

Stowaway

By LOUIS TRACY

Author of the "Pillar of Light," "The Wings of the Morning" and "The Captain of the Kansas."

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CHAPTER XIII.
THE LURE OF GOLD.

"PHILIP, I want to tell you something."
"Something pleasant?"
"No."
"Then why tell me?"
"Because, unhappily, it must be told. I hope you will forgive me, though I shall never forgive myself. Oh, my dear, my dear, why did we ever meet? And what am I to say? I—well, I have promised to marry another man."

"Disgraceful!" said Philip.
"Philip, dear, this is quite serious," said Iris, momentarily withdrawing her wistful gaze from the faraway line where sapphire sea and amber sky met in harmony. Northeastern Brazil is a favored clime. Bad weather is there a mere link, as it were, between unbroken weeks of brilliant sunshine. At her present pace the User Fritz would enter the harbor at Pernambuco on the following morning.

Iris, her troubled face resting on her hands, her elbows propped on the rails of the poop on the port side, looked at Philip with an intense sadness that was seemingly lost on him.
"I really mean what I say," she continued in a low voice that vibrated with emotion. "I have given my word—written it—entered into a most solemn obligation. Somehow the prospect of reaching a civilized place to-morrow induces a more ordered state of mind than has been possible since—the Andromeda was lost."

"Who is he?" demanded Hozier darkly. "Coke is married. So is Watts. Dom Corria has other fish to fry than to dream of committing bigamy. Of course I am well aware that you have been flirting with San Benavides."
"Please don't make my duty harder for me," pleaded Iris. "Before I met you, before we spoke to each other that first day at Liverpool, I had promised to marry Mr. Bulmer, an old friend of my uncle's."
"Oh—he? I am sorry for Mr. Bulmer, but it can't be done," interrupted Hozier.

"Philip, you do not understand. I—I cared for nobody then, and my uncle said he was in danger of bankruptcy, and Mr. Bulmer undertook to help him if I would consent."
He turned and met her eyes. There was a tender smile on his lips.
"So you really believe you will be compelled to marry Mr. Bulmer?" he cried.

"Oh, don't be horrid!" she almost sobbed. "I can't—can't help it."
"I have given some thought to the problem myself," he said, "and I appreciate exactly how well it would serve Mr. David Verity's interests if his niece married a wealthy old party like Bulmer. By the way, how old is Bulmer?"
"Nearly seventy."

"It is a pity that Bulmer should be a patriarch, because his only hope of marrying you is that I shall die first. Even then he must be prepared to espouse my widow. By the way, is it disrespectful to describe him as a patriarch? Isn't there some proverb about threescore years and ten?"
"Philip, if only you would appreciate my dreadful position!"
"I do. It ought to be ended. The first person we meet shall be commanded. Don't you see, dear, we really must get married at Pernambuco."

Iris clinched her little hands in despair. Why did he not understand her misery? Though she was unwavering in her resolution to keep faith with the man who had twitted her with taking all and giving nothing in return, she could not wholly restrain the tumult in her veins. Married in Pernambuco! Ah, if only that were possible!
"I am sure we would be happy together," she said, with a pathetic confidence that tempted him strongly to take her in his arms and kiss away her fears. "We must forget what happened in the land of dreams. I will never love any man but you, Philip. Yet I cannot marry you."
"You will marry me in Pernambuco."
"I will not because I may not. Oh, spare me any more of this! I cannot bear it! Have pity, dear!"
"Iris, let us at least look at the position calmly. Do you really think that fate's own decree should be set aside merely to keep David Verity out of the bankruptcy court?"
"I have given my promise, and those two men are certain I will keep it."
"Ah, they will release you. What then?"
"You do not know my uncle or Mr. Bulmer. Money is their god. I owe everything to my uncle. He rescued my mother and me from dire poverty. He gave us freely of his abundance. We have had our hour, dear. Its memory will never leave me. I shall think of you, dream of you, when, it may be, some other girl—oh, no, I do not mean

that! Philip, don't be angry with me today. You are wringing my heart!"
"I shall never give you up to any other man," he said. "I have won you by the sword, and, please God, I shall never give you up! Not while I live! Why, you yourself dragged me away from certain death when I was lying unconscious on the Andromeda's deck. A second time you saved not me alone, but the ten others who are left out of the twenty-two, by bringing us back to Grand-pere in the hour that our escape seemed to be assured had we put



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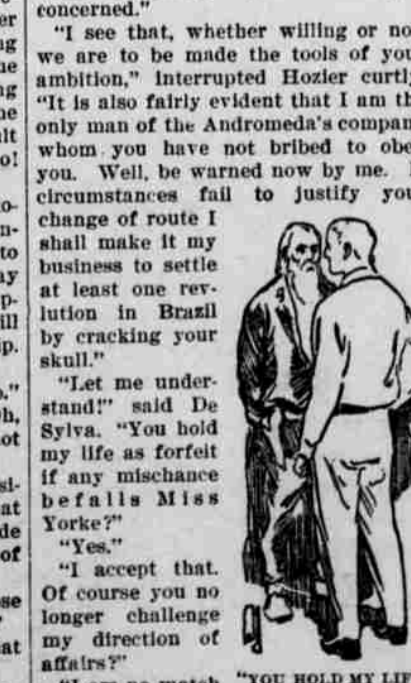
out to sea. We are more than quits, dear heart, when we strike a balance of mutual service. We are bound by a tie of comradeship that is denied to most. And what other man and woman now breathing can lay better claim than we to have been joined by the Almighty?"
The strange exigencies of their lives during the past two days had ordained that this should be Philip's first avowal of his feelings. Under the stress of overpowering impulse he had clasped Iris to his heart when they were parting on the island. In obedience to a stronger law than any hitherto revealed to her innocent consciousness the girl had flown to his arms when he came to the hut. And that was all their lovemaking—two blissful moments of delirium wrenched from a time of gaunt tragedy and followed by a few hours of self negation. Yet they sufficed—to the man—and the woman is never too ready to count the cost when her heart declares its passion.
"Give you up?" he muttered again. "No, Iris, not if Satan brought every dead Verity to aid the living one in his demand."
Coke, to whom tact was anathema, chose that unhappy instant to summon him to take charge of the ship.
"We're givin' Pernambuco the go-by. It's Macelo for us, quick as we can get there," said Coke.

Hozier was in no humor for conciliatory methods. He turned on his heel and walked straight to where De Sylva was leaning against the rails.
"Captain Coke tells me that we are not making for Pernambuco," he said, meeting the older man's penetrating gaze with a glance as firm and self-contained.
"That is what we have arranged," said Dom Corria.

"It does not seem to have occurred to you that there is one person on board this ship whose interests are vastly more important than yours, senator."
"I fancy there is a new move on foot. A gunboat is moored half a mile downstream. You missed her because your back was turned. She has steam up and could slip her cables in a minute. They saw her from the bridge, of course, but I did not report her, as there was a chance that my hail might be heard, and we came in so confidently that we are looked on as a local trader."
He took her by the arm with that masterful gentleness that is so comforting to a woman when danger is rife. They reached the bridge. Some sailors were lowering a boat as quietly as possible.
Dom Corria approached with outstretched hand.
"Goodby, Miss Yorke," he said. "I am leaving you for a few hours, not longer. When next we meet I ought to have a sure grip of the presidential ladder, and I shall climb quickly. Won't you wish me luck?"
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"I see that, whether willing or not, we are to be made the tools of your ambition," interrupted Hozier curtly. "It is also fairly evident that I am the only man of the Andromeda's company whom you have not bribed to obey you. Well, be warned by me. If circumstances fall to justify your change of route I shall make it my business to settle at least one revolution in Brazil by cracking your skull!"
"Let me understand," said De Sylva. "You hold my life as forfeit if any mischance befalls Miss Yorke?"
"Yes."
"I accept that. Of course you no longer challenge my direction of affairs?"
"I am no match for you in argument, senator, but I do want you to believe that I shall keep my part of the compact."
"I'm goin' to 'ave a nap," Coke announced. "Either you or Watts must take 'old. Which is it to be?"
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"Why are you here, Iris?" was all he said. She looked so bowed, so humbled, that he could not find it in his heart to reproach her for having avoided him earlier.
"I wanted to be near you," she whispered. "I—I am frightened, Philip. I am terrified by the unknown. Somehow on the rock our dangers were measurable; here we shall soon be swallowed up among a whole lot of people."
They heard Coke's gruff order to the watch to clear the falls of the jolly-boat. The User Fritz was going dead slow. On the starboard side were the lights of a large town, but the opposite shore was somber and vague.
"Are we going to land at once in a small boat?" said Iris timidly.
"I fancy there is a new move on foot. A gunboat is moored half a mile downstream. You missed her because your back was turned. She has steam up and could slip her cables in a minute. They saw her from the bridge, of course, but I did not report her, as there was a chance that my hail might be heard, and we came in so confidently that we are looked on as a local trader."
He took her by the arm with that masterful gentleness that is so comforting to a woman when danger is rife. They reached the bridge. Some sailors were lowering a boat as quietly as possible.
Dom Corria approached with outstretched hand.
"Goodby, Miss Yorke," he said. "I am leaving you for a few hours, not longer. When next we meet I ought to have a sure grip of the presidential ladder, and I shall climb quickly. Won't you wish me luck?"
"I wish you all good fortune, Dom Corria," said Iris. "May your plans succeed without bloodshed."
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