

The Blue Ocean's Daughter

By Cyrus Townsend Brady

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SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Capt. Hiram Hubbell and his daughter Susan, whose mother is dead and who lived entirely on her father's ship, often wearing, indeed, men's clothes, are bound from Boston on the ship Hiram and Susan from Bordeaux. The crew turns out to be a bad lot, especially the boatswain, Francois. The only reliable man is the mate, Mr. Conant, who is secretly in love with the girl. They are attacked by a British frigate, the time being the American revolution. During the engagement Francois, taking advantage of the confusion, stabs the captain in revenge for being flogged.

The Hiram and Susan, worsted in encounter, is boarded by British officers. Lieut. Robert Mornington, R. N., is left with a prize crew to take the Hiram and Susan to England, the old crew and mate being imprisoned forward. Mornington falls in love with Susan, and she partly forgets her loss in his society.

CHAPTER X.—(Continued.)

"Quite so," said the young man coolly, "but if my memory serves me, your own ships have been doing some of the sinking and taking. I was a midshipman on the Drake when she struck the Ranger and I have the mark of an American bullet on my yet."

"I wish," snapped out the girl impulsively, "that it had—"

"Ah! yes," interrupted the young man, "but you see it did not, and if it had, I should not have had the pleasure of this tete-a-tete with you."

"How can you talk so lightly of it," she said reproachfully, "when it means the loss of my ship just as I had lost my father?"

"Forgive me," pleaded the young man in deep contrition. "I shouldn't have said that; but if the Yankee bullet had gone an inch nearer my heart so that I could not be here, there might have been some one else who might, who might!"

"Who might not have shown me your distinguished consideration?"

"Well, I don't like to put it that way, but that was the substance of my thought."

"Then you intend to show me consideration?"

"The highest I have at command, believe me."

"And as a beginning you enter my private cabin while I was dressing without knocking?"

"Now, there you do me an injustice, for I coughed and knocked."

"You should have waited for my permission. I was just deliberating after you knocked."

"I really can do little except again to apologize. You see, the masters of merchant ships usually occupy that star-board cabin, and I naturally supposed that it was empty, since your father—"

"He gave it to me ever since I was old enough to have a cabin by myself. He used to call me the little master of the ship." Her voice faltered. "He was so good to me," she went on unrestrainedly.

"I'm sure of it. He looked good and honest and true."

"Thank you for that," she answered, ready to have forgiven him almost everything for those simple, spontaneous words.

A little pause fell between them, which he in spite of his readiness hardly knew how to break.

It was she who spoke.

"You've told me what is to do with my ship. Now, what will become of me?"

This was the puzzling part of the question which he would fain have evaded, but there was no escape from the direct interrogation now.

"My dear young lady," he began, "I

hardly know what to say. If I had a mother or a sister or any female relative, in short, I should use my influence with the Admiralty to have you paroled in the care of one of them, but I am absolutely alone in the world."

"Like myself," commented the girl pathetically.

"Like yourself. That makes me the more wishful to befriend you," he went on with the deep gravity befitting such serious conversation. "In short, I cannot say just now what shall be your fate, but you may depend upon me, I shall do the best I can for you. We shall have time to consider what to do before we reach Portsmouth, although this ship seems a good goer."

"There are very few on the ocean that have the heels of her."

"I know that. The Rockingham is our newest frigate. She is built on a French model, too, else we shouldn't have overhauled you."

"We've escaped from many of your ships before."

"Yes, you Americans certainly know how to lay down swift keels."

"And to fight them, too," she burst out impulsively.

"Aye! that also. Indeed, I may say to you that I deplore this war, and I wish to God that we could have arranged our differences amicably."

"You might have done so," returned the girl, "if you had not tried to tax us to death, and—"

"We at least," interrupted the young man, gently but inflexibly putting aside the mooted question, "will not fail to be good friends while I have charge of the ship."

"I hope not," she answered slowly, unable, however unwilling, to withstand such winning courtesy and consideration.

"Now, you understand, of course, that you have the entire freedom of the vessel. If you will give me your father's public papers you shall take charge of everything else that belongs to him. The inviolability of your cabin shall be respected by Mr. Merryfield and myself, who are the only persons who will enter here, if I have to put a sentry before the door."

"Your word, sir, will protect me as well as an armed man," she retorted with one of those swift changes in manner peculiar to her and in which much of her fascination lay.

"I thank you, and if you have a wish, you have only to express it. Now, with your permission, I will look over the papers, the ship's papers, and then, as it long past eight bells, I shall have dinner served here, and perhaps you will allow me the privilege of dining with you."

"The ship is yours. Why should I be consulted?" returned the girl bitterly.

"Nay, madam, until I have turned it over to the authorities at Portsmouth, 'tis yours, and save in the matter of laying the course I beg you so to regard it."

"You are very kind," said the girl, "but you cannot alter the fact that you are master and I am your prisoner."

She dropped her head on her hands where she sat leaning over the cabin table and slow tears trickled down her fingers. The young man thought that if affairs continued as they tended in one very definite sense he would be the girl's prisoner and she would be the captor before the voyage was ended.

"Don't cry," he said at last; "you promised to be brave, you know, and you Americans have a reputation for

courage which you must sustain."

It was a wise appeal. She dashed the tears from her face with the back of her hand and looked up at him, the ghost of a smile flickering upon her lips. And she was one of the very few women who look pretty when they cry, he noted.

"You're right," she said, "I'll not do it again. Now, I will go and get the papers, but before I do won't you tell me your name?"

"My name is"—he hesitated a moment—"Mornington—Robert Cecil Mornington, lieutenant in the Royal Navy, lately attached to the Rockingham and now attached to you—I mean to your ship."

"Of course. And my name is—"

"I know it—Miss Susan Hubbell."

"I hope," she said, rising and turning toward the cabin, "that we may be very good friends, and again I thank you for your kindness."

She extended her hand to him, and this time, before she divined what he was about to do, he raised it and pressed a longer and more fervent kiss upon it than the ordinary courtesies of life demand.

It was the first time that any human being had ever kissed Susan Hubbell's hand since she was a child, and for the third time in the course of an hour she found herself flying the English colors in her cheek as she received in astonishment this natural and ordinary salutation of a gentleman of her time.

CHAPTER XI.

The Ruse and the Letter.

Days passed, and while the ship sped as swiftly as the winds permitted toward the shores of England, these two drifted into position from which it might presently be impossible for them to escape. The idyl is old, and it took its natural course. The ship sailed true to its compass, and the lovers drifted, giving no thought to final havens.

Into this sea paradise there entered, not the serpent, but a subtle suggestion from Mr. Owen Conant.

Several times, regarding himself in honor bound to do so, Mornington had sent for him and repeated his offer of quarters in the cabin, subject to the mate's parole. Each time the offer had been disdainfully refused, greatly to the prizemaster's satisfaction.

On these occasions Mr. Conant had enjoyed the opportunity of exchanging a brief word with Susan Hubbell, which in common courtesy Mornington could not prevent, though he would have liked to do so.

From time to time also Mr. Conant, when permitted with a few other prisoners to take air forward, had observed the woman he loved and the man he hated pacing the quarter-deck side by side.

The feelings of Mr. Conant may be imagined. He was desperate, to put it mildly, and was resolved to stop at nothing to recapture the ship, dominate the English officer, and take that position he fancied to be his in the heart of Susan Hubbell.

She herself was pointedly mindful of his situation. She was not one to forget an old friend, and she had not hesitated to wave her hand or nod to him when she found him looking at her from the forward end of the ship.

One day, something like a week after the capture, it happened that Mornington was surveying the horizon through the glass and the vigilant Mr. Merryfield had turned toward him in obedience to some remark,

leaving Susan alone on the deck. Mr. Conant had been waiting for just such an opportunity apparently, for, taking advantage of the free cover of the formast, and while some of the original crew who were taking the air engaged the attention of the guards, he held up a piece of paper that to Susan's keen vision looked like a note.

Susan Hubbell felt very sorry for Mr. Conant, the more sorry because she found herself in love, with Mornington. She had hitherto viewed the mate's passion for her with indifference, but now a fellow-feeling made her wondrous kind, and, reveling in though but dimly comprehending her own emotions, she felt a great pity for the sturdy young American sailor who could never be anything more to her—and perhaps not to any one else—than the mate of a merchantman of which she was, or had been, the owner.

So that his obvious intent to communicate with her met with a readier response than it would have under other circumstances. At the same time the little note made a powerful appeal to her curiosity.

Now, her affection for Mornington had not yet been precipitated. It was latent, inherent, trembling in the balance, as it were, but the spiritual reagent had not been infused into her being and she did not yet grasp fully what it meant to her. She was aware of the pleasure she took in his society and of the delightful emotions that filled her soul at the thought of him. She leaned toward him more and more consciously. In short, her love was like a bud which waits the kiss of the sun to burst into flower. And as it had not blossomed yet, it was sometimes more or less in abeyance.

The sight of that note checked the flood of her thoughts. The current of her being was turned backward from the man aft poised lightly near the rail, scanning the sea, and the idea of recapture flashed into her mind. It was possible—indeed, it was certain—that Mr. Conant would not risk communicating with her in this way for any slight purpose.

She rightly divined that should Mornington ascertain that a note had been delivered and received his displeasure would be compelled, unless false to his duty, to abridge many of the privileges which had made the week so strange and so delightful to her. She was not disloyal to Mornington, for she had as yet professed no

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