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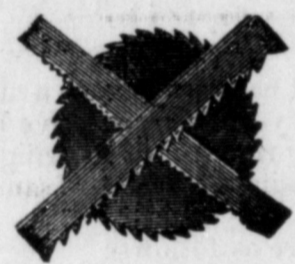
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MAROONED.

BY

W. CLARKE RUSSELL.

(Condensed for THE REVIEW.)

CHAPTER XXXIV.—Continued. A second negro jumped into the boat, into which the water was beginning to drain in twenty places, so that I saw if we did not bear a hand we would be awash before we had half measured the distance between the schooner and the ship. The negroes threw the oars over and splashed me alongside the Bristol Trader as though rowing for a wager, with a dollar for the man who should catch the most "crabs." I sprang into the main-chains, and in a minute stood upon the ship's poop.

The captain, as the man who had hailed us proved to be, was an intelligent-looking weather-darkened, iron-haired fellow of some forty-five years, thin, smooth-faced, with a gray, seaward eye, kind in its expression. I raised my hat, he did the same. I repeated my story, now relating it circumstantially. The two women drew near as I talked, and he interrupted me once to introduce me to one of them as his wife, to the other as a friend of hers, who was going home in his ship as a passenger. My romantic story seemed quite to the taste of these ladies, who frequently broke out into exclamations of astonishment, while they sent glances full of curiosity at Miss Grant, who had withdrawn to the shade of the awning on the schooner's quarter-deck, and sat there watching us, too far off for her beauty to be evident, though one might have guessed her charms even at that distance by the delicate flight of her face under her broad hat.

"But you were bound to Rio," said the captain.

"Yes," he answered. "You may easily get to Rio from Havana," he continued. "That schooner should carry you to Havana in a week. It seems a pity to travel all the way home again, when your port is comparatively at hand. We could provision you too with a few articles to make the run more tolerable."

"No," said I, warmly, "there is nothing in food and drink to render that schooner tolerable. Her cabin creeps with cockroaches, the atmosphere can scarce be respired for the heat and smell of it. The lady and I have talked the matter over, and we are earnest in our wish to return to England. Why, see here, sir, you'll be able to land us in Bristol before we could hope to reach Rio, even suppose yonder schooner should convey us to Havana in a week's time, which I gravely question when I recall the spells of weather which have nearly murdered us. Of course," I said, seeing him look a bit reflective, "we should ask you to receive us as passengers that is to say, as people who would be glad to defray all charges for accommodating us."

"Oh," he said, in a tone of indifference, "that matter can be hereafter settled. As a mere question of humanity it would be my duty to receive you. You have no luggage, you say?" "None."

"Well, sir, the lady can come along at once." He looked over the side. "Hi, you Jumbos, shove off now, and bring the lady aboard."

I hailed the schooner: "Miss Grant, the negroes will fetch you. Duerow, come you along with the lady that you may receive your money."

Ten minutes later I had assisted Miss Grant over the side, and escorted her onto the poop. She bowed with stately grace to the two women who courted her as though she were a princess. The captain, whose name, by the way, was Foljambe, held a trifle aloof at the sight of her, eyeing her with astonishment and admiration. Captain Duerow came up to me, cap in hand. His strut was incomparable. I heard the half-smothered laughter of the men forward as he bowed first to the captain's wife, then to her friend, then to the captain, bringing his cap to his heart, and slowly leading his body, till I thought he had a mind to double himself up after the manner of stage contortionists.

"Berry sorry to lose yah, Massa Musgrave," he said to me, "and berry much sorrier still to say good-bye to dis most bootiful lady, which," he added, with an emotional grunt in his voice, "I may nebbber, nebbber see agin in dis yeeerie earth—" He was proceeding, but I could see that Captain Foljambe was impatient. So I cut him short by handing him the banknote and then shook him warmly by the hand, thanking him with the sort of sincerity that a man who had gone through what I had could hardly miss of, for his rescue of us and his subsequent kindness. Miss Grant also gave him her hand, addressing a few words of gratitude.

"Now, then, skipper," cried Captain Foljambe, "away with ye, my lad. This is a breeze to make the most of, so please don't keep me waiting." "Got bless yah! Gorrarmighty in hebbben bless yah both, an' make yah happy!" cried the poor fellow backing to the gangway as though from the presence of royalty and speaking with so much emotion that I looked to see him blubber. "May dah good Lord look down 'pon dis ship and send yah ten knot breezes all dah way," and arrived at the gangway he dropped over the side and was pulled to his little schooner.

CHAPTER XXXV. HOME.

The Bristol Trader was one of the most comfortable ships of her class that ever I was aboard of. Her cabins were tall and roomy, her decks spacious, her portholes large, her hatchways big enough to serve for an emigrant ship. After our experiences on the island, in the open boat and on the schooner, it was like arriving at some cheerful, hospitable inn, with the welcome of a blazing fire, a hot supper, and a warm bed, after hours of blind groping over miles of snow-clad moors, to find one's self in such a ship as this. One needs to be marooned to appreciate comforts made cheap by homelessness and familiarity. We had been absolutely destitute aboard the schooner, without the commonest and meanest conveniences—no hair-brush, no towels, soap, sheets, and what not; nay, there had not been even a looking-glass, and neither Miss Grant nor I had the least idea of the sort of faces we submitted until we had been conducted to our cabins by Captain Foljambe and his wife. I borrowed a razor from the captain, and shaved myself for the first time since I had left the island, and I protest the sensation was as though nature had clothed me in a new skin. It is the commonplace of life that make themselves heard of in maritime disasters. The captain was good enough to lend me a clean shirt and collar, with other articles of under-clothing, all of which sat very comfortably upon me, as we were pretty nearly of the same build. He told me his wife was taking care of Miss Grant, that she (namely, Mrs. Foljambe), together with her friend, Mrs. Tweed, had between them a plentiful stock of clothing, so that my companion could be at once made comfortable, and kept so until our arrival at Bristol.

He was a man that improved on acquaintance, shrewd, respectful, sailorly in a sort of careless manner that was a grace in its way, well spoken, with something of the manners of a well-bred gentleman, roughened without being coarsened by the usage of the ocean. He sat in my bunk while I dressed, and asked me many questions about the Iron Crown and our life on the island. He could give me no news of the brig, did not seem to know of her name even, but he told me that while at Havana he had heard of a vessel which had fallen in with a boat containing four men, that had gone adrift during thick weather from the craft that owned it; and this coming on top of Ducrow's narration, confirmed my belief that Gordon and the others had been saved; for which I was heartily thankful indeed.

It was long past the dinner hour, but neither Miss Grant nor I had broken our fast since the morning.

On my telling Captain Foljambe this, he immediately gave orders to his steward to prepare a meal for us in the cabin, and by the time I had finished cleaning myself with the razor, hair-brush, and the skipper's linen, the meal awaited us—cold roast chicken, fine white biscuits, ham, several plates of fruit with the sweetness of the tropic soil still in their flavor and freshness, a decanter of brandy, a monkey of cold water—why, Heaven bless us! after poor Ducrow's brine-toughened buffalo meat and his calkers of water warm from the scuttle-butts, this was such a princely regale that the recollection of it bids fair to outlast the memory of many a sumptuous banquet that I had before and have since sat down to. The afternoon sun flashed azure off the water through the open ports, and filled the interior with a soft, golden haze that floated cool to every sense in me after our days and nights of the Orphan's cabin, upon the atmosphere freshened by gustings of air from the white canvas tubes of the wind-sails, while the eye was soothed by the violet shadow cast by the awning down upon the open skylights, in whose gaping casements the hot breeze hummed as though it echoed the burden of the island insect chorus.

I was conversing with the captain's wife and Mrs. Tweed, two very homely, unaffected ladies, brimful of kindness and sympathy, when Miss Grant arrived. The peculiar complexion of the atmosphere in the cabin just then might have helped her but methought there was the glory of the newly blown flower in her as she stood a moment after coming out of her cabin, instantly smiling as our gaze met. I brought her to the table, and we seated ourselves. There was a West Indian plant, bearing a star-shaped flower lovely as the lily, but inodorous, trained against the handsomely framed trunk of the mizzen-mast, sloping abaft the table from the deck to the cabin. The captain cut off one of these flowers and presented it with a sailorly bow to Miss Grant, who thanked him and put it in her bosom.

"This sort of thing," said I, almost jealous to think that the hand of a stranger should have touched a stem that was to find so sacred a resting-place, "makes one feel alive again. I fancy I must have been dead for a month, perhaps a little longer. Everything strikes me with an astonishment that is preposterously unnatural. This damask table-cloth, how white it is! this crystal tumbler—I never before knew glass to sparkle so! and yonder roast chicken!—upon my word, I thought there had been an end of hens." The captain laughed. "I have been shipwrecked, sir," he exclaimed. "I have known the time when the hairy face of a seaman, all knobs and warts, has set me weeping as though I was taking my last

view of the only man left in the world besides myself."

"How very odd!" exclaimed Mrs. Foljambe. "I've never heard you say so before, William."

"My dear," said he, "had it been the last woman perhaps I shouldn't have cried."

"Because I dare say you'd have taken good care it shouldn't have been your last view of her," said Mrs. Tweed, dryly. This lady was a widow.

"Now, Miss Grant," said I, working away at the roast fowl and ham, and immensely enjoying Captain Foljambe's excellent old brandy, "shall we ask our kind friend here to shift his helm and give chase to the schooner, that we may overhaul and board her afresh, and make our way to Havana in her?"

"If you return to her, I will," she answered.

"That means no," said Captain Foljambe. "No for all hands. Bad lookout to shift the helm now, Miss Grant. It blows a pretty six knot breeze."

"Hurrah!" cried I. "Why, with this clipper keel under us we shall be heaving Bristol into sight while the little Orphan is still dodging the ghost of a cat's-paw in waters not yet hull down. No, no, it was a voyage not to be pursued. A twenty-five-ton boat, Mrs. Foljambe! her one pump going day and night! all the plagues of Egypt rolled into one, in the shape of cockroaches! Think of that, Mrs. Tweed."

"Shocking, sir," she cried, "the horrid creatures! But there are none here, thank goodness."

"Here and there one," said the captain. And so we went on, chatting and eating then mounted on deck, I with a big Havana cigar in my mouth, so joyous in spirit that it might have needed but a band of music to have started me off dancing for the rest of the day.

I have spoken of a quality of reserve in Miss Grant's manner when aboard the schooner, of my own sensitiveness to it, and how between us there had come a something that seemed to hold us a bit apart; but this had made way before we left the little vessel for the old frankness, the warmth, the sweet and fearless cordiality of her bearing toward me when on the island. Yet we had not been twenty-four hours in the Bristol Trader when I noticed that her behavior was once more charged with a chilly and uncomfortable element of reserve. Then she even grew timorous at times, shunning my gaze, though sometimes I'd catch her unawares watching me with an expression of wistfulness that lay sad in her eyes, like a shadow of melancholy there. I knew very well that she had guessed that my proposal to sail home was merely that I might possess her society for some weeks or perhaps months longer, and I would fancy that in thinking over this she had come to resent it, as though she was now clearly seeing that my duty lay in proceeding with her in the schooner to Havana whence, as Captain Foljambe was constantly saying—and I certainly did not like him for this confounded trick of iteration—we would have met a ship to transport us to Rio without delay.

There came a day, however, when feeling grew too strong for me. Conscience had wrestled hard with inclination, but to no purpose. Often, while tossing in my bunk at night, while seated alone on the deck by day, I would ask myself if I had not acted dishonorably in falling in love with this woman, and whether I should not be rendering my sin heinous beyond forgiveness by proposing to her. But it was like putting some insoluble riddle to my heart. I gave it up. Had Alexander been my brother instead of my cousin it would have been all the same. I was head over heels in love with Aurelia Grant, and I made up my mind to marry her if she would have me. And there came a time, as I have said, when patience gave way, when passion grew too powerful for restraint, and when I determined to put the matter boldly to her and see what she had to say to it.

The ship was now on the equatorial verge of the Bay of Biscay, so that you will gather that I did not make up my mind in a hurry. When the dusk settled down the half moon shone in the sky. Her light lay soft and white upon our high reaching canvas, and filled the shadow between the rails with a silver tint, through which the forms of the seamen moved in dark outlines. The awning was furled, and the poop-deck lay almond-white to the stars, with many quick-silver-like rippings of radiance in the polished brass-work, and the man at the helm rising with the lift of the stern against the faintness like the after-glow on the sea-line there, his shape sharply wrought upon it, and the circle and spokes of the wheel keen as though he and it were an etching in India ink.

I came on deck after an hour spent alone in my cabin, and stood a little at the head of the ladder that led to the poop, trying to persuade myself that I lingered to admire the fair ocean night-picture; I found my eyes quickly going from it in search of Miss Grant. I saw her in a moment standing in the dark shade flung on the deck by the reflection of the mizzen-mast. She was talking to Mrs. Foljambe and Mr. Murphy, the chief mate, I put on the lightest air I could summon and approached the group with an easy saunter.

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