

THE STORY OF A GREAT SECRET.

Millions of Mischief.

By HEADON HILL.

Author of "By a Hair's Breadth," "The Duke Decides," "A Race with Ruin," Etc., Etc. "And some that smile have in their hearts, I fear, millions of mischief."—Julius Caesar, Act IV., Scene i.

(Continued.)

"But," I said, fired with instant alarm, "if he was at the Home Office yesterday afternoon the search for Arthur will commence this morning at the latest."

"Not so," was the partially reassuring yet terrifying reply. "The object of the Marskes, and certain other interested persons, is to allow as little time as possible to elapse between his capture and execution—to minimise the remote chance of anyone paying attention to what he would say. It was arranged, so Marske told me, that he would not be looked up till the afternoon, so that he might be hustled off to Winchester in the evening and hanged at dawn to-morrow. You should take comfort from the fact that they believe him to be still in the lodgings at 'Springthorpe.' I took care to impress that fiction upon Master Roger. They do not know that their quarry is hidden away in an empty house, and that a hunt is in store for them."

I could only hope for the best, and pray that the sleuth-hounds of the law would believe my dear one to have fled further afield, when they learned that he had not been seen at his lodgings for nearly two days. But Herzog's concise story made me realize how everything depended on the nightshade for the next few hours. A hundred things might happen to cause a fatal delay. Her rattletrap engines might break down; her captain might get drunk and rebellious; ominous clouds, heralded by a spiteful breeze, were banking in the western sky. The weather might upset all Herzog's calculations and send Arthur to his doom.

Antonio came presently to announce that breakfast awaited us in the cuddy, and before going below I was rejoiced to see that we should soon be out of those lonely stretches of stagnant water. The steamer was threading her way between the low shores of the seaward creek, with the sandy beach of Hayling Island visible on the port bow. Once clear of the shallows Captain Belcher could put on full speed if he so willed it.

He did not appear at the breakfast table, the honours being done in surly fashion by the red-headed mate, who eyed Herzog askance, and ostentatiously refused all information as to how long it would take to do the distance to Totland Bay. "You must ask old man Belcher," was his off-putting answer. "He don't permit the likes of me to do the talking on the ship."

came evident that the captain's astuteness in the matter of food did not extend to liquid refreshment. He had been supplied on the bridge with a square flask of Hollands, to which he frequently applied himself in the intervals of giving instructions to the man at the wheel. His face was already flushed, and his speech, as he bellowed foul-mouthed orders to the crew, was thick and inarticulate.

"We shall have trouble," I heard Herzog mutter. "The fellow is fortifying himself for a purpose."

And turning to me, he added aloud, but in a low voice. "It is asking a good deal of you in the way of swallowing noxious air, Miss Chilmark, but I really think that you would be better in your cabin—for the present, at any rate."

"Thank you, I shall remain on deck," I replied in a tone intended to be final.

Herzog's shrug and grimace denoted that he accepted it as such. "Then," said he, "let us entrench ourselves to the best advantage. Ah, the very place."

He led the way to a small deck-house, built at the side of the vessel, flush with the bulwarks and about ten paces aft of the bridge. There was a similar structure opposite on the other side, and I was told afterwards that the signal flags were kept in one of these houses, and spare ropes in the other. Herzog's use for the one he selected was soon to be made plain.

"Now, if you will kindly stand there, you ought to be all right," he said, indicating the angle which the deck-house made with the bulwarks—a spot where I was entirely screened from a view of the bridge, and could see nothing of the ship but the after-part of the deck, with the house for the second wheel, behind which we had conversed earlier in the morning, in the background. Herzog came and leaned over the rail beside me, taking advantage for the moment of the same shelter. His keen gaze was directed at the rough water of the open sea ahead, into which the steamer was steadily ploughing. Already we were beginning to pitch uncomfortably.

My strange companion pointed to a blue line that rose at a great distance in front of us as the steamer were round to the left clear of Hayling Island.

"It is a very little matter—simply the difference between inside and outside—that is worrying me," said he. "These are the cliffs of Bembridge, in the Isle of Wight. If Belcher steers

for them we shall know that he is for going outside the Wight, straight-away down Channel for Spain, instead of shaping a course inside it, down the Solent, according to orders. Which will mean that he has kicked over the traces, and that for it is going to blow a summer gale by all the signs. The elements we cannot control, but we shall know all about the Belcher part of the programme in less than two minutes.

His words filled me with a new despair, just as I had thought the battle won. Alarming as would be the prospect for myself if Belcher elected to run out to sea and commence his voyage without putting me ashore at Totland, for my poor hunted Arthur the result could only be the supreme disaster. I waited with my heart in my mouth for the first indication of the course to be steered and it came quickly enough. Disdaining the narrow waters between the Isle of Wight and the Hampshire coast, the vessel's head swerved further to the left, leaving no doubt that Belcher was making for the English Channel, south of the Island. We were not intended to pass the flourishing little watering-place on the Solent at all.

Gently but firmly Herzog pushed me further behind the shelter of the deck-house, at the same time drawing a formidable revolver.

"It is not likely that the captain will have firearms on him, but I want you to be out of harm's way in case there is shooting," he explained. Then he stood boldly forth and levelled his pistol at the bridge.

"If you do not alter your course, run for the Solent inside thirty seconds, Belcher, I will drill a hole through you," he cried.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Shipwreck.

The thirty seconds allowed in Herzog's challenge seemed to have been multiplied by ten before there was any result. I could not but admire the attitude of my unscrupulous ally during that period of suspense. His aim never wavered, nor did he show the slightest apprehension for his personal safety, great as were the odds he had taken upon himself to confront. I tried to read upon his face signs of what was passing on the, to me, invisible bridge, but his expression remained sternly impassive.

The answer from the enemy came at last, not in a bullet, but in a string of oaths that the interven-

ing deck-house failed to keep from my ears. And with the answer came relief, for almost simultaneously the Nightshade's bows were round for the other course—that between the mainland and the Wight. Herzog did not lower his revolver, but after a reassuring nod at me he addressed himself to Belcher.

"I give you credit for that act of wisdom, captain," he shouted. "You and your crew have nothing to fear from me so long as you obey orders. But I shall shoot any man who attempts to come aft of the bridge, and I shall shoot you, and put the mate in charge if you don't keep up a good speed—ten knots at least."

Another volley of blasphemy flew back harmless, but the vessel ploughed on to the westward in the teeth of the fast rising gale, and Herzog took no notice. But he did not relax his readiness with the pistol.

"I am afraid that, for a stout man who loves his ease, I have taken on rather a large order," he half turned his head to say to me. "At the mildest computation we cannot be off Totland for another three hours, and I must keep watch and ward all that time on a deck that bids fair to become slippery. Luckily, my legs are fairly seaworthy. Before I became a Surveyor of Taxes I had the honour to care for her late Majesty's revenue as an excise-man in Belfast Harbour."

So, for the next hour, as the vessel ploughed into the narrowing waters of the Solent, past Southsea and the Spithead forts on the right, and the green slopes of the Wight, shadowed now by lowering storm clouds on the left, my unexpected champion chatted frivolously. But all the while his eye was full of vigilance for the bridge, and once or twice a sudden stiffening of the fingers on the stock of his weapon told of movements among the crew beyond his field of vision. Once he raised the pistol, but lowered it again with a laugh.

"Belcher has finished his bottle and wants another," he explained for my benefit. "Unfortunately Tor that unquenchable thirst of his it would have entailed a visit by Antonio to the cuddy, which is in our domain, and that I could not permit. What a stroke of luck. Miss Chilmark, that our friend the skipper believed himself such an autocrat that he didn't think it necessary to carry his pistol on his person. If he had done so my vigil might have been more lively, and less of a sinecure."

As the steamer edged further into the Solent, our chief foe for the moment, the weather, had its flank turned by the island barrier, and we steamed past East Cowes, with its anchorage full of sheltering yachts, in less discomfort. Still the wind and the waves were against us, and the old fruit tramp made but poor time. It was past noon when we were off the mouth of Southampton Water, and then something happened.

Herzog preserved his original position at the corner of the deck-house, with his pistol in hand poised ready for use, and with his gaze focussed

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on the forepart of the ship, which I could not see. I myself was impatiently watching the island shores, and thinking how slowly they seemed to slip by, when a yacht, anchored inshore off West Cowes, attracted my attention. She was a pretty schooner, with auxiliary steam power, and I thought I recognized her as one which had been lying at Totland a fortnight before. In order to prolong my scrutiny of the yacht, when we had passed, my eyes turned further astern, and in doing so encountered a sight which drew from me a warning cry.

Two of the Nightshade's foreign cut-throats were peering round the corner of the aft wheel-house. They were armed with long knives, and were evidently on the point of attacking Herzog from the rear. As he turned at my scream they made their rush, but the moment's warning was enough for that ready hand and brain. Two shots from his revolver rang out in quick succession, and the treacherous ruffians fell, mortally wounded, one on the top of the other.

(To be continued.)

IN TELEGRAPHIC AND GENERAL NEWS THE TIMES LEADS.

A BLIND ELECTRICIAN. He Can Wire a House and Manage a Dynamo.

(London Daily Mail.) The idea that blind people are capable only of exercising certain hackneyed professions such as brush, basket, and mat making has been triumphantly refuted by Mr. S. Ferris a resident of Swindon, who, though totally sightless, carries on a most successful business as a practical electrician in that town.

Mr. Ferris gained the requisite knowledge of the business at the Swindon technical schools, winning four certificates and two first prizes in competition with seeing students. His principal, Mr. Knowles, had no hesitation in leaving him in full charge of the engine and dynamo.

Mr. Ferris has since carried out several contracts for the installation of electric light to the entire satisfaction of the Swindon Corporation engineer and his customers and has recently secured a fresh contract for wiring and fitting ten houses.

The blind electrician judges the direction and distance of surrounding objects by the echo of his own footsteps, and is thus enabled to steer clear of obstacles. He never uses a walking-stick.

Mr. Ferris's method in wood-turning is to hold the machine tool in right hand only, and allow the fingers of the left to rest on the revolving work, so that he may detect if it is being accurately done. He grinds and sharpens his own implements, also cutlery of all kinds.

AN EMPTY COT.

When the sun sets in the cold grey sky And I call the children to rest, And tuck each one with a kiss, and a sigh.

In their cosy little nest, As I whisper soft in their sleepy ears—"God keep you safe all night."

I find my eyes are full of tears Though I try to keep them bright. For away in a corner I seem to see, In a quiet, darkened spot— A little form that is gone from me, And a little empty cot.

I pray God lessen the endless pain, To comfort the one, whose lot It has been to know the loneliness Of a little, empty cot.—Jan. Candian Magazine. Winifred Armstrong.

"Well," moralized Mr. Nevergo, "we are here today and gone tomorrow." "Yes," said Miss Hotshot, glancing at the clock. "I've noticed that about you."



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