

easy. The thought flashed through my mind, "Why, here you are, all alone, after ten o'clock at night, in a strange country, going to see a man you never heard of before, in company of an individual whose name you haven't asked, and whose face you have seen only dimly in the dark! You are known to have several hundred dollars in your pocket, and nobody under Heaven but yourself and your companion knows where you are, or in what kind of company." It really seemed time for a diplomatic "hedge."

"Where is Captain Maguffy's house?" I inquired as a starter, after we had driven for an overlong time.

"Newark, New Jersey," was the consoling reply, but soberly made.

"Well—I don't feel equal to a drive that far," I said dryly. "I supposed when I accepted this invitation that your Captain was living around the corner somewhere."

"No," said my companion. "He's aboard his boat—the Samuel J. Taylor."

"His boat?" I cried. "Oh, come now, my friend—if I'd known that—well, really, I think we'd better turn back."

"Not now," said he. "We're almost there." "But why doesn't the Captain keep his boat closer to civilization?" I queried. "Isn't there room for him closer to town?"

"Yes, there's plenty of room closer to town," replied my strange acquaintance; "but the Captain prefers to be closer to the sea in case he needs to make a quick getaway. He and the government aren't on the best of terms. Between you and me, he's doing a little stunt in filibustering, and the folks up at Washington are getting suspicious."

My heart sank into my boots and then rebounded to my throat. "You should have told me all this before we started," said I.

"Well, I should have," said he; "but—well, I was afraid if I did you wouldn't come, and the Captain told me not to come back without you. What he says goes with me."

I COULD think of only one word. The simple term *kidnapped* flashed across my mind, and then the pleasing little phrase, so nice for a headline, *Held for Ransom*, burned itself into my nerve. The beating of my heart sounded like the muffled tread of that invisible steed ahead on the coquina road. I glanced out of the chaise to see what my chances of escape might be in case I made a break for liberty, and saw off to the right of me the lines of a rotting pierhead, and the towering masts of a huge schooner that was moored to its decaying piling. At the inner end of the pier was a whitewashed shed. Everything in sight except the driver, the chaise, and my future looked white,—a ghastly, ghostly white that made me think of all the tales of horrid spooks I had ever heard. Here the carriage came to a sudden halt, and a tall black figure loomed up from behind the shed.

"Did you get him?" came a deep bass voice out of the night.

"You betcha!" was the reply from my companion.

I descended from the carriage, and my conductor led the way along the rotting stringpiece of the pier, a little more than a foot wide, the chill waters of St. Simon's Sound lapping about six feet below on each side, and the dark figure from behind the shed immediately to the rear. I was completely a captive. A moment later we came to a narrow gangplank leading to the broad, holystoned deck of the schooner, in the fore part of which was an open hatchway, out of which there streamed a steady shaft of yellow light.

"Down this way, please," said my conductor as we reached the hatchway.

Tremulously I followed him down the steps, and in a moment found myself—in the prettiest, daintiest, little, white and gold parlor one could have hoped to find anywhere outside of a mansion designed for a Marie Antoinette, or a Madame de Maintenon! Everywhere was gold and white,—chairs, walls, table,—and set in the panels of the walls (built in) were a half-dozen exquisite little water-color paintings, all in most perfect keeping with the general color scheme of the room; and on each side of a door leading to an adjoining apartment, impassive as two bits of sculpture, stood two negroes of gigantic size, not an inch under six feet in height,—two veritable geni out of the pages of the Arabian Nights, but clad in blue flannel coats with brass buttons, white duck trousers, and glazed white hats with black vizors.

It was really a wonderful picture; but I had hardly had time to take it in when from behind me again the bass voice of the figure behind the shed broke upon my hearing.

"Welcome, O Skipper of the Stygian House Boat, to the Samuel J. Taylor!" it said, and quickly turning I found myself gazing into the dark, flashing eyes of my host. If the white and gold cabin had amazed me, the Captain completely took

my breath away. He looked as if he had just come in from a five o'clock tea on Fifth avenue,—frock coat, dark gray trousers, all of perfect fit, white waistcoat, lavender tie with an exquisite pearl pin stuck carelessly into its soft folds, and in his hand the very latest thing in imported high silk hats! He was the beau ideal of your conventional gentleman of society. As I have said, I was breathless, and consequently speechless, for a moment; but I did manage at the end of a few seconds to blurt out:

"Am I—am I awake, Captain?"

"Well—if you're not, we've plenty of room and time for you to sleep it out," he replied.

"But this cabin—this salon—these—these water colors!" I went on.

"A little fancy of my wife's," said mine host. "She fitted it all up herself. The water colors, by the way, are all her own work. Rather nice, I think. She was a pupil of a fellow Centurion of yours, Mr.—" Here he mentioned one of our famous artists, a member of my club, and a painter of rare distinction.

My desire to get away had become less keen; but I deemed it wise nevertheless to make the effort. I still needed some reassurance as to my safety.

"Well, Captain," said I, "it has been a pleasure to meet you, and I hate to run; but I have had a hard day of it, and I'm very tired. I have come just to shake hands with you and say howdido, before turning in for the night."

"Oh, you mustn't go until you have broken bread with me," said he.

"I told him he could be in bed by twelve if he wanted to," interposed my conductor.

"All right," said the Captain. "We'll live up to your promise. You may serve the supper at once," he added, turning to the two geni at the door, who had not stirred a muscle through the whole conversation.

Then began the service of a supper in which for the first time I tasted the joys of alligator pears, the sweets of real grapefruit made into salad, the full possibilities of Moro crabs à la Newburg, alongside of which even my beloved Maine lobsters are dull and dreary reptiles, and of many other delightful edibles as well, with my choice of liquid refreshment as it from the cellar of a Lucullus—and through it all the Captain talked.

HE told me of his interest in the Cuban struggle for independence; how he had gone first to Havana as correspondent for an American newspaper with a decided leaning toward Spanish interests; how he had resigned rather than write the kind of material his chiefs demanded.

He told me then how he had at last decided to help the Cuban cause with arms, and with what money he had; how he had chartered this lumber schooner, and gone ostensibly into the lumber business to cover his real activities; and how every time he set out from Brunswick laden with lumber consigned to some other port he always took time to run over to Cuban waters, and carry weapons and ammunition to the insurgents.

"And what has Uncle Sam had to say to all these activities?" I asked.

"He's getting a little suspicious," laughed the Captain. "Once I thought he had me too. I had a thousand rifles and ten thousand rounds of ammunition in hand for the boys, and when I was being towed out to sea by a tug the Vesuvius, which had been watching me for several days, fired a shot across my bows and stopped me. They sent a search party aboard—and I tell you, Sir, they were a mighty thorough lot! There wasn't a nook or cranny of the Samuel J. Taylor those fellows didn't turn inside out. Not an inch from topmast to keel escaped the official eye; but they found nothing, and I was allowed to go on."

"But how," said I, "did you manage to conceal the stuff?"

"Oh, that was simple," laughed the Captain. "They went through the Samuel J. Taylor with a fine-tooth comb; but they forgot to search the tug. We transferred the guns later, and forty-eight hours afterward they were in the hands of the Cubans."

IT was five o'clock in the morning when Captain Maguffy delivered me at my hotel.

"Goodby, Captain," said I. "For a few moments I was afraid you were going to kidnap me—and now, by George! my only regret is that you didn't!"

He laughed heartily. "Well," he said, "if you really mean that, come back on board. I think it can be arranged."

But freedom was too sweet, and besides I had to make my living; so I reluctantly bade the Captain good morning, and have thought of him affectionately ever since.

[This is the last "leaf" from Mr. Bangs' notebook. A further series by the same author, entitled "Platform Friendships," will be published later.]



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