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### THE CAPTAIN OF the KANSAS

By LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Wings of the Morning," "The Pillar of Light," Etc.

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#### CHAPTER IX--CONTINUED. (From Last Saturday)

These statements were disconcerting. Not only was it possible for the natives to surround the Kansas with a whole swarm of men, but the mere number of their boats would render it exceedingly difficult to resist a combined assault. And nothing could be more treacherous than the demeanor of the Semlaude warriors. They pointed at each person they saw on the decks and made a tremendous row when they passed the canoe fastened alongside. Despite their keen sight, they evidently did not recognize Suarez, who now wore a cap and a suit of clothes taken from the locker of one of the missing stewards.

The impudence of the Indians exasperated Courtney. The sheer size of the Kansas should have awed them, he thought.

At that moment the rowers permitted the canoe to swing round with the tide. One of the men stood up, and Elsie, who seized the chance of snuffing the party, ran to the upper deck, so she did not overhear Courtney's smothered exclamation. He was scrutinizing the savages through his glasses, and he had distinctly seen the ship's name painted on a small water cask on which the Indian had been sitting. Tollemache made the same dramatic discovery.

"Out of one of the ship's lifeboats, I suppose?" he said in a low tone to the captain.

"Yes. Did you see the number?"

"No, I think."

"I agree with you. That was the first lifeboat which got away."

Christobal, started out of his woe and sang frowd, whispered in his turn:

"Do you mean to say that one of the boats has fallen into the hands of these fiends?"

"I am afraid so," replied Courtney.

"Of course that particular log may have drifted ashore. In any case, it tells the fate of one section of the mutineers. Either the boat is swamped or the crew is now on the beach, and we know what that signifies."

"Is there any chance of finding these

people who were taken on board as a temporary truce?"

"It is hard to decide. Tollemache and Suarez are best able to form an opinion. What do you say, Tollemache?"

"Not a bit of use. They are insatiable. The more you give the more they want. The only way to deal with these rotters is to strangle them with a Gatling or a twelve pounder."

Suarez then appealed to shock his head.

"You might as well try to fondle a hungry puma. I am the only man they have ever spared, and they spared me solely because they thought I gave them power over their enemies. If you had a cannon you might drive them off. As it is, we shall be compelled to fight for our lives. They are brave enough in their own way."

The experience of the miner from Argentina was not to be gained. Courtney glared up at Elsie. If aught were needed to complete the contrast between civilization and savagery it was given by the comparison which the girl offered to the women in the canoe. The hot sun and the absence of what had changed the temperature from winter to summer. After breakfast Elsie had donned a muslin dress and a broad brimmed straw hat. Exposed to the weather had browned her skin to a delightful tan. Her nut brown hair framed a sweetly pretty face, and her clear blue eyes and red lips, slightly parted, smiled bewitchingly at the men beneath. The camera in her hands added a holiday aspect to her appearance, an aspect which was unutterably disquieting in its relation to the muttered forebodings she had broken in on.

"I find the set-up of our visitors distinctly humorous," he said, "and I hope they are a bit scared of us. We would prefer their room to their company."

"I thought that Senor Suarez would tell them, as he can speak their language. Perhaps he does not wish them to know he is on board?"

Now, Elsie had heard the man's impassioned appeal when the Indians were first sighted, so Courtney felt that she, too, was seeing

A new direction was given to Elsie's thoughts by the somewhat scowling aspect of Christobal's face. He was looking at Courtney in a manner which betokened certain displeasure. The Spaniard's cultivated cynicism was subjugated by a more powerful sentiment. It seemed to Elsie that he envied Courtney his youth and high spirits.

Elsie dared not meet Courtney's eyes. A flood of understanding had suddenly poured its miraculous waters over her. Incidents unimportant in themselves, utterances which seemed to have no veiled intent at the time, rushed in upon her with overwhelming conviction. The middle aged physician suspected her of flirting with Courtney and disapproved of it as strongly as she herself had condemned Isobela's admitted efforts in the same direction.

The proceedings of the Indians put a stop to any further conversation. The canoe had drifted closer to the ship. It was about eighty yards distant when the Indian who was on his feet suddenly whirled a sling and sent a stone crashing through the window of the music room. The heavy missile, which when picked up, was found to weigh nearly half a pound, just missed Tollemache.

The captain raised a double barreled fowling piece, the only gun on board, and fired point blank at the savages. But the women were paddling away vigorously, and the shot splashed in the water on all sides of the canoe, though a howl and a series of violent contortions showed that one of least of the pellets had stung the wretched Indian whom Suarez believed to be a newcomer.

There was no second shot--cartridges were too precious to be wasted at an impossible range--but the undeniable fact remained that the Indians meant to be aggressive. For a little time no one spoke. They heard the echoes of the gunshot faintly thrown back by the nearest wall of rock. The regular plash of the paddles as the canoe sped shoreward was distinctly audible. They watched the tiny craft until it vanished round the wooded point which concealed Otter creek.

The muffled clang of a hammer boss the silence which had fallen on the watchers from the ship. Walker had slipped back to his beloved engines. Had he not vowed that the massive pistons should again thrust forth their willing arms on or about New Year's day? He had forgotten the cannibals and their threats ere he was at the foot of the engine room ladder. Courtney and Tollemache joined him; Christobal went to the salon to visit his patients; Elsie was left with Mr. Boyle, who forthwith fell into a doze, being worn out by the fresh air and the excitement.

Joey, having followed Courtney to the one doorway in the ship which he could not enter, trotted back to find

Elsie. She greeted him with enthusiasm.

"Hail, friend," she said. "You at least are not jealous if I speak to your master, wherein you show your exceeding wisdom. Now, since you and I are persons of leisure, tell me, Joey, what we shall do to make ourselves useful."

The dog was accustomed to being spoken to. He awaited developments.

"It seems to me, Joey," she continued, "that Guglielmo Frascuelo is the one person on board who claims our attention. There is a mystery to be solved. Bound up in it are my poor isolated, that beast, Ventana and a drunken coal trimmer--an old assortment to rub shoulders, don't you think?"

Joey still reserved his opinion. When the girl went to the forecastle by climbing down the sailors' ladder to the lower deck he thought she was making a mistake, but she held her arms for his spring, and all was well. She had not previously visited the quarters set apart for the crew. Puzled by the large number of small cabins with names of subordinate officers painted on them, she paused and cried loudly:

"Are you there, Frascuelo? May I speak to you?"

An exclamation of surprise, a somewhat forcible exclamation, too, answered her from an inner berth. Frascuelo had heard from the Chilean who brought his meals that there was an Englishwoman on board, but he did not know that she spoke Spanish fluently.

Frascuelo was reclining on a lower bunk. His injured leg was well on the way toward recovery, but the wound and its resultant confinement had chastened him. He had lost the brigandish swagger which was his most cherished asset.

After acknowledging inquiries as to his progress he showed such eagerness for news that Elsie told him briefly what had caused the latest uproar. She cheered him, too, with the announcement made by the engineer and then led him to the topic on which she sought information.

"In some ways I regard you as most unfortunate," she said. "I have been told you are here by accident; that you never meant to take the voyage at all. Is that true?"

Frascuelo, delighted to have secured a sympathetic listener, poured forth his sorrows volubly. He bore no ill will against the captain, he said. He knew it was wrong to draw a knife on the chief officer, as his tale was an unlikely one, and he ought to have trusted to a more orderly recital of the facts to obtain credence.

"But I was that mad, senorita, I just saw red, and the drink was yet surging up in me. I felt I must fight somebody, whatever the consequences."

"Can you tell me why any one had such a grievance against you that you should be thrown into the hold and

nearly killed? That thing to do, especially as you came aboard too late for your work."

"Ah, that is the point, senorita. You see, we trimmers work in gangs, and the man who flung me through the hatch was the man who had taken my place. I see no reason to doubt that it was he who made me drunk the previous evening, and I know who did that."

"What was his name?"

"Jose Anacleto--Jose the Winebar--we call him on the plaza. I ought to have smelled mischief when Jose paid. Never before had I seen him do such a thing. And a good liquor too. Dios, it must have cost him dollars."

"What object had he in coming on board instead of you?"

"Ah, there you beat me, senorita. I have twisted my poor brain with thinking of that. We only earned a dollar a head, and bunkering a ship from a flat is hard work while it lasts, whereas one would expect Jose to ride twenty miles the other way to escape such a task. But he was in the plot, and he shall tell me why or--"

By force of habit Frascuelo put his right hand to his belt, but his sheath knife had been taken from him. He smiled sheepishly, yet his black eyes twinkled.

"Plot? Why do you speak of a plot?" asked the girl, hoping that the word betokened some more promising clew than she could discern thus far.

"Why did the furnaces blow up? Tell me that and I can answer you. Good, honest coal isn't made of gunpowder. Jose or some one behind him meant to sink the ship, and as I might have proved awkward they were willing that I should go down with her. Maybe I shall meet Jose if we get out of this rat trap. Then we shall have a little talk."

Despite the man's shrewd guess as to the cause of the accident in the stockhold Elsie was at a loss to connect the freak of some Valparaiso loafer with the deep laid scheme which contemplated the destruction of the Kansas. She had followed the discussion in the chart room with full appreciation of its significance. Valuable as the ship and cargo were, there was far more at stake in the effect of the loss on the copper markets of the world. The most important copper exporting firm in Chile could practically

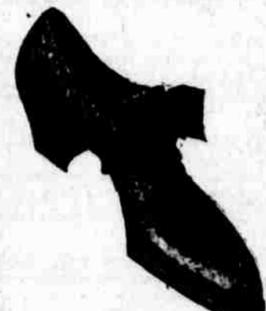
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