

THE ROSE OF PARADISE.

CHAPTER V.—Continued.

Although the sky was clear, the night was excessively dark, as one may often see it on those tropical latitudes; yet I was as well assured that a boat of some sort had left the ship as if I had seen it in broad daylight, because of the phosphorescent trail which it left behind it in its wake.

I had slipped a pistol into my belt before quitting my cabin, and as I hailed the boat I drew it and cocked it, for I thought that the whole occurrence was of a mighty suspicious nature. As I more than half expected, I got no answer. "Boat, ahoy!" I cried out a second time, and then, almost immediately, levelled my pistol and fired, for I saw that whoever the stranger was he had no mind to give me an answer.

At the report of the pistol both Mr. Langely and Mr. White came running to where I was, and I explained the suspicious circumstances to them, whereupon Mr. Langely suggested that it might have been a shark that I had seen, vast quantities of which voracious animals dwell in those and the neighboring waters. I did not controvert what he said, although I knew beyond a doubt that it was a craft of some sort which I had discovered—possibly a canoe, for the dip of the paddle, which I had distinctly seen in the phosphorescence of the water, appeared first upon the one side of the wake and then upon the other, as the blade was dipped into the water from side to side; so although, as I said, I did not undertake to controvert Mr. Langely's opinion, I was mightily discomposed in my own mind concerning the business.

At this time there was a vast deal of disturbance aboard the *Greenwich* and the *Ostender* because of my hail and the discharge of the pistol, which, however, soon quieted down when they found that nothing further followed upon the alarm.

I walked up and down the poop-deck for a great while, endeavoring to conceive what could be the meaning of the boat, which had most undoubtedly been lying under the stern of the *Cassandra*, and how it came that the watch had failed so entirely to discover its arrival. It would not have been possible for an ordinary ship's boat to come upon us so undiscovered, for, as I myself knew, the watch were keeping a sharper lookout than usual; therefore this circumstance, together with that which I had above observed concerning my opinion that the craft had been rowed with a paddle, led me to conclude that it was one of the native canoes, though I was as far as ever from guessing what the object of the visit had been, or what it portended. As I sat ruminating upon this subject, looking straight ahead of me, without thinking whither my observation was directed, I presently perceived that I was looking absently at the spot where Captain Leach had been sitting a little while before. This led me to think of him, and from him of the jewel that was in my keeping, and of its excessive value. Of a sudden it flashed into my mind, as quick as lightning what if Captain Leach should have it in his mind to practice some treachery upon us all?

I may truly say that this thought would never have entered my brains had not the circumstances of Captain Leach's conversation with me in my cabin tended to set it there. But no sooner had this gloomy suspicion found place in my mind than it and those troubles which had beset me of late, and the loss of that sleep which I had failed to enjoy the night before, together cast me into such a ferment of spirits as I hope I may never experience. Nor could I reason my mind out of what I could not but feel might be insane and unreasonable fancyings.

At last I could bear my uncertainties no longer, but went down into the great cabin, and so to the door of the berth which Captain Leach occupied. I knocked softly upon the door, and then waited a while, but received no answer. After that I knocked again, and louder, but with no better success than before. Finding I was like to have no answer to my knocking, I tried the door, and found that it was locked.

My heart began to beat at a great rate at all this, but I suddenly bethought me that perhaps the captain was a sound sleeper and not easily roused. If this were so, and he were in his cabin, and had locked the door upon himself, I could easily convince myself of the fact, for it hardly could be doubted that the key would be in the key-hole. I drew out my pocket-knife, opened a small blade which it contained, and thrust it into the key-hole. There was no key there!

This discovery acted upon my spirits in such a manner that a dose of water could not have cooled me quicker: for now that my worst suspicions were so far confirmed—for I felt well assured that Captain Leach was nowhere aboard the ship—my perturbation left me, and I grew of a sudden as calm as I am at this very moment. However, to make matters more assured, I rapped again upon the door of the cabin, and this time with more vigor than before; but although I repeated the knocking four or five times, I received no answer, and so went upon deck to consider the matter at my leisure.

My first thought was of the jewel in my keeping, and that Captain Leach had made off with it. My cooler reason told me that this could not be, I having taken

such effectual means to hide it, as before stated. Nevertheless, I went to my cabin and examined my hiding-place to set my mind at rest, finding, as might be expected that the jewel was safely there.

My first impulse was to tell Mr. Langely of my suspicions, but in digesting the matter it appeared to me best to keep them to myself for the present; for if I should, after all, prove wrong in my surmise, it would only add to the entanglement to have another involved in the business before anything certain had been discovered; moreover, should I observe sufficient cause for using extreme measures against Captain Leach, I might easily arrest him at any time, having him entirely in my power.

Having settled this matter to my own satisfaction, I determined to lie in wait for his return, and to discover how he himself would explain his absence.

I surmise that he must have left the ship from the boat which was hanging to the davits astern, and on inspecting the matter found that I was correct, and that a stout line, such as might easily bear the weight of a man, had been lashed to one of the falls, and hung to within a foot or two of the water. I was then well assured that Captain Leach must have clambered into the boat astern whilst I had gone forward, as told above, and had dropped thence into the canoe by means of the line just spoken of. The noise which I had heard I conceived to have been caused by his making a mis-step, or by the canoe rising with the ground-swell more than he had expected.

Now, it he left the ship in that manner, of which, according to my mind, there could be but little doubt, there was equal certainty that he would return by the same way; so I determined to lie in wait for him there, and to talk him with his absence so soon as he should come aboard. Accordingly I laid myself down in the boat astern as comfortably as I could contrive, and lighting my pipe, watched with all the patience I could command for the return of the fugitive.

I judge that I lay there for the space of two or three hours, and in all that time saw or heard nothing to arouse my suspicions; nor do I believe that I would have discovered anything had I not been watching at that very place, for so quiet was Captain Leach's return that I heard no sound of oars nor knew anything of it until I saw the line that hung at the davits moved from below by some one climbing aboard. I lay perfectly still and made no noise until he had clambered into the boat and stood within a few feet of me.

"Well, sir," says I, as quietly as I could speak, "and may I ask where you have been for all this long time?"

CHAPTER VI.

Had a pistol been fired beside his head he could not have started more violently, and I had thought that he would have been utterly dumfounded; but he recovered himself with a most amazing quickness.

"Why, Captain Mackra," says he with a laugh, "and is it you that welcome me back again like the prodigal that I am?"

"Sir," said I, very sternly, "you will be pleased to answer my question, for I tell you plain that I am in no humor for jesting upon this occasion."

"And why should I not jest?" says he; "the whole business is a jest from first to last. As all this coil has been made about a very simple piece of business, I am forced to tell what I had not intended to tell, and which I am surprised that a man of your feeling should urge another into declaring. A man of parts, sir, may find favor with dusky beauties as well as with white; nor can I see what more harm there may be in visiting a sweetheart here than at Gravesend, which I doubt not you yourself have done, and that more than once."

I confess that I was vastly struck aback at this reasonable answer, and began for a moment to misdoubt that my suspicions of the captain were correct. For a while I stood, not knowing what to say, when of a sudden certain circumstance struck me that Captain Leach's words had not explained.

"And why," said I, "at a time of such anxiety and uncertainty, did you not ask permission to leave the ship?"

"I should think," says he, "a man of delicacy would have no need to ask such a question as that."

"Then tell me this," I cried, "why did you not direct your course towards the land instead of towards the open sea?"

"Why," says he, laughing, and answering with the utmost readiness, "I thought of nothing at all but of getting away from the ship as fast as possible, seeing that some hasty fool aboard was blazing away at me with a pistol or musquetoon, and that if I had been picking my course at the time I might have wound up the business with an ounce of lead in my brains, instead of enjoying this pleasant conversation in such good health."

All this time we had been standing within a foot or two of one another, I looking him straight in the face, though I could see nothing of it in the darkness. For a moment or two I could make no answer, his words being so mightily plausible; and yet I did not believe a single one of them, for they ran so smoothly and glibly that I could not but feel convinced that he had them already sorted and arranged for just such an occasion as the present.

"Sir," said I, in a low voice, for I was afraid lest my indignation should get the better of me, "I tell you plain that, though your words are so smooth, I do not believe that which you tell me. Go to your cabin, sir, and let me tell you that if I see anything that may tend to confirm my suspicions of you, I will clap you in irons, without waiting a second, and as sure as you are a living man."

"Captain Mackra," said he, in a voice as quiet as that I myself had used, "if ever I come safely to land, you shall answer to me for these words, sir."

"That as you please," said I; and thereupon turned and left the boat, entering my own cabin so soon as I had seen that Captain Leach had obeyed my order by betaking himself to his.

I was not thus quickly to see the last of this part of the affair, for early the next morning, and before I had left my cabin, Mr. Langely comes to me with a message from Captain Leach to the effect that he would like to have a few words with me. I at once sent a return message that I would be pleased to see him at whatever time it might suit him to come. Accordingly in about five minutes he knocked upon the door of my cabin and I bade him enter. I motioned him to a chair but he only bowed and remained standing where he was, nigh to the door.

"Captain Mackra," said he coldly, "you were pleased to put upon me last night a gross and uncalculated insult, I cannot summon you to account for it at present, although I hope to do so in the future. But you may perceive, sir, that it will be best both for you and for myself that should withdraw from this ship, and finish my passage to India, as the opportunity now offers, either in the *Greenwich* or the *Van Weiland*" (which was the name of the *Ostender* boat).

I was overjoyed at so propitious an opportunity of getting thus easily rid of my uncomfortable passenger. However, I think I showed nothing of this to him—at least I endeavored not to do so—and told him that a boat was at his service if he chose to look for another berth for the rest of the voyage. I myself went upon deck and had the gig lowered into which Captain Leach presently stepped, having bid good-by to his fellow-passengers, and having said that he would send for his chest so soon as he had secured a berth in one or the other of the vessels mentioned.

I gave directions to the boat-wain, who was captain of the gig, to await Captain Leach's orders until he should indicate that he had no further use for the boat, and then saw him rowed away to the *Greenwich* with the most inexpressible pleasure.

The *Cassandra's* boat lay alongside of the *Greenwich* for maybe half an hour, at the end of which time I was surprised to see Captain Leach re-enter her, and direct his course to the *Ostender*, which lay a little distance beyond. He remained aboard of her for about the same length of time that he had stayed with the *Greenwich*, after which he climbed the boat for a third time, and directed his course for the *Cassandra* again.

I was standing upon the quarter-deck when he came aboard, and he approached me with a countenance expressive of the utmost mortification and chagrin.

"Captain Mackra," said he, "I find that by a most unfortunate sequence of events I can find a berth neither aboard the *Greenwich* nor the *Ostender*, so that nothing remains but for me to force my unwelcome presence upon you for the balance of the voyage."

I own that I was very much disappointed by these words. However, nothing remained but to put the best face possible upon the matter. "Sir," said I, as graciously as I could contrive to speak, although I am afraid that my tone was expressive of my disappointment, "it was at your own suggestion that you quitted the *Cassandra*; your berth, sir, is still ready for your occupation."

He said nothing further, but indicating his acknowledgments with a bow, proceeded directly to his cabin.

CHAPTER VII.

As I was in such a ferment of spirit for all this time, and so fearful of an attack from the pirate craft, having continually in my mind not only the treasure, but also the helpless women intrusted to my keeping, it might occur to the reader to ask why I did not send both it and them to such a place of safety upon the land as the king's town offered to English people beset as we were. I may now say that I had considered it, and had perceived that more than one difficulty lay in the way. In the first place, I could not send the ship's boat to the king's town, because that in passing the cape to the northward they would come within a mile or less of the pirate craft, from which they might not hope to escape without molestation.

Secondly, I could not send them across the country, because it would require not only an escort such as could be ill spared at this juncture, but also an efficient leader, who might be spared even less readily. Besides this I could not tell what dangers such a party might encounter, not only from natives, of whose disposition I knew nothing, but also from wild beasts, which we could hear distinctly every night howling in the jungle in a most melancholy, dreadful manner.

Thirdly and lastly, I did not believe the

(Continued on Page 5.)

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