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THE FROZEN PRINCE.

BY W. CLARK RUSSELL.

[Continued.]

CHAPTER XXVII.

I ENCOUNTER A WHALER.

I gave him the date.

"That's not a month ago," cried he.

"It's long enough, whatever the time," said I.

Here the crew fell a-talking, turning from one another to stare at me, and the negroes' eyes showed as big as saucers in the dismay of their regard.

"See, here, master," sung out the long man, "if you hadn't been cast away more than a month, how came you clothed as men went dressed a century since, hey?"

The reason of their misgivings flashed upon me. It was not so much the schooner as my appearance. The truth was, my clothes having been wetted, I had ever since been wearing such thick garments as I met with in the cabin, keeping my legs warm with jackboots, and I had become so used to the garb that I forgot I had it on. You will judge, then, that I must have presented a figure very nicely calculated to excite the wonder and apprehension of a body of men whose superstitious instincts were already sufficiently flattered by the appearance of the schooner.

When I tell you that, in addition to the jackboots and a great fur cap, my costume was furnished of a red plush waist-coat lined with silver, purple breeches, a coat of frieze with yellow braiding and huge cuffs, and the cloak that I had taken from the body of Mendoza.

"Captain," cried I, "if so be you are the captain, in the name of God and humanity come aboard sir." Here I had to wait till he reappeared. "My story is an extraordinary one. You have nothing to fear. I am a plain English sailor; my ship was the *Laughing Mary*, bound in ballast from Calicut to the Cape. Here I had to wait again. "Pray, sir, come aboard."

There was nothing to fear. I am alone—in grievous distress, and in want of help. Pray come, sir."

There was so little of the goblin in this appeal that it resolved him. The crew hung in the wind, but he addressed them peremptorily. I heard him damn them for a set of curs, and tell them that if they put him aboard they might lie off till he was ready to return, where they would be safe, as the devil could not swim; and presently they buckled to their oars again and the boat came alongside. The long man, watching his chance, sprang with great agility into the chains, and stepped on deck. I ran up to him and seized his hand with both mine.

"Sir," cried I, speaking with difficulty, so great was the tumult of my spirits and the joy and gratitude that swelled my heart, "I thank you a thousand times over for this visit. I am in the most helpless condition that can be imagined. I am not astonished that you should have been startled by the appearance of this vessel and by the figure I make in these clothes, but, sir, you will be much more amazed when you have heard my story."

"Well, cook my gizzard," he exclaimed presently, through his nose, and after another good look at me and along the decks and up aloft, "if this ain't mi-raculous, tew. Durned if we didn't take this hooker for some ghost ship rizz from the sea, in charge of a merman rigged out to fit her age. Y' are all alone, air you?"

"All alone," said I.

"Branch me every barrel aboard if ever I see such a vessel," he cried, his astonishment rising with the searching glances he directed aloft and alow.

"How old be she?"

"She was cast away in seventeen hundred and fifty-three," said I.

"Well, I'm durned. She's froze hard, sirree. I reckon she'll want a hot sun to thaw her. Split me, mister, if she ain't worth sailing home as a show-box."

I interrupted his ejaculations by asking him step below, where we could sit warm while I related my story, and I asked him to invite his boat's crew into the cabin that I might regale them with a bowl of such liquor as I ventured to say. On this he went to the side, and, hailing the men, ordered all but one to step aboard and drink to the health of the lone sailor they had come across. The word "drink" acted like a charm; they instantly hailed upon the painter and brought the boat to the chains and tumbled over the side, one of the negroes remained in her. They fell together in a body, and surveyed me and the ship with a hundred marks of astonishment.

"My lads," said I, "my rig is a strange one, but I'll explain all shortly. The clothes I was cast away in are below, and I'll show you them. I'm no spectre, but as real as you; though I have gone through so much, if I am not a ghost, it is no fault of old ocean, but owing to the mercy of God. My name is Paul Rodney, and I'm a native of London. You sir," said I, addressing the long man, "are I presume, the master of the *Susan Tucker*?"

"At your service—Josiah Tucker is my name and that ship is my wife Susan."

"Captain Tucker, and you, men, will your please step below," says I. "The weather promises fair; I have much to tell, and there is that in the cabin which will give you patience to hear me."

I descended the companion-stairs, and they all followed, making the interior that had been so long silent ring with their heavy tread, whilst from time to time a gruff, hoarse whisper broke from one of them. But superstition lay strong upon their imagination, and they were awed and quiet. The daylight came down the hatch, but for all that the cabin was darksome.

I waited till the last man had entered, and then said, "Before we settle down to a bowl and a yarn, captain, I should like to show you this ship. It'll save me a deal of description and explanation if you will be pleased to take a view."

"Lead on, mister," he said, "but we shall have to snap our eyelids and raise fire in that way, for durned if I, for one, can see in the dark."

I fetched three or four lanterns, and, lighting the candles, distributed them among the men, and then, in a procession, headed by the captain and me, we made the rounds. I had half-declared the arm-room, but there were weapons enough left, and they stared at them like yokels in a booth. I showed them the cook-house and the fore-cabin, where the deck was still littered with clothes, and chests, and hammocks, and after carrying them aft to the cabin, gave them a sight of the hold. I never saw men more amazed. They filled the vessel with their exclamations. They never offered to touch anything, being too much awed, but stepped about with their heads uncovered, as quietly as they could, as though they had been in a crypt, and the influence of the strange and terrifying memorials was upon them. I also showed them the clothes I had come away from the *Laughing Mary*; and, that I might submit some aspect to them as should touch their sympathies, I whipped off the cloak and put on my own pilot-cloak coat.

Once being no more to see, I led them to the cook-room, and there brewed a great hearty bowl of brandy-punch, which I seasoned with lemon, sugar, and spices into as relishable a draught as my knowledge in that way could command, and giving every man a pannikin, bade him dip and welcome, myself first drinking to them with a brief speech, yet not so brief that I broke down towards the close of it, and ended with a dry old or two.

The captain, standing up, called upon or his men to drink to me, promising me that he was very glad to have fallen in with my schooner, and then, looking at the others, made a sign, whereupon they all fixed their eyes upon me and drank as one man, every one emptying his pot and inverting it as a proof, and fetching a roaring sigh of satisfaction.

This custom ended, I began my story, beginning with the loss of the *Laughing Mary*, and proceeding step by step. I told them of the dead body of Mendoza, but said nothing about the Frenchman and the mate, and the Portuguese boatman, lest I should make them afraid of the vessel, and so get no help to work her. As to acquainting them with the recovery of Tassard, after his stupor of eight-and-forty years, I should have been mute on that head in any case, for so extraordinary a relation could, from such people, have earned me but one of two opinions: either that I was mad and believed in an impossibility, or that I was a rascal and dealt in magic, and to be vehemently shunned.

There were seven seamen and the captain and I made nine, and we pretty nearly filled the cook-room. "Twas a scene to be handled by a Dutch brush. We were a shaggy company, in several kinds of rude attire, and the crimson light of the furnace, whose playing flames darted shadows through the steady light of the lanterns, caused us to appear very wild.

They were a good deal puzzled when I told them of the mines I had made and sprung in the ice. They reckoned the notion fine, but could not conceive how I had, single handed, broken over the powder-barrels, gotten over the side, and fixed them.

"Why," said I, "t'was slow, heavy work, of course; but a man who labours for his life will do marvellous things. It is like the jump of a hunted stag."

"True for you," says the captain. "A swim of two miles spends me in pleasuring; but I've swum eight miles to save my life, and stranded by a new-hooked cod. What's your intention, sir?"

"To sail the schooner home," said I, "if I can get help. She's too good to abandon. She'll fetch money in England."

"Ay, as a show,"

"Yes, and as a coalman. Rig her moderately, and carry your fore-cabin into the head, captain, and she's a brave ship, fit for a Baltimore eye."

He stroked down the hair upon his chin.

"Dip, captain, dip my lads; there's enough of this to drown ye in the hold," said I, pointing to the bowl. "Come, this is a happy meeting for me; let it be a merry one. Captain, I drink to the *Susan Tucker*."

"Sir, your servant. Here's to your sweetheart, be she wife or maid. Bill, jump on deck and take a look round. See to the boat, and make it snug."

One of the men went out.

"Captain," said I, "you are a full ship?"

"That's so."

"Bound home?"

"I want you men enough and to spare. Lend me three of your hands to help me to the Thames, and I'll repay you thus; there should be near a hundred tons of wine and brandy, of exquisite vintage, and choice with age beyond language in the hold. Take what you will of that freight; there'll be times the value of your lay in your pickings, modest as you may prove. Help yourself to the clothes in the cabin and fore-cabin; they will turn to account. For the men you will spare, and who will volunteer to help me, this will be my undertaking: the ship and all that is in her to be sold on my arrival, and the proceeds equally divided. Shall we call it a thousand pounds apiece? Captain, she's well found; her inventory would make a list as long as you, I'd name a bigger sun, but here she is, you shall overhaul her hold and judge for yourself."

I watched him anxiously. No man spoke, but every eye was upon him. He sat pulling down the hair on his chin, then, jumping up on a sudden and extending his hand, he cried, "Strike it! It's a bargain, if the men'll jine."

"I'll jine!" exclaimed a nuan. There was a pause.

"And me," said the negro. I was glad of this, and looked earnestly at the others.

"Is she tight?" said a man. "I say so," said I.

They fell silent again.

Joe Wilkinson and Washington Cromwell—then two jines," said the captain. "Bullies, he wants a third. Don't speak altogether."

The man named "Bill" at this moment returned to the cook-room, and reported all well above. My offer was repeated to him, but he shook his head.

"This is the Horn, mates," said he. "There's a deal o' water 'twixen this and the Thames. How do she sail?—no man knows."

"I want none but willing men," said I. "I want sailors as good as sailors as the English. What an English seaman can face any of you can. There is another negro in the boat. Will you let him step aboard captain? He may jine."

A man was sent to take his place. Presently he arrived, and I gave him a cup of punch.

"Splain the business to him, sir," said the captain, filling his pannikin; "his name's Billy Pat."

I did so; and when I told him that Washington Cromwell had offered, he instantly said, "All right, massa, I'll be ob'ay."

This was exactly what I wanted, and had there been a third negro I'd have preferred him to the white man.

"But how are you going to navigate this craft home with three men?" said the man "Bill" to me.

"There'll be four; we shall do. The fewer the more dollars, hey, Wilkinson?"

He grinned, and Cromwell broke into a vernal laugh.

They seemed very well satisfied, and so was I.

(To be continued.)

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