

Parthian shaft, a rankling hint that the mate, if not a gentleman, at least might qualify as a servant in a public wash house.

It was subtle, perhaps; but Beasley understood, for Valda peeped over and saw him reddening the roots of his ugly hair. He was standing directly behind the kneeling man, and his action relieved him of the possibility of being called a gentleman. He raised one foot, set it in the middle of the other's back, then pushed him sprawling on the sloppy deck.

Valda leaped forward to the rail, but not more quickly than the victim of the mate's brutality regained his feet. She saw his handsome face distorted by the lash of rage,—the eyes that glowed, the teeth that set in fury. Forgotten now were the laws that govern land and sea, forgotten was the gulf that lay between a master and a man; and Valda saw him crouch as the leopard crouches for its spring, the shoulders hunched, the head held low—and then she caught his eye.

He looked, and the fury faded from his face; his crouching figure became erect, while his fists unclenched and sank slowly to his sides. For an instant he stood in silence,—painful silence,—then he bowed and turned to his humble work again.

Beasley laughed. His small, untutored brain had misinterpreted; but Valda understood. She knew that a man had torn a something from his pride,—had torn it by its very roots,—and because of her. He had trampled on a law that rules the hearts of courageous men, and because of a higher law of chivalry.

NOW in Valda's veins ran also the blood of a fighting race. Indeed, old Oliver Cromwell was in part responsible for her present rôle in life. Besides, there was a certain venerable judge, a square souled man who dispensed his justice with an honest tongue; and now these two old boys came back in spirit to whisper with a daughter of the Eagle. She harkened, while her own fair cheeks were tinged with red. She gripped the rail, and her heart was pounding furiously.

"Mr. Morson," she called, "as the master of this yacht, I give you my full permission to avenge that insult to the limit of your strength and will."

She had used his other name unconsciously; but somehow it seemed more fitting at the time, and it made her glad to use it. As for him, he simply stared at her, then he smiled, and the light of hope came back into his eyes. He made her a courtly bow. In it were mingled reverence, delight, and gratitude, though none might say which held the place of honor; then he turned on his enemy. His words were not intended for Valda's ears; but her ears were sharp and she overheard.

"Mr. Beasley," he said, in his modulated Southern voice, "you have taken a hellish pleasure in making me wipe up this deck; and now, curse you! I'm going to do it with you!"

Beasley questioned his foe's ability along that line, and expressed himself without reserve. He knew the game, and felt entirely competent to dispose of him with a few well planted blows; and yet there was an air about his lean antagonist that caused the mate to proceed with caution. He removed his coat, rolled up his sleeves to his hairy elbows, then tightened his belt and tossed his cap aside. He was ready now to put the finishing touches on a novice's education.

At this juncture Captain Joe walked out on the bridge, and, marking the poise of the men below, he started down the ladder on a run; but Valda checked him.

"Captain Joe," she called, "this is my affair, and you will please not interfere!"

The old sea dog gazed at her with a numbed expression of split jawed wonder, then closed his mouth slowly, while a grin of pleasure illumined his rugged features. As long as the responsibility was lifted from his own official shoulders, he could enjoy a "go" as much as the next man; so he drew up a camp stool to the edge of the bridge, seated himself in the front row of the gallery, so to speak, and lit his pipe.

Meanwhile seamen came from everywhere, silently, mysteriously, smelling out a happy trouble, as it were, and seeking positions of advantage to themselves, but of inconspicuousness to the mistress of the Spitfire.

TIME!" called Captain Larris. "Clang!" went the yacht's bell, struck by Lavine the second mate, who lashed his wheel and leaned as far as possible out of a window in the pilot house. "Twenty to one on Brown!" whispered an enthusiastic seaman hoarsely; but there were no takers, and the pugilists began to move in circles, watching each other in the manner of cautious cats.

As for Valda, this beginning completely upset all her preconceived ideas as to what a genuine fisticuff should be. She had thought to see the opponents rush together and pummel each other until one should cry "Enough!" then they would shake hands and brush their clothes. But this was different—horribly different. They began with such careful method,—with the coolness employed in a friendly game of chess,—and still there was something in their eyes that set her shivering.

Ormond strolled up and calmly lit one of Girard's personal cigars. Tracy came also, but with a more outward and visible sign of appreciation.

"Gee!" he observed soulfully. "Bare knuckles, one round, and to a finish—with no police interference! Gee!"

Had Aunt Mary been present, he might have now explained to her what he meant by his previous reference to the poet Keats; but fortunately both Polly and that law abiding woman were dressing in their state rooms. Otherwise there might have been police interference.

Valda, gripping the rail before her, looked down and shuddered. The men below kept moving their arms and feet, especially their feet, shifting in circles round and round, each watching for a weakness in the other's guard; then suddenly Beasley found it—or thought he had. His right fist swung, with his body's weight behind it, aimed full at the jaw of Morson-Brown; but the owner of the jaw ducked gracefully, received a left on his lifted shoulder, and retreated before the other's rush.

VALDA crimsoned. Her champion was running away—backward, it was true, but running—shamelessly! He was a coward! Why didn't he stand his ground and return that blow? Why didn't he rush at Beasley as Beasley rushed at him? Then presently she understood. Once more the mate swung wickedly. The Southerner stepped aside easily, as one might avoid a passing car, while in a flash his fist licked out, like the tongue of a serpent, and landed with a pleasing thwack in the center of Mr. Beasley's countenance.

"Oh—you—Brown!" yelled a joyous admirer from the rigging; but the Captain looked up sharply, and the noise subsided.

Beasley's head had jolted backward on his shoulders; but he snorted and came for more—and got it. His foe averted danger by the shifting of his nimble feet, the swaying of his body, while ever and again his left fist darted out and found its mark. The mark was variously distributed about the person of the mate, mainly the nasal organ, or that biblical point of vulnerability beneath a certain rib. If Beasley retreated, Morson-Brown was after him, in the manner of a hornet that mortifies a dog; but if Beasley rushed, then Morson-Brown would run away shamelessly, parrying blows, or receiving them on a hunched up shoulder, yet ready at all times to stab with that quick left fist.

It was not the kind of battle to be viewed in prize rings, for neither of the men could claim professional ability; though he it said that many a ring has offered a far less interesting affair—that is, from the raw, uncultured point of pugilism.

And Valda stood and watched it all. To the sensitive refinement of her nature, the thing was terrible; and yet she felt a weird, exotic tingling of her nerves, a pride in this man that battled at her bidding, and battled gloriously. It was wrong, beyond the shadow of a doubt, yet a graceful man in action is a thing to stir the gladiatorial taint that lingers in our blood; and Valda felt this ghostly savage



When Beasley
Came Back Into
the World.

stir. She could almost forget her bitterness against a human animal that moved as the leopard moves, whose keen eyes glittered when his face was turned to her, whose broad back writhed with dancing muscles as he spun away.

And yet, the horror of it! The bestiality! The thought that two men could thus unleash their passions, forgetting all else beyond the one desire to strike a fellow creature down! So Valda's emotions fought within her, while she gripped the deck rail with her icy hands,—gripped it till her arms were aching and her heart was sick,—then, in her nervous pain she cried out sharply.

She had not meant to cry, and, had she dreamed of its result, she would have stifled it or died. At its sound the Southerner looked up, and in that instant of unwatchfulness the big mate struck him a terrific blow beneath the heart. It landed with a muffled thud, vicious, merciless, and the victim lurched backward against the rail, where he hung by the strength of his arms alone. His blue lips stretched and quivered at the corners; his eyes rolled back till little but their whites were seen; his flush winked out, and in its place crept a gray agony.

And Valda had caused this thing! She! She

who had cried out foolishly, and had seen him pause in answer to her cry! Great Heaven! was this to be? There awoke in her heart a wondrous pity and a rage,—a pity for him that suffered, a rage for him that wrought the suffering. It was thought no more, but instinct,—that mother instinct which sheds its very blood to protect its own, the fury of the female animal against a conquering beast. She longed to protect this stricken man with the shield of her own soft body. She longed to spring down on the shoulders of the mate and tear him with her nails. It was so unfair of this great red brute to rush upon a helpless foe—to beat him to the deck with his mighty fists! It could not, should not, be!

There was a burny spot in the pit of her stomach that spread and spread with a suffocating, nauseous glow, till every fiber of her frame grew hot with mother pity and with mother pain. Again she cried out sharply; but this time in command, raising her hand for the horrid cruelty to cease; but again the Southerner looked up, and in his eyes she read one short, courageous prayer:

"For God's sake, don't!"

FOR an instant Valda wavered, wondering; then she dropped her hand,—she knew not why,—and Morson ducked beneath the fists of the charging mate. Once more he was retreating, covering face and body with his swiftly moving arms, striking no blow, but retreating always, watchful lest he was forced against the rail.

Valda rejoiced to know that he was on his legs again; but she did not know that they were legs of lead, that they quivered and drooped beneath his weight, that every lightning step, which had its meaning, was made with pain unutterable. She did not know that his heart was protesting fiercely, that his lungs seemed scorched and raw, that his soul was pleading silently with Mars for the courage to hold his body on its feet.

Again the big mate rushed, striking viciously with a right arm swing; but his foeman ducked, as though bowing politely to Beasley, then, as the mate spun half round by the impetus of his fruitless blow, he received a rap that caught him behind the ear, and plunged forward on his face.

Valda almost shrieked in triumph. Ah, now was Morson's chance! He could spring upon that fallen beast! He could seize him by his great red ears and bang his hateful head against the deck!

"Now! Now, you fool!" she whispered to herself; but the fool did nothing of the sort. Instead, he filled his lungs with a grateful breath of air, and waited calmly for the mate to rise. How foolish! How insane! To Valda's mind, he had flung away his chance, his one faint chance of victory; yet presently it came to her that this was a brave man's courtesy to a helpless foe, and her woman's heart gave tongue and paid its homage to a true gentleman.

But perhaps it was not all courtesy; for the few inactive moments on the part of Beasley were invaluable to his weak antagonist, who before was fighting for breath, for life itself, and the respite brought him sweet relief. The flush returned to his cheeks, while the hazy blur departed from before his eyes; the fiery pain in his limbs was eased, and strength came trickling back into his arms. There was still a gulf between the master and the man, and he that leaped it first would be the master; therefore Morson changed his tactics and prepared to take the leap.

This time he did not wait for Beasley, but pressed upon that man, stinging him with short armed blows,—a left that jabbed and jabbed,—while, to make it worse, the right would periodically find an opening and jolt the person of Beasley in a manner most obnoxious to his views of happiness. Meanwhile, among the watching seamen rose a hum of admiration for their champion,—and not exactly admiration, either, but adoration,—and had the fight stopped then and there Morson-Brown might have asked for their very trouser lacings—and had them too. But the battle was not yet done.

The mate was now retreating before a swirl of blows, and wore a troubled look. Still he was game, fighting back with all his brutal strength and a species of brutal science that was his.

THEN a strange thing happened. Morson-Brown had been boring in and striking quickly, as quickly as a wasp; but now his left fist moved across his opponent's guard in a slow, peculiar twist, landing with a soft, faint pat on the point of Beasley's chin.

As Valda expressed it, "it seemed a very feeble lick indeed"; yet amazing results attended it. The big mate's arms sank weakly to his sides, while over his features stole an expression of beatific idiocy. Why not? To his ears came floating the strains of various seraphic bands,—brass bands—string bands—bands of mellifluous cherubim. They ravished his senses, tickled his fancy with the joy of some heavenly joke; so he stood there, swaying, grinning, till his legs caved under him—then the mate went down like a butchered bull.

From the crew rose a deferential, half strangled cheer. Tracy, probably from force of habit, began to count very slowly, up to ten, then he sighed a sigh of peace.

"Out, by holy!" he breathed, in simple, soulful appreciation of a worthy deed.

"Is he dead?" asked Valda, shuddering as she