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EL CENTRO _____ HOLTVILLE

When we reach England he will be tried for murder, and I have no doubt he will be hanged, as he deserves. Did any of you men see the blow?'

Many of them had, but they answered not a word. In one sense the boatswain, by braving the lieutenant, unified their antagonism to England, which was even greater than their hatred of the mate.

"You will give me your word about this, sir," continued the lieutenant to the mate, "although you refused it in the other case."

"And for what?" cried the New Englander.

"That you will refrain from doing him any harm, and that you will keep him well guarded."

"I'll keep him well guarded," was the bitter enswer.

"And your hands off him?"

"Oh, very well," said the mate reluctantly, for even he could see that the orderly course of the law was the best; "I give you my word. I'll do him no harm. You've no objection to bread and water for him, though, have you?"

"None whatever," answered the lieutenant. "But remember, hands off."

"I'll remember. Have you heard what caused the whole trouble?"

"I have heard something about it. He was mutinous, and was flogged, and out of revenge"——

"That's not quite all," returned Mr. Conant. "He offered a deadly insult to the captain's daughter. It was her who repulsed your boat attack over the stern, and in the darkness this hound ran up on the poop, seized her unsuspectin', kissed her and said he loved her."

"Do you know, Mr. Conant," said the lieutenant quietly—he was a very quiet young man, as a rule—"I am almost sorry that you gave me your word to keep your hands off of him."

"I can take it back if you want me to," returned the other promptly.

"No," said the lieutenant. "The law must deal with him, but I sometimes find the law a very irksome thing."

The boatswain opened his mouth to speak.

The lieutenant turned on him in fury.

"Not a word!" he roared, with a sudden burst of passion. "If I consult my inclination you would be swinging from that yard-arm. I am saving your life, and it behooves you to be silent. Go forward all, now. Good morning, Mr. Conant, a pleasant voyage to you, and may you find the forehold agreeable."

Somehow, the rough, ill-tempered mate had got on the edge of the English officer's nerves in turn for all his polite way of dealing with him, and he was glad to see him go forward. Indeed, he would not have offered him a choice of places of confinement, but would have had him locked in his cabin, had it not been for Miss Susan Hubbell.

The Englishman had a great desire to see more of that young lady, and he realized that the presence of another man behind a thin bulkhead would effectually bar any confidences or other conversation, and put a damper upon an acquaintance which bade fair to relieve the tedium of what would probably be an otherwise eventless voyage to England.

And the more he thought of it the less he liked the idea of any future relationship whatsoever between Mr. Owen Conant and Miss Susan Hubbell. It went distinctly against his sense of the universal fitness of things that a woman so beautiful, and so accomplished in so strange a way, should be wasted upon such a seadog—gruff, unmannerly, and uncouth—as the mate.

He had met and been thrown in the society of women of the highest social station all his life, but he had never seen anyone of precisely the characteristics of this American girl, and he was eager to know more of her. With that end in view, he turned presently, after observing the course and speaking a word or two with his young subordinate, and re-entered the cabin.

CHAPTER X.

Once! Twice! Thrice!

The cabin, of course, was empty. The lieutenant had as yet enjoyed no opportunity for inspecting it, and now that he had the chance, he hesitated. He would not have stood upon ceremony a moment had the conditions been other than they were. He would have made direct for the captain's stateroom; and afterward have examined the others.

But the presence on the ship of the captain's daughter complicated matters. She might be in her dead father's cabin, or she might be in some other, and after the experience of a few moments ago, he hesitated about intruding upon her grief wherever she might be. Yet it was clearly necessary for him to examine the ship's papers, and if it had not been, the desire that possessed him for a further acquaintance with the young woman who had so charmingly masqueraded in men's clothes would have urged him to action.

By way of preliminary, he coughed once, and again more loudly. So far as he could observe, there was no response. Possibly he had not been heard above the natural noises of the straining ship in the high seas.

Grown desperate, he stepped toward the door of the captain's cabin, or at least what in ships of that class was usually the captain's cabin, and tapped lightly upon it. After waiting a moment for a response and receiving none, he opened it, only to be confronted by a very surprised and angry woman in some disarray of clothing. He had time to mark, however, that it was feminine clothing, if of a very plain and simple fashion, when a high and indignant voice cut athwart his amazement.

"Are prisoners allowed no privacy, sir, on your ship?"

"I beg your pardon," began the lieutenant, staring in bewilderment appreciation of the loveliness before him, "but"——

"Will you close the door?" cried the girl, with a stamp of her foot, the color flaming into her face again. It was the second time he had made her blush; once when she wore the dress of the other sex, and this time in her own.

He turned precipitately, dragging the door after him, and then found himself just where he had been before—alone in the cabin. He was making no progress, unless it was to get into the bad graces of the young lady, whom he found charming in any guise, and of whom he could say that the more frequently he saw her the more frequently he desired to be in her company.

He stood baffled yet amused by the situation, and then he knocked again on the cabin door, this time more firmly.

"Am I not to be allowed to dress in peace?" came from the other side of the door with asperity.

"Certainly, madam; by all means. But will you allow me—may I be permitted to"——

"Well, what is it?"

"I wish to see you out here as soon as you are ready to receive me," returned the abashed lieutenant.

"If you will let me alone I shall be ready in a few moments," came back the answer viciously trough the door.

Those moments were long ones to the young man idling on the transom and staring at the after-cabin bulkhead.

Now, Susan Hubbell was as little given to the adornment of her person as any woman, for she had asociated with men, none of whom could she by any possibility regard as equals, or companions, or individuals whose admiration she cared to excite, or whose attention she wished to provoke. For all the vaporings of the mate, she regarded him from very much the point that the average shipmaster regarded his principal subordinate in those days, and any closer alliance, which, the wish being father to the thought, he had alluded to, had never entered her head.

She had worn the clothes of the sailor lad with a careless indifference which was in keeping with her assumption of the youthful and masculine station. Of course, she was naturally fond of pretty things, but she was that rara avis in any age, a woman who knew little and cared less about the fashions. Her feminine and proper garments were cut for comfort and convenience.

Beautiful she would ever be, perhaps more beautiful in the unadorned simplicity of the garments of her fancy than in the more elaborate toilets of a day in which dress played, if possible, a larger part in feminine economy—and in masculine extravagance—than it does even at present. There was a wild picturesqueness about her attire, a combination of color and form accentuating her freedom, which was a novel and as refreshing as the variant moods and colors of the ocean which had been her home. In a word, she might not be fashionable, but she was never dowdy.

Association with her plain but honest and high-souled father had taught her instinctively to recognize a gentleman, and for practically the first time in her life she had been thrown in contact with one who fully deserved that title. Likewise for the first time she found herself thinking seriously of the things that she was putting on.

The mirror was an object of little use in her sea boudoir, but today she stared longer and harder into it than she had ever done in her life. In her infrequent visits to great cities while the Hiram and Susan was receiving its lading in some adjacent port, she had seen women of fashion, or at least persons she thought might come in that category, and the curious nature of the dress they wore had moved her amusement and contempt until today.

Yet in the matter of expense, no money had been spared to fit out My Lady Susan in the sweetest way. In cut, in shape, in style, her clothes might have a simplicity which marked her own individuality, but in material there was nothing better. Captain Hiram had not traded with France for many years, bringing silks and furbelows to America, without knowing the value of the things he carried.

The more she surveyed herself the more she wished that she was not differentiated by whatsoever cause from the rest of her sisters. There is some virtue in monotony after all. To be like the others is sometimes salvation to a disquited soul.

Susan, however, had to make the best of a bad beginning. Even her stubbornly curly hair, which she wore manlike, tied in a club behind, could not be made to change its character on so short a notice. There was no help for it. She had to go out in what she had. Shamefacedly at last, therefore, she opened the door and stepped into the cabin.

And then, with a rush of recollection she realized that for a whole half hour she had forgotten her father.

The familiar room, the officer sitting on the transom where her father used to sit, brought it all back to her, and the memory came with an added poignancy because she recognized the fact that a chance meeting with the veriest stranger had driven her grief from her heart. She went pale again before his glance and then her eyes filled with tears.

"Don't cry," he said sympathetically, rising and offering his hand. "You must be brave, and"——

His words recalled her to herself.

"I shall not give way again," she answered. "And before anything else, I want to thank you for your kindness in having read the service for my father. I do truly appreciate it, and I am deeply grateful."

"Pray say no more, my dear madam"—the unfamiliar word startled her a little—"I am glad to be of any service to you whatsoever."

"It was foolish of me to run away as I did, but you see, you startled me, and"——

"Indeed, I protest, ma'am, it was most natural for you. He intended to reassure her. But she put another construction upon his remark—that he was pointedly alluding to her masculine dress. She was quick in temper and sudden and hasty in action. Her face flamed again and her eyes sparkled.

"I'm not ashamed of it at all, I beg to assure you," she retorted fiercely.

"Not ashamed? I don't understand!"

"Well, you would if you knew me better. I wear it generally on the sea. I feel so much more free, and"—

"Are you referring to your dress?"

"Certainly; didn't you mean that?"

"Of course not; but since you mention it, I'm sure it's most becoming—and appropriate as well."

"How dare you refer to it in the slightest degree?" began Susan perversely.

"Well, ma'am, I am indeed unfortunate. I seem to do nothing but annoy you." returned the young man, biting his lip to suppress his amusement. "I thought it was you that brought the subject up, and I merely wanted to reassure you."

"I want none of your reassurances, sir. I want to know what you are going to do with me and with my ship, and with the murderer of my father?"

That was a question which from one point of view it was not easy to answer.

Manlike he took the line of least resistance.

"The murderer I have put in double irons; your mate is looking after him. Your ship, I reget to say, is prize to His Britannic's Majesty's ship Rockingham, of which I am, or was, the third lieutenant. I have been ordered to carry her into Portsmouth, where the boatswain will be tried, and, of course, I have no option but to obey my orders."

"And what will become of the ship then?"

"I—I suppose it will be condemned and sold, and"——

"How I hate the English!" cried the girl. "They forced this war upon us and now they take our property and sink our ships."

(To be continued.)

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