

SET IN A SILVER SEA!

A ROMANCE BY B. L. FARJEON.
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CHAPTER XXVIII.

HAROLD SEES FACES IN THE SMOKE OF HIS CIGAR.

"Your pardon, gentlemen," it was the captain of the vessel who broke in upon their conversation.

"What have you to say, captain?" "I await your orders; I can get safe anchorage here. Is your voyage at an end?"

"For the present. Yonder lies the Silver Isle—a fair land."

"It seems so; but I have seen as fair, at a distance, that turned out foul upon a nearer acquaintance."

"This will not. Let go your anchor; to-morrow morning I shall wait a boat to convey one of my servants ashore with a letter to the islanders. There is nothing to fear from them; the people are not cannibals."

"Maybe not; but you tell me they have no king."

"The greater fortune," said Harold, "for the king they have not. Having no king they cannot hunt one to death."

"Our king lives and is safe."

"In banishment," said Mauvain, gloomily, "as we are. Better to have died, sword in hand. Captain, it is likely you will have to put up with us a day or two longer."

"The later we part company the better I shall be pleased."

Mauvain, with a nod, dismissed the captain, and turned to Harold.

"I am almost at a loss what to say to the islanders, and to whom to address my missive."

"The letter you gave me on my visit to the island was addressed to one Sebastian. A stately man, whose white hair flowed from his shoulders. By this time, doubtless, gathered to his forefathers. I can suggest a younger man."

"Name him."

"Ranf, the hunchback."

Mauvain frowned. "There lies an obstacle."

Harold laughed blithely. "My very thought, Mauvain. If my memory does not deceive me, you begged the islanders to accept the hunchback as a trust in kindly remembrance of yourself. Doubtless they appreciated your generosity in having sent them such a Caliban."

"And something worse," said Mauvain, "added to his hunchback."

"There could be nothing worse in human form."

"There is no saying. He had a daughter, remember, of whom you gave me a frightful description. If she has fulfilled the promise of her youth, we may find not only a Caliban, but a younger Syracor on the Silver Isle. Would you believe, Harold, that this man once told me a woman loved him? It is inconceivable, and yet I must do the hunchback the justice to say that I believe him not to be guilty of falsehood. You are silent, Harold. Are you thinking of the hunchback's daughter, and reading her spells? For by this time, if she live (it may mercifully have happened that she is both removed from mortal spheres) she is a mistress of all that is foul in nature. I can see her, already with bent back, searching the woods for poisonous herbs for purposes of witchcraft. The account you gave me of your voyage hither in such company is very vivid in my mind: all his hideousness reproduced in her, a very monkey in mischief, body as twisted, hair unkempt, limbs crooked—"

"Hold!" cried Harold. "Be a little merciful. There are fair as in ill-begotten."

"Make me," continued Mauvain, "appearing to take pleasure in the subject, a group in stone of this interesting couple. Do you remember my suggesting it to you? And look forward with a prophet's eye, I said, and cut the figures as they will be in twenty years. You performed the task well; you have the soul of an artist, Harold, and when you are interested in a model, excellence is the result. You modeled Ranf to the life, an old man whose likeness lives only in the being we know, and projecting your mind into the future, you created in stone the figure of a woman so startling in its weird ugliness that it would have made the fortune of a sculptor had a critic dealt with it. Ranf and this hideous Evangeline side by side, stooping over a pool of water. There is no mistaking that the repulsive pair are father and daughter. It was a trick, Harold, but most truly original, that you should have hewn out of the marble over which these creatures are bending, a great hollow, with a floor of glass, so that, being filled with clear water, the reflection of the two faces is plainly seen. The marvelously original Evangeline shall be set up in the grounds of my house on the Silver Isle—"

"Impossible!" interrupted Harold. "The iconoclasts of our unhappy country have by this time criticised it with their hammers."

"It happens otherwise, fortunately. Foreseeing what was coming, and thinking it not unlikely that we should have to fly the country, I had certain household treasures packed up and conveyed to the seaside. They are in the hold of this vessel at the present moment, and your Ranf and Evangeline among them. I shall have an opportunity, if the interesting couple are alive, of comparing living flesh with dumb stone, and of proving what kind of a prophet you were when you designed the group."

"It is scarcely worth while," said Harold, "with a slight tremor in his voice, "to inflict humiliation upon me."

"Humiliation, Harold! Explain."

"It is not pleasant to look, in our ripe age, upon the mistakes of our earlier years. My life—in other respects, as well as in that of an artist—has been a failure. I am painfully conscious of this lamentable conclusion. The group you speak of may be classed among youth's extravagances, which serve their purpose for the time (not in the healthiest way), and then are best forgotten."

"You underrate yourself, Harold. Had you possessed industry and application—"

"Two words, Mauvain, not to be found in my vocabulary."

"Nor in mine; but I do not need them."

Had you possessed these qualities, you would have shone in the world with even a brighter light than you have shone in private circles. For it has been said of you frequently that you are an artist of a divine mold, and that you belong, of your own force and power, to the race of those who have made art a religion. You have in you the true fire, and the world would have hailed you as a prophet inspired. Your indolence stopped the way of your advancement. The world has lost a leader; your friends have been the gainers."

"You are generous in your praise; give me a further exhibition of your generosity."

"I can deny you nothing, Harold."

"Thank you. You will, then, present me with the group of Ranf and Evangeline, which, indeed, and in truth, is a reproach to the art I worship. Let me be judged by what I believe is worthy of me, not by what I know will tend to lower me."

"If art workers were their own critics, they would condemn their most perfect productions. You would destroy your child."

"It is a crime, and I do not care to be perpetually reminded of it."

"Pardon the seeming indecency of the remark; I paid for the group, Harold."

The sculptor winced, as though a lash had been laid across his shoulders. "You paid me liberally, Mauvain."

"It is mine, therefore, and I am its owner, judge, and critic. You have done nothing as fine as this. No, Harold, I cannot give it you."

"Sell it to me, then," said Harold, with earnestness.

"I am not," said Mauvain, somewhat haughtily, and yet with a touch of amusement in his tone, "a dealer in curiosities. I cannot sell the group. Dismiss the subject. Come with me to the saloon, and assist me in my letter to the islanders."

The ship lay at anchor that night. The sailors sang their sea-songs, the rough melody of which became softened as they floated over the water. With the moonlight on it, the sea looked like a fairy isle; the soft waves lapped the shore, along which sauntered here and there a couple in their springtime. The future was theirs, and their hearts were light; no shadows rested on their lives. Harold remained upon the deck, gazing on the sea, and thinking of the past. His thoughts traveled in these groves:

"Could we but tear some leaves out of the book! Or, better still, could we destroy the book itself! Turn over the pages, Harold. What do you see?"

"Wasted days and nights; misspent endeavor; masses of violent color; harmony robbed of sweetness; beauty out of proportion such as weak-brained aesthetes love to draw; tangles of artificial flowers; painted women; men with the souls of waiters; false pretensions."

"What a jumble of discordances! Struggling one with another, not for the purpose of arriving at some sort of order and decency, but for the purpose of asserting an enjoyment of the hours which becomes pain when the touchstone of true manliness is applied to it. Even at the time its worst pages were written, some glimmering of this entered my mind."

"A witch's revel. The beauties of nature distorted and insulted, and mud flung upon purity. Miracles on every side. Spring's tenderness; summer's perfectness; autumn's peacefulness; winter's little loveliness; all mocked, derided, belittled (if nature can be) by false refinement or coarse indulgence."

"A creditable production, such a book, for a mortal endowed with reason, imagination, and an indolent affectation of idealism. If this life were all, it would be adding wasted time to wasted time to occupy the moments in regret and self-reproach. In such a belief, every hour should be made to yield its measure of enjoyment; it would be an intellectual exercise of opportunity to exact this tribute from time which flies or lags according to our humor. But it is not all; we are something higher than beasts of the field."

"Herein lies the appalling shadow. The phantom of your higher self rises before you, and with sad eyes demands an account."

"I render it. Not mine all the fault. My boat has drifted on, and I have not striven to direct its course. I am wrong; there was a time when a spirit on the shore seemed to say, 'There is life in earnest, lovely life before you; there is life in life a sweetly hope, in whose light your higher aspirations shall be realized; lose shall give you earnestness and courage. But the voice I seemed to hear was of my own creation. The spirit stood before me, but its tongue was mute; its heart never responded to mine."

"So much for the past. Let it go. Retain only what is pure and sweet. The future still is yours."

"How many years ago it is since I visited this fairy isle? I have kept no count of time. The memory of the few hours I spent upon its shores lingers with me like a pleasant dream. The child I brought hither, in strange ungenial society, is a woman now, fair and beautiful. There is no doubt of it. 'Princess of the Silver Isle, I kiss your fairy fingers.' My very words come back to me. She gave me her hand, with nature's true grace, and so I left her."

"Were I a painter, I would draw the picture. The child, the hunchback, and the islanders standing a little apart, the reapers looking on. All the accessories perfect. But without being a painter, I can draw Evangeline's likeness. No Syracor, Mauvain. The loveliest Miranda. If I had such a spirit-slave as Ariel to show me this Miranda in her living form!"

"Dreams, Harold! will you never be practical? I answer myself. I think—never."

As Harold gazed and mused, the night deepened, and the lovers left the sea-shore for the inland.

At midnight Mauvain came on deck, smoking a cigar, and walked to where

Harold was lying on his side, with the moonlight streaming on him.

"Aleep, Harold?" The sculptor did not reply; he had fallen asleep, with tender fancies in his mind. His position was a dangerous one; his form swayed to and fro with the rocking of the ship in the swell of the waves, and a sudden lurch would have sent him into the sea. Mauvain stooped over him and awoke him. Harold opened his eyes languidly.

"Cruel to wake me," he murmured. "I was dreaming of another world."

"You might have been in it," said Mauvain, "but for me. A deeper swelling of a chance wave, and you would have glided into the sea."

"And so through water to another state of being. An easy mode of transition, which one would choose if one had the power; but there consciousness sets in. It is dangerous, too, they say, to sleep with the moonlight on your face; and I have been doing so. Madness might visit the sleeper, a different kind of madness from that which we endeavor to hide from the knowledge of the world. Give me a cigar, Mauvain. So, you did not wish to lose me."

"Life on the isle," replied Mauvain, imitating unconsciously the indolent tone of his friend, "would be intolerable without a kindred soul such as yours to sympathize with."

"Oh play upon. Eh, Mauvain? Confess. You have used men."

"Having the right."

"Undoubtedly. Who has ever disputed it? You should have been a king, and your right would have been divine. No, how nice the smoke from our cigars, which of its own volition ascends and spreads until it is merged into invisible ether. It is pretty while it lasts, and gives ample time for fancy; Ranf's. It is impossible for you to see it; raise one for yourself. My Ranf twists and curls and grins with impish malice. Ranf was a strong man—strong in character, I mean. Between you and him some passages have taken place. He saved your life, I believe?"

"He rendered me service at a critical time. I paid him for it."

"As you always do. You pay, and there's an end. Blood, brain, heart, are so bought and fairly paid for—even the soul may be included, for it is customary to pay for prayer. What can have induced a being like Ranf to jeopardize his life for you? He is not too fond of his letters."

"You forget he was my servant."

"He is free now. All men are equals on the Silver Isle. A state of things we have flown from; I never thought of that. So! Ranf's face has curled itself away—no, the thinnest line remains. And here comes a perfect cluster of faces, women's faces, all beautiful. A vision of the women of the isle, enchanting in the prospect it holds out. To think that smoke-color could be capable of such variety and vividness! I am becoming resigned to the loss of a worn-out world. There was nothing new in it, Mauvain; day after day, week after week, the same. Here we have the chance of something novel in sensation."

"What you sigh for," said Mauvain, in a tone of quiet contempt, "may happen, and then you will taste a joy it is impossible I can ever have enjoyed."

"You have a faithful memory. This jangle of faces has disappeared, and in the curling wreaths I see one whose counterpart cannot be found in the Silver Isle, it is so strangely familiar. What name to attach to it—there have been so many? Whose name? Whose name? Am I grown suddenly old that I cannot recall the name of one so fair?"

"As you say, Harold, there are so many."

"But this one, of all others. Simple, childlike, with no knowledge of the world, friendless and alone. Tut! tut! tut! I have it on my tongue, and it will not come."

"Why trouble yourself about her? She has forgotten you, as you have forgotten her."

"I have never forgotten her; so you are plays tricks. Do you not find it so? You are older than I, and therefore a better judge. Ah! I have it! Clarice!"

Mauvain flicked the ash off his cigar.

"Clarice. Yes, she was fair, and may have deserved all your encomiums."

"She did, as you know."

"You are dictatorial, without possessing the right. I never had faith in woman."

"I am in a strange mood, Mauvain; I cannot brook contradiction, Clarice was all I have desired."

"To please you, granted. What then?"

"Merely that the age of chivalry never existed, for the reason that men are men."

"And women, women. You have finished your rhapsody, I presume."

"I extinguish it with this cigar." He threw his lighted cigar into the sea. The light flickered for a moment, and then was extinguished. "And so," its brief joy slain, it drifts as I and others have drifted, into the unknown. Good-night, Mauvain."

"Good-night, mad-brain."

The next morning a boat was rowed to shore, and a messenger landed, bearing a letter, which he was instructed to deliver to some person in authority. It ran as follows:

"Dear Friends of the Silver Isle: A cruel destiny compels me once more to seek shelter among you. My country is in the hands of a lawless rabble, who have torn down the sacred symbols of authority. Had opportunity offered, I would have chosen to die by the side of my king, but I was debared that happiness. Compelled to fly—the choice of an honorable death not being mine—my thoughts traveled to the peaceful land in which I passed some happy years. I feel that I shall be welcome. The house I built upon your isle will shelter me; I desire to retire to it, and seek, for a little while, rest and seclusion; and when my mind, disturbed by recent events, has recovered its balance, I shall mix among you as of old, and take my share in the duties of citizenship. I have with me a few relics which I saved from fortune's wreck, and these I shall convey to my house when it is ready to receive me. In all good will, dear friends,

"MAUVAIN."

The letter was read and commented upon, and the messenger was questioned.

"Is Mauvain alone?"

"No; he has friends and servants with him."

"Then it is for others, as well as for himself, he desires a welcome?"

To this the messenger made no reply.

"Mauvain speaks of relics he has brought with him. Of what do they consist?"

"Furniture, family memorials and such-like."

"Acquaint us with your full instructions."

"Simply to receive your reply and convey it to Mauvain."

"Does he know that his house is occupied?"

"I cannot say."

After a long deliberation, at which the messenger was not allowed to be present, the following letter was sent by his hands to Mauvain:

"From the inhabitants of the Silver Isle to Mauvain: We recognize the claim you have upon us. You own a house and land in our isle, and we have also treasure of yours which we are ready to pay over to you. Your house has been in the occupation of a family named Sylvester; it is in their occupation now. A few days must necessarily elapse before they can send their home; in the interval we offer you the best accommodation at our disposal. Let us know your pleasure."

When this letter was read upon ship-board, Harold made a wry face.

"It smacks of constraint," he said; "there is a flavor of vinegar about it."

But Mauvain professed to be satisfied with its tone, saying it was sufficient for him that his rights were recognized; and he informed the islanders, through his messenger, that his pleasure was to remain on board ship until his house was empty, and ready to receive him.

(To be continued.)

FORBETSTOWN ITEMS.

A correspondent of the RECORD-UNION, writing from Forbetstown, Butte county, under date of July 31st, says:

"We have two stores, one hotel, a saloon, blacksmith, tinsmith, shoemaker, a market, a good school, and a new church, which is to be dedicated one week from to-morrow. The ten-stamp quartz mill has not been running for some time, but company have been looking for one of the many quartz veins which our hills contain, and they have a good supply of rock in readiness for crushing. We have occasionally associations and a dramatic society to excellent entertainments. Like many, and one may say all mining towns throughout the coast, it is a reading community. County, State and Eastern newspapers, as well as some from across the Atlantic, may be found here, together with standard literary works, magazines, etc., and it is not claiming too much to place ourselves up with the times. At the Forbetstown branch of the American Encyclopedia, complete, which is a great convenience to the teachers and scholars, and also to the whole community."

Having recently received from a large business house in Sacramento a communication desiring to learn what newspaper has the largest circulation in Forbetstown, our Postmaster, N. D. Finn, informed me that the RECORD-UNION has the largest circulation of any newspaper that comes to his office.

In the early and palmy days of placer mining this was a very lively place, for the mines were very rich, and they were richly worked, as was also the south end of Feather river, the trade of which section came here. At present the heaviest mining operations are on New York Flat, by the Nevada Company, McChesney, Roberts, Conroy, and Meares, Roberts & Kendall. The latter are not running their mine this season. Mr. Conroy has also a good mine on Garden Ranch, a continuation of the Nevada Flat, and he is working for there is a good deal of trouble with their ground fast at a cost of less than \$50,000 of the yield, which approximates 100,000 an acre in the company taken as an example. That combination of water, which is used with a Crater elevator, using about 600 inches of water for the monitor and for raising the dirt, under a pressure of 365 feet, which is 15 feet of water (the water) it requires to run the elevator. This diggings are not more than 20 feet deep, about 18 feet of which is alluvial soil, and readily washed away under hydraulic pressure. The uncrystallized granite 'bed-rock' yielding freely to the shovel, which enables the miner to work their ground fast at a cost of less than \$50,000 of the yield, which approximates 100,000 an acre in the company taken as an example. That combination of water, which is used with a Crater elevator, using about 600 inches of water for the monitor and for raising the dirt, under a pressure of 365 feet, which is 15 feet of water (the water) it requires to run the elevator. This diggings are not more than 20 feet deep, about 18 feet of which is alluvial soil, and readily washed away under hydraulic pressure. The uncrystallized granite 'bed-rock' yielding freely to the shovel, which enables the miner to work their ground fast at a cost of less than \$50,000 of the yield, which approximates 100,000 an acre in the company taken as an example. 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