

THE ROSE OF PARADISE.

CHAPTER VII.—Continued.

I was mightily amazed and taken aback at this speech. "And why do you talk so about standing by me, Captain Kirby," said I. "Is it not, then, that we stand by one another? Is my craft in greater peril than yours? Am I to be given up as a sacrifice to these wicked and bloody wretches?"

I thought he seemed vastly disturbed at this speech.

"In course," says he, "we'll stand by one another. All the same, each must look out for himself."

I regarded Captain Kirby for a while without speaking, and he seemed more than ever troubled at my gaze.

"Sir! sir!" I cried, "I must tell you that I do not understand this matter. Do you not mean to make a fight of it?"

At this he flew into a mighty fume. "How!" says he; "do you mean to question my courage? Do you call me a coward?"

"No, sir," says I, "I call you nothing; only I did not understand your speech. Sure, sir, you cannot but remember that I have three helpless women aboard my ship, and that it behooves you as a man and an Englishman to stand by me in this time of peril."

So saying, I left the cabin and the ship, but with the weight of trouble that lay upon my mind any thing but lightened, for I could not understand why, we all being in this peril together, neither he nor the *Ostender* captain had spoken a single word concerning our defence.

However, I yet retained the hope that the pirates would not venture into our harbor, seeing that we were three to two, and lying in a chosen position whence we might hope to defend ourselves for a long time, and to their undoing.

Upon my return I found my passengers all in the great cabin, and in a very serious mood, having heard some rumor as to the danger that threatened. I stood for a while as though not knowing what to say, but at last I made shift to tell them how matters stood, and in what danger we were like to be, though I smoothed everything over as much as lay in my power. I think that our peril had been pretty well discussed amongst them before I confirmed it with that which I said. Nevertheless, I am amazed even now at the coolness with which all hands regarded it.

Misses Pamela, I recollect, laid her hand lightly upon my arm. "Whatever our danger may be," she cried, "this we all know, that we could confide our safety to no truer sailor nor more gallant man than he who commands this ship." This she said before them all who were there standing.

In my cabin I summoned Mr. Langely and Mr. White (my second mate) to a serious consultation, which was the last we were to hold before that great and bloody battle concerning which so much hath been writ and spoken of late. When we had finished our councils we came upon deck again, and found that the sloop was rather less than a mile distant from the other craft, and in a little while she hove to, nigh to the barque, and let go her anchor with a splash and rattle of the cable which we could hear distinctly whence we lay.

For half an hour Mr. Langely and I stood upon the poop-deck watching the two crafts by aid of the telescope, and what we saw in that time foreboded to my mind no good to ourselves.

First we beheld a boat pass from the barque to the sloop, and in which was one evidently of great consequence amongst the pirates, for by aid of the glass we could distinguish that his apparel was better than the others, and also that he wore what appeared to be a crimson scarf tied about his body.

He remained aboard the sloop for maybe the space of ten minutes, at the end of which time he returned again to the barque where they immediately began lowering away the boats. Four of these boats were filled with men who were all transported to the sloop, up the side of which we soon saw them swarm to the number of fifty or more.

Whilst these things had been going forward, Mr. Langely and I had been standing in silence, but now my first mate turned to me. "Sir," said he, "methinks that they mean to attack us."

I nodded my head in answer, but said nothing.

By this time the breeze was welling upon us, for the smooth water all around us was dusky by the little cat's paws that swept the glassy surface.

Now that morning, just before the pirate sloop hove in sight, I had got out warps by means of which I hoped to change our position, bringing the *Cassandra* nigher to the *Greenwich*, and to a station of greater defence. In this, however, we had made but little progress, for the current set strong against us at the present state of the tide. Seeing now the imminence of the attack, I hoisted sail, hoping to take advantage of the first wind, and bring the *Cassandra* closer to the *Greenwich*.

What followed I am even now not able to explain, for I am slow to believe that an English captain could desert another in such an emergency as the present. It might be that Captain Kirby thought that we intended trying to get away upon the wind, for the *Greenwich* also began immediately to set all her sail. Seeing what

they were about I hailed the other craft, but got no answer. Then I hailed her again and again, but still received no reply.

The next minute she being open to the first puffs of the breeze by a valley, filled and bore away, followed by the *Ostender*, who had also set her sails, leaving me becalmed where I was.

"My God!" cried Mr. Langely, "do they mean to desert us? Look, sir, here come the pirates!"

I had just then been so intent upon the other vessels that I had not thought of observing what our enemies were about, not thinking that they would take such immediate action. But, no doubt, seeing us set our sails, and fearing that we might get away, slipped their own cables; for they were now coming down upon us with the freshening wind, having already entered the channel as boldly as though there were none to oppose them, the sloop leading the others by a quarter of a mile or so. Indeed the *Greenwich* and the *Ostender* bearing away had left the passage entirely open to them, with no one but ourselves to oppose them.

In this extremity I hailed the *Greenwich* for a third time, and getting no answer, ordered the gunner to fire across her bows, but in spite of this she did not heave to, whereupon we gave her a round shot, but whether to her harm or no I am not able to say.

And now nothing remained for us but to fight what appeared a hopeless battle against heavy odds.

The main ship-channel leading from the offing to the bay or harbor wherein the *Cassandra*, the *Greenwich*, and the *Ostender* had been riding for these days past, lay almost easterly and westerly, but so shaped by the sand-bars to the south and those shoals that ran out from the northern cape as to take the form of a very crooked letter S. Nowhere was this channel over half or three-quarters of a mile wide, and in some places it was hardly more than a quarter of a mile wide.

From the position which the *Cassandra* occupied this entrance to the harbor was so well defended that any vessel entering thereat must be twice raked by our broadside fire, once in rounding the northern point, and once the southern angle of the channel. Hence it was that I determined to hold our present position as long as I was able.

But the pirates did not both attack us by way of the main ship-channel as we had expected, for when they had rounded the northern angle, the sloop, fearing perhaps that we would try to get away upon the wind, instead of keeping in consort with the barque made directly for us across the shoals that lay between us and them. This they were able to do without running aground, both because of their intimate knowledge of these intricate waters and of the small amount of water which the sloop drew.

"We'll rake 'em anyhow," says I to Mr. Langely, for I could see no other means for them to approach us but to come upon us bow on, there being no room to manoeuvre among the bars and shoals that lay betwixt us and them.

But the devilish ingenuity of these cruel wicked wretches supplied them with other means than a direct attack upon the *Cassandra*, for when they had come within about a mile or so of us, they hove to, dropped their main-sail, and, running out great-oars from the ports between decks, began rowing towards us in a clumsy fashion, somewhat after the manner of a galleon. By this means, and by the aid of the current which set toward us, they were enabled to keep nearly broadside on, and so avoid being raked by our fire.

"Mr. Langely," said I, "if they are able to board us we are lost. Order the gunners to fire upon the oars and not upon the decks."

"Ay, ay," says he, and turned away.

CHAPTER VIII.

The pirates were the first to open the battle, which they did when within about a quarter of a mile from us, giving us a broadside. It was the first time that I had ever been under fire in all of my life, and never shall I forget it as long as I may live. Their aim was wonderfully accurate so that when their shot struck us a great cloud of white splinters flew from a dozen places at once. I saw three men drop upon the deck, and one who stood at a gun on the quarter-deck just below me leaped suddenly forward half across the cannon with a deep groan, whilst a fountain of blood gushed out from his bosom across the carriage and upon the deck.

One of the others caught him by the arm, whereupon he turned half round and then slipped and fell forward upon his face. He was the first man killed in this action and the first man that I ever beheld die in a like manner.

The *Cassandra* answered the pirate's fire almost immediately. But our guns were trained, as I had ordered, upon the oars and not upon the crowded decks, so that while every shot that they delivered told upon the lives of the poor fellows aboard the *Cassandra*, our return fire did apparently no harm to them.

I hope I may never again feel such an agony of impatience and doubt and almost despair, as I beheld my men fall by ones and twos upon the deck, which soon became stained and smeared with their blood whilst the pirate craft came drifting ever nigher and nigher to us, its decks swarming with yelling, naked wretches that in

their aspect and manners resembled demons incarnated rather than mortal men.

"Mr. Langely," said I, in a low voice, "if those oars are not broken in five minutes' time we are all lost. For there yet remained three thrust through the ports upon the side nighest to the *Cassandra*, and the current was carrying the pirate craft in such a direction that if they were able to hold their course a little while longer they would be almost certain to drift upon us and so board us.

One minute passed, and two minutes, then there was a shiver of splinters, and only one oar was left. Instantly the stern of the sloop began to swing slowly around toward us, for one oar was not enough to keep her to the current. I could see the ash wood bend with the strain like a willow twig, then—snap!—it broke, and around came the stern with a swing directly under our fire. The pirates sprang to the main-sheets, but it was too late to save themselves.

When the crew of the *Cassandra* saw the result of their fire they burst out shouting and cheering like madmen. Down came the sloop drifting stern on, whilst the *Cassandra*, making up for lost time, poured broadside after broadside into her. Never did I behold such a sight in all of my life, for every shot we gave her ploughed great lanes along her crowded decks. To make matters worse for them, their mast was presently shot through, falling alongside in a great tangled wreck, thus preventing any manoeuvres which they might still have hoped to make. They drifted by us at about forty or fifty yards' distance, shouting and yelling, and giving us a last broadside with great courage and determination. They presently ran aground upon a sandbar and there stuck fast for the time, though in such shoal water that we could not come nigher to them than we then were.

All this while the barque had been slowly making her way through the tortuous turnings of the channel. At one point, the water being low, she had run aground, and though she had cleared again with the rising tide, she had been so delayed by this mischance that she had not been able to come up in aid of her consort.

But immediately they discerned what mishap had befallen the sloop, and that she was fast aground and in no present position to attack us, they hove to and lay directly athwart the channel.

I at once perceived their intentions, and that they were determined to keep us shut up where we were until the sloop could float clear away with the rising tide and resume her attack against us. It was then that the resolve entered my mind not to await an attack but to seek it ourselves; for though the crew of the barque must have outnumbered that of the *Cassandra* two to one, she was yet much the smaller vessel of the two and the less heavily armed. Now, if we could only once get past her and safe into the channel our safety would be wellnigh assured; for, as said above, the *Cassandra* was one of the best sailers at the East India Company's docks.

I turned and beckoned my first mate to me. "Sir," said I, "yonder is our one and only chance of getting away, we must run down upon that vessel in the channel, engage her, and trust to God and take our chance of getting safe past her and away. If we are fortunate enough to pass her we can gain a good start before she can round to in such narrow space-room." Mr. Langely opened his mouth as though to speak. "Nay, nay, sir," I cried, "it is our only chance, and we must take it.

At first we did not suffer so much as I had expected from the fire of the pirate; but when we had come within one hundred or two hundred yards of them, and when within range of the musketry in their fore and main tops, their fire was truly dreadful.

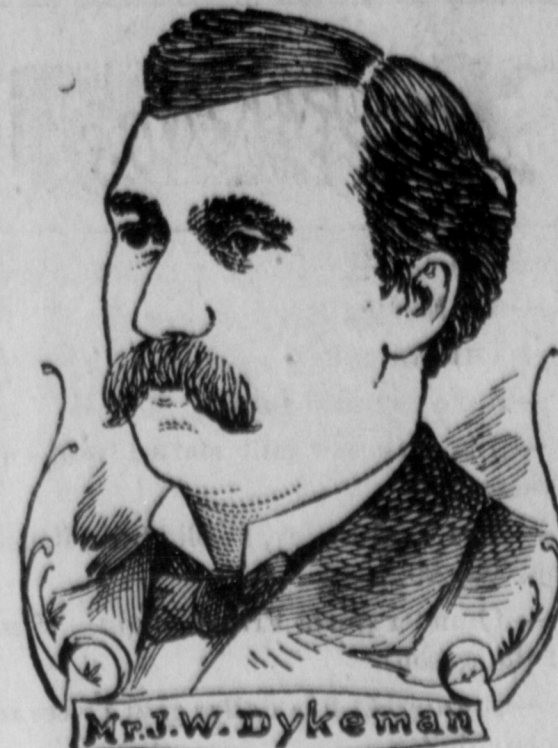
The *Cassandra's* wheel was stationed under the overhang of the poop-deck, and upon the helmsman most of their aim was concentrated; for if the *Cassandra* was once allowed to fall off, and should run aground in the narrow channel, she would then be in their power, and they could destroy her at their leisure.

One after another three men fell at that dangerous post, which was entirely open to the pirate's fire. We were now within one hundred and fifty yards of them, and a fourth took hold, but only for a minute, for he presently dropped upon his knees, though he still kept a tight grip on the wheel, keeping the ship upon her course. Mr. Langely and I were standing upon the overhang of the poop, whereupon he, seeing that the man was wounded, without waiting for orders from me, sprang forward and seized the wheel in his own hands just as the other fell forward upon his face.

The next minute Mr. Langely cried out, "My God, captain, I am shot!" His right hand fell at his side, and in an instant I beheld his shirt stained with blood that gushed out from the wound in his shoulder.

The ship beginning to fall off, I ran forward and took the wheel myself, for in a minute more, if we held our course, we would be under the pirate's stern, and in a position to rake them with our starboard broadside. I heard a dozen bullets strike into the wood-work around me; one struck the wheel, so that I felt as if my hand and my wrist were paralyzed by the jar. The next instant I felt a terrible blow upon my head; a hot red stream

(Continued on Page 5.)



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