

The Sea Scourge

CHAPTER XVI.—(Continued.)

"Treachery! treachery!" replied the lieutenant, drawing a pistol from his belt. "Beware, my men! Arm, arm!" Langley's pistol was knocked from his grasp by the stranger, and on the next instant the lieutenant himself was lying prostrate. The rest of the pirate gang would have sprung to his assistance, but by this time the horsemen were upon them, and they had to look to themselves.

The struggle was a short one, though one of the pirates escaped—a young, stimple fellow, named Jack Martin. He seemed more inclined to use his legs than his arms, and he got off; but the others were quickly captured, and their arms pinioned behind them. Langley had arisen, and as soon as he could command himself he spoke:

"Why is this?" he asked, turning a flashing look upon his captor. "By what authority do you thus assault quiet people who are about their own business?"

"Ah, that remains to be proved. I will tell you the whole truth and then you can best judge whether any harm can come or not. The Governor of Nagasaki sent us here, and ordered us, if we found any one catching horses here, to take them and bring them to him."

"And do you mean to take us?"

"I do, most surely."

Upon this the prisoners were all mounted and secured in their seats, and the party started on. It was a strange piece of work, and so suddenly had it come upon them that the pirates knew not what to make of it. But to Nagasaki they had evidently got to go, and they made the best of it by hoping that horse stealing would be the only thing brought against them, for they felt sure that they could free themselves from that charge; but there were other things which, should they be brought against them, would rest more heavily upon them.

Buffo Burnington tried to beg off upon the ground that he had been in the country but a short time, and had been hired to catch horses by Mr. Laroon. He professed to be horrified at the idea of horse stealing, and assured his captor he wouldn't have engaged in the work had he dreamed that there was anything wrong connected with it.

"Your very face gives the lie to your words," said the officer, with a sarcastic smile; "but if you can make Pedro Manriques believe you, you may get clear."

"And who is he?" asked Buffo.

"Governor of Nagasaki."

Burnington said no more. In one hour the party had gained the small bay where the fishermen's huts were built, and here was found a small government vessel, on board which both men and horses were soon placed. Shortly afterward the prisoners were on their way beyond the power of escape—for some of them, thinking that the whole passage, of some ninety to a hundred miles, was to be made by land, had held strong hopes of getting away.

In the meantime Jack Martin had made his way back to the brig, where he had stated the strange event which had transpired. At first the pirates were frightened, fearing that they should all be taken, but when Martin came to assure them that Langley and his men were taken for horse-stealing, their fears were mostly removed.

Paul heard the whole story, and his suspicions at once fell upon Burnington. He remembered the letter he had disposed of, and which was directed to Pedro Manriques, and he had since learned that Manriques was the governor. But he had no idea of what it all meant. It was but another strange link in the mystic chain of circumstances that seemed to bind that dark-visaged man to his present position and to others about him. If Burnington had been the means of getting these men entrapped, he must mean something more by it than their mere apprehension for crime. And if this were the fact, then he must have meant from the first to be taken with them, for he had been very urgent of late to be allowed to accompany the shore parties, pretending that it did him much good to roam about on land.

But Paul's meditations were soon cut short by another cause. It was now near sundown, and just as the youth came up from the cabin, where he had been eating supper all alone, the captain's boat was seen coming down the river as swiftly as the oarsmen could pull. The captain was not there, and Paul's heart sank, for he feared that something ill had befallen Mary. The coxswain leaped on board the brig as soon as he came alongside, and moving at once up to where Paul stood, he said:

"You must go up to the castle immediately. The young lady is worse."

Paul rushed to the cabin, and, having possessed himself of every kind of medicine that could possibly be wanted, he hastened back and descended to the boat, and in a moment more he was on his way up the river.

CHAPTER XVII.

When Paul reached the castle, the first person he met was the faithful Otehewa.

"Fear not, my master," she said, in a tone that no one else could hear; "she is not much in danger. She has fainted again, and I made the captain believe that she would die if she did not have medicine. I knew he must send for you, then. Keep up a good heart, for you have some loyal friends who will not betray you. All is not lost yet."

The youth pressed Otehewa's hand with gratitude, and then hastened away to Mary's room. He found Mari Laroon by her bed, while the maiden seemed to be asleep. But his step aroused her,

and she opened her eyes. She smiled as she saw who had come, and, putting out her hand, she said:

"I am glad you have come, my brother."

Paul started at these last two words, for he had almost forgotten them. A dagger's point reached his heart. But he stopped not; he took the small white hand and raised it to his lips.

"How do you feel, Mary?" he asked, when he had taken a seat by her head, Laroon moving his own chair further down in order to allow him room.

"I am very weak, Paul."

Paul felt of her pulse for some moments, and then examined her tongue. After this he ran his hand over her brow and temples, and then said:

"Ah, Mary, you are very low, and you must have the utmost care. If you manage to keep quiet and easy, I think I can break up the fever."

The young surgeon found the circulation free, and after some reflection he resolved for the present to administer some light sedatives and watch their effect. This he accordingly did, and then he left his patient under the charge of Otehewa, with full directions for her treatment.

After this he and Laroon withdrew, and as soon as they reached the hall, Paul told the captain what had occurred to Mr. Langley and his party. At first Mari was dumb with astonishment; but soon his tongue found its use, and he questioned the youth upon every point; but the latter could only tell what he had heard from Jack Martin—"that the party had been captured by a band of soldiers, and that they had been accused of horse stealing."

"Why!" exclaimed Mari, vehemently, "not a single horse have I captured, or my men, that did not belong to me. There is some villainy in this."

After pondering upon the thing for some time he resolved to leave Mary wholly in the charge of Paul, and return at once to the brig to see if he could not hunt up something more concerning the business.

On the following morning Paul found Mary much better, and he felt assured that she would have no fever if she remained quiet. About 10 o'clock Mari came up, and after he had seen the invalid concluded to let Paul remain to attend her, for he had planned to go to Nagasaki and learn why his men had been arrested.

Accordingly Laroon hastened away, and Paul was once more in company with the being he so wildly, so fondly loved.

That evening as the sun touched the western horizon and poured its flood of golden sheen into the room, Paul sat by the bed and held Mary's hand within his own. He sat thus for some time in silence, when the maiden spoke:

"Paul," she said, in a low, tremulous voice—trembling from emotion rather than weakness—"you are not happy at having found a sister."

The youth started, and for a moment his eyes were bent to the floor. But soon he looked up, and while an expression of more than common sadness rested on his handsome features, he replied:

"It is not what I have found that moves me. It is a holy blessing to own a sister's love. But what have I lost?"

"None of my love, Paul," quickly cried Mary. "I can love you ever, my brother."

"Oh, Mary, if you love me, speak not that name. Call me Paul—call me—call me—Love. Oh, call me anything but that!"

"And do you not love your sister?" murmured the stricken girl, in soft, plaintive sadness.

"Yes, yes, oh, yes; I love you more than I can tell. But do not call me—brother. Not now—not now. At some time when my heart has arisen from its grief, I may bear it. But not now."

The youth pressed the white hand he held to his lips, and the tears coursed freely down his cheeks. In this position was he when Otehewa entered the room.

"My master," she said, addressing Paul, "you must not fear, for all is not yet lost. I have been long prepared for any emergency, and Mari Laroon cannot succeed in any plan of wickedness he may undertake, save to keep my mistress here a prisoner; and I do not think he can do that."

Paul returned her a look of gratitude, but he made her no immediate reply in words. The sun was now down, and the shades of evening were gathering about the place. The youth saw that his fair patient needed repose, and leaving with Otehewa instructions how to administer the medicine, he left the apartment and walked out into the garden, and there he paced to and fro until long after the darkness had come.

"She my sister!" he murmured to himself, stopping suddenly and clasping his hands together. "I know the man can lie—most basely lie; but this may be true. Alas, I fear it is for my own memory holds some such picture. Well do I remember of calling her my sister, yet it may be false. The man with whom I lived was not my father, for Burnington has told me as much; and then I remember that I called him uncle. Oh, why has this come to blast my life plan? Why has this heavy hand of anguish fallen on me? Burnington might tell me something, but he is my enemy—and he is a prisoner, besides."

Paul stopped, for at that instant he felt a light touch upon his shoulder. He turned and saw Otehewa.

"What seek ye here?" he quickly asked.

"To tell you a secret," answered the dark-skinned girl, at the same time casting her eyes quickly about.

"A secret?" repeated Paul.

"Ay," whispered Otehewa; "and when you know it you may be on your guard."

though you must love me more than yourself. Mari Laroon means to make my mistress his wife as soon as he comes back."

"What!" ejaculated the young surgeon, starting as though he had been shot. "How know you this?"

"Because I heard him say so; and he has sent for a priest. The priest will come here and remain until the maiden is well enough to be married."

Paul started away with his hands clasped. The girl hesitated a moment, and then she added in a thrilling whisper:

"Wait until the time comes. Even the base man's life is not worth that maiden's happiness."

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was just a week from the time of his leaving that Mari Laroon reached the castle on his return. His first movement was to learn the condition of Mary. He found her not only convalescent, but almost wholly recovered, and the peculiar sparkle of his eyes told how much inward satisfaction he found in the fact. Although it is near sundown, the captain had his boat called and manned, for he desired to visit the brig, to see how matters were progressing there. Paul's heart beat quick when he heard this order, for he feared that he should be forced to accompany his commander; but such was not the case. Mari simply told him that he should return before long, and then went away.

Paul now felt anxious and uneasy. He had seen Mary recover with much joy, but ever and anon that joy had been clouded by the fears which Otehewa's revelation had brought up. But now those fears assumed a palpable form. The dark spirit had returned—the lovely maiden was strong again—and within the dwelling there had come a man whose very look and air of sanctity struck him with dread. It was the priest.

At 10 o'clock the captain returned, but he did not again see Mary that night. During the latter part of the night the wind arose, and before morning heavy drops of rain began to fall. When daylight came a severe storm had set in, and before noon the wind blew almost a hurricane; but Laroon did not make himself uneasy about the brig, for he knew that the tops of the hills would have to blow off before the gale touched his vessel; and besides this, he knew that Storms and Ben Marton would know as well what to do in case of danger as he would himself.

The wind came from the northward and eastward, and before night the atmosphere had become really cold—so cold that Mary shuddered under the influence of the searching blast, and Laroon ordered a fire to be built in the great sitting room; and after this was done, Paul and Mary repaired thither to supper, the captain having invited them to eat with him.

The meal had been eaten, and the table moved back, and both Paul and Mary had taken seats near the blazing fire, when there came an alarm from the great gate. Mari Laroon's first emotion was one of fear, for he showed it in his every motion; but he soon overcame that, and by the time the porter entered, he was quite calm.

"What is it?" he asked of the servant.

"A stranger, sir, who asks hospitality for the night."

"Then let him in."

The servant withdrew, and ere long the door of the sitting room was opened, and the stranger was ushered in.

He was a medium-sized man, or rather of medium height; but in his frame he was more full and bulky than usual, though not tending at all to obesity. His features were regular and handsome, his eyes of a dark hazel, and very brilliant, his hair a dark auburn in color, with much mixture of silver, and in age he appeared about fifty. The only peculiarity about him was a peculiar squint of the eyes; or rather a tendency to a crossing glance, one of the eyes turning differently from its neighbor. But this was not noticed at all times; it was only when he looked sideways that it was very apparent. Further than this he seemed to be a man who had seen much trouble, and his features had assumed a melancholy cast.

"Have you traveled far?" asked Mari, after the stranger had become seated.

"From Nagasaki since yesterday," returned he. "This is the place of Captain Laroon, I think? Are you the gentleman?"

"I am, sir," returned Mari, beginning to eye the stranger with interest. "What may I call your name?"

"Fox, sir—James Fox."

"Ah—an American? From what part did you come?" asked the pirate, now showing palpable signs of uneasiness.

"From the east."

Mari Laroon was not the only one who watched that man with more than usual interest. Paul also eyed him anxiously, and once or twice when Fox spoke the youth started as though some long-forgotten memory had suddenly come to him. But the guest seemed to notice nothing of this. He had simply examined the countenances of those present when he first sat down.

The servants were called and directed to set the table; and while this was being done, Laroon engaged his guest in conversation.

"You may deem me over curious," said Mari, after some remarks had been passed about the weather, and so on; "but we seldom see a traveler on this road, save our fishermen and peasants."

"Oh, it's natural that you should be curious about it," quietly answered the other, "and I'm sure I should be so myself. It was pleasant when I left Nagasaki and I only came to look at the country, and perhaps find some opening for business."

"Business? What business would you find here?"

"Hunting for jewels."

"You'll find but few here. None at all, I should think."

(To be continued.)

It is getting the kite on a string that makes it soar.



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