

THE STORY OF A GREAT SECRET.

Millions of Mischiefs.

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.)

And with what subtlety had he adopted it. I remembered how the crafty old man had appealed to my mercy, dressing up his prayer in the guise of a bargain, and suggesting that if I did not perform my part and allow Roger the chance of escape the promised proofs would be withheld and the admission repudiated. It was plain to me now that the younger Marske had utilized the start his wily father had gained for him, not in flight, but in preparing the trap into which I had fallen.

That the brutal captain of the Nightshade had any knowledge of Arthur's unfortunate sister, or had ever sailed with Roger Marske on a yacht, was extremely improbable. Belcher did not look like a man who would ever be entrusted with the command of a yacht. However, by the light of what had befallen me at his hands, that was immaterial. Doubtless Roger Marske, or maybe Sir Gideon himself, had had previous dealings with him, and knew that he would be an unscrupulous instrument for conveying me—where?

All these recollections and forebodings rushed at lightning speed through my clearing brain, and with an effort I staggered to my feet and looked about me. The place I was in was a small cabin, with two sleeping bunks on the lower of which I had slept out my drugged sleep. I saw with a thrill of apprehension that the bedclothes were fairly clean nor was this inconsistent. On such a vessel as this cleanliness suggested preparation and design, and there were infinite possibilities in the designs of such people as had hold of me.

One step brought me to the door, which, of course, was locked, and I turned to the circular port-hole. It was closed, but had I been able to open it, it would have been useless for purposes of escape, for it was too small to admit the passage of my head, to say nothing of my body. It offered this advantage, though, that it gave me a view of the outside world, and enabled me to calculate the time that had elapsed since I had come on board. My watch had already told me that it was half-past five, but that might mean anything.

The sun was rising from a bank of haze, between which and the ship, at a considerable distance, a long line of low-lying mud-flats was visible. I was able to conclude, therefore, with tolerable accuracy that it was early morning, and that the steamer was somewhere in the lower reaches of Thames, heading for the open sea. The discovery destroyed my last hope

of deliverance through the simple feminine expedient of using my lungs and doubtless the anaesthetic had been timed for that. I might have screamed with success while the Nightshade was in dock; out here in the broad waterway my voice, lifted to its fullest compass, would never reach a passing vessel from the muffled seclusion of the closed-up cabin. And as I gazed with wistful longing at the far-off shore through the plate-glass circle, the steamer wore to the right, the land fell away quickly, and, minute by minute, the waves ran higher. I knew that we were out of the river, standing down Channel on a southerly course for the Straits of Dover.

Vessels passed us in plenty, from heavily-laden barges to huge inward bound ocean liners, but none so near that even had I been on deck could I have made my distress known on board them. For a few minutes, that seemed interminable, I was cruelly tantalized by a small craft that suddenly swooped down quite close, and set my heart beating by lowering a boat. My excitement grew into positive pain when the boat pulled straight towards my floating prison, and at the same time the Nightshade slowed down and nearly stopped. I guessed what was happening. The pilot, my last link with freedom was about to be put off. In my semidazed condition I had forgotten all about him, and now, in the frantic hope that he would hear, I cried aloud when it was too late.

Too late, because I was either heard by Belcher, or he had divined that I might make this last effort for my voice was immediately drowned by the rush of escaping steam. The order had evidently been given to relieve the pressure on the safety-valve, with the result that my cries could not have been audible on deck amid the hideous 'din. I drummed on the port-hole to try and attract the attention of the two men in the pilot cutter's boat, but they were busy with their oars in the choppy sea, and the boat shot under our stern and was lost to view. Then came the sharp 'ting-ting' of the engine-room bell, and the Nightshade forged ahead again. The pilot had descended on the other side, and I was a prey to black despair as I saw the cutter go curtseying towards the boat a hundred yards in our wake.

I think the tears would have come then, had I not been distracted by a loud knock at the cabin door—a superfluous attention that I appreciated vaguely, seeing that the door was locked on the outside, and that it

was open to anyone to enter. "Ahoj there, missy. Now you've done singing you'll be wanting some breakfast, eh?" came the husky tones of Captain Belcher's voice.

I decided rapidly that, as I was at the man's mercy and in complete ignorance of his intentions towards me, there was nothing to be gained by open defiance or a display of temper. Woman's wit had served me as but a poor weapon so far but it remained my only one. I would pin such little faith as was left in me to it still.

"How soon will breakfast be ready?" I asked, striving to make the question sound as indifferent as if I was addressing the steward of an Atlantic mailboat.

My apparent complacency must have astonished him, for a plasmphous but not unfriendly oath prefaced the reply: "Now you're talking sense. The coffee 'll be hot as soon as you want it, and—your door's unlocked."

The truth of the latter statement, evidenced by the scrooping of the key, emboldened me to put the question: "I wish you would tell me where you are bound for, Captain Belcher. I cannot pretend to feel very comfortable till I know that."

The rasping laugh that met my request for enlightenment was not reassuring. "There you have me, missy," replied the captain. "You may believe me or not, but I know no more than you do, and shan't till we have passed the Straits. We're sailing man-of-war fashion this trip—under sealed orders."

"Very well," I said. "I shall be quite ready for breakfast in ten minutes. Am I to have it in here?"

"Not you," thundered through the cabin door. "You're to have it along with me—here in the cuddy. And you'll find me a first-class ladies' man, I warn you."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Captain Belcher opens the Envelope.

The prospect of sitting down to breakfast with the captain of the Nightshade gained nothing in attractiveness from his self-description as a 'ladies' man, but to undergo the ordeal seemed the wisest policy. It was possible that by feigning a stupid epathy I might avoid the brutal violence of which he seemed capable.

And there would be more scope for seizing any opportunity that might occur if I availed myself of the run of the ship, than if I sul-

ed in the stifling cabin. At the same time I impressed upon myself the necessity of not overdoing the assumption of studied carelessness, for I shrewdly suspected that in Captain Belcher's crude animalism there was a large proportion of native cunning. His reception of Sir Gideon Marske as an unexpected stranger, in order to lead up to my interment down the companion, had shown that he himself could play a part with success.

When I emerged from the cabin into the cuddy, I found the captain already seated at the end of the table, and it was a relief to see that the meal was not to be eaten tete-a-tete. The place on his left was occupied by a sheepish-looking man with an enormous shock of red hair, whom I afterwards discovered to be the mate. There was also a Portuguese steward in attendance, to encourage me with the proverb that 'tis safety in numbers, though I should have been very loth to meet any one of these three men, collectively or individually, in a country lane on a dark night.

At my entrance Belcher looked me over with a bold stare, and pointed to the seat on his right.

"Now, then, Antonio, you black swab, bacon and eggs for the passenger," he roared at the steward. "O'Brien," turning to the mate, "just trot out your company manners before a lady. If I catch you shoving your knife into your ugly mouth again so long as this blooming cuddy is a first-class saloon, I'll send you to grub forward, along of the crew. I hope you slept well, Missy?"

The leer with which he accompanied the impudent question discounted its rough humour, and I had much ado to keep from breaking down at the start.

"At any rate, I slept very soundly, but perhaps the less we say about that the better," I nerved myself to reply, trying to make a pretence of eating in spite of the nausea with which the rank stuffiness of the place nearly overcame me.

For some reason my answer with its suggestion of a modified playfulness, pleased the captain, and he laughed boisterously. "Funny thing, when you come to think of it," he said, "a Chancellor of the Exchequer going in for tempting a poor honest sailor-man into the smuggling trade. Spends all his time hindering contraband, and then goes into the business himself. Makes a difference I reckon, when it's outward-bound smuggling, and the goods is a pretty girl."

"Did Sir Gideon Marske leave any message for me?" I asked, ignoring his coarse reference to my forcible detention on board.

"Not a word, unless it's in a certain little envelope he gave me—the sealed orders I spoke of, and not to be opened till we're passed Brighton," replied the captain. And again he broke into a noisy guffaw which only died away when he found it necessary to wipe his mouth on his coat-sleeve. "See here," he went on, "do you know what was making me laugh? It was the way that starchy old cove was trying to look like a

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chap that's given a blind beggar sixpence as he walked off along the deck. A pious fraud, he is, missy, but he's my paymaster, and a good 'un, so don't you try to run athwart my hawse."

The scowl that accompanied the concluding words constituted them a threat, and I parried the thrust by shaking my head in silly fashion, as though I did not understand. Captain Belcher appeared to be satisfied with my submissiveness, and presently rose and signed to the mate to follow him up to the deck. At the foot of the companion he halted and looked round at me.

"Go where you like on the ship," he said. "Or out of it, if you prefer to jump overboard," he added with a hideous grin. "From what your distinguished patron let drop, I reckon he wouldn't blame me for such an accident."

(To be continued.)

"SWISS FOOD" GETS THE MEDAL.

"Swiss Food" prepared by P. McIntosh & Son, Toronto, was awarded the Gold Medal at St. Louis Exposition.

"They married for love, I believe?" "Yes." "Are they happy?" "They don't know yet. They are waiting to see what her father is going to do for them."

NOT SO BLACK AS IS PAINTED.

Hon. J. R. Stratton Says
He is a Better Man
Than His Opponents
Would Make Him.

Peterboro, Ont. Jan. 14.—(Special.)—At a meeting in the interests of the provincial liberal candidate, R. F. McWilliams, the principal speakers were Hon. G. P. Graham, provincial secretary and Hon. J. R. Stratton. Referring to political corruption, Mr. Stratton said it would appear that he had been the bad boy of the party but that circumstances gave him the assurance that a systematic plan of attack being pursued against him by his opponents.

GETTING READY TO GOBBLE HAYTI.

United States May Proceed to Energetic Intervention.

Port Au Prince, Hayti, Jan. 13.—Mr. Powell, the American minister, has informed the government of Hayti that the United States government refuses to recognize the validity of the sentence in contumacy to 15 years at hard labor, pronounced by the Haytian Court against Jaeger Huber, an American citizen, for alleged complicity in bond frauds charged against the administration of former President Simon Sam and officers of the Bank of Hayti. The U. S. demands the annulment of the sentence under pain of energetic intervention. The demand has caused much excitement here.

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