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BUSINESS IS BUSINESS

Continued from page 6

a note of unmistakable tenderness. Then, with a accent of bitterness, he went on, "Oh, the Blackstones have always been a hard lot, Pericles—as black and hard as their name! We—"

BLACKSTONE paused sharply at the sound of footsteps descending the after companionway. Then suddenly Constance Blanding stood framed in the entrance to the cabin, her dark eyes leveled upon Jonathan Blackstone. In swift succession surprise, interest, and wonderment reigned in her countenance. Blackstone started to speak; but with a helpless glance at Pericles turned away, and it was she, now discovering John Laysan's partner, who broke the silence.

"Captain O'Brien," said she, advancing and revealing the stalwart form of Joe Carver behind her, "I did not mean to interrupt. I—"

"Perfectly all right, Miss Blanding," answered he.

"I am rather excited. I don't understand business, of course; but I have just heard what happened at the auction, and I'm sure you've been cheated." She shot a glance of scorn at Joe Carver, who looked as if he wished he was ten thousand miles away. "You couldn't have known that it would take at least ten thousand dollars to repair the rigging and masts. I did not know this until a little while ago. Mr. Laysan said you and he could not use her in any circumstances, and now—"

"But it is all right now, my dear Miss Blanding."

"Still you couldn't have known how Captain Carver painted and fixed things just to deceive—"

"The old rule of *caveat emptor*, 'Let the purchaser beware,' still holds, Miss Blanding. I wasn't deceived. I—"

Jonathan Blackstone, coming out of the deep shadow in the forward part of the cabin into which he had retreated, drew Pericles' glance.

"What did I tell you?" asked Carver, his face lighting triumphantly; but instead of meeting his gaze Constance Blanding was looking at Blackstone.

"Nobody has been cheated, Con—Miss Blanding," said the chandler, flushing in confusion at his slip of the tongue.

"It was you, then, who bought—" she began; only to break in her speech, and in that instant to remember what Johnson, the canneries' broker, had told Joe Carver, "O'Brien paid for the Bevan with somebody else's check."

The chandler for a moment lowered his gaze in a shamefaced way, and then, with bitterness and yet something of pride in his voice, said, "I bought the Constance Bevan this morning, and nobody ever cheated Jonathan Blackstone but—Jonathan Blackstone himself. That painting behind you is worth more than—"

BELOW there!" interrupted a voice from the deck, followed by a clattering of feet coming aft through the forward cabin. With this introduction Simon Rosenthal entered the scene, his tubby form exuding blandness, his round, highly colored countenance rippling with smiles. At sight of him Joe Carver's face darkened, and he led Constance Blanding out through the companionway.

"Oh, excuse me please, Mr. Captain O'Brien," he said unabashed, "but I like to talk business."

"You know where my office is!" answered Pericles angrily, and he would have gone on to order him ashore had he not caught a warning glance from Blackstone.

"For sure; but I got no hard feeling about anything. Maybe you don't like me; but business is business, and I like to fix this ship by you so soon as I can for the Elesken coast. I like to make a time sharter for her—six months—ruling rate. Nillsen he's a bothead. He wouldn't listen to me this morning, or you shouldn't been made to pay the price you did, believe me! I say to him, 'You better let Mr. Captain O'Brien have her. It's yust the same. Then we can sharter her.' Now I like to fix her up this afternoon, Mr. Captain O'Brien."

"We might close now," cut in Jonathan Blackstone, and in amazement Pericles heard him add, "I think Captain O'Brien has forgotten to tell you that I have already bought half of this ship. She's a good vessel, a good piece of property."

It was the cold, hard, calculating Blackstone that the world knew who was speaking, and Pericles O'Brien felt somehow that the chandler had been waiting for this moment ever since Johnson had explained why Nillsen had happened to bid so high for the old Bevan.

"She's a fine wessel," said Rosenthal with ingratiation. "Maybe we yould like her for a station supply ship at our salmon kennery."

"We'll put our names on paper and talk about that later," rejoined Blackstone, and there and then he drew up a provisional charter party. Greek faced Greek.

"Eight dollars a ton! The market this morning only—only was six!" exclaimed Simon, and mopping his brow at the sight of the rate fixed by Blackstone.

"Tonnage is short," replied the chandler icily.

None knew that better than Rosenthal, but it was with a deep sigh of resignation, behind which Pericles felt there was a chuckle, that he put his name to the contract and went ashore.

IMMEDIATELY after Rosenthal's departure Jonathan Blackstone asked Carver to go over the ship with him, and Constance Blanding and Pericles were left alone aft near the wheel.

"'And nobody ever cheated Jonathan Blackstone—but Jonathan Blackstone himself,'" said she, her gaze following the man she quoted and the rangy form of Carver where the two went forward and came to a halt abreast of the steel foremast.

"I believe that," answered Pericles with a laugh that drew a glance of inquiry from his companion.

"Then he—you do not know what he meant?" and as she asked the question the girl read in Pericles' expression that he did not. "This ship was built by Jonathan Blackstone's father to be a wedding gift to my mother and to him—this month twenty-eight years ago. At a party one night he declared that if my mother danced with John Blanding he would never speak to her again. There was a long feud behind it—a quarrel with a very frivolous beginning—which had existed for generations between the Blackstones and Blandings. Mother danced with the man who was to be my father, and Jonathan Blackstone never did speak to her again. Their engagement was broken that night. He sold the ship—the painting of mother he himself had done—to strangers, and long afterward my father bought them."

She paused for a moment, and her eyes went following an outward bound China liner. With a sigh she looked inboard again just as Blackstone, coming aft alone, ascended the poop. Impulsively Constance Blanding left Pericles' side and, with her hand extended, went to meet him.

"I think—I think if my mother—could know, Mr. Blackstone, that she would—that she would be glad," said she.

"Maybe—maybe she does know, Constance," answered Blackstone, and with lips a tremble he turned quickly away. The girl could not know that it was on that very spot that he and her mother had stood on the day of that vessel's launching, and in the ardor of youth planned what their lives were going to be together.

THAT night Pericles O'Brien unexpectedly had to set out for the north coast on a salvage job, the floating of a stranded light vessel, and so it happened that he did not attend a conference that Blackstone and Carver held the following morning. A week afterward he received a letter from John Laysan telling him that the Constance Bevan had been registered with the chandler as her sole owner and Carver as her master.

"The ship's loading for despatch in two weeks," ran the closing sentence, and to Pericles' sea-wise mind it was fraught with portent. It meant that Blackstone was going to send the Constance to sea without repairing her. New masts and spars and rigging could not be put into the vessel in that time, nor in any circumstances when she was taking in cargo.

"It's suicide, no less, at this season of the year," said Pericles O'Brien to himself, and he had occasion to repeat it many times as he watched March enter upon a stormy reign over the North Pacific.

It was at the beginning of a dirty night two weeks later that Pericles, homeward bound and abreast of Eureka in the West Coast Salvage Company's wrecking steamer Electra, gave the word to haul off shore. There was trouble in the wind whining round him—or he didn't know how to add two and two! With that command he left the bridge and sought the wireless room.

"You'll stand by till further orders," he was saying to the operator at seven o'clock,