BLACK BEARD, THE CURSE OF THE COAST.

BY H. E. SCOTT.

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The two girls descended into the cabin, but soon returned with oranges and apples. Fannie gave Herbert a couple, and they proceeded to the stern of the schooner, where as they took the outer covering off they cast it overboard. Clara was seated on the schooner's railing, and Herbert standing nearly in front of her.

Suddenly he said: "Hand me the apple, Miss Clara, I will pare it for you," and he extended his hand—it came in contact with the hand that held her knife.

She recoiled as though stung by a viper, swayed back—one scream, she fell from the railing into the river, and sank beneath its foaming surface directly in the wake of the schooner.

Fannie screamed, and Herbert Lathrop cried: "Stop the boat! Captain, stop the boat! Miss Hill is overboard!"

Angus Bruce, with his red hair flying, came rushing aft, kicking off his slippers as he came. "Port your helm! Hard port your helm! Swing her to, and lower a boat," and over the vessel's railing head first, with a cry of a wounded beast, he disappeared from view. Down, down into the depths of the river, but not for long—his head was soon above the surface, his strong arms causing the water to fly, as valiantly, with mighty strokes, he dashed it aside to rescue one who, unknown to herself, held in chains never to be broken but by death the body, heart and soul of Angus Bruce.

Angus caught sight of two white hands, then of a whiter face, surrounded by clustering hair, as it rose above the surface.

"Courage! Courage!" he cried, and with all the might in his powerful frame he plowed through the water, nearing the form of the one he loved.

Clara heard that cry, and on the instant the thought passed through her brain: "I am saved."

Then she sank again—down, down; strange roaring sounds were in her ears, but her lips were firmly closed.

As that loved form sank a second time from view, so also did the form of Angus Bruce, and when he reappeared on the river's surface he bore in his arms the form of Clara Hill.

He clasped her round the waist with his left arm, and sustained himself on the water with his right.

Her arms were around his neck, clinging as will a drowning person to anything in reach.

"Courage! Dear heart! Courage, Clara Belle! don't clasp me quite so tight, alas, that I must say that! There, so—that will do.

"Hey! Calvin, quick! Mate, quick!"

"Unloose me, Angus, and let me drown, else will you drown too."

"Unloose you, Clara Belle? not while life lasts. You are dearer to the heart of Angus Bruce than life itself—why, we float the river's surface like a cork; laugh at your fears, you'll never drown, while clinging to Bruce."

"Oh, Angus! Angus! but for you, I should have never risen more."

"Aye, Clara Belle, and but for that lucky fall, I would never have known the happiness of this hour; it will go with me through life, yes, even to the grave."

"Oh, Angus! Angus!"

With her helm hard-a-port, the schooner had rounded to, and now lay athwart the river, her sails flapping idly and emptied of the breeze.

Calvin Stewart, the mate, had lowered the yawl, and with two good men was pulling to the rescue.

When he reached them Angus lifted Clara, with the help of Calvin, into the yawl, and was soon seated beside her.

When the boat reached the side of the schooner, a rope ladder was hanging to the rail, by which to ascend to the deck, and Herbert Lathrop was standing by it.

"Are you strong enough to climb the ladder, Miss Hill?"

"Oh yes, my brave rescuer, certainly."

Then glancing up, she saw at the head of the ladder Herbert Lathrop leaning over the rail. "But you go first, captain, and help me over the rail, for I like not Herbert Lathrop, and but for him, I should not have taken this bath."

"I am glad of that," said Angus.

"O, which? that I like not Herbert, or that I took the bath?"

"Of—of both, Miss Hill," said Angus, as he climbed to the deck.

"Oh, captain!"

As Angus mounted the deck, Herbert said: "A brave act, Capt. Bruce, a brave act!"

"Oh no," said Angus, "none but a coward would see a lady drown; had I stood where you did, when she went overboard, she would have little more than been immersed; now she is well soaked."

Herbert hated Angus Bruce from that time.

"Well, you have done your duty, captain, now stand aside and I will receive Miss Hill."

"Not so, Herbert Lathrop, I never do things by half," and Herbert bit his lips, as Angus lifted Clara over the railing, and, followed by the weeping Fannie, bore her to the cabin.

"Don't cry, Fannie! don't cry! the time to cry has passed. I am quite over my scare now—only wringing wet."

"My sister Jennie," said Angus, "accompanied me to Charleston on my last trip down the coast. You will find in the bureau there, dresses and clothing that she left aboard—I beg you will speedily make use of such as please you; there is wine in that decanter—now I will go and put on dry toggery, as this is too wet, even for a sailor."

When Angus returned to his berth and changed his clothing, he thought of some of the language he had used, under the excitement of the moment, while he was rescuing Miss Hill, and felt somewhat abashed.

"Clara Hill is not for me," he said, "but by the gods, she will never find a heart that loves her more—I have saved her life for some more fortunate man."

While Angus was soliloquizing thus, Clara Hill was repeating over and over in her mind the words:

"Angus Bruce loves me! Angus Bruce loves me! This," she thought, "is the love of a man; with such a one I could be happy, but that would never do—what would my father and my brother say?—yes, or what would they do, should I even think of wedding Angus—even my mother, I think, would revolt to see her daughter wed a pilot's son, and the captain of a schooner; and yet I knew when I heard his voice: 'Courage! courage! Clara Belle,' that I loved him; yes, I do love him as fervently as he loves me—beside him, Herbert Lathrop is a cipher. Oh, Angus! you saved my life, you have my heart; would I could give you my hand. But not so, your image will be graven on my heart my whole life long, but I will be the bride of my father's friend, John Loyd, and now I can not [illegible] soon—for then will there be an impassable barrier between the man I love and may not marry, and me."

An hour later the two girls were on the deck, gazing back in the direction of the recent disaster; Clara clad in the Scotch plaid of Jennie Bruce.

"Ah," said Angus, as [illegible] them, "I have aboard [illegible] now."

"Miss Hill," he continued, aside to Clara, and a deep blush suffused his cheek, "pray pardon me for any words I uttered, when I knew not but that they might be the last."

"Speak not of pardon, Angus Bruce, but for you I should be now lying at the river's bottom."

"This locket, Miss Hill, came from your neck while in the water, when I grasped you first; the slender chain parted and it remained in my hand. I now return it."

"Have you opened its face?"

"Oh no, I would not take that liberty."

"Then do so now."

He opened it, and an exclamation of pleasure fell from his lips.

"Do you recognize the lady, captain?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Hill, it is your lovely self."

"Keep it, captain, in memory of the worthless life you saved;" and with tears in her eyes, as she saw the look on the face of Angus, Clara Hill descended to the cabin.

It was four o'clock when the schooner landed at her pier, and John Loyd's carriage was in waiting.

"Good-by, Capt. Bruce. When do you return to Orton?"

"I take a cargo here, Miss Hill, for Charleston, but will go ashore at Orton and see your father."

"When do you return to Wilmington?"

"In three weeks' time; provided, always, that we have fair winds and weather."

"I shall hope to see you then, and until then—good-by."

"Good-by, Miss Hill. Miss Loyd, good-by," and Angus assisted them to the wharf, where they entered the elegant carriage of Banker Loyd and were rapidly whirled away, Clara shuddering, as she thought: "The next time I see Angus Bruce I shall have on my finger an engagement ring."

Angus watched the carriage until it turned the corner; then, turning to his mate, Calvin Stewart, a man of some 30 years, who had been with him now two years, said:

"Now, Calvin, get everything in readiness for unloading. I will go ashore and see the consignees. We must unload to-night."

Calvin was a man of Bruce's stature who had appeared in Smithville two years before. He had stated that he had been shipwrecked, and as he was a thorough seaman, bold, fearless and well acquainted with the coast, Angus, having found him trustworthy, made him second in command on board the Clara Belle.

That night they discharged their cargo, and Thursday night were again under way, en route for Charleston harbor.

CHAPTER V.

"TRULY, MY UNCLE, THERE ARE TWO WHO STAND UPON A MINE."

Clara Hill had been Fannie's guest for a week, when one evening Herbert had been out, and it was fully ten o'clock when he came in.

He softly opened the door and noticed from the parlor door being ajar that it was still lighted. He heard his uncle's voice, and something in the tone caused him to halt as he was about to enter the parlor. The words he heard were:

"My dear Clara, the reason I detain you to-night is to tell you that you are very dear to me. There has always been a warm friendship existing between your father's family and mine; I have asked your father's permission to address you; he may have told you of the result—Clara, I am no longer a young man, I have a daughter almost of your age, but I will love you, Clara, and guard you tenderly while I live. Clara, can you be my wife?"

Herbert Lathrop stood with white face and clenched hands at the threshold, listening to his uncle's declaration, and breathlessly he awaited Clara's answer.

"Mr. Loyd, I need not feign surprise, for my father told me of the honor you had conferred on both him and me, by seeking my hand—indeed, he is very anxious that I change my name to Clara Loyd, but I do not love you, Mr. Loyd, as a wife should love her husband."

Herbert Lathrop almost smiled here.

"But I honor and respect you," continued Clara, "and if, knowing how I feel, you desire to make me your wife, this hand is yours."

Mr. Loyd took Clara's hand in his.

"I love you, Clara, dearly enough to take this little hand on any terms, and I know you are marrying me for neither wealth or station, as you have both."

"Of that, Mr. Loyd, you may feel quite sure; as to wealth, I cannot say that it ever had great attractions for me, though my father is reputed among the wealthiest planters of the state, and you must know that, in accordance with family customs, his oldest son will inherit nearly his entire fortune; in making me your wife you cannot hope to aggrandize your wealth, and as for station—I know of none higher than that of being the daughter of Abner Hill."

"Well spoken, Clara; nor is there. And as for wealth, why, let him keep it all, and even then, so I have you, I have the greater part of it, and you in time will be the wealthiest widow in the Carolinas."

"Pray do not speak of that, Mr. Loyd; remember life is uncertain, and but for Angus Bruce I would not be here to-night."

"True! True! Capt. Bruce shall be rewarded on his return."

"Angus Bruce, Mr. Loyd, would accept of no reward, at least none that you could give him."

"Well, Clara, dear, as you will be 'the old man's darling, and not the young man's slave,' when shall we wed?"

"Let it be, Mr. Loyd, when Clarence and Fannie are united."

"Why, that is the first of June."

"Yes, and at Orton; let our marriage take place at the same time."

"It shall, dear; God grant you may be happy—for myself I fear not. Do you know, Clara, I at one time thought that perhaps you would be won by my nephew?"

"No, Mr. Loyd, there was never danger of that. I detest, and almost fear him."

"In that event, before our marriage, I will have him located elsewhere; it would be but torture to have one around toward whom you feel like that. But I little wonder at it, I sometimes feel as though I was standing on a mine, when I think of his father's record, and were he not my nephew, I would not tolerate him—eventually I shall endeavor to establish him in business elsewhere.

"Why, he even had the impudence to ask my daughter's hand in marriage.

"Well, good night, dear one, and happy dreams," and Mr. Loyd stooped slightly and kissed the white brow of the girl, who to please her father, and build up an impassable barrier between herself and the man she loved but might not marry, had promised to become his wife.

"Good night, Mr. Loyd."

Clara was very pale, and tears were in her eyes, as she started towards the door.

Then it was that Herbert Lathrop glided rapidly through the hall. No smile parted his lips, but on his set [illegible] a look of malignant hate [illegible] he muttered, [illegible] then set aside his sister's [illegible] e pleases not his wife.

"Clara loathes me, and my dear, dear uncle sometimes thinks he's standing on a mine—look out, John Loyd, for by the gods that made me, that mine shall soon explode, and at the altar you shall never stand, with Clara Hill—Dotard! Fool! ere that I'll have—have what?

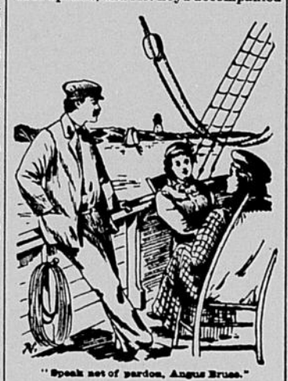
"Your life, my uncle! Yes, your very life!" and shaking his clenched fist at the parlor door he rapidly ascended the stairs, muttering still.

Herbert Lathrop had not been unobserved.

At the time he entered the front door, Aunt Mag, the mulatto housekeeper and old family servant of the banker, was going the rounds to see that the doors were secure for the night. As she was advancing, when just in the shadow of the winding stairs, she caught sight of Herbert Lathrop in a listening attitude at the parlor door. Instinctively she halted, and had seen his pantomime of actions as he stood there, and as he advanced she had observed the passionate look on his face, as well as the clenched hand shaken at the door; and when he was ascending the stairway, just opposite her, as she stood crouching in the recess, she caught the words:

"Your life, my uncle! yes, your very life!"

As Herbert disappeared, the parlor door opened, and Mr. Loyd accompanied



"Speak not of pardon, Angus Bruce."

Clara to the foot of the stairs, which she ascended, and he retired to his room, which was on the first floor, and adjoining the library, from which a door opened into it.

Aunt Mag securely bolted the front door, put out the lights in the parlor and hall, and she also ascended the stairs.

Noiselessly she passed over the soft carpet to the back of the hall on the second floor, and halted before a door.

First her eye and then her ear was applied to the keyhole—her eye saw Herbert Lathrop standing before a looking-glass in his shirt sleeves; he was gesticulating wildly, and she heard him say:

"So, uncle, I can neither wed my cousin Fannie, nor Clara Hill—the one for Clarence, and you would be the bridegroom to the other.

"Watch well, my uncle! you may die ere that, and suddenly—so suddenly—I have it, your death, and in such a manner that Angus Bruce shall appear the murderer—the gallows then for him—two birds with one stone killed.

"Truly, my uncle, there are two who stand upon a mine."

Aunt Mag ascended the stairs, and repaired to her room, and as she is quite an important character in some of the events that will follow, it may be well to give the reader some information regarding her.

She had been brought to Wilmington some dozen years before by a trader, who stated that he purchased her at an administration sale.

Her children had been sold and scattered, she knew not where, and her husband had been purchased by a Georgia planter. Mag had been a house servant all her life, and was now fully fifty years of age. Tall, scrawny, and what was usually termed raw boned—nevertheless, her long arms were very muscular, and her large black eyes and jet black hair that hung, when loose, far down her back, proclaimed her Tuscorora origin.

John Loyd had purchased her, nor did he ascertain till afterwards that her mind was somewhat unhinged, the result, probably, of having lost all that she had ever loved. She had a strange habit of talking to herself, and had some few articles of clothing that her children had once worn. At times she would get them out and talk to them, as though her family were around her; sometimes weeping, at others chuckling or laughing merrily as she recalled some incidents in her early life; but she was a faithful, a cleanly and obedient servant, and after the banker had become accustomed to her ways he would not part with her.

Indeed, he had sought the husband and some trace of the children with a view of purchasing them, but could learn nothing of them.

Such was Aunt Mag; faithful and true, but with a disordered brain; though, disordered as it was, she was not wanting in the necessary steadfastness of purpose and determination requisite to enable her to watch the future movements of Herbert Lathrop.

Herbert had thoroughly reviewed the matter in his mind and had come to the conclusion that with the banker safely out of the way and the guilt fixed on Angus in no uncertain manner he would be able to make Clara Hill his wife. Notwithstanding all he had heard her say, it was still his opinion that it was his uncle's wealth alone that induced her to accept his proposal; but how would the removal help him, in respect to wealth? Fannie would inherit all.

Perhaps it would be best to win Fannie or coerce her into marrying him; but she was engaged to marry Clarence, and the squire and Clarence would be more than he could overcome.

He must have their friendship, for he would need them both.

How, then, could his uncle's wealth become his? Remove Fannie also? No, that would never do.

One murder might be successfully carried through, but two, not at this time—and then there might be other heirs who would inherit equally with him—but, stay, there was the banker's will among his private papers in the vault at the bank! He had told him where they might be found in case of his sudden death.

The first thing was to inspect that will, and that he would do before making further plans.

Clara Hill returned to Orton a week after having accepted the proposal of Mr. Loyd, and it is safe to say that as the Sunshine passed the locality where she had fallen overboard Angus Bruce was the one who occupied her thoughts. He had been seldom from her mind since the moment when she had heard him exclaim, as she was sinking down into the river's depths for the last time:

"Courage! Courage! Clara Belle!" and she thought how instantly she had felt "I am saved!" and of the strong arms of the brave Scot as he clasped her in them and dragged her back from death.

"He has won my love nobly," she thought. "I am untrue to womanhood, but he cannot have my hand."

When she arrived at Orton she found her father and Clarence very happy over the state of affairs. Mr. Loyd and herself had written them of the engagement.

"This is well, Clara," said the squire, as they were riding from the landing to the house. "You will be the fairest and wealthiest bride in the old North state. Loyd has wealth enough, but your mother has no small dower for you, and you shan't leave Orton unremembered by your father.

"I wish you to select two young negroes, a male and female, from Orton—any two that may please you. The girl bring into the house at once and let your mother and Aunt Eliza begin training her for a housemaid; the boy, Clarence and Corbett can drill in the care of horses. Thus you will always have around you two servants whom you know you can trust, and you shall have a bill of sale for them, receipted, they go with you—yes, daughter, and horses, and cows, and anything in Orton, that your heart desires; you will be at the top of the ladder, child. Are you happy?"

"No, father, not happy, and yet, I can't say unhappy. I know that Mr. Loyd loves me for myself alone, and not for any aggrandizement he expects to obtain to his wealth, by obtaining me for his wife. I told him that all your wealth went to your eldest son, and he said, 'that having me, he considered that he had the greatest part of it.'"

"Why he has, so he has; and his daughter shall be mistress of the rest; two splendid marriages."

"But, father, I came very near being the bride of death."

"Yes, yes! and Bruce stopped here going out and never spoke of it; feared to worry us, I suppose, and the next day your letter told us all about it—a brave and trusty man is Angus Bruce. I owe him a debt that I can never repay, but I can reward him well."

"Speak not of rewarding Angus, father. You would insult a noble soul. But one object would reward Angus Bruce, and that he will not seek."

"And that, Clara?"

"Is your daughter's hand; he has her love."

"Clara! you love Angus Bruce?"

"Yes, father, yes; and he loves me, I know. It is a love of which a princess might be proud. If you had heard his cry when I sank beneath his waves."

"I can't blame the lad; I can't blame him. It is well you are to wed so soon."

Mrs. Hill did not seem as enthusiastic over the coming marriage as did her husband and Clarence, and in the weeks that intervened between the time of the engagement and the first of June, while preparations were being made for the double wedding, often said:

"Daughter, if you think you will not be happy, revoke your pledge to become his wife."

"No, mother, I will marry Mr. Loyd, though I know if I told him I desired to be released he would release me, but I do not desire it."

"Daughter, I would be willing you should marry Capt. Bruce rather than see you live a life of misery."

"I know, dear mother, but father and my brother Clarence would rather see me in the grave than wedded to a pilot's son. I shall not live a life of misery, but I shall always in my inmost heart carry the image of Angus Bruce. Now, mother, pray, let us speak no more of that."

The next day all of the young darkies on the place were assembled in front of the mansion, and Clara, assisted by her mother, selected Millie, a bright, smart girl of 15 years, who was at once brought into the house and placed under tutelage, in order that she might in time be competent to look after the wardrobe of her young mistress.

Caleb, three years the senior of Millie and a grandson of old Uncle Jobe, was selected as her future coachman.

"Das you, honey! Das you, Miss Clary!" exclaimed Uncle Jobe, as he felt the honor conferred. "You jus' stick to the ole stock. D'as 'liable, da is, ain't da, marster?"

"Yes, Jobe, I believe they are—liable to get mixed up with alligators."

"Now, g'long, marster, g'long! Isn't you neber gwine to let loose 'bout dat 'gator?"

Angus Bruce, when he passed out the mouth of the river on the trip down with the cargo for Charleston, reached his destination safely and now was on the open sea, bound for Beaufort, and as his schooner scudded along before the wind the times were not infrequent when he took from beneath the bosom of his vest a golden locket. The small chain was around his neck, and as his big brown hand unclasped the locket and he gazed down into the deep blue eyes of Clara Hill tears filled his own, and many a time he pressed the miniature to his lips and uttered the words:

"I saved you, Clara Belle; thank God, I saved you, if even for another."

CHAPTER VI.

"IT WILL GO HARD THEN, BUT I WILL HAVE YOUR HAND."

The last day of May arrived and found all preparations completed for the two marriages which were to take place the evening of the ensuing day.

Mr. Loyd and Fannie were to come down on the Sunshine, which had been especially chartered to convey both themselves and friends of the contracting parties to Orton.

Clarence Hill was happy as a lark, and Fannie, who would soon be his bride, was not less so.

Clara had not looked back since plighting her troth to the banker, nor would she have recalled her pledge could she really have done so.

As to the banker, he was very happy in his quiet way; very proud of the splendid girl who would so soon become mistress of his home and heart. But his mind was sometimes filled with misgivings as he thought of the difference between their ages, and he asked himself the question:

"Am I doing this young girl an injustice in making her my wife? Can she be happy as the wife of a man so many years her senior?"

Never did he question if he should be happy. He doubted not his happiness. It would lie in contributing to that of his fair young bride, and, knowing the high character of Clara, he was satisfied that she would not marry where she feared for the happiness of the future.

Abner Hill was well satisfied with the outlook for his son and daughter, and his wife was pleased if only her children were happy.

Clara had written a letter that day that she was very anxious Fannie should receive before coming down the river on the morrow, and at five o'clock she had her pony saddled and brought to the door, and she was soon mounted and cantering in the direction of the landing, with the idea that she would be able to intercept the Sunshine, which she knew was down the river, and should be coming back at this time, but to her dismay the Sunshine passed up without halting, when she was yet several hundred yards from the wharf.

Clara was about to turn back, when she noticed the sails of a schooner, flapping almost idly in the air opposite the wharf.

"This schooner may suit my purpose," she thought, as she hastened down.

Arrived at the landing she recognized the Clara Belle, and, as the schooner was but 40 or 50 yards out in the stream, the form of Angus Bruce upon the deck.

There was no air stirring, and the tide, being at low ebb, they were becalmed and making no headway. Angus evidently recognized Clara as she rode upon the dock, for he raised his hat.

Clara hesitated about signaling him, believing it not well that they should meet again. "But this letter," she thought, "must reach Fannie, and this may be my last opportunity. I must signal the Clara Belle; Angus may send the mate or one of his sailors ashore."

She waved a handkerchief, a boat was lowered from the schooner and Angus descended into it, accompanied by two sailors, who speedily pulled away for the landing, and he was soon standing by the side of the girl he loved.

To be continued.

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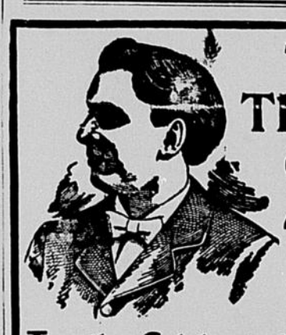

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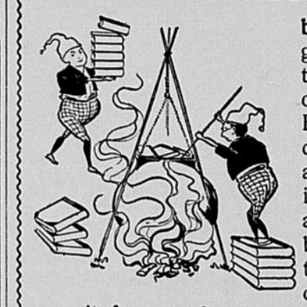

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