call intimate. Helena could bar her door if she liked in more ways than one; and against the fences that she raised against me one way or another, what with headaches, whims or Aunt Lucinda, I had now no chance to meet her alone save as she herself might dictate. So that, after all, though now I stood as commander of the *Belle Hélène* in place of yon varlet, Cal Davidson, although I ate his ship's stores, wore, indeed, his waistcoats and his neckties when that was humanly possible, I was his successor only and not his equal. He could—nay, had done so—meet Helena as he liked, at meals, on deck, on a thousand errands, whereas I was helpless to do so. He could talk with her all over the ship, take her alone on deck of a moonlit night, listen to her sing, gaze—oh, curse him!—on the little curls on Helena's neck—but no! I could not endure that thought. The round white neck, the white shoulders, the soft curves beneath the peignoir's careless irreverences—why, it was an intolerable thought that any man should raise eye or heart or thought to Helena, save myself. So, this morning, after that rare and unconventional meeting on the after deck, one easily may see how much I wished all Gaul were divided into but two parts, and that the occupants of the reserved after cabin would come to lunch in the saloon with their captors, Black Bart, Jean Lafitte and Henri L'Olonnois.

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Now, 'tis an odd thing, but one of my superstitions, that when we wish much and fervently and

cleanly for any certain thing, one day that thing is ours. Some day, some time, some hour or instant, our dear desire, our coveted thing, our wish, comes and flutters and alights at our side; if really we have deserved it and have wished long and deeply and honestly and purposefully. You ask proof? Well, then, hardly had we three, Black Bart, Jean Lafitte and Henri L'Olonnois, seated ourselves at table for luncheon that day before I became sensible of a faint shadow at the saloon stair. I saw a trim boot and a substantial ankle which I knew belonged to Aunt Lucinda; and then I looked up and saw on the deck Helena also, stooped, her clean-cut head, with its blown dark hair, visible against the blue sky.

"May I come in?" she asked gaily enough. And I reached up next to her to hand her down, and smooth down her skirt for her at the rather awkward narrow stair.

"You are always invited," said I, and perhaps I flushed in my pleasure. "John," I called down the tube, "two more—the ladies." And I heard his calm "All lite." [Pg 289]

My young gentlemen had risen, politely, but Helena gently pushed them down into their places. "Be seated here, ladies," said I. "These places are, as you see, always spread for you. Your covers wait. And all the ship's silver shall see duty now. L'Olonnois, my hearty, you and I shall serve, eh? I am, indeed, delighted—greatly delighted—I shall not inquire, I shall only hope."

"Well," boomed the deep voice of Auntie Lucinda, "we came because we did not like the look of things."

"To be sure, things are not looking bully," I assented vaguely.

"I mean the weather. It's getting black, and it's colder. And after what you told me about the storms, and that lighthouse being blown down——"

"My dear Mrs. Daniver," said I, helping her to her chair while L'Olonnois served his Auntie Helena in like fashion, "you really must not take one too seriously. That lighthouse fell over of its own weight—the contractor's work was done shamefully."

"But you said it blew," ventured Helena.

"It blows, a little, now and then, to be sure, but never very much, only enough to enable the oyster boats and shrimpers to get in. How could we have oysters without a sailing breeze?" [Pg 290]

"It's more than a breeze," said Aunt Lucinda. "My neuralgia tells me——"

"It is fortunate that you honored us, my dear Mrs. Daniver," said I, "for I have here in the cooler a bottle of ninety-three. I had an inspiration. I knew you would come, for nothing in the world could have pleased me so much."

I was looking at Helena, whose eyes were cast down. I observed now that she was in somewhat elegant morning costume, her bridge coat of Vienna lace, caught with a wide bar of plain gold, covering some soft and shimmering under-bodice which fitted closely enough to be formal. And I saw she had on many rings, and that her throat sparkled under a circlet of gems.

She must have caught my glance of surprise, for she said nervously, "You think we are overplaying our return call? Well, the truth is, we're afraid."

"So then?"—and I bowed.

"So then I fished out all my jewelry."

"We are honored."

"Well, I didn't know what might happen. If one should be shipwrecked——" I caught her frightened gaze out an open port, perfectly aware myself of the swift weather change. [Pg 291]

"There is nothing like dressing the part of the shipwrecked," said I. "For myself, these same flannels will do."

"Pshaw!" said young L'Olonnois, "suppose she does pitch a little—it ain't any worse'n on the *Mauretania* when we went across. I ain't scared, are you, John?"

"No," replied Jean Lafitte shyly. He was almost overawed with the ladies. But I liked the look of his eye now.

"She's not as big as the *Mauretania*," said Helena, fixing L'Olonnois' collar for him.

"I'm sure she's going to roll horribly," added Aunt Lucinda. "And if I should be seasick, with my neuralgia, I'm sure I don't know what I should do."

"I know!" remarked L'Olonnois; and Helena promptly dropped her hand over his mouth.

"Let us not think of storm and shipwreck," said I, "at least until they come. I want to ask your attention to John's imitation of Luigi's oysters *à la marinière*. The oysters are of our own catching this morning. For, you must know, the water hereabout is very shallow, and is full of oysters."

"You said full of sharks," corrected Aunt Lucinda. [Pg 292]

"Did I? I meant oysters." And I helped her to some from the dumb-waiter and uncorked the very last bottle of the ninety-three left in the case. "And as for this storm of which you speak, ladies," I

added as I poured, "I would there might come every day as ill a wind if it would blow me as great a good as yourselves for luncheon."

"Yes," said L'Olonnois brightly, "you might blow in once in a while an' see us fellers. I told Black Bart that captives——" but here I kicked Jimmy under the table. Poor chap, what with his Auntie Helena's hand at one extremity and my boot at the other, he was strained in his conversation, and in disgust, joined Jean Lafitte in complete silence and oysters.

"Really," and Helena raised her eyes, "isn't it growing colder?"

"Jean, close the port behind Miss Emory," said I. It was plain enough to my mind that a blue norther was breaking, with its swift drop in temperature and its possibly high wind.

"The table's actin' funny," commented Jean Lafitte presently. He had never been at sea before.

"Yes," said Aunt Lucinda, with very much—too much—dignity. "If you all will please excuse me, I think I shall go back to the cabin. Helena!" [Pg 293]

"Go with Mrs. Daniver at once, Jimmy," said I to L'Olonnois.

"Aye, aye, Sir!" saluted he joyously; and added aside as he passed me, "Hope the old girl's going to be good an' sick!"

I could see Peterson standing near the saloon's door, and bethought me to send Jean Lafitte up to aid him in making all shipshape. We were beginning to roll; and I missed the smooth thrust of both our propellers, although now the engines were purring smoothly enough. Thus by mere chance, I found myself alone with Helena. I put out a hand to steady her as she rose.

"Is it really going to be bad?" she inquired anxiously. "Auntie gets *so* sick."

"It will be rough, for three hours yet," I admitted. "She's not so big as the *Mauretania*, but as well built for her tonnage. You couldn't pound her apart, no matter what came—she's oak and cedar, through and through, and every point——"

"You've studied her well, since you—since you came aboard?"

—"Yes, yes, to be sure I have. And she's worth her name. Don't you think it was mighty fine of—of Mr. Davidson to name her after you—the *Belle Helène*?" [Pg 294]

"He never did. If he had, why?"

"Don't ask such questions, with the glass falling as it is," I said, pulling up the racks to restrain the dancing tumblers.

"Oh, don't joke!" she said. "Harry!"

"Yes, Helena," said I.

"I'm afraid!"

"Why?"

"I don't know. But we seem so little and the sea so big. And it's getting black, and the fog is coming. Look—you can't see the shore-line any more now."

It was as she said. The swift bank of vapor had blotted out the low-lying shores entirely. We sailed now in a narrowing circle of mist. I saw thin points of moisture on the port lights. And now I began to close the ports.

"There *is* danger!" she reiterated.

"All horses can run away, all auto cars can blow up, all boats can sink. But we have as good charts and compasses as the *Mauretania*, and in three hours——"

"But much can happen in three hours."

"Much has happened in less time. It did not take me so long as that to love you, Helena, and that I have not forgotten in more than five years. Five years, Helena. And as to shipwreck, what does one more matter? It is you who have made shipwreck of a man's life. Take shame for that." [Pg 295]

"Take shame yourself, to talk in this way to me, when I am helpless, when I can't get away, when I'm troubled and frightened half to death? Ah, fine of you to persecute a girl!" She sobbed, choking a little, but her head high. "Let me out, I'm going to Auntie Lucinda. I hate you more and more. If I were to drown, I'd not take aid from you."

"Do you mean that, Helena?" I asked, more than the chill of the norther in my blood.

"Yes, I mean it. You are a *coward*!"

I stood for quite a time between her and the companion stair, my hand still offering aid as she swayed in the boat's roll now. I was thinking, and I was very sad.

"Helena," said I, "perhaps you have won. That's a hard word to take from man or woman. If it is in any way true, you have won and I have lost, and deserved to lose. But now, since little else remains, let me arrange matters as simply as I can. I'll admit there's an element of risk in our

situation—one screw is out of commission, and one engine might be better. If we missed the channel west of the shoals, we might go aground—I hope not. Whether we do or not, I want to tell you—over yonder, forty or fifty miles, is the channel running inland, which was my objective point all along. I know this coast in the dark, like a book. Now, I promise you, I'll take you in there to friends of mine, people of your own class, and no one shall suspect one jot of all this, other than that we were driven out of our course. And once there, you are free. You never will see my face again. I will do this, as a ship's man, for you, and if need comes, will give my life to keep you safe. It's about all a coward can do for you. Now go, and if any time of need comes for me to call you, you will be called. And you will be cared for by the ship's men. And because I am head of the ship's men, you will do as I say. But I hope no need for this will come. Yonder is our course, where she heads now, and soon you will be free from me. You have wrecked me. Now I am derelict, from this time on. Good-by."

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I heard footfalls above. "Mrs. Daniver's compliments to Captain Black Bart," saluted L'Olonnois, "an' would he send my Auntie Helena back, because she's offle sick."

"Take good care of your Auntie Helena, Jimmy," said I, "and help her aft along the rail."

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I followed up the companionway, and saw her going slowly, head down, her coat of lace blown wide; her hand at her throat, and sobbing in what Jimmy and I both knew was fear of the storm.

"Have they got everything they need there, Jimmy?" I asked, as he returned.

"Sure. And the old girl's going to have a peach of a one this time—she can't hardly rock in a rockin' chair 'thout gettin' seasick. I think it's great, don't you? Look at her buck into 'em!"

Jimmy and his friend shared this immunity from *mal de mer*. I could see Jean now helping haul down our burgee, and the deck boy, Willy, in his hurried work about the boat. Williams, I could not see. But Peterson was now calm and much in his element, for a better skipper than he never sailed a craft on the Great Lakes.

"I think she's going to blow great guns," said he, "and like enough the other engine'll pop any minute."

"Yes?" I answered, stepping to the wheel. "In which case we go to Davy Jones about when, Peterson?"

"We don't go!" he rejoined. "She's the grandest little ship afloat, and not a thing's the matter with her."

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"Can we make the channel and run inside the long key below the Côte Blanche Bayou?"

"Sure we can. You'd better get the covers off the boats, and see the bottom plugs in and some water and supplies shipped aboard—but there's not the slightest danger in the world for *this* boat, let me tell you that, sir. I've seen her perform before now, and there's not a storm can blow on this coast she won't ride through."

CHAPTER XXX

[Pg 299]

IN WHICH IS SHIPWRECK OF OTHER SORT

AFTER the fashion of these gulf storms, this one tarried not in its coming, nor offered any clemency when it had arrived. Where but a half-hour since the heavens had been fair, the sea rippling, suave and kind, now the sky was not visible at all and the tumbling waves about us rolled savagely as in a nature wholly changed. The wind sang ominously overhead, as with lift and plunge we drove on into a bank of mist. A chill as of doom swiftly had replaced the balm of the southern sky; and forsooth, all the mercy of the world seemed lost and gone.

And as our craft, laboring, thrust forward blindly into this reek, with naught of comfort on any hand, nor even the dimmest ray of hope visible from any fixed thing on ahead, in like travail of going, in like groaning to the very soul, the bark of my life now lay in the welter, helpless, reft of storm and strife, blind, counseled by no fixed ray ahead. I know not what purpose remained in me, that, like the ship which bore us, I still, dumbly and without conscious purpose, forged onward to some point fixed by reason or desire before reason and desire had been engulfed by this final unkindness of the world. For myself, I cared little or none at all. The plunge of the boat, the shriek of the wind, the wild magic and mystery of it, would have comported not ill with a strong man's tastes even in hours more happy, and now, especially, they jumped with the wild protest of a soul eager for some outlet of action or excitement. But for these others, these women—this woman—these boys, all brought into this danger by my own mad folly, ah! when the thought of these arose, a swift remorse caught me; and though for myself I feared not at all, for these I feared.

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Needs must, therefore, use every cool skilled resource that lay at hand. No time now for broken hearts to ask attention, the ship must be sailed. Crippled or not, what she had of help for us must be got out of her, used, fostered, nourished. All the art of the navigator must be charged with this duty. We must win through. And, as many a man who has seen danger will testify, the great need

brought to us all a great calm and a steady precision in that which needed doing.

I saw Peterson at the wheel, wet to the skin, as now and again a seventh wave, slow, portentous, deadly-deliberate, showed ahead of us, advanced, reared and pounded down on us with its tons of might. But he only shook the brine from his eyes and held her up, waiting for the slow pulse of our crippled engine to come on.

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"Can't keep my pipe lit!" he called to me, as I stood beside him; and at last, Peterson, in a real time of danger, seemed altogether happy and altogether free of apprehension beyond that regarding his pipe.

At the first breaking of the storm I had, of course, ordered all ports closed, and had sent both my young companions to the ladies' cabin aft, as the driest part of the boat. Even there, the water that sometimes fell upon our decks as the great waves broke, poured aft and even broke about the cabin, drenching everything above deck. It was man's work that was to be done now, yet none could bear a hand in it save the engineer and the steersman. I was, therefore, ready sternly to reprove Jean Lafitte when, presently, I saw him making the perilous passage forward, clinging to the rail and wet to the skin before he could reach the forward deck. But he protested so earnestly and seemed withal so fit and keen, that I relented and allowed him to take his place by us at the wheel, showing him as well as I could, on the chart, the course we were trying to hold—the mouth of a long channel, six miles or more, dredged by the government across a foot of the bay and making through to deeper and more sheltered waters beyond.

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"S'posin' we don't hit her, in this fog!" asked Jean Lafitte.

"It is our business to do that," was my reply. "In an hour or so more we shall know. How did you leave the ladies, Jean?"

"Jimmy, he's sicker'n anything," was his reply, "except the old lady, and she's sicker'n Jimmy! The young lady, Miss Emory, she's all right, an' she's holdin' their heads. She says she don't get sick. Neither do I—ain't that funny? But gee, this is rougher'n any waves ever was on our lake. What're you goin' to do?"

"Hold straight ahead, Jean," I answered. "Now, wouldn't you better go back to the others?"

"Naw, I ain't scared—much. I told Jimmy, I did, any pirate ought to be ashamed to get sick. But they're all scared. So'm I, some," he added frankly.

I might have made some confession of my own, had I liked, for I did not, in the least, fancy the look of things; but after a time, I compromised with sturdy Jean by sending him below into the dining saloon, whence he could look out through the glass front and see the tumbling sea ahead. Through the glazed housing I could see him standing, hands in pockets, legs wide, gazing out in the simple confidence that all was well, and enjoying the tumult and excitement of it all in his boyish ignorance.

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"He don't know!" grinned Peterson to me, and I only nodded in silence.

"Where are we, Peterson?" I asked, putting a finger on the wet chart before us.

"I don't know," replied the old man. "It depends on the drift, which we can't calculate. Soundings mean nothing, for she's shallow for miles. If the fog would break, so we could see the light—there ain't any fog-buoy on that channel mouth, and it's murder that there ain't. It's this d—d fog that makes it bad."

I looked at my watch. It was now going on five o'clock, and in this light, it soon would be night for us. Peterson caught the time, and frowned. "Wish't we was in," said he. "No use trying to anchor unless we must, anyhow—she'll ride mighty wet out here. Better buck on into it."

So we bucked on in, till five, till five-thirty, till six, and all the boat's lights revealed was a yellow circle of fog that traveled with us. Wet and chilled, we two stood at the wheel together, in such hard conditions that no navigator and no pilot could have done much more than grope.

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"We must have missed her!" admitted the old skipper at last. "I don't fancy the open gulf, and I don't fancy piling her up on some shore in here. What do you think we should do, Mr. Harry?"

"Listen!" said I, raising a hand.

"There's no bell-buoy," said he.

"No, but hark. Don't you hear the birds—there's a million geese and swans and ducks calling over yonder."

"Right, by George!" said he. "But where?"

"They'd not be at sea, Peterson. They must be in some fresh-water lake inside some key or island. On the Long Key there's such an inland lake."

"It's beyond the channel, maybe?" said he. But he signaled Williams to go slow, and that faithful unseen Cyclops, on whose precious engines so much depended, obeyed and presently put out a head at his hatch, quickly withdrawing it as a white sea came inboard.

"We'll crawl on in," said Peterson. "The light can't be a thousand miles from here. If only there was a nigger man and a dinner bell beside the light—that's the trouble. And now—good God!

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There she goes!"

With a jar which shook the good boat to the core, we felt the bottom come up from the depths and smite us. Our headway ceased, save for a sickening crunching crawl. The waves piled clear across our port bow as we swung. And so we hung, the gulf piling in on us in our yellow rimmed world. And at the lift and hollow of the sea we rose and pounded sullenly down, in such fashion as would have broken the back of any boat less staunch than ours.

Here, in an eye's flash, was danger tangible and real. I heard a shriek from the cabin aft, and called out for them all to keep below and keep the ports closed. Peterson had the power off in an instant, and swung her head as best he could with the dying headway; but it only put her farther on the shoal.

"It's the Timbalier Shoals!" he screamed. "Oh, d— it all! We'll lose her, now." I recalled that his concern seemed rather for his boat than the lives she carried.

Jean Lafitte came bounding up the companionway, his face pale, but ready for ship's discipline. "Come," said I quickly, "help me with the anchor." A moment later, we sprung the capstan clutch, and I heard the brief growl of the anchor chain as the big hook ran free. Glad enough I was to think of the extra size it had. We eased her down and made fast under Peterson's orders now, and so swung into the head of the sea, which mercilessly lifted us and flung us down like a monkey seeking to crack a cocoanut shell. Williams joined us now, and Willie and John, pale as Jean Lafitte, came up from the forecabin, all shouting and jabbering. I ran aft as soon as might be, and only pulled up at the cabin door to summon such air of calm as I might. I rapped, but followed in, not waiting. Helena met me, pale, her eyes wide, her hair disheveled, but none the less mistress of herself.

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"What is it?" she demanded. "What makes it jolt?"

"We've gone aground," said I. "She does pound a little, doesn't she?"

She looked out into the wild night, across which the voices of the confused wild fowl came like souls in torment.

"This is terrible!" said she simply. "Are we lost?"

"No," said I. "Let us hear no such talk. Go below, now, and keep quiet. We may pass the night here, or we may conclude after a little to go on ahead a little farther. We've just dropped the anchor. The island's just over there a way." I did not care to be too specific.

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"What is it, oh, what is it?" I heard the faint voice of Mrs. Daniver. "Oh, this is awful. I—am—going—to—die, going to *die!*" The agony of *mal de mer* was hers now of full license, for the choppy sea was sustained on the bosom of a long ground swell, coming we knew not whence.

"Jimmy!" I called down. "Are you there?"

"Yes, Sir," answered L'Olonnois bravely, from his place on the floor. "I'm feeling pretty funny, but I'll be all right—maybe."

"Stay right where you are—and you also, Miss Emory. I must go forward now, and just came to tell you it's all right. If there should be any need, we'll let you know. Now keep down, and keep the door shut."

"I'm—going—to—*die!*" moaned Mrs. Daniver as I left. Helena made no outcry, but that horror possessed her I knew very well, for every reason told us that our case was desperate. The boat might start her seams or break her back, any instant, now.

I found the men trying to make soundings all about us as best they could with boat hooks and a spare spar. But it came to little.

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"Peterson," said I, "you're ship's master. What are your orders?"

"Unlash the boat covers," said he. "Get even the dingey ready. Williams, close your hatch and bear a hand to swing the big boat out in her davits. Set the bottom plugs in well. And Mr. Harry, you and John, the Chink, had better get some stores and a case or so of bottled water aboard the long boat. Have you got the slickers and rugs ready, and plenty of clothes? We'll just be ready if it happens. I don't know where that damned light or the damned channel is, but the damned ducks maybe know where some damned thing is. We'll run for them, if we can't ride her out."

We all hurried now, Jean Lafitte at my heels, silent and faithful as a dog, aiding me as I piled blankets and coats and rugs from our cabin into the ship's boat, which swayed and swung perilously at the davits. What with the aid of John, the China boy, and Willy, the deck-hand, we also got supplies aboard her, I scarce knew what, except that there seemed abundance. And then we stood waiting for what might happen, helpless in the hands of the offended elements, and silent all. I held Jean's hand in my own. He was loyal to his mate, even now. "Jimmy'd be here," he said. "'Course he would, only he's so awful sick. I ain't sick—yet, but I feel funny, someway."

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Peterson stood looking ahead, but was anxious. "She's coming up stronger," said he, "and two points on the port quarter. We're going on harder all the time. Anchor's dragging. Afraid we're going to lose her, Mr. Harry."

"Hush!" said I, nodding to the boy. "And turn on the search-light. It seems to me I hear breakers

in there.”

“That’s so,” said the old man. “Hook on the light’s battery, Williams, and let’s see what we can see.”

The strong beam, wavering from side to side, plowed a furry path into the fog. It disclosed at first only the succession of angry incoming waves, each, as it passed, thudding us down on the bar of shell and mud and slime. But at last, off to starboard and well astern in our new position, riding at anchor, we raised a faint white line of broken water which seemed a constant feature; and now and then caught the low boom of the surf.

“She ain’t a half mile, over yonder,” I heard Willy, the deck-hand, say. “An’ we could almost walk it if it wasn’t for the sea.” [Pg 310]

“Yes, sir,” said Williams, “we’d do fine in there now, with them boats. When we hit that white water——”

“Shut up!” ordered Peterson. “Safe as a church, here or there, you lubbers. Stand by your tackle, and keep your chin. Mr. Harry, tell the ladies just to wrap up a bit, because—well, maybe, because——”

“Call me when it is time, Peterson,” said I; and moved aft, holding Jean Lafitte by the arm.

“Gee!” said he, as he dropped, wet and out of breath, into the cabin; and “Gee!” remarked a very pale L’Olonnois in return, gamely as he could. And Mrs. Daniver’s moans went rhythmic with the pound of the keel on the shoal.

“What shall we do?” asked Helena at last calmly. “Auntie is very sick. I am beginning to fear for her, it is such a bad attack. This is as rough as I ever saw it on the Channel.”

“There is no danger,” said I, “but Peterson and I just thought that if she kept on pounding in this way, it might be better to go ashore.”

I spoke lightly, but well enough I knew the risk of trying to launch a boat in such a sea; and what the surf might be, none could say. Ah, how I wished that my empty assurance might be the truth. For I knew that, anyway we looked, only danger stared back at us now, on every hand. [Pg 311]

CHAPTER XXXI

[Pg 312]

IN WHICH WE TAKE TO THE BOATS

I LOOKED at the woman I loved, and self-reproach was in my soul, as I saw a shudder go across her form. She was pale, but beyond a swift look at me made no sign connecting me, either with the wreck or the rescue. I think she had even then abandoned all hope of safety; and in my own heart, such, also, was the rising conviction which I concealed. Under the inborn habit of self-preservation, under the cultivated habit of the well born, to show no fear and to use the resources of a calm mind to the last in time of danger, we stood now, at least, in some human equality. And again I lied and said, “There is no danger,” though I could see the white rollers and could hear their roar on the shore.

The night grew wilder. The great gulf storm had not yet reached its climax, and none could tell what pitch of fury that might mean. The dull jar of the boat as she time and again was flung down by the waves, the shiver and creak and groan of the sturdy craft, told us that the end might come at any instant, though now the anchor held firm and our crawl on to the shoal had ceased. All around us was water only four or five feet deep, but water whose waves were twice as high. Once the final crash came, and it would be too late to launch a boat, and all of us, overboard in that welter, were gone. [Pg 313]

Silently, I stepped on deck once more, and motioned to Willy, the deck-hand, to bring me the life preservers. “Put them on,” I said to Helena.

“Oh, I can’t. I can’t!” moaned the older woman. “I’m dying—let me alone.”

“Stop this nonsense, madam,” said I sternly—knowing that was the only way—“put it on at once. You too, Miss Emory, and you, my boys. Quick. Then throw on loose wraps—all you can. It will be cold.”

In spite of all my efforts to seem calm, the air of panic ran swiftly. Mrs. Daniver awoke to swift action as she tremblingly fastened the belt about her. Pushing past me, she reached the deck, and so mad was she that in all likelihood she would have sprung overboard. I caught at her, and though my clutch brought away little more than a handful of false hair, it seemed to restore her reason though it destroyed her coiffure. “Enough of this!” I cried to her. “Take your place by the boat, and do as you are told.” And I saw Helena pass forward, also, as we all reached the deck, herself pale as a wraith, but with no outcry and no spoken word. So, at last, I ranged them all near the boat that swung ready at the davits. [Pg 314]

“We can’t all get in that,” said Jean Lafitte.

"No," said I: and I did not like to look at the tiny dingey which lay on the cabin-top, squat and tub-like, or the small ducking skiff that here on deck was half full of water from the breaking seas.

"Peterson," said I, "take charge of the big boat here. Take Williams to run her motor for you. And the ladies will go with you."

I turned to the two boys, and my heart leaped in pride for them both; for when I motioned to Jimmy to make ready for the large boat, with the ladies, he stepped back, pale as he was. "Not unless John goes, too," said he. And they stood side by side, simply and with no outcry, their young faces grave.

"He must go with us—Jimmy," broke out Helena yearningly: "and so must you."

"Shut up, Auntie," exclaimed Jimmy most irreverently. "Who's a-runnin' this boat, like to know?" Which abashed his auntie very much.

"We'll take this one," said Jean Lafitte, and already was tipping the duck boat. "It'll carry us three if it has to." And I allowed him and his mate to stand by, not daring to look at its inadequate shell and again at the breaking seas. [Pg 315]

That left the dingey for Willy and the cook. I glanced at Willy. "Which would you rather chance?" I asked him, "the dingey or the duck boat?"

"The dingey," said he quickly,—and we both knew the cork-like quality of this stubby craft.

"Very well," said I. "Call John, when the word comes to go."

"Aren't you going with us?" asked Helena now, suddenly, approaching me. I took one long look into her eyes, then, "Obey orders," was all I said, and pointed to the larger boat. I said good-by to her then. And, in the swift intuitive justice that comes to us in moments of extremity, I passed sentence upon these young boys and myself. Though they had sinned in innocence, though I had sinned in love, it had been our folly that had brought these others into this peril, and our chance must be the least. Peterson and Williams would be a better team in the big boat than any other we could afford. I saw Peterson step toward us, and divined what was in his mind. "I'm owner of this boat, my man," said I. "Go to your duty. You're needed in the big boat." [Pg 316]

"I'm last to leave her," whispered the old man. "She's my boat, and I've run her."

"Peterson," said I, taking him aside, "I'll buy us another boat. But there is no woman on earth, nor ever will be, like that one yonder. Save her. It is your first duty. I wanted that for myself, but she thinks I'm a coward, and I would be, if I arranged our crews any other way than just as we are. Take your boat through. We others will do the best we can. And give the word for the boats when you're sure we can't ride it out."

Silently, the old man touched his cap, and giving me one look, he went to the bows of his boat. The *Belle Hélène*, lashed by the storm, rolled and pulled at her cable, rose, fell thuddingly. And at last, came a giant swell that almost submerged us. I caught Helena to the cabin-top to keep her drier from it, and the two boys also sprang to a point of safety. Mrs. Daniver, less agile, was caught by Peterson and Williams and held to the rail, wetted thoroughly. And by some freak of the wind, at that instant came fully the roar of the surf. We of the *Belle Hélène* seemed very small.

I looked now at Peterson. He raised his little megaphone, which hung at his belt, and shouted loud and clear, as though we could not have heard him at this distance of ten feet. "Get ready to lower away!" Williams and the deck-hand sprang to the falls. "Get the women in the boat, you, Williams," called the skipper, "and go in with them to steady her when she floats. Take his place there, Mr. Harry. Lively now!" And how we got the two women into the swinging boat I hardly knew. [Pg 317]

The old skipper cast one eye ahead as a big wave rolled astern. "Now!" he shouted. "Lower away, there!"

The boat dropped into the cup of a sea, rose level with the rail the next instant, and tossed perilously. I saw the two women huddled in the bottom of her, their eyes covered, saw Williams climbing over them and easing her at the bowline. Then, as we seized the next instant of the rhythm, and hauled her alongside, Peterson made a leap and went aboard her, and Williams scrambled back, once more, across the two huddled forms. I saw him wrench at the engine crank, and heard the spitting chug of the little motor. They fell off in the seaway, Peterson holding her with an oar as he could till the screws caught. Then I saw her answer the helm and they staggered off, passing out of the beam of our search-light, so that it seemed to me I had said good-by to Helena forever. [Pg 318]

We who remained had no davits to aid us, and must launch by hand. For a moment I stood and made my plans. First, I called to Willy, our deck-hand, who had the dingey now astern, some fashion. "Are you ready?" I demanded: but the next moment I heard his call astern and knew that, monkey-like, he had got her over and was aboard her somehow.

"Now, boys," said I, "come here and shake hands with Black Bart." They came, their serious eyes turned up to me. And never has deeper emotion seized me than as I felt their young hands in mine. We said nothing.

"Now, bear a hand there, you, Jean!" I pulled open the gate of the rail, and ran out the landing stage, on which the flat-bottomed skiff sat. With an oar I pushed it across at right angles as nearly as possible when she cleared. "Quick! Get in, both of you," I called. I was holding the inboard end of the plank under a wedged oar shaft, thrust below the sill of the forward cabin door. They scrambled out and in, Jean grasping the bight of the painter that I handed him, and passing it over the rail.

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"Now, look out," I called, and dropped the landing stage to meet the swell of the next wave. They slid, tilted, righted, rose high—and held. The next moment I sprang, fell into the sea, was caught by the collar as my hand grasped the cockpit coaming, and so I slid in, somehow, over the end deck, and caught the end of the painter from John's hand and cast her free.

The drift carried us off at once, and the next wave almost hid the hull of the *Belle Hélène*. I knew at once we were powerless, and that our one hope lay in drifting ashore. There is no worse sea boat than a low, flat ducking boat, decked though she be, and of good coaming, for she butts into and does not rise to a sea. But now, I thanked my star, one thing only was in our favor. We rolled like a log, already half full of water, but we floated, because in each end of our skiff was a big empty tin air tank, put there in spite of the laughing protest of the builder, who said no room was left for decoys under the decks. Just now, those tin cans were worth more than many duck decoys.

"Keep down!" I ordered. "And hold on!" The boys obeyed me. I could see their gaze bent on me, as the source of their hope, their reliance. Jimmy was now free from the first violence of the seasickness, but I saw Jean's hand on his arm.

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"Gee!" I heard the latter mutter as the first sea crossed under us. "Dat was a peach." I took heart myself, for we lived that one through. "Bail!" I ordered, and they took their cups to it, while I did all I could with the long punt paddle to make some sort of course. Now and then the blazing trail of the *Belle Hélène's* search-light swung across as we rolled, to leave us, the next instant, in blackness. As the seas permitted, we could see her, riding and rocking, sometimes, alight from stern to stern and making a gallant fight for her life, as were we all.

So long as the rollers came in oily and black, we did well, but where the top of one broke under us, we sank deep into the white foam that had no carrying power, and our cockpit filled so that we all sat in water. Only the tanks held us, log-like, and we bailed and paddled: and after they saw we did not sink, my hardy bullies, perhaps in the ignorance of youth and boy's confidence that a boy and water are friends, began to shout aloud. We wallowed on.

No sound came to us from either of the other boats; and now, very quickly it seemed, we came at the edge of the surf.

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"I'm touching bottom, boys," I called, and cast the long punt pole adrift as I took up the short paddle I had held under my leg.

Now we had under us two feet of water or ten, as the waves might say, and any moment we might roll over; but we wallowed in, rolling, till I knew the supreme moment had come. I waited, holding her head in well as I could so unruly a hulk, and as a big roller came after us, paddled as hard as I could. The wave chased us, caught us, pushed us, carried us in. There was a lift of our loggish bows, a blinding crash of white water about us. Our boat was overturned, but in some way, since the beach was all sand and very gentle, the wave flattened so that the back-tow did not pull us down. In some way, I do not know how, I found myself standing, and dragging Jimmy by the hand. Jean already was ahead, and I heard his shout and saw his hand as he stood, knee-deep but safe. So we all made it ashore, and our boat also, which now we hauled out of the spume. And the long white row of breakers, less dangerous than I had feared, came in, white maned and bellowing.

I could still see the rocking lights of the yacht, and the shifting stroke of the search-light on the sea, but I did not hear and see aught else, at the time, and my heart sank.

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It was Jimmy whose ear first got the sound which came in—the feverish phut-phut of the motor skiff. Then the ray of the great light swung and I saw the boat still outside the breakers—nor could I tell then why we had beaten her in. It seemed Peterson was hunting for us others.

"Stay back, boys!" I called to my companions. "You might get thrown down by the waves—keep back." But now I was ready to rush in to meet the long boat, whose keel I knew would leave her to overturn if she caught bottom.

But Peterson knew about the keel as well as any, and he caught what he thought was water enough before he yelled to Williams to drive her in. She sped in like an arrow; and again the white wave reared high and broke upon its prey. By then, I was in water to my waist. I caught Helena out with one reach of my arms, just as I saw Williams and Peterson stagger in with Mrs. Daniver between them. In some miraculous way we got beyond danger, and met my pirates, dancing and shouting a welcome to our desert isle. Their advent, thereon, gave the two womenfolk a fervent wish to embrace, sob and weep extraordinarily. I had said nothing to Helena and said nothing now.

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"Where's the dingey, Peterson?" I called, as he came up, grinning.

"Coming in," said he; and forsooth that water-rat, Willy, made a better landing of it than any of us, and calmly helped us now to haul the heavy motor skiff up the beach, a few feet at a time as

the waves thrust it forward.

"Thank God!" I heard Helena exclaim. "Oh, thank God! We're safe, we're all safe, after all."

I looked at my little group for a time, all soaked to the skin, all huddled now close together. Peterson, Williams, Willy—all the crew, yes. Auntie Lucinda and the woman who had called me a coward—the two captives, yes, Jean Lafitte and Henri L'Olonnois and myself, Black Bart—all the ship's owners. What lacked? For a moment I could not tell why I had the vague feeling that something or some one was missing.

"Willy," said I at last, "where's John, the cook?"

"Why, I don't know," said Willy. "Didn't he come with you?"

CHAPTER XXXII

[Pg 324]

IN WHICH I RESCUE THE COOK

"**W**HAT'S that?" said Peterson sharply—"you didn't obey orders?"

"Well, I thought he was in the other boat," explained Willy, hanging his head.

"You'll get your time," said the old man quietly, "soon as we get to the railroad—and you'll go home by rail."

"What are you trying to do, Mr. Harry?" he demanded of me, a moment later. I was looking at the long boat.

"Well, he's part of the boat's company," said I, "and we've got to save him, Peterson."

"What's that?" asked Helena now coming up—and then, "Why, John, our cook, isn't here, is he?" She, too, looked at the long boat and at the sea. "How horrible!" she said. "Horrible!"

"What does he mean to do?" she demanded now of Peterson in turn. The old man only looked at her.

"Surely, you don't mean to go out there again," she said.

I turned to them both, half cold with anger. "Do you think I'd leave him out there to die, perhaps?" [Pg 325]
It was my own fault, not to see him in the boat."

"It wasn't," reiterated Peterson. "It was Willy's fault—or mine."

"In either case it's likely to be equally serious for him. We can't leave the poor devil helpless, that way."

"Mr. Harry," began Peterson again, "he's only a Chinaman."

"Take shame to yourself for that, Peterson," said I. "He's a part of the boat's company—a good cook—yes, but more than a good cook—"

"Well, why didn't he come up with the rest of us?"

"Because he was at his place of duty, below, until ordered up," said I.

Peterson pondered for a moment. "That's right," said he at length; "I'll go out with you."

I felt Helena's hand on my arm. "It's awful out there," said she. But I only turned to look at her in the half-darkness and shook off her hand.

"You can't launch the big boat," said Peterson. "You'd only swamp her, if you tried."

"That may be," said I, "but the real thing is to try."

"We might wait till the wind lulls," he argued.

"Yes, and if the wind should change she might drag her anchor and go out to sea. Which boat is best to take, Peterson?" [Pg 326]

A strange feeling of calm came over me, an odd feeling not easy to explain, that I was not a young man of leisure, but some one else, one of my ancestors of earlier days, used to encounters with adversity or risk. Calmly and much to my own surprise, I stood and estimated the chances as though I had been used to such things all my life.

"Which is the best boat, Peterson?" I repeated. "Hardly the duck boat, I think—and you say not the big boat."

"The dingey is the safest," replied Peterson. "That little tub would ride better; but no man could handle her out there."

"Very well," said I; "she'll get her second wetting, anyhow. Lend a hand."

"She'll carry us both," commented the old man, stepping to the side of the stubby little craft.

"But she'll be lighter and ride easier with but one," was my reply. "A chip is dry on top only as long as it's a chip."

"Let me go along," said Jean Lafitte, stepping up at this time.

"You'll do nothing of the sort, my son," said I. "Go back to the ladies and make a fire, and make a shelter," said I. "I'll be here again before long." [Pg 327]

The news of the new adventure now spread among our little party. Mrs. Daniver began sniffing. "Helena," I heard her say, "this is terrible." But meantime I was pulling off my sweater and fastening on a life belt. Nodding to Peterson, we both picked up the dingey, and when the next sea favored, made a swift run in the endeavor to break through the surf.

"Let go!" I cried to him, as the water swirled about our waist. "Go back!" And so I sprang in alone and left him.

For the time I could make small headway, indeed, had not time to get at the oars, but pushing as I might with the first thing that came to hand, I felt the bottom under me, felt again the lift of the sea carry me out of touch. Then an incoming wave carried me back almost to the point whence I had started. In such way as I could not explain, none the less at length the little boat won through, no more than half filled by the breaking comber. I worked first as best I might, paddling, and so keeping her off the best I could. Then when I got the oars, the stubby yawing little tub at first seemed scarce more than to hold her own. I pulled hard—hard as I could. Slowly, the line of white breakers passed astern. After that, saving my strength a trifle, I edged out, now angling into the wind, now pulling full into the teeth of the gale. Even my purpose was almost forgotten in the intensity of the task of merely keeping away from the surf. Dully I pulled, reasoning no more than that that was the thing for me to do. [Pg 328]

It had seemed a mile, that short half-mile between the yacht and the beach. It seemed a hundred miles now going back to the boat. I did not dare ask myself how I could go aboard if even I won across so far as the yacht. It was enough that I did not slip backward to the beach once more. Yawing and jibbing in the wind which caught her stubby freeboard, the little boat, none the less, held up under me, and once she was bailed of the surf, rode fairly dry in spite of all, being far more buoyant than either of the other craft. Once in the dark, I saw something thrust up beside me and fancied it to be a stake, marking the channel which pierced the key hereabout. This was confirmed in my mind when, presently, as rain began to fall and the fog lessened for the time, I saw the blurred yellow lighthouse eye answering the wavering search-light of the *Belle Helène*, which swept from side to side across the bay as she rolled heavily at her anchor. In spite of the hard fight it had given me, I was glad the wind still held inshore. I knew the point of the little island lay not far beyond the light. Once adrift beyond that, not the *Belle Helène* herself would be safe, in this offshore wind, but must be carried out into the gulf beyond. [Pg 329]

Not reasoning much about this, however, and content with mere pulling, I kept on until at length I saw the nodding lights of the *Belle Helène* lighting the gloom more definitely about me. Presently, I made under her lee, so that the dingey was more manageable, and at last, I edged up almost to her rail, planning how, perhaps, I might cast a line and so make fast. But, first, I tried calling.

"Ahoy, there below, John!" I called through the dark. At first there came no answer, and again I shouted. At this I saw the door of the dining saloon pushed open, and John himself thrust out his hand.

"All litee," said he, merely greeting me casually. "You come?"

"Yes," said I, with equal sang-froid. "You makee quick jump now, John, s'pose I come in."

"All litee," said he once more. I saw now that he stood there, a book and a bundle in his arm. Perhaps he had been reading to pass the time! [Pg 330]

Be that as it may, I cautiously pulled the dingey under the lee of the *Belle Helène*. Timing his leap with a sagacity and agility combined which I had not suspected of him, my China boy made a leap, stumbled, righted himself, got his balance and so placed his bundle on the bottom of the boat and his book upon the seat, where he covered it carefully against the spray.

"All litee," said he once more. "I makee pull now. You come this place."

I endeavored to emulate his Oriental calm. "John," said I, "I catchee plenty wind this time."

"Yes, plenty wind," said he.

"You suppose we leave China boy?" I demanded.

"Oh, no, no!" he exclaimed with emphasis. "I know you come back allee time bimeby, one time."

"What were you doing, John?"

"I leed plenty 'Melican book," said he calmly. "Now I makee pull." To oblige him I made way for him, and we crawled past each other on the floor of the heaving dingey. He took the oars and began pulling with an odd chopping sort of a stroke, perhaps learned in his youth on some sampan that rode the waters of his native land; but for my own part, since Fate seemed to be [Pg 331]

kind to me after all, I trusted his skill, such as it was, and was willing to rest for a time.

"No velly bad," said John judicially, after a time. "Pretty soon come in." No doubt he saw the little fire, now beginning to light the beach. At any rate, he headed straight in, the seas following, reeling after us. They have their own ways, these people of the East. I fancy John had run surf before. At any rate, I knew the water now was shallow and that, perhaps, one could swim ashore if we were overset. I trusted him to make the landing, however, and he did it like a veteran. One plunge through the ultimate white crest, and we were carried up high on the beach, to meet the shouts of my men and to feel their hands grasp the gunwales of the sturdy little craft.

"All litee," remarked John amiably, and started for the fire, such being his instinct, not with the purpose of getting warm, but of cooking something. And in half an hour he had a cup of hot bouillon all around.

"It's a commendable thing," remarked Mrs. Daniver, "that you, sir, should go to the rescue of even a humble Chinaman. I find this bouillon delicious." [Pg 332]

"Have you quite recovered from your seasickness by this time, Mrs. Daniver?" I asked politely.

"Seasickness?" She raised an eyebrow in protest. "I never was seasick in my life—not even in the roughest crossings of the Channel, where others were quite helpless."

"It is fortunate to be immune," said I. "People tell me it is a terrible feeling—they even think they are going to die."

Jean Lafitte, I found, had made quite a serviceable shelter, throwing a tarpaulin over one of the long boat's oars. We pushed our fire to the front of this, and after a time induced the ladies to make themselves more comfortable. Only with some protest did my hearty pirates agree to share this shelter which made our sole protection against the storm.

CHAPTER XXXIII

[Pg 333]

IN WHICH WE ARE CASTAWAYS

THE rain came down dismally, and the chill of the night was very considerable, as I learned soon after ceasing my own exertions. The men made some sort of shelter for themselves by turning up the long boat and the dingey on edge, crawling into the lee, and thus finding a little protection. All but John, my cook. That calm personage, every time I turned, was at my elbow in the dark, standing silent, waiting for I knew not what. For the first time, I realized the virtue of his waterproof silk shirt. He seemed not to mind the rain, although he asked my consent to put his bundle and his book under the shelter. I stooped down at the firelight, curious to see the title of his book. It was familiar—*The Pirate's Own Book!*

"Where you catchee book, John?" I asked him.

"Litlee boy he give me; him 'Melican book. I lead him some. Plenty good book."

"Yes," said I; "I see. That boy'll make pirates of us all, if we aren't careful."

"That book, him tellee what do, sponsee bad storm," said John proudly. "I know." [Pg 334]

I walked over to where Peterson lay, his pipe now lighted by some magic all his own. We now could see more plainly the furred and yellow gleam of the lighthouse lamp. Peterson's concern, however, was all for the *Belle Helène*.

"I hate to think of her out there all by herself," said he.

"So do I, Peterson. I hate also to think of all that ninety-three we left out there."

We were standing near the edge of the ladies' shelter, and I heard Mrs. Daniver's voice as she put out her head at the edge of the tarpaulin.

"I thought you said all the ninety-three was gone," said she with some interest, as it appeared to me.

"No, we only had the last bottle of that case at luncheon, Mrs. Daniver," said I. "There are yet other cases out yonder."

"It's a bad night for neuralgia," said she complainingly.

"It is, madam. But I don't think I'll pull out again. And I am rejoiced that you are not troubled now with seasickness,—that you never are." Which last resulted in her dignified silence.

Through the night, there came continually the clamoring of the wild fowl in the lagoon back of us, and this seemed to make the boys restless. It was Jean Lafitte, next, who poked his head out from under the tarpaulin. [Pg 335]

"I've got the gun all right," said he, "and a lot of shells. In the morning we'll go out and get some of those ducks that are squawking."

"Yes, Jean," said I; "we're in one of the best ducking countries on this whole coast."

"That's fine—we can live chiefly by huntin' and fishin', like it says in the g'ographies."

"If the wind should shift," said I, "we may have to do that for quite a time. I don't know whether the lighthouse keeper has a boat or not, and the channel lies between us and the light—it makes out here straight to the Gulf. But now, be quiet, my sons, and see if we can't all get some sleep. I'll take care of the fire."

I passed a little apart to hunt for some driftwood, my shadow, John, following close at hand. When I returned I found a muffled figure standing at the feeble blaze. Helena raised her eyes, grave and serious.

"It was splendid," said she in a low tone of voice, addressing not so much myself as all the world, it seemed to me.

"Get back in there and go to sleep," said I. And, quietly she obeyed, so far as I might tell.

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For my own part, I did not seek the shelter of the other boat, but, wrapped in sweater and slicker, stood in the rain, John at my side. Once in a while we set out in the dark to find more wood for the little fire. In some way the long night wore on. Toward morning the rain ceased. It seemed to me that the rocking search-light of the *Belle Hélène* made scarce so wide an arc across the bay. The lighthouse ray shone less furry and yellow through the night. The wind began to lull, coming in gusts, at times after some moments of calm. The roll of the sea still came in, but sometimes I almost fancied that the surf was bellowing not so loud. And so at length, the dawn came, softening the gloom, and I could hear the roar of the great bodies of wild fowl rising as they always do at dawn, the tumult of their wings rivaling the heavy rhythm of the surf itself.

The advancing calm of nature seemed to quiet the senses of the sleepers, even in their sleep. Gently making up the fire for the last time, as the gray light began to come across the beach, I wandered inland a little way in search of the fresh water lagoon. Its edge lay not more than two or three hundred yards back of our bivouac. So, as best I might, I bathed my face and hands, and regretted that such things as soap and towels had been forgotten with many other things. Not irremediable, our plight; for now I could see the *Belle Hélène* still rolling at her anchor, uneasy, but still afloat; and in the daylight, and with a lessening sea, there would be no great difficulty in boarding her as we liked.

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Presently the others of the party were all afoot, standing stiffly, sluggishly, in the chill of dawn; and such was the breakfast which my boy John presently prepared for us, that I confess I began to make comparisons not wholly to his discredit. Now, for instance, said I to myself, had it been Mrs. Daniver who had been forgotten on board ship—but, of course, that line of reasoning might not be followed out. And as for Mrs. Daniver herself, it was only just to say that she made a fair attempt at comradeship, considering that she had retired without any aid whatever for her neuralgia. Helena seemed reticent. The men, as usual, ate apart. I did not find myself loquacious. Only my two young ruffians seemed full of the enjoyment possible in such a situation.

"Gee! ain't this fine?" said L'Olonnois. "I never did think we'd be really shipwrecked and cast away on a desert island. This is just like it is in the books."

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"Can we go huntin' now?" demanded Jean Lafitte, his mouth still full of bacon. "And will you come along? There must be millions of them ducks and geese. I didn't know there was so many in all the world."

"You may go, both of you, Jean Lafitte," said I, "if you'll be careful not to shoot yourselves. As for me, I must go back once more to the boat, I fancy."

Peterson and I now held a brief conference, and presently, leaving the ladies in charge of Willy and the cook, we two, with Williams to run the motor, with some difficulty launched the long boat and made off through a sea none too amiable, to go aboard the *Belle Hélène* once more—which so short a time before I had thought we never might do again.

"This is easier than pulling out in the dingey," grinned Peterson, as we approached the *Belle Hélène*. "Confound that deck-hand, he might have got you drowned! I'll fire him, sure!"

"No," said I; "I've been thinking that over. There was a great deal of confusion, and after all, he may have thought that we had John with us. Besides, he's only young, and he's human. I'll tell you what we'll do, Peterson—I'll dock him a month's wages, and I'll send his wages to his mother. Meantime, let him carry the wood and water for a week."

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We found it not difficult now to go aboard the *Belle Hélène*, for, in the lessening seaway, she rolled not so evilly. Peterson sprang to the deck as the bow of our boat rose alongside on a wave, and made fast our line. When Williams and I had followed, we took a general inventory of the *Belle Hélène*. All the deck gear was gone, spare oars and spars, a canvas or so, and some coils of rope. Beyond that, there seemed no serious damage, unless the hull had been injured by its pounding during the night.

"It's a mud-bank here, I think, Mr. Harry," said Peterson. "She may have ripped some of her copper on the oyster reefs, but she seems to bed full length and maybe she's not strained, after all."

"There's the line of channel guides," said I, pointing to a row of sticks driven into the mud a

couple of miles in length.

"Yes," said the old man, "the channel's not more than a biscuit toss from here. We came right across it—if it hadn't been in the dark, we'd have gone through into the lee of the island and been all right. Now as it is, we're all wrong."

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"How do you mean?" I asked.

"How'll we get that anchor up?" grumbled he. "If we start the engines and try to crawl up by the capstan, we couldn't pull her out of the mud. If we put on a donkey engine we'd snatch the bow out of here before we could lift the hook. And until we do, how are we going to move her? There's the channel, but it's as far as ever. We can't sweep her off, of course, and we can't pole her off."

"Well, Peterson," said I, "let us, by all means, hope for the worst." I smiled, seeing that he now was possessed of his normal gloom.

"Well," said he, "we went on at full tide, and hard aground at that. This wind is blowing all the water out of Côte Blanche. Of course, if the wind should turn and drive in again, we might move her, if we caught her at high tide once more. Until that happens, I guess we're anchored here for sure."

"The glass is rising now, Peterson," said I, pleasantly.

"Oh, yes, it may rise a little," said he, "and of course the storm's gone by for the time. But I don't think there's going to be any good change of weather that'll hold, very soon. But now, Williams and I'll go below and see if we can start a pump. I expect she's sprung a leak, all right."

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Shaking his head in much apprehension, the old man made his way with Williams, first into the engine-room. For my own part, I turned toward my cabin door. All at once as I did so it seemed to me I heard a sound. It came again, a sort of a meek diffident sound, expectant rather than complaining. And then I heard an unmistakable scraping at the door. Hastening, I flung it open. I was greeted with a great whine of joy and trust, a shaggy form leaped upon me, thrust its cold nose into my face, gave me much greetings of whines, and at length of a loud howl of joy.

"Partial!" I cried, and caught him by the paws as he put them on my shoulders and rubbed his muzzle along my cheek, whimpering; "Partial! Oh, my dear chap, I say now, I'm glad to see you!"

As a matter of fact, I had forgotten Partial these three days, other things being on my mind. Once more our amateurishness in shipwreck had nearly cost us a life. Partial, no doubt, had meekly waited at his usual place until ordered to come out with the rest. We had closed the doors and port-holes when we left the *Belle Hélène*, and thus he had been locked in.

I sat down on one of the bench lockers with Partial's head in my hand, and almost my eyes became moist. "Partial," said I, "let me confess the truth to you. The woman had maddened me. I forgot you—I did, and will own it now. It was a grave fault, my friend. I do not ask you to forgive me, and all I can do is to promise you such amend as lies in my power. From now on, I promise you, you shall go with me to all the ends of the earth. My people shall be your people, till death do us part. Do you hear me, Partial?"

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He answered by springing up again and licking my face and hands, whimpering excitedly, glad that I had come at last. "Dear Partial," said I, "you're no gladder than I am. And what's more, you've nothing to cost you penitence. Come, we'll go to the dining-room and see whether there's anything left to eat."

He followed me now along the rolling deck, and happily I was able to get him some scraps for his breakfast. Peterson heard me talking, and thrust up a head above the engine-room hatch. He was as crestfallen as myself when I showed him that, once more, we had been forgetful and had left a friend while busy in saving ourselves.

I went once more to my cabin—Peterson having discovered, apparently to his great regret, that so far as could be determined, we had not started a seam or smashed a timber anywhere. I found a small tent among other of my sporting equipment and tossed this out to go in the long boat's cargo. Another fowling piece and ammunition, my canvas hunting coat and wading boots, followed. Even, I caught down from a nail the only other pair of trousers available in my wardrobe—for Davidson's vast midship section comported ill with my own. I found my watch in these other trousers, and putting a hand in a pocket, fished out also my portemonnaie. It had certain bills in it—I presume two or three thousand dollars in all, and I thrust these into my pocket. At the bottom of the little purse,—among collar buttons and other hard objects,—I found a little round white object, and once more bethought me of my pearl which I had won on the far northern river, as it seemed to me many years before—the pearl which, as I have said, was to be known as the *Belle Hélène*. I preserved it now.

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Peterson and Williams, meantime, were busy in getting aboard a case or so of water—not forgetting the ninety-three of which I reminded the old man once more. Some additional stores of bacon and tea, and a case of eggs, were also taken aboard. At length, with quite a little cargo in the way of comforts, we embarked once more and started for our rude encampment.

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"We may be here for a month," said Peterson gloomily, looking at the *Belle Hélène*, now rolling just a little, her keel fast full length in the mud-bar. "I don't think there's ever going to be any change of wind—it'll blow steadily this way for a week, anyhow."

"I presume, Peterson," said I coolly, "that you don't see the sun breaking through the clouds over there, at all. And I fancy that you will not believe, either, that the sea is lulling now. Very well, I don't want to make you unhappy, my friend."

I heard Williams chuckling as he stooped over his engine. Thus, chugging on merrily with the long oily roll of the sea under us, we presently once more ran our surf, and this time had small difficulty in winning through, for, once we felt the ground under us, we simply sprang overboard and waded in, dragging the boat with us, waist-deep sometimes in the flood, but on the whole quite safe.

My two pirate mates came down to the beach joyously, and helped us unload. It seemed that they had made something of a hunt already, for with much pride Jean now displayed to me certain birds, proof of his own prowess with his shotgun. [Pg 345]

"Some of 'em's good to eat," said he. "Regular greenheads, like we get up North." I looked at the string of birds, and saw that they were mallards and teals, a couple of dozen at least.

"Fie, fie!" said I. "I fear you've been shooting on the water."

"Sure I did! And here's four things that I don't suppose are good to eat—they got kind of snaky heads, and red-colored, too. Ain't no ducks good to eat that ain't got green heads."

"Each man to his taste," said I, "but if you like, you may have the green heads, and I'll take these with the auburn locks."

"Pshaw! What are they?" answered he.

"Only canvasbacks," said I, "and good fat ones, too. What luck have you, Jimmy, my son?"

"Well, I went along and helped carry things," said L'Olonnois.

"What's that you've got on a string?" I asked him.

"Oh, that," said he, flushing. "It ain't nothing but a little turtle. It had funny marks on its back. I caught it in the grass over there by the lake." [Pg 346]

Something about Jimmy's little turtle interested me, and I picked it up in my hands.

"For amateur sportsmen, gentlemen," said I, "you're doing pretty well. Your funny little turtle, Jimmy, is nothing but a diamond-back terrapin. There are perhaps more of them on this coast than anywhere else in the world to-day. And Partial, here—that friend of ours now leaping excitedly and joyously before them, barking at this little turtle of Jimmy's—will perhaps be able to help you find some more of them in the grass—the market hunters here hunt them with dogs, as perhaps you did not know."

"We got some oysters, Sir," said Willy, coming forward shyly and shamefacedly; and showed me the cockpit of the duck boat pretty well filled. The boy had, it seems, found a reef of these in a brackish arm which made inland, and dug them by the simple process of stooping down below the surface of the water, since he had no oyster tongs.

"Well," said I, "it looks as if we would fare pretty well for lunch. John"—and I called my China boy—"again I find renewed cause for felicitations on your rescue."

John stood looking at me blankly. [Pg 347]

"You savee, John?" said I, showing him one of the canvasbacks, and he remarked mildly, "All litee." If anything, his lunch was better than his breakfast, and when I saw him take Jimmy's funny little turtle from him and examine it with appraising eye, I felt fairly well convinced that we should not suffer at the dinner hour.

But though a certain gaiety now came to others of the party as we sat about our midday meal, warm now and well fed, and although the boys excitedly made plans about putting up the tent and furnishing it and going into camp for the winter, I could not share their eagerness. There was one other reticent figure at our fireside. Helena sat silent, the head of Partial in her lap. I felt resentment that she should steal from me even my dog. At last, having nothing better to do, I picked up my gun, and slipping on my coat, started down the beach, telling the boys that I was going alone, perhaps too far for them to follow, with the purpose of making some sort of an exploration of the island.

Moody and depressed, not in the least well satisfied with life, even with matters thus so far more fortunate than we had so recently had reason to expect, I walked along the hard sand, sometimes looking at the long lines of wild fowl streaming in above the fresh-water lagoon, but in reality thinking but little of these. I did not at first hear the light step which came behind me on the sand. [Pg 348]

CHAPTER XXXIV

IN WHICH IS NO RAPPROCHEMENT WITH THE FAIR CAPTIVE

“HARRY!” I heard her call, and turned quickly. “Harry, wait!”

She came hurrying up toward me. I felt my color rise. Awkwardly, I stood waiting, and did not greet her. I cast a quick glance the other way down the beach. It would be a hundred yards before the first bend of the shore-line would carry us behind the tall rushes. Meantime, we were in full sight of all.

Partial, who had followed me when I whistled, now greeted her more joyously than did his master.

“Yes?” said I dully; “I suppose you came to take away my dog from me, didn’t you? It was all that was left.”

“Of course,” said she coloring. “I didn’t know but what Partial might be hungry.”

“It is I who am hungry, Helena,” said I. “I have long been hungry—for a look, a word.”

She did not smile, showed not any trace of coquetry in her mien, but paced on with me now down the beach. I suppose she knew when we had turned the point of rushes, for now she laid her hand on my rough canvas sleeve. It must have cost her effort to do that.

[Pg 350]

“Harry, what’s wrong with you?” said she after a time, since I still remained moodily staring ahead. I did not answer, would not look at her for a time, but at length she turned. She stood, I say, with her hand on my arm, her chin raised fully, her serious eyes fixed on me. The dark hair was blown all about her face. She had on over her long white sweater a loose silk waterproof of some sort, which blew every way, but did not disturb the lines of her tall figure, nor lessen the pale red and white which the sea breeze had stung into her cheeks. She did not smile, and her eyes, I say, looked steadily and seriously into mine.

“What’s wrong with you?” she asked, frowning slightly, as it seemed to me.

“Everything in the world is wrong with me, as you know very well,” said I. “Am I not a poor man? Am I not an unsuccessful lover? Am I not a failure under every test which you can apply? Am I not a coward—did you not tell me so yourself?”

Her eyes grew damp slowly. “I didn’t mean it,” said she.

“Then why did you say it?”

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“It was long before—that was before last night, Harry. You forget.”

“What if it was?” I demanded. “I was the same man then that I was last night.”

“I didn’t mean it, Harry,” said she, her voice low. Her hand was still on my arm. Her eye now was cast down, the tip of her toe was tracing a circle on the wet sand where we stood.

“I didn’t think,” said she, after a little while.

“I presume not,” said I coldly. “Sometimes women do not stop to think. You have not stopped to think that there is a limit even to what my love would stand, Helena. Now, much as I love you—and I never loved you so much as I do now—I’ll never again ask you for what you can not give me. I’ve been rubbed the wrong way all I can stand, and I’ll not have it any more. I’ve brought you here, yes, and I’m sorry enough for it. But I’m going to fix all that now, soon as I can.”

“What do you mean, Harry?” she asked quietly.

“Yonder, across the bay,” said I, pointing, “runs a channel. That’s the Chenière. I presume the lighthouse boats come from in there. Maybe there’ll be one down after the storm in a day or so. He’ll take out a message, and get it on some boat bound for Morgan City, perhaps.”

[Pg 352]

“And what then?”

“Why, I shall send out any message you like, beside my own message to the parents of these boys of mine. And I’ll send a message, too, to my friend, Manning.”

She turned her eyes where I pointed once more, this time seemingly northward across the bay. “Yonder is still another channel,” said I, “not twenty miles from where we stand. It runs back to the live-oak islands where my friend Manning has his plantation. If the tide serves and we can get the yacht afloat, it won’t take us long to get in there. Once there, you are safe; and once there, I say good-by. Judge for yourself whether or not this is the last time.”

“And when will that be, Harry?” she demanded, still tracing some figure on the sand with the toe of her little boot.

“That, I have said, is something I can not tell. But as soon as possible, rest assured.”

She was silent now, confused, a little abashed, a mood entirely new to her in my recollection of her many moods. Her hand still lay upon my coarse canvas sleeve as though she had forgotten it. I bent now and kissed it. “Harry,” said she in a whisper, “don’t you care for me any more?”

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“Go back to the camp, Helena,” said I; “you know I do, but I’ve done enough for you, and I’ll do no more. All a coward can do to keep you safe I have done, but I’m no such coward as to follow you around now and dangle at your apron strings. It’s good-by once more. What are you,” I

demanded fiercely, once more, "that you should walk over my soul again and again? Hasn't there got to be an end to that sort of thing some time, and don't you think there is an end for me? Go back and tell your aunt that you have won. And much joy may you both have in your winning."

I kissed her hand, flung it off, turned and went down the beach. She did not look about, but presently as I saw, turned and went back toward the camp, her head hanging. And, as I had said to her, I never loved her so much in all my life, though never was I so little disposed to go one step in her pursuit.

Partial sat, looking after her also, his heart torn in the division between us, for he loved us both.

"Partial," I called to him harshly, and he came, his ears down and very unhappy. Silently, the dog at my heels, I strode on down the beach, and so I saw her no more for some time. [Pg 354]

I found for myself a driftwood log at the edge of the sea-marsh, and here for a time I sat down, moodily staring out across the bay, as unhappy, I fancy, as man gets to be in this world. I scarce know how long I sat here, in the wind which blew salt across the bay, and for some time, I paid no attention to the clamoring fowl which passed and repassed not far from my point.

At length, a long harrow of great Canadian geese passed so close to me that without much thought about it, I raised the gun and fired. I killed two birds, and as I picked them up I found they were not a brace, but a pair. The report of my gun started a clamoring of all manner of fowl beyond the edge of reeds which hid the reef. A cloud of ducks passed before me, and slipping in the shells once more, I fired right and left. Again I killed my brace, and again when I picked them up they were a pair. The head of one was green, the other brown. "Male and female made He them!" said I. "If I had not killed these birds, in the spring they would have gone northward, to the edge of the world in their own love-making, thousands of miles from here." I looked at my quarry with remorse, and not caring to shoot more, at length picked up the birds and slowly started back to camp, not looking forward with any too great pleasure, it may be imagined, to further meetings with the woman whom, of all the world, I most cared to meet. [Pg 355]

I found all the others of the party amiably engaged in camp affairs. The tent now was up, the fire was arranged in more practical fashion, and John was busy with his pans. Lafitte, ever resourceful and ever busy, was out with Willy after more oysters. L'Olonnois, his partner, seemed engaged in some sort of argument with his Auntie Helena.

"Jimmy, I can't!" I heard her say. "There isn't any sugar."

"Aw!" said he, "there's plenty of sugar, ain't there, John?" And that worthy smiled as he pointed toward an open canister of that dainty.

"But I haven't any pan."

"Yes, you have, too, got a pan. Here's one a-settin' right here in front of you. Come on now, Auntie. We're goin' to have duck and terrapin and oysters and everything—all a fellow would want, besides that, is just fudges."

Helena stood preoccupied and hesitant, hardly hearing what he said, as I fancy. At once L'Olonnois' attitude changed. Folding his arms, he turned toward her sternly. [Pg 356]

"Woman!" said he, "are you not a captive to our band? Then who gives orders here? Either you make fudges, or your life's blood stains these sands!"

"Oh, all right, Jimmy," she said listlessly. "I'll make them, if you like."

"You'd better," remarked that worthy sententiously. "Of course," he added, seeking to mollify his victim, over whom he thus domineered, "it ain't just like it is back home on the stove, but you'll have to get used to that, because we're going to live here forever. And," he added, casting a glance of his stern blue eyes upon her, "it is the part of the captive maid ever to live happily with the chief of the pirate band."

Whereupon Helena and Jimmy both looked up and saw me standing, unwilling listener to all that had been said. Helena moved away and pretended to be busy with the material for her confections.

"Aw, shucks, Black Bart," said Jimmy, turning to me—"ain't that just like a woman?—They won't never play the game."

CHAPTER XXXV

[Pg 357]

IN WHICH I FIND TWO ESTIMABLE FRIENDS, BUT LOSE ONE BELOVED

THE weather now, moderating, after the fashion of weather on this coast, as rapidly as it had become inclement, we passed a more comfortable night on our desert island. No doubt the lighthouse tender knew of our presence, for he easily could see our tent by day and our fire by night, and he surely must have seen our good ship riding at anchor under his nose at the edge of the channel; but no visit came from that official—for the very good reason, as we later learned,

that the storm had stove in his boat at her mooring; so that all he himself could do was to cross his Cajun bosom and pray that his supply skiff might come from across the bay. So, as much alone as the Swiss family by name of Robinson—an odd name for a Swiss family, it always seemed to me—we remained on our desert island undisturbed, the ladies now in the comfortable tent, my hardy pirates under the tarpaulin, and the rest of us as we liked or might, all in beds of the sweet scented grasses which grew along the lagoon where the great ranks of wild fowl kept up their chatter day and night.

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It was a land of plenty, and any but a man in my situation might well have been content there for many days. Content was not in my own soul. I was up by dawn and busy about the boats, before any sign of life was visible around the tent or the canvas shelter. But since the sun rose warm, it yet was early when we met at John's breakfast fire. I felt myself a shabby figure, for in my haste I had forgotten my razors; and by now my clothing was sadly soiled and stained, even the most famous of the Davidson waistcoats being the worse for the salt-water immersions it had known; and my ancient flannels were corkscrewing about my limbs. But as for Helena, young and vital, she discarded her sweater for breakfast, and appeared as she had before the shipwreck, in lace bridge coat and wearing many gems! L'Olonnois, with the intimacy of kin and the admiration of youth—and with youth's lack of tact—saluted her now gaily. "Gee! Auntie," said he, at table on the sand, "togged out that way, all them glitterin' gems, you shore look fit for a pirate's bride!"

Poor Helena! She blushed red to the hair; and I fear I did no better myself. "Jimmy!" reproved Aunt Lucinda.

"Don't call me 'Jimmy'!" rejoined that hopeful. "My name is L'Olonnois, the Scourge of The Sea. Me an' Jean Lafitte, we follow Black Bart the Avenger, to the Spanish Main. Auntie, pass me the bacon, please. I'm just about starved."

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Mrs. Daniver, as was her custom, ate a very substantial breakfast; Helena, almost none at all; nor had I much taste for food. In some way, our constraint insensibly extended to all the party, much to L'Olonnois' disgust. "It's *her* fault!" I overheard him say to his mate. "Women can't play no games. An' we was havin' such a bully chance! Now, like's not, we won't stay here longer'n it'll take to get things back to the boat again. I don't want to go back home—I'd rather be a pirate; an' so'd any fellow."

"Sure he would," assented Jean. They did not see me, behind the tent.

"Somethin's wrong," began L'Olonnois, portentously.

"What'd you guess?" queried Lafitte. "Looks to me like it was somethin' between him an' the fair captive."

"That's just it—that's just what I said! Now, if Black Bart lets his whiskers grow, an' Auntie Helena wears them rings, ain't it just like in the book? Course it is! But here they go, don't eat nothin', don't talk none to nobody."

[Pg 360]

"I'll tell you what!" began Lafitte.

"Uh-huh, what?" demanded L'Olonnois.

"A great wrong has been did our brave leader by yon heartless jade; that's what!"

"You betcher life they has. He's on the square, an' look what he done for us—look how he managed things all the way down to here. Anybody else couldn't have got away with this. Anybody else'd never a' went out there last night after John, just a Chink, thataway. An' her!"

Jimmy's disapproval of his auntie, as thus expressed, was extreme. I was now about to step away, but feared detection, so unwillingly heard on.

"But he can't see no one else but yon fickle jade!" commented Jean Lafitte, "unworthy as she is of a bold chief's regard!"

"Nope. That's what's goin' to make all the trouble. I'll tell you what!"

"What?"

"We'll have to fix it up, somehow."

"How'd you mean?"

"Why, reason it out with 'em both."

Jean apparently shook his head, or had some look of dubiousness, for L'Olonnois went on.

"We *gotta* do it, somehow. If we don't, we'll about have to go back home; an' who wants to go back home from a good old desert island like this here. *So* now——"

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"Uh, huh?"

"Why, I'll tell you, now. You see, I got some pull with her—the fair captive. She used to lick me, but she don't dast to try it on here on a desert island: so I got some pull. An' like enough you c'd talk it over with Black Bart."

"Nuh—uh! I don't like to."

"Why?"

"Well, I don't. He's all right."

"Yes, but we got to get 'em *together!*"

"Shore. But, my idea, he's hard to *get* together if he gets a notion he ain't had a square deal nohow, someways."

"Well, he ain't. So that makes my part the hardest. But you just go to him, and tell him not to hurry, because you are informed the fair captive is goin' to relent, pretty soon, if we just don't get in too big a hurry and run away from a place like this—where the duck shootin' is immense!"

"But kin you work *her*, Jimmy?"

"Well, I dunno. She's pretty set, if she thinks she ain't had a square deal, too."

"Well now," argued Lafitte, "if that's the way they both feel, either they're both wrong an' ought to shake hands, or else one of 'em's wrong, and they either ought to get together an' find out which it was, or else they ought to leave it to some one else to say which one *was* wrong. Ain't that so?" [Pg 362]

"O' course it's so. So now, thing fer us fellows to do, is just to put it before 'em plain, an' get 'em both to leave it to us two fellers what's right fer 'em both to do. Now, *I* think they'd ought to get married, both of 'em—I mean to each other, you know. Folks *does* get married."

"Black Bart would," said Jean Lafitte. "I'll bet anything. The fair captive, she's a heartless jade, but I seen Black Bart lookin' at her, an'——"

"An' I seen her lookin' at him—leastways a picture—an' says she, 'Jimmy——'"

"Jimmy!" It was I, myself, red and angry, who now broke from my unwilling eavesdropping.

The two boys turned to me innocently. I found it difficult to say anything at all, and wisest to say nothing. "I was just going to ask if you two wouldn't like to take the guns and go out after some more ducks—especially the kind with red heads and flat noses, such as we had yesterday. And I'll lend you Partial, so you can try for some more of those funny little turtles. I'll have to go out to the ship, and also over to the lighthouse, before long. The tide will turn, perhaps, and at least the wind is offshore from the island now." [Pg 363]

"Sure, we'll go." Jean spoke for both at once.

"Very well, then. And be careful. And you'd—you'd better leave your auntie and her auntie alone, Jimmy—they'll want to sleep."

"You didn't hear us sayin' nothin', did you, Black Bart?" asked L'Olonnois, suspiciously.

"By Jove! I believe that's a boat beating down the bay," said I. "Sail ho!" And so eager were they that they forgot my omission of direct reply.

"It's very likely only the lighthouse supply boat coming in," said I. "I'll find out over there. Better run along, or the morning flight of the birds will be over." So they ran along.

As for myself, I called Peterson and Williams for another visit to our disabled ship, which now lay on a level keel, white and glistening, rocking gently in the bright wind. I left word for the ladies that we might not be back for luncheon.

We found that the piling waters of Côte Blanche, erstwhile blown out to sea, were now slowly settling back again after the offshore storm. The *Belle Helène* had risen from her bed in the mud now and rode free. Our soundings showed us that it would be easy now to break out the anchor and reach the channel, just ahead. So, finding no leak of consequence, and the beloved engines not the worse for wear, Williams went below to get up some power, while Peterson took the wheel and I went forward to the capstan. [Pg 364]

The donkey winch soon began its work, and I felt the great anchor at length break away and come apeak. The current of the air swung us before we had all made fast; and as I sounded with a long bow pike, I presently called out to Peterson, "No bottom!" He nodded; and now, slowly, we took the channel and moved on in opposite the light. We could see the white-capped gulf rolling beyond.

"Water there!" said Peterson. "We can go on through, come around in the Morrison cut-off, and so make the end of the Manning channel to the mainland. But I wish we had a local pilot."

I nodded. "Drop her in alongside this fellow's wharf," I added. "The ladies have sent some letters —to go out by the tender's boat, yonder—I suppose he'll be going back to-day." [Pg 365]

"Like enough," said Peterson; and so gently we moved on up the dredged channel, and at last made fast at the tumble-down wharf of the lighthouse; courteously waiting for the little craft of the tender to make its landing.

We found the mooring none too good, what with the storm's work at the wharf, and as we shifted our lines a time or two, the gaping, jeans-clad Cajun who had come in with mail and supplies passed in to the lighthouse ahead of us; and I wonder his head did not twist quite off its neck, for

though he walked forward, he ever looked behind him.

When at length we two, Peterson and myself, passed up the rickety walk to the equally rickety gallery at the foot of the light, we found two very badly frightened men instead of a single curious one. The keeper in sooth had in hand a muzzle-loading shotgun of such extreme age, connected with such extreme length of barrel, as might have led one to suspect it had grown an inch or so annually for all of many decades. He was too much frightened to make active resistance, however, and only warned us away, himself, now, a pale saffron in color.

"Keep hout!" he commanded. "No, you'll didn't!"

[Pg 366]

"We'll didn't what, my friend?" began I mildly. "Don't you like my looks? Not that I blame you if you do not. But has the boat brought down any milk or eggs that you can spare?"

"No milluk—no haig!" muttered the light tender; and they would have closed the door.

"Come, come now, my friends!" I rejoined testily. "Suppose you haven't, you can at least be civil. I want to talk with you a minute. This is the power yacht *Belle Helène*, of Mackinaw, cruising on the Gulf. We went aground in the storm; and all we want now is to send out a little mail by you to Morgan City, or wherever you go; and to pass the time of day with you, as friends should. What's wrong—do you think us a government revenue boat, and are you smuggling stuff from Cuba through the light here?"

"We no make hany smug'," replied the keeper. "But we know you, who you been!"

He smote now upon an open newspaper, whose wrapper still lay on the floor. I glanced, and this time I saw a half-page cut of the *Belle Helène* herself, together with portraits of myself, Mrs. Daniver, Miss Emory and two wholly imaginary and fearsome boys who very likely were made up from newspaper portraits of the James Brothers! Moreover, my hasty glance caught sight of a line in large letters, reading:

[Pg 367]

TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD!

"Peterson," said I calmly, handing him the paper, "they seem to be after us, and to value us rather high."

He glanced, his eyes eager; but Peterson, while a professional doubter, was personally a man of whose loyalty and whose courage I, myself, had not the slightest doubt.

"Let 'em come!" said he. "We're on our own way and about our own business; and outside the three mile zone, let 'em follow us on the high seas if they like. She's sound as a bell, Mr. Harry, and once we get her docked and her port shaft straight, there's nothing can touch her on the Gulf. Let 'em come."

"But we can't dock here, my good Peterson."

"Well, we can beat 'em with one engine and one screw. Besides, what have we done?"

"Haint you was 'hrobber, han ron hoff with those sheep?" demanded the keeper excitedly.

"No, we are not ship thieves but gentlemen, my friend," I answered, suddenly catching at his long gun and setting it behind me. "You might let that go off," I explained. At which he went yellower than ever, a thing I had thought impossible.

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"Now, look here," said I. "Suppose we are robbers, pirates, what you like, and suppose a price is put on our heads—a price which means a jolly nice libel suit for each paper printing it, by the way, or a jolly nice apology—none the less, we are a strong band and without fear either of the law or of you. Here you are alone, and not a sail is in sight. If any boat did come here, we could—well, we could blow her out of the water, couldn't we, Peterson? We could blow you out of the water, too, couldn't we, we and these ruffians of our crew?"—and I pointed at the two low-browed pictures of Lafitte and L'Olonnois.

A shudder was my only answer. I think the two portraits of my young bullies did the business.

"Very well, then," I resumed, "it is plain, Messieurs, that there is many a slip between the reward and the pocket, *voyez vous? Bien!* But here—" and I thrust a hand into my pocket—"is a reward much closer home, and far easier to attain."

Their eyes bulged as they saw two or three thousand dollars in big bills smoothed out.

"*Ecoutez, Messieurs!*" said I. "Behold here not enemies, but men of like mind. I speak of men who live by the sea, men of the old home of Jean Lafitte, that great merchant, that bold soldier, who did so much to save his country at the Battle. Even now he has thousands of friends and hundreds of relatives in this land. You yourself, I doubt not, Messieurs, are distant cousins of Jean Lafitte? *N'est-ce pas?*"

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They crossed themselves, but murmured "*Ba-oui!*" "Est ees the trut'! How did Monsieur know?" asked the tender.

"I know many things. I know that any cousin descended from those brave days loves the sea and its ways more than he loves the law. And if money has come easy—as this did—what harm if a cousin should take the price of a rat-skin or two and carry out a letter or so to the railway, and keep a close mouth about it as well? To the good old days, and Messieurs, my friends!" I had seen

the neck of a flask in Peterson's pocket, and now I took it forth, unscrewed the top, and passed it, with two bills of one hundred dollars each.

They poured, grinned. I stood, waiting for their slow brains to act, but there was only a foregone answer. The keeper drank first, as ranking his tender; the other followed; and they handed the flask—not the bills—back to Peterson and me. [Pg 370]

"*Merci, mes amis!*" said I. "And I drink to Jean Lafitte and the old days! Perhaps, you may buy a mass for your cousin's soul?"

"*Ah non!*" answered the keeper. "Hees soul she's hout of *Purgatoire* long hago eef she'll goin' get hout. Me, I buy me some net for s'rimp."

"An' me, two harpent more lan' for my farm," quoth the tender.

"Alas! poor Jean!" said I. "But he was so virtuous a man that he needs no masses after a hundred years, perhaps. As you like. You will take the letters; and this for the telegraph?"

"Certain'! I'll took it those," answered the tender. "You'll stayed for dish coffee, yass?" inquired the keeper, with Cajun hospitality.

"No, I fear it is not possible, thank you," I replied. "We must be going soon."

"An' where you'll goin', Monsieur?"

"Around the island, up the channel, up the old oyster-boat channel of Monsieur Edouard. The letters are some of them for Monsieur Edouard himself. And you know well, *mes amis*, that once we lie at the wharf of Monsieur Edouard, not the government even of the state will touch us yonder?"

"My faith, *non!* I should say it—certain' not! No man he'll mawnkey wit' Monsieur Edouard, heem! You'll was know him, Monsieur?" [Pg 371]

"We went to school together. We smoked the same pipe."

"My faith! You'll know Monsieur Edouard!" The keeper shook my hand. "H'I'll was work for Monsieur Edouard manny tam hon hees boat, hon hees plantation, hon hees 'ouse. When I'll want some leetle money, s'pose those hrat he'll wasn't been prime yet, hall H'I'll need was to go non Monsieur Edouard, hask for those leetle monny. He'll han' it on me, yass, heem, ten dollar, jus' like as heasy Monsieur has gave it me hondred dollar now, yas, heem!"

"Yes? Well, I know that a cousin of Jean Lafitte—who no doubt has dug for treasure all over the dooryard of Monsieur Edouard——"

"But not behin' the smoke-house—nevair on dose place yet, I'll swear it!"

"—Very well, suppose you have not yet included the smoke-house of Monsieur Edouard, at least you are his friend. And what Acadian lives who is not a friend of the ladies?"

"Certain', Monsieur."

"Very well again. What you see in the paper is all false. The two ladies whose pictures you see here, and here, are yonder at our camp. You shall come and see that they are well and happy, both of them. Moreover, if you like another fifty for the mass for Jean Lafitte's soul, you, yourself, my friend, shall pilot us into the channel of Monsieur Edouard. We'll tow your boat behind us across the bay. Is it not?" [Pg 372]

"Certain'! *oui!*" answered the tender. "But you'll had leetle dish coffee quite plain?" once more demanded the lonesome keeper; and for sake of his hospitable soul we now said yes; and very good coffee it was, too: and the better since I knew it meant we now were friends. Ah! pirate blood is far thicker than any water you may find.

"But if we take you on as pilot, my friend," said I to the pilot as at length we arose, "how shall we get out our letters after all?"

"Thass hall right," replied he, "my cousin, Richard Barrière—she's cousin of Jean Lafitte too, heem—she'll was my partner on the s'rimp, an' she'll was come hon the light, here, heem, to-mor', yas, heem."

"And would you give the letters to Mr. Richard Barrière to-morrow?" I inquired of the lighthouse keeper.

"*Oui, oui*, certain', *assurance*, wit' *plaisir*, Monsieur," he replied. So I handed him the little packet. [Pg 373]

It chanced that my eye caught sight of one of the two letters Mrs. Daniver had handed me. The address was not in Mrs. Daniver's handwriting, but one that I knew very well. And the letter, in this handwriting that I knew very well, was addressed to Calvin Horace Davidson, Esquire, The Boston Club, New Orleans, Louisiana: all written out in full in Helena's own scrupulous fashion.

I gave the letter over to the messenger, but for a time I stood silent, thinking. I knew now very well what that letter contained. But yesterday, Helena Emory had finally decided, there on the beach, alone with me, the salt air on her cheek, the salt tears in her eyes. She had gone far as

woman might to tell me that she was grieved over a hasty word—she had given me a chance, my first chance, my only chance, my last chance. And, I, pig-headed fool, had slighted her at the very moment of moments of all my life—I who had prided myself on my “psychology”—I who had thought myself wise—I had allowed that woman to go away with her head drooping when at last she—oh, I saw it all plainly enough now! And now indeed small psychology and small wit were requisite to know the whole process of a woman’s soul, thus chilled. She had been hesitant, had been a little resentful of this runaway situation, had not liked my domineering ways; but at last she had relented and had asked my pardon. Then I had spurned her. And then her mind swung to the other man. She had not yet given that man his answer, but when I chilled her, rejected her timid little desire to “make up” with me—why, then, her mind was made up for that other man at once. She had written his answer. And now—oh! fiendlike cruelty of woman’s heart—she had chosen me as her messenger to carry out that word which would cost me herself forever! She had done that exquisitely well, as she did everything, not even advising me that I was to be her errand boy on such an errand, trusting me to find out by accident, as I had, that I was to be my own executioner, was to spring my own guillotine. She knew that, none the less, though I understood what the letter meant thus addressed, I sacredly must execute her silent trust. Oh! Helena, yours was indeed an exquisite revenge for that one hour of a dour man’s hurt pride.

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CHAPTER XXXVI

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IN WHICH WE FOLD OUR TENTS

BY consent of the lighthouse keeper, we left the *Belle Helène* moored at the wharf in the channel, with Williams in charge, while Peterson and I, towing the tender’s sailing skiff, its piratical lateen sail lowered, started back for our encampment in our long boat. It was only a half mile or so alongshore around the head of the island, although we had to keep out a bit to avoid going aground on the flats where the *Belle Helène* had come to grief—and had, moreover, to wade ashore some fifty yards or so, now that the sea was calm, since the keel of the motor-boat would not admit a closer approach in the shallows.

We found our party all assembled, John having but now issued his luncheon call; and, such had proved the swift spell of this care-free life, none expressed much delight at the announcement of my decision to strike camp and move toward civilization. Helena only looked up swiftly, but made no comment; and Mrs. Daniver, to my surprise, openly rebelled at leaving these flesh-pots, where canvasback and terrapin might be had by shaking the bushes, and where the supply of ninety-three seemed, after all, not exhausted. Of course, my men had nothing to say about it, but when it came to my partners and associates, Lafitte and L’Olonnois, there was open mutiny.

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“Why, now,” protested L’Olonnois, his lip quivering, “O’ course we don’t want to go home. Ain’t our desert island all right? Where you goin’ to find any better place ’n this, like to know? Besides”—and here he drew me to one side—“they’s a good reason for not goin’ just yet, Black Bart!”

“What, Jimmy?” I inquired.

“Well, I know somethin’.”

“And what is it?”

“Well, Jean Lafitte knows it, too.”

“What is it then?”

“Well, it ain’t happened yet, but it’s goin’ to—or anyhow maybe.”

“You interest me! Is it a matter of importance?”

“—Say it was!”

“To whom?”

“Why, to you—an’ besides, to my Auntie Helena. ’N’ you can’t pull off things like that just anywheres. Jean Lafitte an’ me, we frame up how to handle yon heartless jade, the fair captive, ’n’ here you butt in ’n’ spoil the whole works. It ain’t right.”

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I bethought me now of the conversation I had unwillingly overheard—and my heart was grateful to these my friends—but the next instant I remembered the note to Cal Davidson.

“I thank you, Jimmy, my friend,” said I, “and I believe I know what you mean, but it can’t be done.”

“What can’t, an’ why can’t it?”

“Why, the—the frame-up that you have just mentioned. In short—but, Jimmy, go on and roll up the blankets.”

“But why can’t it, and what do you know about it? Tell me,” he demanded with sudden inspiration, “is yon varlet a suitor, too, for yon heartless jade?”

"I decline to answer, Jimmy. Don't let's get into too deep water. Go on and get your bundles ready."

"You're a fine pirate, ain't you, Black Bart!" he broke out. "Do you hold yerself fit to head a band o' bold an' desprit men, when you let yerself be bluffed by yon varlet, an' him a thousand miles away? You try *me*, just you gimme a desert island, or even a pirut ship, a week, like the chance you got, an' beshrew me, but any heartless jade would be mine!"

"Oh, maybe not, Jimmy."

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"—Or else she'd walk the plank."

"There isn't any plank to walk here, Jimmy," said I, pointing to our boat, which lay in the shoals far out. "I rather wish there were."

"You'll have to carry my Auntie Helen out on yore strong right arm, Black Bart."

"I'll do nothing of the sort, Jimmy."

"Don't you like her no more? An' if you don't, what're we here for?"

I could foresee embarrassments in further conversation with Jimmy in his present truculent mood, so sought out others less mutinous, and gave orders for the striking of the camp and the embarkment of all in the small boats. I left Peterson and Willy to take the ladies and most of the duffel in the large boat, assigned John the dingey for his cook boat, and decided to pole the light draft duck boat over the shallows direct to the yacht, taking my two associates with me. It was necessary, of course, to carry our fair passengers out to the long boat, which was some distance out on the flat beach. Peterson and I made a cradle for Mrs. Daniver, with our locked hands, and so got her substantial weight aboard. Helena mutely waited, but seeing her so, and unwilling myself to be so near to her any more, I motioned her to step into the flat duck boat, dry shod, and so poled her out to the long boat; but I did so in silence, nor did she look up or speak to me.

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Our new pilot sat in his own boat, and was towed back, after rendering some assistance with the cargoes; so now, at last, I was ready to leave a spot which, in any other circumstances, would have offered much charm for a man fond of the out-of-doors. As for my young friends, they were almost in tears as they sat, looking back longingly at the great flights of all manner of wild fowl continuously streaming in and out of the lagoon. At any other time, I would have been unwilling as any to depart, but, now, the whole taste and flavor of life had left me, and no interest remained in any of my old occupations or enjoyments. All that remained was the action necessary to deliver Helena and her aunt back to the usual scenes of their lives, to make their losses as light as possible, to take my own losses, and so close the books of my life.

"There they come!" said Jean Lafitte, pointing to a vast gaggle of clamoring wild geese coming in from the bay. "Right over our point, Jimmy! Gee! I wisht I was under them fellers right now. Pow! Pow!"

"Aw, shut up!" was Jimmy's reply. "We won't never get no chance like this again. Why, looky here, we was reg'lar castaways on a real desert island, an' we had a abandoned ship, an' we c'd 'a lived chiefly by huntin' an' fishin'; and we had evaded all pursuit an' run off with the fair captive to a place o' hidin'—why, it's all just like in the book. An' what do *we* do? Why, we go home! Wouldn't it frost you? An' what's worse, we let the heartless jade get away with it, too! Ain't that so?"

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"Yes, that's true, Jimmy," I replied.

"Well, I was talkin' to Jean Lafitte—but it's so. We started out all right as pirates, but now we let a girl bluff us."

"What would you do, Jimmy, in a case like that?" I inquired.

"I would wring the wench's slender neck, beshrew me! She couldn't put over none o' that coarse work on me. No, curses on her fair face!"

"That will do, Jimmy!" said I, and pushed on in silence, Jean Lafitte very grave, and Jimmy snuffling, now, in his grief at leaving the enchanted island. So, all much about the same time, we reached the *Belle Helène* and went aboard. The ladies went at once to their cabin, and I saw neither again that day, although I sent down duck, terrapin and ninety-three for their dinner that night.

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In half an hour we were under way; and in an hour and a half, having circumvented our long desert island, we were passing through the cut-off which led us back into Côte Blanche, some fifty miles, I presume, from what was to be our voyage's end. We still were in the vast marsh country, an inaccessible region teeming with wild life. The sky now was clear, the air once more warm, the breeze gentle, and all the country roundabout us had a charm quite its own. A thousand side channels led back into the fortresses of the great sea-marsh, to this or that of the many lakes, lagoons and pond holes where the wild fowl found their feeding beds. Here was this refuge, where they fled to escape persecution, the spot most remote, secluded, secret, inaccessible. Here nature conspired to balk pursuit. The wide shallows made a bar now to the average sailing craft, and as for a motor-yacht like ours, the presence of a local pilot, acquainted with all the oyster reefs and shallows, all the channels and cut-offs, made us feel more easy, for we knew we could no longer sail merely by compass and chart. A great sense of remoteness from

all the world came over me. I scarce could realize that yonder, so lately left behind, roared the mad tumult of the northern cities. This wide expanse was broken by no structure dedicated to commerce, not even the quiet spire of some rural church arose among the lesser edifices of any village—not even the blue smoke of some farmhouse marked the dwelling-place of man. It was the wilderness, fit only for the nomad, fit only for the man resentful of restraint and custom, longing only for the freedom of adventure and romance. The cycles of Cathay lay here in these gray silences, the leaf of the lotus pulsed on this lazy sea. Ah! here, here indeed were surcease and calm.

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And all this I was leaving. I was going back now to the vast tumult of the roaring towns, to the lip of mockery, the eye of insincerity, the hand of hypocrisy, where none may trust a neighbor. And moreover, I was going back without one look, face to face, into the eyes and the heart of the woman I had loved, and who, by force of these extraordinary circumstances had, for a miraculous moment, been thus set down with me, her lover, in the very surroundings built of Providence for secrecy and love! Yonder, speeding to her summons, no doubt hastened, ready to meet her, the man whom she had preferred above me. And like a beast of burden, driven in the service of these two, I was plodding on, in the work of leaving paradise and opportunity, and delivering safe into the hands of another man the woman whom I loved far more than all else in all the world.

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CHAPTER XXXVII

[Pg 384]

IN WHICH IS PHILOSOPHY; WHICH, HOWEVER, SHOULD NOT BE SKIPPED

WE passed on steadily to the northward until mid-afternoon, making no great headway with one propellor missing, but leaving the main gulf steadily, and at length, raising, a faint blue loom on the sky, the long oak-crowned heights of those singular geological formations, the heights known as “islands”, that bound the head of this great bay. Here the land, springing out of the level marshes and alluvial wet prairies, thrusts up in long reefs, hundreds of feet above the sea level. On the eminences grow ancient and mossy forest trees, as well as much half-tropic brake in the lower levels. Here are wide and rich acres also, owned as hereditary fees by old proud families, part of whose wealth comes from their plantations, part from their bay fisheries, and much from the ancient salt mines which lie under these singular uplifts above the great alluvial plain. As of right, here grow mansion homes, and here is lived life as nearly feudal and as wholly dignified and cultured as any in any land. Ignorant of the banal word “aristocracy,” here, uncounting wealth, unsearching of self and uncritical of others, simple and fine, folk live as the best ambition of America might make one long to live, so far above the vulgar northern scramble for money and display as might make angels weep for the latter in the comparison.

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Perhaps it was Edouard Manning, planter, miner, sportsman, gentleman, traveler, scholar and host, who first taught me what wealth might mean, may mean, ought to mean. Always, before now, I had approached his home with joy, as that of an old friend. There, I knew, I would find horses, guns, dogs, good sport and a simple welcome; and I could read or ride as I preferred. A king among all the cousins of Jean Lafitte, Monsieur Edouard. Hereabouts ran the old causeway by which the wagon reached the “importations” of Jean’s barges, brought inland from his schooners hid in the marshes far below. Here, too, as is well known in all the state, was the burying-ground of Jean Lafitte’s treasure-chests: for, though the old adventurer sold silks and tobaccos and sugars very cheap to the planters and traders, he secreted, as is well known, great store of plate, bullion and minted coins, at divers points about the several miles of forest covered heights; so that the very atmosphere thereabout—till custom stales it for the visitor who comes often there—reeks with the flavor of pieces of eight, Spanish doubloons, and rare gems of the Orient. Laughingly, many a time Monsieur Edouard had agreed to go a-treasure hunting with me, even had showed me several of the curious old treasure-keys, maps and cabalistic characters which tell the place where Lafitte and his men buried their gold—such maps as are kept as secret heirlooms in many a Cajun family.

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But now, as I saw myself once more approaching this pleasant spot so well known to me, I felt little of the old thrill of eagerness come over me. True, Edouard would be there, and the dogs, and the birds, and the horses, and the quiet welcome. True, also, I could, either in truth or by evasion, establish a pleasant and conventional footing for all my party—it would be easy to explain so natural and pleasant an incident as a visit during a yacht cruise, and to laugh at all that silly newspaper sensation which by now must fully have blown over. True, Monsieur Edouard would be charmed to meet the woman whose influence on my life he knew so well. Yes, I could tell him everything easily, nicely, except the truth; which was, that I was bringing to another man’s arms the woman whom he knew I loved. No, the blue loom of Manning’s Island gave me no joy now. I wished it three thousand miles away instead of thirty. I wished that almost anything might prevent my arrival—accident, delay.

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And then, in the most natural way in the world, there were both! Without much warning, the pulse of our engine slackened, the throb of our single screw slowed down and ceased. Williams stuck his head up out of his engine-room and shouted something to Peterson, who methodically drew out his pipe and made ready for a smoke.

"It's no use going any farther," explained Williams when I came up. "That intake's gone wrong again, and she's got sand all through her. It's a crime to see her cut herself all to pieces this way. We've just got to stop and clean her up, that's all, and fix the job right—ought to have done it back there before we started in."

"How long will it take, Williams?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know, sir. More than this afternoon, sure."

"That's too bad," said I, with a fair imitation of regret. "We had expected to make Manning Island by night." [Pg 388]

"Yes, it is too bad, but it's better to stop than ruin her, isn't it, sir?"

"Certainly it is, and I quite approve your judgment. But I presume we can go a little way yet, until we find a good berth somewhere? There's a deep channel comes in from the left, just ahead, and I think if we move on half a mile or so, we can get water enough to float even at low tide, and at the same time be out of sight of any boats passing in the lower part of the bay."

"Oh, yes, sir, we can get that far," said the engineer. Peterson was full of gloom, and though he thought nothing less than that we were going to be kept here a month, as one more event in a trip already unlucky enough, he gave the wheel to our Cajun pilot, and we crawled on around the head of a long point that came out into the bay. Here we could not see Manning Island, and were out of sight from most of the bay, so that, once more, the feeling of remoteness, aloofness, came upon me.

Not that it did me any present good. I despatched L'Olonnois as messenger to the ladies, telling them the cause of our delay, and explaining how difficult it was to say just when we would get in to the island; and then I betook myself to gloomy pacing up and down what restricted part of the deck I felt free for my own use. I wearied of it soon, and went to my cabin, trying to read. [Pg 389]

At first I undertook one of the modern novels which had been recommended by my bookseller, but I found myself unable to get on with it, and standing before my shelves took down one volume after another of philosophers who once were wont to comfort me—men with brains, thinking men who had done something in the world beside buying yachts and country houses. My eye caught a page which earlier I had turned down, and I read again:

"Trust thyself; every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the Divine Providence has found for you—the society of friends, the connexion of events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age.... And we now are men, and must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent destiny; and not pinched in a corner nor cowards fleeing before a revolution, but redeemers, and benefactors, pious aspirants to be noble clay, under the Almighty effort let us advance on Chaos and the Dark."

I read the mystic, involved, subjective words again, as most of the Concord Sage's words require, and reflected how well they jumped with the note of my heathen Epictetus, who had said, "Be natural and noble". And, so thinking, I began to wonder whether, after all, my father, whose ruthless ways I betimes had explored, whose ruthless sins I had betimes atoned, had not been, perhaps, a better man than sometimes I had credited him with being. He, in accordance with his lights, had accepted the part given him by the Poet of the Play. He had confided himself childlike to the genius of his age, roaring, fighting, scrambling, getting and sometimes giving. He had trusted himself; and in the end, a bold man, he had advanced bravely on Chaos and the Dark. After a life of war and sometimes of rapine, done under the genius of his day, he had struck boldly the last chord on an iron string. Dear old Governor! I did not regret the million of his money I had spent to restore his memory clean in my own mind: for after all, it had all been in open war—that time when he unloaded a worthless mine on his friend, Dan Emory—Helena's father, Daniel Emory, who was, at first, said to have left his family penniless; until a shrewd lawyer in some miraculous way had managed to sell at a good price a box full of worthless mining stock to some innocent victim. [Pg 390] [Pg 391]

Helena Emory never knew of that sale, nor did her guardian aunt. I did know of it, for the very good reason that I was both the shrewd lawyer and the innocent purchaser. It was the last act of my professional career; and it was this which caused the general report that I had made a bad mining venture, had lost my father's fortune, and retired from my career a ruined man. A few friends knew otherwise: and I blessed the rumor which cost me certain friends who thought me poor and so forsook me. Perhaps, my father would have called me quixotic had he known. Now, as I read and pondered, I neither blamed him for his own course in fair business war with old Dan Emory, nor did I censure myself for my own hidden act of restitution. Let the world wag its head if it liked, and remain ignorant of other millions given to me before my father's death, unprobated, secret, after the fashion of my pirate parent who buried his treasures and told none but his kin how they might be found.

Of course, in time, it all might come out. In time, Helena would know that this yacht which she supposed to be Davidson's was my own, that the farm I was supposed to have rented really was a handsome estate that I owned, that many covert deeds in finance had been my own—it was only my silence and my absence in many parts of the world which had prevented her, also much a traveler, from knowing the truth about me long ago. And the truth was, I was not a poor man, but a rich one. [Pg 392]

Yet he who had stolen my purse would indeed have stolen trash this day. Rich in one way, I was poor, indeed, in others. I cared nothing for old Dan Emory's money, but very, very much for old Dan Emory's daughter; and her I might not have, even after all my efforts.... No, the waters would leave no trail; and once more, after I had restored old Dan Emory's daughter to her home and friends, I would travel the wide world again, and the gossipers might guess what causes had ended a professional career, apparently ended a great fortune, and actually had ended a life.... For, I thought—using some philosophy of my own making—it is not wealth, but usefulness, contentment and independence which a man should hold as his most desired success. These achieved, little is left to gain. Any one of these last, and nothing remains worth gaining.

I took up another book, at another marked page: "Let us learn to be content with what we have. Let us get rid of our false estimates, set up all the higher ideals—a quiet home, vines of our own planting; a few books full of the inspiration of genius; a few friends worthy of being loved; a hundred innocent pleasures that bring no pain or remorse; a devotion to the right that will never swerve; a simple religion empty of all bigotry, full of trust and hope and love—and to such a philosophy, this world will give up all the empty joy it has." [Pg 393]

I meditated over this also, applying these tests to my own life.... Ah! now I saw why my foot was ever restless, why I sought always new scenes.... Where was my quiet home, the vines of my own planting? Would I flee from that to every corner of the world? Not if it held the woman of my choice. Would she thus roam restless, if she held the heart of her chosen and if they had a home?... I began to see the Plan unfold. Yes, and saw myself outside the Plan.... Because of a devotion to the right that would not swerve. Because of a fanaticism, an "oddness", a nonconformity—ah! so I said bitterly to myself, because, after all, I was unattuned to my age, because I was unfit to survive before a man's own judge.... It is Portia judges this world. The case of every man comes before a woman for decision. I, who rarely had lost a case at law where I could use my own trained mind, had lost my first and only case at the bar of Love.... [Pg 394]

So—and I sighed as I shut the books and returned them to their shelves—contentment never could be mine, nor that quiet home where only life is lived that is worth living; nor usefulness; nor independence.

I did not hear Jimmy when he came in, and when he spoke I jumped, startled.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

[Pg 395]

IN WHICH IS AN ARMISTICE WITH FATE

"BLACK BART!" said Jimmy. "Say, now—"

"Well, good mate," said I, and laid a hand on his curly fair head, "what shall I say?"

"Say nothin'," he remarked, dropping his voice. "Listen!"

"Yes?"

"We have held a council."

"Who has?"

"Why, me and Jean Lafitte and the heartless jade. I told her you sent us to her to bid her seek your presence."

"Jimmy! What on earth do you mean! That's precisely the last thing I would have done—I haven't done it. On the contrary—"

"I told her," he resumed calmly, "that when Black Bart, the pirut, spoke, he spoke to be obeyed. She said, 'I can't go,' and I said, 'You *gotta* go.'"

"You, yourself, may now go and tell her that there has been a very bad mistake, Jimmy; and that she need not come."

"An' make her cry worse? I ain't goin' to do it!"

"Sir! This is mutiny!—But did she cry, Jimmy?"

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"Yes. Awful. She said she was homesick. She ain't. I don't know what really is the matter. I ast Jean Lafitte, an' he said maybe you'd know. We thought maybe it was something about yon varlet. Do you know?"

"No, I do not, Jimmy." I found myself engaged in one of those detestable conversations where one knows the talk ought to end, yet dislikes to end it.

Jimmy stood for some time, much perturbed, looking every way but at me, and at last he blurted out.

"Don't you just jolly well awfully love the fair captive, yon heartless jade—my Auntie Helen? Don't you, Black Bart?"

I made no answer, but frowned very much at his presumption.

“—Because, everybody else does. She’s nice. I should think you would. *I do, I know mighty well.*”

“She is—she is—she’s a very estimable young woman, Jimmy,” said I, coloring. “I think I may say that without compromising myself.”

“Then why do you hurt her feelings the way you do—when she’s plumb gone on you, the way she is?”

I sprang toward him to clap a hand over his garrulous mouth, but he evaded me, and spoke from behind the bathroom door. “Well, she is! Don’t I hear her sticking up for you all the time—didn’t I hear her an’ Auntie Lucinda havin’ a reg’lar row over it again, ‘I don’t care if he *hasn’t* got a cent!’ says she.” [Pg 397]

“But yon varlet is rich,” said I.

“She didn’t mean yon varlet—she meant you, I’m pretty sure, Black Bart. An’ she’s been feedin’ Partial all the afternoon—say, he’s the shape of a sausage.”

“She is heartless, Jimmy! Little do you know the ways of a heartless jade—she wants to win away from me the last thing on earth I have—even my dog. That’s all. Now, Jimmy, you must go.”

But he emerged only in part from his shelter. “So Jean Lafitte an’ me, we looked it up in the book; an’ it says where the heartless jade is brought before the pirut chief, ‘How now, fair one!’ says he, an’ he bends on her the piercin’ gaze o’ his iggle eye: ‘how now, wouldst spurn me suit?’ The fair captive she bends her head an’ stands before him unable to encounter his piercin’ gaze, an’ for some moments a deep silence prevails—”

“Jimmy!” I heard a clear voice calling along the deck. No answer, and Jimmy raised a hand to command silence of me also. [Pg 398]

“Jimme-e-e-e!” It was Helena’s voice, and nearer along the rail. “Here’s the fudges—now where can the little nuisance have gone! Jim!”

“Here I am, Auntie,” replied the little nuisance, as she now approached the door of our cabin; and he brushed past me and started not aft but toward the bows. “An’ there *you* are!” he shouted over his shoulder in cryptic speech, whether to me or to his Auntie Helen I could not say.

She stood now in such position near my door that neither of us could avoid the other without open rudeness. I looked at her gravely and she at me, her eyes wide, her lips silent for a time. Silently also, I swung the cabin door wide and stood back for her to pass.

“You have sent for me?” she said at last, still standing as she was. A faint smile—part in humor, part in timidity, part, it seemed suddenly to me, wistful; and all just a trifle pathetic—stirred her lips.

“I sent my soul through the Invisible,” said I; and stepped within and quite aside for her to pass.

“Jimmy told the biggest lie in all his career,” said I. She would have sprung back.

“—And the greatest truth ever told in all the world. Come in, Helena Emory. Come into my quiet home. Already, as you know, you have come into my heart.” [Pg 399]

“I am not used to going into a gentleman’s—quarters,” said she: but her foot was on the shallow stair.

“It is common to three gentlemen of the ship’s company, Helena Emory,” said I, “and we have no better place to receive our friends.”

She now was in the room. I closed the door, and sprung the catch.

“At last,” said I, “you are in my power!” And I bent upon her the piercing gaze of my eagle eye.

CHAPTER XXXIX

[Pg 400]

IN WHICH ARE SEALED ORDERS

SHE stood before me for just a moment undecided. The twilight was coming and the room was dim.

“Auntie will miss me,” said she, “after a time.”

“I have missed you all the time,” was my reply.

“But you sent for me?”

“Of course I did. Doesn’t this look as though I had?”

“I don’t quite understand—”

"Shall I call Jimmy to explain? He called you a heartless jade——"

"The little imp! How dare he!"

"—As in fact all of our brotherhood has come to call you: "The heartless jade.""

"I made fudges for him! And the little wretch told me I wasn't playing the game! What did he mean? Oh, Harry, I wouldn't have come if I hadn't wanted to play the game fairly. I'm sorry for what I said." She spoke now suddenly, impulsively.

"What was it you said?"

"When I said—when I called you—a coward. I didn't mean it."

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"You said it."

"But not the way you thought. I only meant, you took an unfair advantage of a girl, running off with her, this way, and giving her no chance to—to get away. But now you do give me a chance—you meant to, all along—and in every way, as I've just done telling auntie, you've been perfectly fine, perfectly splendid, perfectly bully, too! It has been a hard place for a man, too, but—Harry, dear boy, I'll have to say it, you've been some considerable gentleman through it all! There now!" And she stood, aloof, agitated, very likely flushed, though I could not tell in the dark.

"Thank you, Helena," I said.

"And as to your being any other sort of a coward—that you had physical fear—that you wouldn't do a man's part—why, I never did mean that at all. How could I? And if I had—why, even Auntie Lucinda said your going out after that Chinaman the other night was heroic—even if he couldn't have cooked a bit!—and you know Auntie Lucinda has always been against you."

"Yes, and you both called me a coward, because I quit my law office and ran away from misfortune."

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"Yes, we did. And I meant that, too! I say it now to your face, Harry. But maybe I don't know all about that——"

"Maybe not."

"Well, I wouldn't want to be unjust, of course, but I *don't* think a man ought to throw away his life. You're young. You could start over again, and you ought to have tried. Your father made his own money, and so did my father—why, look at the Sally M. mine, that has given me my own fortune. Do you suppose that grew on a bush to be shaken off? So why couldn't you go out in the same way and do something in the world—I don't mean just make money, you know, but *do* something? That's what a girl likes. And you were able enough. You are young and strong, and you have your education; and I've heard my father say, before he died—and other men agreed with him—that you were the best lawyer at our bar, and that you had an extraordinary mind, and a clear sense of justice, and, and——"

"Go on. Did he say that?"

"Yes."

"But with all my fine qualities of mind and heart," said I, "I lost all when I lost my money!"

"What do you mean?"

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"I'll tell you what I mean—you dropped me because you thought me poor. Well, I don't blame you. It takes money to live, and you deserved all that the world can give. I don't blame you. There were other men in the world for you. The trouble with me was that there was no other woman in the world for me. All our trouble—all our many meetings and partings—have come out of those two facts."

"Did you think that of me?" she asked at length, slowly. I suppose she was pale, but I could not see.

"I certainly did. How could I think anything else?"

"Harry!" she half whispered. "Why, Harry, Harry!"

"Admit that you did!" I exclaimed bitterly, "and let me start from that as a premise. Listen! If you were a man, and loved a woman, and she chucked you when you lost your money, do you think you'd break your neck to make any more success in the world after that? Why should you? Why does a man work? It's for a home, for the sake of power, and mostly for the sake of the game."

"Yes."

"And I could play that game—I can play it now, and win at it, any time I like. I quit it not because I was afraid of the game—it's the easiest thing in the world to make money, if that's all you really want to do. That's all your father wanted, or mine, and it was easy. I can play that game. But why? Ah! if it were to win a quiet home, the woman I loved, independence, usefulness, contentment,—yes! But when all those stakes were out of the game, Helena, I didn't care to play it any more. And that was why you thought I ran away. I did run away—from myself, and you."

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She was silent now, and perhaps paler—I could not see.

“—But wherever I have gone, Helena, all over the world, I’ve found those two people there ahead of me, and I couldn’t escape them—myself, and you!”

“Did you think that of me, Harry?” She half whispered once more.

“Yes, I did. And did you think that of me?”

“Yes, I did. But I did not understand.”

“No. Like many a woman, you got cause and effect mixed up: and you never troubled yourself to get it straight. Let me tell you, unless two people can come to each other without compromises and without explanations and without reservations, they would better never come at all. I don’t want you cheap, you oughtn’t to want me cheap. So how can it end any way other than the way it has? If it was my loss of fortune that made you chuck me, I oughtn’t ever to give you a second thought, for you wouldn’t be worth it. The fact you did, and that I do, hasn’t anything to do with it at all.”

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“No.”

“And if you don’t think me able and disposed to play a man’s part in the world, you oughtn’t to care a copper for me, that is plain, isn’t it?”

“Yes, quite plain.”

“And the fact that you did, and that you do, has nothing to do with it—nothing in the world, has it, Helena?”

“No.” She must have been very pale, though I could not tell.

“Therefore, as logic shows us, my dear, and because we never did get our premises straight, and so never will get our conclusions straight, either—we don’t belong together and never can come together, can we?”

“No.” I could barely hear her whisper.

“No. And that is why, just before you came, I was trying to pull myself together and to advance as best an unhappy devil may, upon Chaos and the Dark! And that’s all I see ahead, Helena, without you—Chaos and the Dark.”

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“It was all you saw that night, in the little boat,” she said after a time. “Yet you went?”

“Oh, yes, but that was different.”

“Is this all, Harry?” she said, and moved toward the door.

“Yes, my dear; it is all—but all the rest.”

Her color must have risen, for I saw dimly that she raised both her hands to her bosom, her throat. Thus the heartless jade stood, her head drooped, unable to meet the piercing gaze of my eagle eye.

There came a faint scratching at the door, a little whimpering whine.

“It is Partial, my dog, come after you,” said I bitterly. “He knows you are here. He never has done that way for me. He loves you.”

“He knows *you* are here, and he loves you,” said she. “That is why things come and scratch at doors where ruffians live.”

I flung open the door. “Partial,” said I, “come in; and choose between us.”

As to the first part of my speech, the invitation to enter, Partial obeyed with a rush; as to the second, the admonition, he apparently could not obey at all. In his poor dumb brute affliction, lack of human speech, he stood, after saluting us both, alternately and equally, hesitant between us, wagging, whining and gazing, knowing full well somewhat was wrong between us, grieving over us, beseeching us—but certainly not choosing between us.

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“Give him time,” said I hoarsely. “He loves you more, and is merely polite to me.”

“Give him time,” said she bitterly. “He loves you more, and you don’t deserve it.”

But Partial would not choose.

“He wants us *both*, Helena!” said I at last. “He has wiped out logic, premises, conclusions, cause and effect, horse, cart and all! He wants us *both*! He wants a quiet home and independence, Helena, and usefulness, and contentment. Ah, my God!”

She reached down and put a hand on his head, but he only looked from one to the other of us, unhappy.

“Don’t you love me, Helena?” I asked quietly, after a time. “For the sake of my dog, can you not love me?”

She continued stroking the head of the agonized Partial... And until, somewhat inarticulately, I had choked or spoken, and had caught her dark hair against my cheek and kissed her hair and

stammered in her ear, and turned her face and kissed her eyes and her cheek and her lips many, many times, Partial held his peace and issued no decision.... At least, I did not hear him.... [Pg 408]

She was sobbing now, her head on my shoulder, as we sat on the locker seat, and Partial's head was on the cushion beside us, and he was silent and overjoyed, and tranquilly happy—seeing perhaps, that a quiet home would in the event be his, and that he was going to live happy ever after. And after I drew Helena's head closer to my face, I kissed her hair.

"Do you love me, Helena?" I asked. "Only the truth now, in God's name!"

"You know I do," she said, and I felt her arms about my neck.

"Have you, always?"

"I think so, yes. It seems always."

"We have been cruel to each other."

"Yes, are cruel now."

"How now?"

"You make me say I love you, and yet—"

"You will marry me—right away, soon, Helena—as I am, poor, ragged, without a cent, only myself?"

"Not here," she smiled.

"At Edouard Manning's, at once, as soon as we get in?"

"It is duress! I am in the power of a ruffian band! Is it fair? Are you sure I know my mind?" [Pg 409]

"I am sure only that I know my own! Tell me, what was in that note I carried, addressed to you varlet Davidson?"

"Sealed orders!"

"And how does that affect me, Helena. Tell me—I know you love me, and you know that all the rest is small, to that; but as to that wedding part of it, Helena—what do you say?"

She hesitated for an instant. "You want me to—come—to come with honor, as you do?"

"Yes. I'll take any risk that means with you."

"Will you take sealed orders, too?"

"Yes."

"Turn on the lights."

I reached the switch, and an instant later a dozen high candle-power bulbs flooded the suite with light. With a little cry of dismay Helena sprang away, and stood at my shaving-glass, arranging her hair. Now and then she turned her face just enough to smile at me a little, her eyes dark, languid, heavy lidded, a faint shadow of blue beneath. And now and then her breast heaved, as though it were a sea late troubled by a storm gone by.

"What will auntie say?" she sighed at last. [Pg 410]

"What will you say?" I replied.

"Oh, brute, you shall not know! I must have some manner of revenge against a ruffian who has taken advantage of me while I was in his power!"

"Ah, heartless jade!"

"—So you shall wait until we are ashore. I will give you sealed orders—"

"When?"

"Now. And you shall open them at your friend's house—as soon as we are all settled and straightened after leaving the boat—as soon as—"

"It looks as though it were as soon as you please, not when I please."

"Harry, it is my revenge for the indignities you have heaped on me. Do you think a girl will submit to that meekly—to be browbeaten, abused, endangered as I have been! No, sir—sealed orders or none. I have only owned I loved you. So many girls have been mistaken about things when—when the moon, or a desert island or—or something has bewitched them. But I haven't said I would marry you, have I, ever?"

"No. I don't care about that so much as the other; but I care a very, very great deal about it, too. You, too, are cruel. You are a heartless jade." [Pg 411]

"And you have been a cruel and ruthless pirate."

"Tell me now!"

"No." And she evaded me, and gained the door. "I must go. Oh, it's all a ruin now—Auntie'll be furious. And what shall I say?"

"Give her sealed orders, and my love! And when do I get mine?"

"In five minutes."

She was gone.... And after some moments, rapt as I was at her late presence, which still seemed to fill the room like the fragrance, like the fragrance of her hair which still lingered in my senses, I looked about, sighing for that she was gone. Then I noted that our friend Partial had gone with her. "Fie! Partial, after all, you loved her more!" I said to myself.

But in a few moments I heard a faint sound at my door. I opened. There stood Partial in the dusk, gravely wagging his tail, looking at me without moving his head. And I saw that he held daintily in his mouth a dainty note, addressed to me in the same handwriting as that on the note I had sent out from the heartless jade to yon varlet. And it was sealed, and marked with instructions for its opening.... "When You Two Varlets Meet." No more. [Pg 412]

"Peterson," said I, advancing to the forward deck, where I found him smoking, "I've been getting up some correspondence, since we'll be ashore by to-morrow noon——"

"—I don't know as to that, Mr. Harry."

"Well, I know about it. So, tell Williams that, even if he has to work all night, we must be moving as soon as it's light enough to see. I've got a very important message——"

"By wireless, Mr. Harry?" chuckled the old man.

"Yes, by wireless," (and I looked at Partial, who wagged his tail and smiled). "So I must get into Manning Island the first possible moment to-morrow. And Peterson, as we've had so good a run this trip, with no accident or misfortune of any kind, I don't know but I may make it a month or two extra pay—double—for you and Williams, and even John. And as to Willy, please don't fire him, Peterson, for his deserting the ship's cook the other night. In fact, I'm very glad, on the whole, he did. Give him double pay for doing it, Peterson!"

"Ain't this the wonderful age!" remarked Peterson to a star which was rising over the misty marsh. "Especial, now, that wireless!"

I only patted Partial on the head, and we smiled pleasantly and understandingly at each other. Of course, Peterson could not know what we knew. [Pg 413]

CHAPTER XL

[Pg 414]

IN WHICH LAND SHOWS IN THE OFFING

BEFORE the white sea mists had rolled away I was on deck, and had summoned a general conference of my crew.

"Polyte," I demanded of our pilot, "how long before your partner will be at the lighthouse, below, there?"

"Ow long?"

"Yes."

"Oh, maybe thees day sometam."

"And how long before he'll start back with the mail?"

"Ow long?"

"Yes."

"Oh, maybe thees same day sometam."

"And how long will it take him to get back to some post-office with those letters?"

"Ow long?"

"Yes."

"Oh, maybe those nex' day sometam."

"And then how long to the big railroad to New Orleans?"

"Ow long?"

"Yes."

"Oh, maybe those nex' day too h'also sometam, heem."

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"Then it will be three days, four days, before a letter could get from the lighthouse to New

Orleans?"

"Ow long?"

"Three or four days?"

"*Oui*, maybe so."

"And how long will it take us to get in to the plantation of Monsieur Edouard, above, there?"

"Ow long?"

"Yes."

"H'I'll could not said, Monsieur. Maybe three four day— '*sais pas*."

"Holy Mackinaw!" I remarked, *sotto voce*.

"Pardon?" remarked 'Polyte respectfully. "Le Machinaw—*que-est-que-ce-que-est, ca?*"

"It is my patron saint, 'Polyte," I explained, and he crossed himself for his mistake.

"Suppose those h'engine he'll h'ron, we'll get in four five h'our h'all right, on Monsieur Edouard, yass," he added. "H'I'll know those channel lak some books."

By now Williams—who, judging by certain rappings, hammerings and clankings heard through the cabin walls back and above the engine-rooms, had been at work much of the night—had reported, and much to my pleasure had said he thought we could make it in at least to the Manning dock before further repairs would be needed. To prove which, he went down and "turned her over a time or two," as he expressed it. Whereupon I gave orders to break out the anchor, and knowing that any Cajun market hunter and shrimp fisher like 'Polyte can travel in any mist or fog before sunup by some instinct of his own, I took a chance and began to feel our way out to the mouth of the Manning channel before the morning mists were gone; so that we were at breakfast by the time the wide and gently rippling bay broke clear below us, and by magic, we saw the oak-crowned heights of the island dead ahead.

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Thence on, within the walls of the deep dredged channel, all we had to do was to go sufficiently slow and follow the curves carefully, so that the heavy waves of our boat, larger than any intended for that channel, might not too much endanger the mud walls, or threaten wreckage to the frail stagings leading to the cabins of the half-aquatic trappers and fishers who dwell here in the marshes.

So, at last, after many windings and doublings, we came in at the rear of the timbered slopes, and could see the mansion houses and the offices of the stately old plantation, where dwelt my friend, Edouard Manning, who knew nothing of my coming.

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After custom, I signaled loud and often with the boat's whistle, so that the men might come to the landing for us; and, in order that Edouard himself might be warned, I gave orders to my hardy mates to make proper nautical salute of honor.

"Cast loose the stern-chaser, Jean Lafitte," said I: "and do you and L'Olonnois load and fire her often as you like until we land; or until you burst her."

Gleefully they obeyed, and soon the roar of our deck gun echoed formidably along the slopes, as had no gun since the salt-seeking Union navy, in the Civil War, had pounded at the gates of Edouard's father: and until scores of coots and rail chattered in excited chorus for answer, and long clouds of wild ducks arose and circled over the marsh. Again and again, my bold mates loaded and fired: and now, turning back by chance from my own place at the wheel, I saw that they had assumed full character, and each with a red kerchief bound about his brow, was armed with, I dare not say how many, pistols, dirks, swords and cutlasses thrust through his belt or otherwise suspended on his person.

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I saw now the two ladies, their fingers in their ears, also on deck, protesting at this cannonading at their cabin door; and so I raised my hat to a very radiant and radiantly appareled Helena, for the first time that day; and heard the answer of L'Olonnois to the dour protest of Auntie Lucinda.

"We follow Black Bart the Avenger, an' let any seek to stop us at their per-rul! Jean, run up the flag, while I load her up again."

And Jean having once more hoisted the skull and cross-bones at our masthead, and assumed a specially savage scowl as he stood with folded arms on our bow deck, we made what a mild imagination might have called rather an impressive entry as we swept into the Manning landing.

I was not surprised to see Edouard himself there, and his wife, and some thirty odd dogs and as many blacks, waiting for us at the wharf. Nor was I surprised to see that all seemed somewhat to marvel at our manner of advent, though I knew that Edouard, through his field-glasses, had recognized both my boat and myself long before we made the last curve and came gently in to the wharf where the grinning darkies could catch our line.

What did surprise me—and perhaps for a time I may have shown surprise—was to see, in all this gay throng, two forms not usual on the Manning landing. One was the elegantly garbed and rather stunning figure of Sally Byington; and the other the robust, full-bodied, gorgeously arrayed form of my old friend, Cal Davidson! How or why they came there I could not for the

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moment guess.

"'Tis he—yon varlet!" I heard a stern voice hiss at my ear. "Beshrew me, but it shall go hard with him! I'm loading her up with marbles now!" But I had no more than time to persuade my two lieutenants to modify this purpose, and partially to disarm themselves, before the two groups were mingling, with much chattering and laughing and gay saluting.

Edouard, hat in hand, was on deck before our fenders touched the wharf, laughing and grasping my hands and looking up at my flag.

"I knew you were coming," said he. "Fact is, all the country's been looking for you. Davidson just got in a couple of hours ago—and you know his lady is an old friend of Mrs. Manning's. And——"

He was shaking the hands of Mrs. Daniver and Helena almost before I could present them. Auntie Lucinda bestowed upon him the gaze of a solemn and somewhat tear-stained visage (though I saw distinct approval on her face as she caught sight of the great mansion house among the giant oaks, and witnessed the sophisticatedness of the group on the landing, and the easy courtesy of Edouard himself).

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"By Jove! old man!" the latter found time to say to me, "I congratulate you—she's away beyond her pictures." He did not mean Mrs. Daniver; and he never had seen Helena before. I could only press his hand and attempt no comment as to the congratulations, for part of that was a matter which yet rested in a sealed envelope in my pocket; and at best it must be three or four days.... But then, with a great flash of arrested intelligence, it was borne in upon me that perhaps, after all, it was not so much a question of the tardy United States mails! Because yon varlet, fat and saucy, and well content with life, already, by some means and for some reason, had outrun the mails. He was here, and we had met. It need not be four days before I could learn my fate.... I reached into my pocket and looked at my sealed orders. No matter what Davidson's letter held, here was Davidson himself.

"Oh, I say, there, you Harry, confound you!" roared Davidson to me in his great voice above the heads of everybody. "I say, what did I tell you?"

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Now I had not the slightest idea what Davidson had told me, nor what he meant by waving a paper over his head. "They've signed Dingleheimer for next year! Now what do you think of that? World's championship, and good old Dingleheimer for next year—I guess that's pretty poor for them little old Giants, what?" And he smiled like one devoid of all care as well as of all reason.

I myself smiled just a moment later—after I had greeted the Manning ladies, had seen Helena step up and kiss Sally Byington fervently, directly on the cheek, whose too keen coloring I once had heard her decry; had slapped Edouard joyously on the shoulders and pointed to my pirate flag and gloomy black-visaged crew—I say I also smiled suddenly when I felt a hand touch me on the shoulder.

'Polyte, the pilot, stood, cap in hand, and asked me to one side.

"Pardon, Monsieur," said he, "but those *gentilhommes*—those fat one—ees eet she'll was Monsieur Davelson who'll H'I'll got letter on heem from those lighthouse, heem?"

"Why, yes, 'Polyte—the letter you said would take four days to get to New Orleans."

'Polyte smiled sheepishly. "He'll wouldn't took four days now, Monsieur! H'I'll got it h'all those letter here. H'I'll change the coat on the *lighthouse*, maybe, h'an H'I'll got the coat of Guillaume witt' h'all those letter in her, yass?" And he now handed me the entire packet of letters, which I had supposed left far behind us on the previous day!

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I took the letters from him, and handed all of them but one to Edouard's old body servant to put in the office mail. The remaining one I held in the same hand with its mate: and I motioned Davidson aside to a spot under a live oak as the other began now slowly to move toward the path from the landing up the hill.

"This is for you," said I, handing him his letter; and told him how it came to him thus.

"It's from Helena—dear old girl, isn't she a trump, after all!" he said, tearing open the letter and glancing at it.

"She is a dear girl, Mr. Davidson," said I, stiffly, "yes."

"Why, of course—yes, of course I'd have done it, if I'd got this before I left the city," said he, "but how can I now?"—holding the letter open in his hand.

"Do you mean to tell me," I began, but choked in anger mixed with uncertainty. What was it she had asked of him, offered to him? And was not Helena's wish a command.

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"Yes, I mean to tell you or any one else, I'd do a favor to a lady if I could; but——"

"What favor, Mr. Davidson?" I demanded icily.

"Well, why 'Mr. Davidson'? Ain't I your pal, in spite of all the muss you made of my plans? Why, I'm damned if I'll pay you the charter money at all, after the way you've acted, and all——"

"Mr. Davidson, damn the charter money!"

"That's what I say! What's charter money among friends? All right, if you can forgive half the charter fee, I'll forgive the other half, and——"

"What was in the letter from her?"

"It's none of your business, Harry—but still, I don't mind saying that Miss Emory wrote me and said that if I was still—oh! I say!" he roared, turning suddenly and poking a finger into my ribs, "if you haven't got on one of my waistcoats!"

"The one with pink stripes," said I still icily, "and deuced bad ones they all are. And these clothes I borrowed from my China boy. But then——"

"I see, you must have come in a hurry, eh?"

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"Yes. But come now, old man, what's in that letter? I've got one of my own here, done in the same hand, hers. I am under sealed orders—until I shall have met you, which is now. So I suppose some sort of explanation is due on both sides. We might as well have it all out here, before we join the house party, so as to avoid any awkwardness."

"Oh, nothing in my letter to amount to anything," he replied. "Miss Emory only wanted to know if I'd please have her trunks shipped out here from New Orleans—only that; and she asked me please to bring her a box of marshmallows, as hers were all gone. She's polite, always, dear old Helena—she says, here, 'So pleasant is our journey in every way, and so kind have you gentlemen been, and so thoughtful in providing every luxury, that I can not think of a single thing I could ask for except some more marshmallows. Jimmy, the young imp, my nephew, you know, has found mine, though I hid them under both cushions in the stateroom.'"

I had my hat off, and was wiping my forehead. A sudden burst of glory seemed to me to envelope all the world. If there had been duplicity anywhere, I did not care.

"I suppose Jimmy is the one with two guns and a Jap sword, eh?" asked Davidson.

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"No, the other one, God bless him! Is that all there was in the letter, Cal?"

"Yes. What's in yours? What's the game—button, button, who's got the girl? And can't you *open* your letter now?"

"Yes," said I, and did so. It contained just two words (Helena afterward said she had not time to write more while Auntie Lucinda might be in from the other stateroom).^[A]

"Well, what's it say, dash you!" demanded Cal Davidson. "Play fair now—I told, and so must you!"

"I'm damned if I do, Cal!" said I, and put it in my pocket. But I shook hands with him most warmly, none the less....

FOOTNOTE:

^[A] (Those interested may find them later in the text.^[B])

CHAPTER XLI

[Pg 426]

IN WHICH IS MUCH ROMANCE, AND SOME TREASURE, ALSO VERY MUCH HAPPINESS

WE walked on slowly up the hill together, my friend Calvin Davidson and myself, following the parti-colored group now passing out of sight behind the shrubbery. At last we paused and sat down on one of the many seats that invited us. Around us, on the great lawn, were many tropic or half-tropic plants, and the native roses, still abloom. Yonder stood the old bronze sun-dial that I knew so well—I could have read the inscription, *I Mark Only Pleasant Hours*; and I knew its penciled shadow pointed to a high and glorious noon.... It seemed to me that Heaven had never made a more perfect place or a more perfect day; nor, that I am sure, was ever in the universe a world more beautiful than this, more fit to swing in union with all the harmony of the spheres.... I had fought so long, I had been so unhappy, had doubted so much, had grown so sad, so misanthropic, that I trust I shall be forgiven at this sudden joy I felt at hearing burst on my ears—albeit a chorus of Edouard's mocking-birds hid in the oaks—all the music of the spheres, soul-shaking, a thing of joy and reverence.... So I spoke but little.

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"But I say, old man," began Davidson presently, "it's all right for a joke, but my word! it was an awfully big one, and an awfully risky one, too,—your stealing your own yacht from me! I didn't think it of you. You not only broke up my boat party—you see, Sally was going on down with us from Natchez—Miss Emory said she'd be glad to have her come, and of course she and Mrs. Daniver made it proper, all right—I say, you not only busted that all up, but by not sending a fellow the least word of what you were going to do, you got those silly newspapers crazy, from New Orleans to New York—why, you're famous, that is, notorious! But so is Miss Emory, that's the worst of it. I don't just fancy she'll just fancy some of those pictures, or some of those stories.

Least you can do now is to marry Helena and the old girl, too, right off!"

"In part, that is good advice," said I. "I wish I could wear your clothes, Cal—but I remember now that Edouard and I can wear the same clothes, and have, many a time."

"But I say, don't be so hoggish. There's other people in the world beside you—you'd never have thought of making that river cruise, now would you?" [Pg 428]

"No."

"Nor you couldn't have got Helena aboard the boat if you had, now could you?"

"No."

"Let alone the old girl, her revered aunt!" He dug another thumb into his own pink striped waistcoat. "She loves you a lot, I am not of the impression!"

"No, I think she rather favored you!" I replied gravely.

"No chance! And I say, isn't Sally a humdinger? Just the sort for me—something doing every minute. And a fellow can always tell just what she's thinkin'—"

"I'm not right sure, Cal, whether that's safe to say of any woman," said I. "A ship on the sea, or a serpent on a rock has—to use your own quaint manner of speech, my friend—so to speak, nothing on the way of a maid with a man. But go on. I do congratulate you. Do you know, old man, I almost thought, once—a good while ago—that you were just a little—that is—*épris* of Helena your own self?"

"Come again? 'Apree'—what's that?"

"—Gone on her."

"Oh, not at all, not at all—not in the least! Why, I can't see what in the world—oh, well of course, you know, she's *fine*; but what I mean is, why—there was Sally, you know. Say, do you know why I wanted to get Sally away on that boat?—I was afraid you'd cut in somewhere, run across her down at Mardi Gras, or something. And I just *figured*, once you got a girl on a boat that way, away from all the other fellows, you know, why even a plain chap like me would have a chance, do you see? And I say now, I'll own it up—I was right down *jealous* of you, too! Wasn't it silly? And I ask your pardon. You're an awfully good sort, Harry, though you're so d—d serious—you get too much in earnest, take things too hard, you know. Will you shake hands with me, knowing what a fool I've been? I say, you're the best chap in the world, old man—if only you were a little more *human* once in a while." [Pg 429]

He put out his hand and I met it. "Will you shake hands with me, Cal?" said I, "on precisely those same terms about having been an awful fool? It's you who are the best chap in the world. And I'll admit it—I was jealous of you!"

He roared at this. "Well," said he, "as George Cohan says, 'All's well that ends well', and I guess we couldn't beat this for a championship year, now could we? Now say, about Dingleheimer—" [Pg 430]

"Oh, hang Dingleheimer, Cal!" I exclaimed. "What I want to know is, did you ever talk any to Miss Emory about—well, about me, you know?—say anything about my affairs, or anything, you know? I mean while you were there on the boat together."

"No. She wouldn't let me. Besides, the truth is, I was so full of Sally all the time, I mostly talked about *her*. By Jove! that was a measly trick you played us, running off with the boat from under my nose! But I proposed to Sally in Natchez that night, and she came on down to the city the next day by rail—while I ran down in that dirty little scow you left behind. And I never tumbled for days that it was *you* had run off with the boat—though I found a photo of Helena and your cigarette case in the boat you left. Never tumbled till that story of the taxi driver came out. Then I said, 'Well, of all things! Wonder if that old stick has really come to life after all!' And you sure had! What's in *your* letter? Say, ain't a boat the place—"

"But how did you happen to be here?"

"Oh, I've known Ed Manning years, in New York, Paris, all around. He asked me to visit him some time. I wired and asked him if I could come out for our honeymoon—you know, Harry, I'm such a d—d romantic son of a gun, and once before I was out here at Ed's, and those d—d nightingales, catbirds, what d'ye call 'ems—" [Pg 431]

"—Mockers."

"Yes, mockers, they sung so sweet, especial in the evenings, you know—and I'm so d—d romantic—*always* was thataway—and you know, why, a fellow *can* be romantic on his honeymoon, can't he?—he can just cut loose then an' be as big a d—n fool as he likes then—an' get away with it, what? Say, can't he?"

"—Yes."

"—So that's why I came."

"—But—honeymoon? Are you going to be married?"

—“Naw! I ain’t goin’ to be married—I *am* married! Day before yesterday, in New Orleans. And I don’t believe in dandlin’ an’ foolin’ around about a little thing like that. Ain’t you married yet?”

“No. Impossible. No preacher on Côte Blanche Bay or on our boat. I’ve got Aunt Lucinda Daniver along, to take care of the proprieties. If I should leave it to her, I never would be married.”

[Pg 432]

“Why?”

“She thinks I’m broke.”

“Yes, too bad about that! I wish I could swap bank rolls with you. Why didn’t you tell her the truth—and Helena, too? Why didn’t you tell ’em it was your own yacht? Why didn’t you tell ’em you’re worth a few millions and don’t have to work?”

“I don’t know—maybe I’m like you, Cal, foolish about nightingales and things. But tell me—you never did tell them anything about that Sally M. mine business, did you?”

“No, I should say not! Didn’t you tell me you didn’t want it to get out? It was bad enough, the way old Dan and your—sainted father handed it to each other over that mine, wasn’t it? I know about it, for I promoted that mine myself, and the name’ll prove that—Sally M. Byington, with the Byington left off! There wasn’t a blasted thing in it then. But when you—like a blame quixotic fool—after she was good for six thousand a month velvet, and ore blocked out to last a thousand years—why, then you fool around in Papa’s records, and think Papa wasn’t on the square with old Dan. So on the quiet you get it all made over, back to old Dan’s daughter; and take a sneak into the hazelbrush when she turns you down! Say, you know what *I’d* a-done?”

[Pg 433]

“No.”

—“I’d a-held on to the mine and told the girl how much it was bringin’ in—that’s *my* system. Then I’d a-got the mine and the girl both, maybe!”

—“Maybe.”

“Well, that’s the system I’d a-played. I wouldn’t a-took to the tall grass, me.”

“On the other hand, I played a system invented by myself and Henri L’Olonnois.”

“I never heard of him. Well, anyhow, you were rich enough to afford to do what you liked. But as to keeping it secret, you can’t do that any longer. Those newspaper fellows are the devil to get hold of things. Since all this stuff came out about you running away with your own boat—I can see now why you did it, and I’m glad you did—why, your whole life history has been printed, including all that restitution business about the Sally M. Fellows came to me and asked me about you, asked if I knew you. Said, yes, I knew you—said you were a romantic chap, and a good business man, too—and the best old scout in the world—what?”

I had arisen, and stood in some doubt. “What’s the matter—let’s go on up to the house. I want to see Sally,” he concluded.

[Pg 434]

“And I want very much to see Helena,” said I. “Only, it’s going to be rather harder now to meet her—and Mrs. Daniver.”

“Well, I don’t know,” said Cal Davidson; “every fellow plays his own system. There’s something in what you say about women having a good poker face so far as tellin’ what they think about a man is concerned—yes. Frinstance, how much did Helena know I knew, or know you knew or thought you knew—well, you get me? But the trouble with you is, you ain’t romantic in your temperament like me.... But if I was you, I wouldn’t be scared to tell Mrs. Daniver I had a dollar and a quarter or so left! It’ll soften the blow some to her, maybe. And as for Helena—”

“And as for Helena, I can look her in the face, and she can me, now. And—will you telephone to New Iberia for a minister—at once—for this evening train? And will you tell Edouard to have his man lay out his best evening clothes for me—tell him I’ll trade him these of my cook’s for them—and a suit of traveling clothes? Because, oh! fellow varlet—” (I paused here; we both did; for a mocker just now broke into an extraordinary burst of song, so sweet, so throbbingly sweet, that we could not help but listen, both of us being lovers)....

[Pg 435]

“What were you saying, old man?” Cal Davidson asked after a while, musingly, as one awakening.... “Some bird, what?”

... “Because, to-night,” I answered, “I am going to marry my fair captive, yon heartless jade, Helena. I’ve loved her always, rich or poor, and she loves me, rich or poor. And we shall live happy ever after. And may God bless us, and all true lovers!”

“Amen!” I heard some one say; and have often wondered whether it was yon varlet, the mocking-bird, or Cal Davidson himself, who spoke.... I looked around for Partial. He had followed Helena.

FOOTNOTE:

- [B] (The words in Helena’s note, addressed to Henry Francis Drake, Esquire, were, as I have said, but two: “Yes—Now”. That was why I was married that evening. It was curious about the wedding ring, for that I would not borrow; so an old negro blacksmith took a gold ring Edouard gave me, one found years ago by a Cajun treasure hunter in some one

of the few successful hunts for the treasure of Jean Lafitte; and into this, in place of the gem long since missing, he clasped my pearl, the one we got on the river far in the north; the great pearl later known as the largest and most brilliant ever found in fresh water. It was I who named it the "*Belle Helène*". So that our ring pleased all but L'Olonnois and Jean Lafitte. These two pirates had set at work that very afternoon, with Polyte (by Edouard's consent) and dug behind the smoke-house. Wonderful enough, they did find old bricks, enclosing a sort of hollow cavity, bricks of an ancient day; and though they got nothing else ('Polyte said he knew who had beaten them to this treasure—it was Achilles Dufrayne of Calcasieu, curse him!) they both explained how easy it would be to deceive the fair captive into thinking we really had found the ring's setting as well as the ring itself, in a pirate treasure-box. I would not do that, on the ground that already I had deceived the fair captive quite enough.... But, though yon varlet, my friend dear old Cal Davidson, spoke rather freely about his honeymoon, and all that, I can not do so of mine with Helena.... I did not know that I could again be so happy. Often I have wished I were a romantic man, like dear old Cal.... I fear my book on the mosquitoes of North America never will be written now.—H. F. D.)

THE END

Transcriber's Note

Minor typographic errors in spelling and punctuation have been corrected without note.

The Table of Contents has been made consistent with the chapter headers, as follows—"In Which I Have a Polite Conversation" amended to "In Which I Have Polite Conversation"; "In Which Is Certain Conversation" amended to "In Which Is Certain Polite Conversation".

This book contains some archaic spelling, and some dialect; this is all reproduced here as in the original.

Illustrations have been moved slightly so that they are not in the middle of a paragraph. The frontispiece illustration has been moved to follow the title page.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE LADY AND THE PIRATE ***

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