ROMANCE

BY JOSEPH CONRAD

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PART FOURTH.

Blade and Guitar.

CHAPTER I.

There was a slight, almost imperceptible jar, a faint grating noise, a whispering sound of sand — and the boat, without a splash, floated.

"Hurry, senor," whispered Castro. "The mists in the middle of the bay will hide us when the moon rises."

It was time—if we were to escape. Escape where? Into the open sea? With that silent, sorrowing girl by my side! In this miserable cockle shell, and without any refuge open to us? It was not really a hesitation; she could not be left at the mercy of O'Brien.

Perhaps, if I had known what was before us, my heart would have failed me utterly out of sheer pity. Suddenly my eyes caught sight of the moon making like the glow of a bush fire on the black slope of the mountain. In a moment it would flood the bay with light, and the schooner anchored off the beach before Casa Riego was not eighty yards away. I dipped my oar without a splash. Castro pulled with his one hand.

The mists rising on the lowlands never filled the bay, and I could see them lying in moonlight across the outlet like a silvery white ghost of a wall. We penetrated it, and instantly became lost to view from the shore.

On this very night Manuel-del-Popolo was outside with a good many rowboats, waiting on an Indiaman. The ship had been seen nearing the shore since noon. She was becalmed now. Perhaps they were looting her already.

Domingo's partisans were watching the Casa Riego, while Manuel (who was more of a seaman) had taken most of his personal friends, and all the larger boats that would float, to do a bit of "outside work," as they called it, upon the becalmed West Indiaman.

This had facilitated Castro's plan, and it also accounted for the smallness of the boat, which was the only one of the refuse lot left on the beach that did not gape at every seam. She was not tight by any means, though. I could hear the water washing above the bottom boards, and I remember how concerned about keeping Seraphina's feet dry mingled with the grave apprehensions of our enterprise.

The vague shadows and dim outlines that had hung around us began, at last, to vanish utterly in an impenetrable and luminous whiteness. And through the jumble of my thoughts darted the sudden knowledge that there was a sea fog outside—a thing quite different from the nightly mists of the bay. It was rolling into the passage inexplicably, for no stir of air reached us. It answered our immediate need for concealment, and this was enough for me, when all our future hung upon every passing minute.

I heard Seraphina's voice saying softly: "You are a true friend, Tomas Castro. To you shall come a friend's reward."

"Alas, senorita!" he sighed. "What remains for me in this world—for me who have given for two masses for the souls of that illustrious man, and of your cousin Don Carlos, my last piece of silver?"

"We shall make you very rich, Tomas Castro," she said with decision, as if there had been bags of gold in the boat.

He returned a high-flown phrase of thanks in a bitter, absent whisper. I knew well enough that the help he had given me was not for money, not for love—not even for loyalty to the Riegos. It was obedience to the last recommendation of Carlos. He ran risks for my safety, but gave me none of his allegiance.

He was still the same tubby, murderous little man, with a steel blade screwed to the wooden stump of his forearm, as when, swelling his breast, he had stepped on his toes before me like a bloodthirsty pigeon, in the steerage of the ship that had brought us from home. I heard him mumble, with almost incredible, sardonic contempt, that, indeed, the senor would soon have none but dead friends if he refrained from striking at his enemies. Had the senor taken the very excellent opportunity afforded by Providence, and that any sane Christian man would have taken—to let him stab the Juez O'Brien—we should not then be wandering in a little boat. What folly! What folly! One little thrust of a knife, and we should all have been now safe in our beds. * * *

His tone was one of weary superiority, and I remained appalled by that truth, stripped of all chivalrous pretense. It was clear, in sparing that defenseless life, I had been guilty of cruelty for the sake of my conscience. There was Seraphina by my side; it was she who had to suffer. I had let her enemy go free, because he had happened to be near me, disarmed. Had I acted like an Englishman and a gentleman, or only like a fool satisfying his sentiment at other people's expense?

She gave no sign of having heard Castro's words. But suddenly I felt, without her cloaked figure having stirred, her small hand slip into mine.

"Ah, you are generous," I whispered close to the edge of the cloak overshadowing her face.

"You must now think of yourself, Juan," she said.

"Of myself," I echoed sadly. "I have only you to think of, and you are so far away—out of my reach. There are your dead—all your loss, between you and me."

She touched my arm.

"It is I who must think of my dead," she whispered. "But you, you must think of yourself, because I have nothing of mine in this world now."

I said no more. If I could have taken O'Brien with me into the other world, I would have died to save her the pain of so much as a pinprick. But because I could not, she must even go with me: must suffer because I clung to her as men cling to their hope of highest good—with an exalted and selfish devotion.

CHAPTER II.

The noise of oars rowing fast, to the precipitated jingling of a guitar, swooped down upon us with a gallant ferocity.

"Caramba," Castro muttered, "it is the fool Manuel himself!"

I said then:

"We have eight shots between us two, Tomas."

He thrust his brace of pistols upon my knees.

"Dispose of them as your worship pleases," he muttered.

"You musn't give up yet," I whispered.

"What is it that I give up?" he mumbled, wearily. "Besides, there grows from my forearm a blade. If I shall find myself indisposed to quit this world alone. * * * Listen to the singing of that imbecile."

A caroling falsetto seemed to hang muffled in upper space, above the fog that settled low in the water, like a dense and milky sediment in the air. The moonlight fell into it strangely. We seemed to breathe at the bottom of a shallow sea, white as snow, shining like silver, and impenetrably opaque everywhere, except overhead, where the yellow disc of the moon glittered through a thin cloud of steam. The shrill trolling went on crescendo to a burst of babbling voices, a mad speed of tinkling, a thundering shout, "Altro, Amigo!" followed by a great clatter of oars flung in. The sudden silence pulsated with the ponderous strokes of my heart.

To escape now seemed impossible. At least it seemed impossible while they talked. A dark spot in the shining expanse of fog swam into view. It shifted its place after I had first made it out, and then remained motionless, astern of the dingey. It was the shadow of a big boat full of men, but when they were silent I was not sure that I saw anything at all. I make no doubt, had they been aware of our nearness, there were amongst them eyes that could have detected us in the same elusive way. But how could they even dream of anything of the kind. They talked noisily, and there must have been a round dozen of them at the least. Sometimes they would fall a-shouting all together, and then keep quiet as if listening. By-and-by I began to hear answering yells, that seemed to converge upon us from all directions.

We were in the thick of it. It was Manuel's boat, as Castro had guessed, and the other boats were rallying upon it gropingly, keeping up a succession of yells:

"Ohe! Ohe! Where, where?"

And the people in Manuel's boat howled back at them. "Ohe! Ohe * * * e! This way; here!"

Suddenly he struck the guitar a mighty blow, and chanted in an inspired and grandiose strain:

"Steer—for—the—song."

His fingers ran riot among the strings, and above the jingling his voice, forced to the highest pitch, declaimed, as in the midst of a tempest:

"I adore the saints in the glory of heaven
And, on the dust of the earth,
The print of her footsteps."

It would have been easy to pull away unheard while he sang, but I had a plan, the beginning of a plan, something like the beginning of a hope. And for that I should have to use the fog for the purpose of remaining within earshot.

Would the fog last long enough to serve my turn? That was the only question, and I believed it would, for it settled lower; it settled down denser, almost too heavy to be stirred by the fitful efforts of the breeze.

With my sharpened hearing catching every word with preternatural distinctness, I felt as if, the ring of Gyges on my finger, I had sat invisible at the council of my enemies.

Manuel began to make a set speech. It was like the oration of an ambitious leader in a farce! he held his hearers with his eloquence, as much as he had done with the song of his grotesque and desecrating love. He vaunted his sagacity and his valor, and overwhelmed with invective all sorts of names—my own and Castro's among them. He revealed the unholy ideals of all that band of scoundrels—ideals that he said should find fruition under his captaincy. He boasted of secret conferences with O'Brien. There were murmurs of satisfaction.

I don't wonder at Seraphina's shudder of horror, of disgust, of dismay and indignation. Robbed of the inexpugnable shelter the Casa Riego, she, too, was made to look into the depths; upon the animalism, the lusts and the reveries of that sordid, vermin-haunted crowd. I felt for her a profound and shamed sorrow. It was like a profaning touch on the sacredness of her mourning for the dead, and on her clear and passionate vision of life.

"Hombres de Rio Medio! Amigos! Valientes! * * *" Manuel was beginning his peroration. He would lead them, now, against the English ship. The terrified heretics would surrender. There was always gold in English ships. He stopped his speech, and then called loudly, "Let the boats keep in touch with each other, and not stray in that fog."

"The dog," grunted Castro. We heard a resolute bustle of preparation; oars were being shipped.

"Make ready, Tomas," I whispered.

"Ready for what?" he grumbled. "Where shall your worship run from these swine?"

"We must follow them," I answered.

"The madness of the senor's countrymen descends upon him," he whispered with sardonic politeness. "Wherefore follow?"

"To find the English ship," I answered swiftly.

This, from the moment we had heard Manuel's guitar, had been my idea. Since the fog that concealed us from their sight made us, too, hopelessly blind, those wretches must guide us themselves out of their own clutches, as it were.

In the moment before the picaroons actually started, I became the prey of the most intense anxiety. I knew we were to seaward of the cluster. But of our position relatively to the boats, and to the English ships they would make for, I was profoundly ignorant. The dingey might be lying right in the way. Before I could master the sort of disorder I was thrown into by that thought—which, strange to say, had not occurred to me till then—with a shrill whistle Manuel led off.

We are always inclined to trust our eyes rather than our ears; and such is the conventional temper in which we receive the impression of our senses that I had no idea they were so near us. Instantly, it seemed, with the second swing and plash of the oars, the boats were right upon us. They went clear. It was like being grazed by a fall of rocks. I seemed to feel the wind of the rush.

The rapid clatter of rowing, the excited hum of voices, the violent commotion of the water, passed by us with an impetuosity that took my breath away. They had started in a bunch. There must have been amongst them at least one crew of negroes, because somebody was beating a tambourine smartly, and the rowers chorused in a quick, panting undertone, "Ho, ho, tallbambo. * * * Ho, ho, tallbambo." One of the boats silhouetted herself for an instant, a row of heads swaying back and forth, towered over astern by a full-length figure as straight as an arrow. A retreating voice thundered, "Silence!" The sounds and the forms faded together in the fog with amazing swiftness.

Seraphina, her cloak off, her head bare, stared forward after the fleeting murmurs and shadows we were pursuing. Sometimes she warned us, "More to the left," or "Faster!" We had to put forth our best, for Manuel, as if in the very wantonness of confidence, had set a tremendous pace.

We followed in the track of the sound, and, for the most part, kept in sight of the elusive shadow of the sternmost boat. Often, in a denser belt of fog, the sounds of rowing became muffled almost to extinction; or we seemed to hear them all round and, startled, checked our speed. Dark apparitions of boats would surge up on all sides in a most inexplicable way: to the right; to the left; even coming from behind. They appeared real, unmistakable, and, before we had time to dodge them, vanished utterly. Then we had to spurt desperately after the grind of the oars, caught, just in time, in an unexpected direction.

And then we lost them. We pulled frantically. Seraphina had been urging us, "Faster! faster!" From time to time I would ask her, "Can you see them?" "Not yet," she answered curtly. The perspiration poured down my face. Castro's panting was like the wheezing of bellows at my back. Suddenly, in a despairing tone, she said:

"Stop! I can neither see nor hear anything now."

We feathered our oars at once, and fell to listening with lowered heads. The ripple of the boat's way expired slowly. A great white stillness hung slumberously over the sea.

It was inconceivable. We pulled once or twice with extreme energy for a few minutes after imaginary whistles or shouts. Once I heard them passing our bows. But it was useless; we stopped, and the moon, from within the mistiness of an immense halo, looked dreamily upon our heads.

Castro grunted, "Here is an end of your plan, Senor Don Juan."

CHAPTER III.

A distant tumult arose suddenly, and as suddenly ceased for a space of a breath or two.

"Now, Castro," I shouted.

"Ha! bueno!"

We gave way with a vigor that seemed to lift the dingey out of the water. The uproar gathered volume and fierceness.

From the first it was a hand-to-hand contest, engaged in suddenly, as if the assailants had at once managed to board in a body, and, as it were, in one unanimous spring. No shots had been fired. Too far to hear the blows, and seeing nothing as yet of the ship, we seemed to be hastening towards a deadly struggle of voices, of shadows with leathern throats; every cry heard in battle was there—rage, encouragement, fury, hate and pain. And those of pain were amazingly distinct. They were yells; they were howls. And suddenly, as we approached the ship, but before we could make out any sign of her, we came upon a boat. We had to swerve to clear her. She seemed to have dropped out of the fight in utter disarray; she lay with no oars out, and full of men who writhed and tumbled over each other, shrieking as if they had been flayed. Above the writhing figures in the middle of the boat, a tall man, upright in the stern sheets, raved awful imprecations and shook his fists above his head.

The blunt dingey foamed past that vision within an oar's length, no more, making straight for the clamor of the fight. The last puff of wind must have thinned the fog in the ship's track; for, standing up, face forward to pull stroke, I saw her come out, stern-on to us, from truck to water line, mistily tall and motionless, but resounding with the most fierce and desperate noises. A cluster of empty boats clung low to her port side, raft-like and vague on the water.

We heard now, mingled with the fury and hate of shouts reverberating from the placid sea, mighty thuds and crashes, as if it had been a combat with clubs and battle axes.

As I headed for her, a big boat, full of men, with many oars, shot across our bows, and vanished round the ship's counter in the twinkling of an eye. The defenders, engaged on the port side, were going to be taken in the rear. We were then so close to the counter that the cries of "Death, death," rang over our heads. A voice on the poop said furiously in English, "Stand fast, men." Next moment, we, too, rounded the quarter only twenty feet behind the big boat, but with a slightly wider sweep.

I said, "Have the pistols ready, Seraphina." And she answered quite steadily: "They are ready, Juan."

No sooner round than we were upon them. We were upon them so fast that I had barely the time to fling away my oar, and close my grip on the butt of the pistols Seraphina pressed into my hand from behind. Castro, too, had dropped his oar, and turning as swift as a cat, crouched in the bows. I saw his good arm darting out towards their boat.

They had cast a grapnel cleverly, and, swung abreast of the main chains, were grimly busied in boarding the undefended side in silence. One had already his leg over the ship's rail, and below him three more were clambering resolutely, one above the other. The rest of them, standing up in a body with their faces to the ship, were oblivious of everything in their purpose, that they staggered all together to the shock of the dingey, heavily, as if the earth had reeled under them.

Castro knew what he was doing. I saw his only hand hop along the gunwale, dragging our cockle-shell forward very swiftly. The tottering Spaniards turned their heads, and for a moment we looked at each other in silence.

I was too excited to shout; the surprise seemed to have deprived them of their senses, and they all had the same grin of teeth closed upon the naked blades of their knives, the same stupid stare fastened upon my eyes. I pulled the trigger in the nearest face, and the terrific din of the fight going on above us was overpowered by the report of the pistol, as if by a clap of thunder. The man's gaping mouth dropped the knife, and he stood stiffly long enough for the thought, "I've missed," to flash through my mind before he tumbled clean out of the boat without touching anything, like a wooden dummy tipped by the heels. His headlong fall sent the water flying high over the stern of the dingey. With the second barrel I took a long shot at the man sitting, amazed, astride of the rail above. I saw him double up suddenly, and fall inboard sideways, but the fellow following him made a convulsive effort, and leaped out of sight on to the deck of the ship. I dropped the discharged weapon, and fired the first barrel of the other at the upper of the two men clinging half-way up the ship's side. To that one shot they both vanished as if by enchantment, the fellow I had hit knocking off his friend below. The crash of their fall was followed by a great yell.

These had been all nearly pointblank shots, and, anyhow, I had had a good deal of pistol practice. Macdonald had a little gallery at Horton Pen. The Lugareños, huddled together in the boat, were only able to moan with terror. They made soft, pitiful, complaining noises. Two or three took headers overboard, like so many frogs, and then one began to squeak exactly like a rat.

By that time, Castro, with his fixed blade, had cut their grapnel rope close to the ring. As the ship kept forging ahead all the time, the boat of the pirate bumped away lightly from between the vessel and our dingey, and we remained alongside, holding to the end of the severed line. I sent my fourth shot after them, and got in exchange a scream and a howl of "Mercy! mercy! we surrender!" She swung clear of the quarter, all hushed, and faded into the mist and moonlight, with the head and arms of a motionless man hanging grotesquely over the bows.

Leaving Seraphina with Castro, and sticking the remaining pair of pistols in my belt, I swarmed up the rope. The moon, the lights of several lanthorns, the glare from the open doors, mingled violently in the steamy fog between the high bulwarks of the ship. But the character of the contest was changing, even as I paused on the rail to get my bearings. The fellow who had leaped on board to escape my shot had bolted across the deck to his friends on the other side, yelling:

"Fly, fly! The heretics are coming, shooting from the sea. All is lost. Fly, oh, fly!"

He had jumped straight overboard, but the infection of his panic was already visible. The cries of "Muerte, muerte! Death, death!" had ceased, and the Englishmen were cheering ferociously. In a moment, under my eyes, the seamen, who had been holding their own with difficulty in a shower of defensive blows, began to dart forward, striking out with their fists, catching with their hands. I jumped upon the main hatch, and found myself in the skirt of the final rush.

A tall Lugareno had possessed himself of one of the ship's capstan bars, and, less craven than the others, was flourishing it on high, aiming at the head of a sailor engaged in throttling a negro whom he held at the full length of his immense arms. I fired, and the Lugareno tumbled down with all the appearance of having knocked himself over with the bar he had that moment uplifted. It rested across his neck as he lay stretched at my feet.

I needn't relate how I had my arms shaken off in the character of a savior. But I got any amount of praise at last, though I was terribly out of breath—at the very last gasp, as you might say. A man, smooth-faced, well-knit, very elated and buoyant, began talking to me endlessly. He was mighty happy, and anyhow he could talk to me, because I was past doing anything but taking a moment's rest. He said I had come in the nick of time, and was quite the best of fellows.

"If you had a fancy to be called the Archbishop of Canterbury, we'd 'your grace' you. I am the mate, Sebright. You don't think they'd come back for another taste? The blessed old deck's afloat. That's my little dodge, boiling water for these Dagos, if they come. So I got the cook to fire up, and we put the suction hose of the fire pump into the boiler, and we filled the coppers and the kettles. Not a bad notion, eh? But ten times as much wouldn't have been enough, and the hose burst at the third stroke, so that only one boat got anything to speak of. But Lord, she dropped out of the ruck as if she'd been swept with langridge. Squealed like a litter of pigs, didn't they?"

And then I managed to tell him something of Seraphina that he would listen to.

"What, what?" he said. "Oh, heavens and earth! there's your girl. Of course. * * * Hey, bo'sun, rig a whip and chair on the yardarm to take a lady on board. Bear a hand. A lady! yes, a lady. Confound it, don't lose your wits, man. Look over the starboard rail, and you will see a lady alongside with a Dago in a small boat. Let the Dago come on board, too; the gentleman says he's a good sort. Now, do you understand?"

He talked to me a good deal more; told me that they had made a prisoner—"a tall, comical chap; wears his hair like an old aunt of mine, a bunch of curls flapping on each side of his face"—and then said that he must go and report to Capt. Williams. The name struck me. I said: "Is this ship the Llon?"

"Aye, aye. That's her. She is," several seamen answered together, casting curious glances from their work.

"Tell your captain my name is Kemp," I shouted after Sebright with what strength of lung I had.

What luck! Williams was the jolly little ship's captain I was to have dined with on the day of execution on Kingston Point—the day I had been kidnaped. It seemed ages ago. I wanted to get to the side to look after Seraphina, but I simply couldn't remember how to stand. I sat on the hatch, looking at the seamen.

They were clearing the ropes, collecting the lamps, picking up knives, handspikes, crowbars, swabbing the decks with quashy flaps. A bare-footed, bare-armed fellow, holding a bundle of brass-hilted cutlasses under his arm, had lost himself in the contemplation of my person.

"Where are you bound to?" I inquired at large, and everybody showed a friendly alacrity in answer.

"Havana." "Havana." "Havana's our next port. Aye, Havana."

I heard a loud "Alas!" sighed out behind me. A distracted, stricken voice repeated twice in Spanish, "Oh, my greatness; oh, my greatness." Then, shiveringly, in a tone of profound self-communion, "I have a greatly parched throat," it said. Harshly jovial voices answered:

"Stow your lingo and come before the captain. Step along."

A prisoner, conducted aft, stalked reluctantly into the light between two short, bustling sailors. Disheveled black hair like a damaged peruke, mournful, yellow face, enormous stag's eyes straining down on me. I recognized Manuel-del-Popolo. At the same moment he sprang back, shrieking, "This is a miracle of the devil—of the devil."

The sailors fell to tugging at his arms savagely, asking, "What's come to you!" and, after a short struggle that shook his tatters and his raven locks tempestuously like a gust of wind, he submitted to be walked up; repeating:

"Is it you, senor? Is it you? Is it you?"

One of his shoulders was bare from neck to elbow; at every step one of his knees and part of a lean thigh protruded their nakedness through a large rent; a strip of grimy, blood-stained linen, torn right down to the waist, dangled solemnly in front of his legs. There was a horrible raw patch amongst the roots of his hair just above his temple; there was blood in his nostrils, the stamp of excessive anguish on his features, a sort of guarded despair in his eye. His voice sank while he said again, twice:

"Is it you? Is it you?" And then, for the last time, "Is it you?" he repeated in a whisper.

The seamen formed a wide ring, and, looking at me, he talked to himself confidently.

"Escaped—the Inglez! Then thou art doomed, Domingo. Domingo, thou art doomed. Dom. * * * Senor!"

The change of tone, his effort to extend his hands toward me, surprised us all. I looked away.

"Hold hard! Hold him, mate!"

"Senor, condescend to behold my downfall. I am led here to the slaughter, senor! To the slaughter, senor! Pity! Grace! Mercy! And only a short while ago — behold. Slaughter * * * I * * * Manuel. Senor, I am universally admired—with a parched throat, senor. I could compose a song that would make a priest weep * * * A greatly parched throat, senor," he added piteously.

"You have not forgotten me, senor. Forget Manuel! Impossible! Manuel, senor. For the love of God. Manuel. Manuel-del-Popolo. I did sing, deign to remember. I offered you my fidelity, senor. As you are a caballero, I charge you to remember. Save me, senor. Speak to those men. * * * For the sake of your honor, senor."

His voice was extremely harsh—not his own. Apparently he believed that he was going to be cut to pieces there and then by the sailors. He seemed to read it in their faces, shuddering and shrinking whenever he raised his eyes. But all these faces gaped with good-natured wonder, except the faces of his two guardians, and these expressed a state of conscientious worry. They were ridiculously anxious to suppress his sudden contortions, as one would some gross indecency. In the scuffle they hissed and swore under their breath. They were scandalized and made unhappy by his behavior.

"Are you ready down there?" roared the bos'un in the waist.

"Olla raight! Olla raight! Waita a leetle," I heard Castro's voice coming, as if from under the ship. I said coldly a few words about certain punishment awaiting a pirate in Havana, and got on my feet stiffly. But Manuel was too terrified to understand what I meant. He attempted to snatch at me with his imprisoned hands, and got for his pains a severe jerking, which made his head roll about his shoulders weirdly.

"Pity, senor!" he screamed. And then with low fervor, "Don't go away. Listen! I am profound. Perhaps the senor did not know that? Mercy! I am a man of intrigue. A politico. You have escaped, and I rejoice at it. * * * He bared his fangs and frothed like a mad dog. * * * "Senor, I am made happy because of the love I bore you from the first—and Domingo, who let you slip out of the Casa, is doomed. He is doomed. Thou art doomed, Domingo! But the excessive affection for your noble person inspires my intellect with a salutary combination. Wait, senor! A moment! An instant! * * * A combination! * * *"

He gasped as though his heart had burst. The seamen, open-mouthed, were slowly narrowing their circle.

"Can't he gabble!" remarked someone patiently.

His eyes were starting out of his head. He spoke with fearful rapidity.

"* * * There's no refuge from the anger of the Juez but the grave—the grave—the grave! * * * Ha! Ha! Go into thy grave, Domingo. But you, senor—listen to my supplications—where will you go? To Havana? The Juez is there, and I call the malediction of the priests on my head if you, too, are not doomed. Life! Liberty! Senor, let me go and I shall run—I shall ride, senor—I shall throw myself at the feet of Juez, and say * * * I shall say I killed you. I am greatly trusted by the reason of my superior intelligence. I shall say, 'Domingo let him go—but he is dead. Think of him no more—of that Inglez who escaped—from Domingo. Do not look for him. I, your own Manuel, have killed him.' Give me my life for yours, senor. I shall swear I had killed you with this right hand! Ah!"

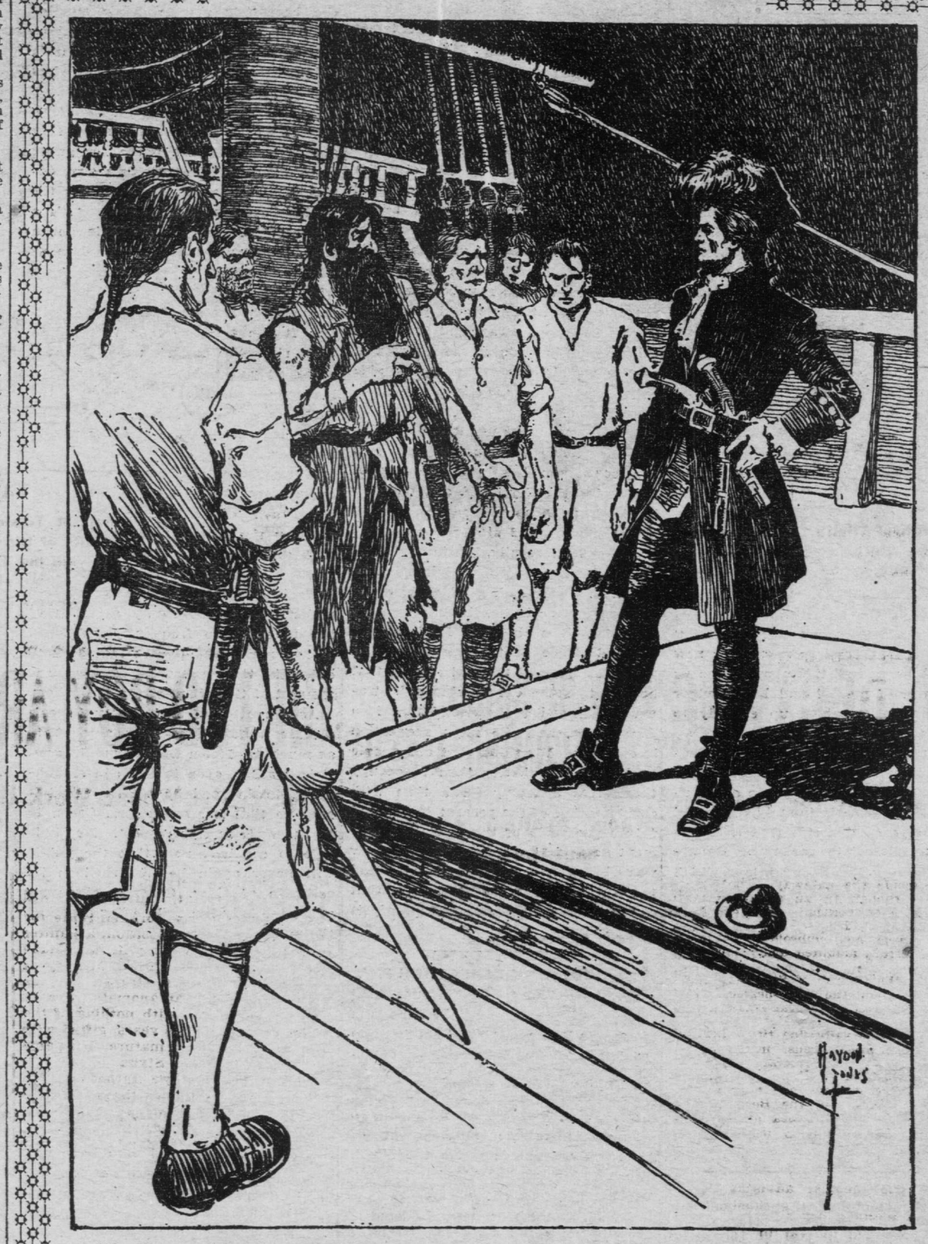
He hung on my lips breathless, with a face so distorted that, although it might have been death alone he hated, he looked, indeed, as if impatient to set to and tear me to pieces with his long teeth. Men clutching at straws must have faces thus convulsed by an eager and despairing hope. His silence removed the spell—the spell of his incredible loquacity. I heard the boatswain's hoarse tones:

"Hold on well, ma'am. Right! Walk away steady with that whip!"

I ran limping forward.

"High enough," he rumbled; and I received Serapina into my arms.

(To Be Continued.)



"I offered you my fidelity, Senor. As you are a caballero I charge you to remember. Save me, Senor. Speak to those men. For the sake of your honor, Senor!"

A COWGIRL'S OPINION.

Makes me aggravatin' weary fur to hear
this leap year beller
'Bout it bein' right an' proper fur a gal to
brace her feller,
Fur to pop the question at him, tell him
how she hankers fur him,
An' with lallygaggin' language to the limit
try to stir him.
May be proper in the city, 'cordin' to
their high flung viewin's,
But you'll never ketch this sagehen buttin' in with no sich doin's,
Fur, according to my ideas, 'tisn't ladylike
nor fittin',
An' a gal that ain't wuth askin' fur, by
jing, ain't wuth a-gittin'.

'Tisn't out o' place in leap year fur a gal
to make advances
In a-bracin' decent fellers fur their company to dances,
Or to mebbe take 'em ridin', or to see 'em
home from parties,
Fur the fun it is reversin' o' the tables on
the smarties,
But a-makin' love toward 'em in a spoony
way an' sighin',
An' a-rollin' up their eyeballs like a dogy
calf a-dyin',
Is degradin' to our gender, don't keer how
bad they are smitten,
An' a gal that ain't wuth askin' fur ain't
nowise wuth a-gittin'.

Mebbe gals that's gettin' skeery as they
see their chances slippin',
An' kin feel the strands a-partin' in the
rope o' hope they're grippin',
Are excusable fur tryin' as a last resort
to try to
Git some masculine refusin's that no other
gal's 'd tie to;
But if any lovin' rider ever ropes this little critter,
He will have to do the chinnin' necessary
fur to git 'er;
So I'll jest keep on attendin' to my individjul knittin',
Fur a gal that ain't wuth askin' fur, by
gosh, ain't wuth a-gittin'.

—James Barton Adams in Denver Post.

Jersey Fossil.

"This tusk," said the Jersey commuter, "I dug up in my garden. It's all of four feet long. Remarkable, isn't it?"

"Yes. It's very probably the bill of a prehistoric mosquito."—Philadelphia Ledger.

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