

Other adventures through which these two men had passed dwindled into insignificance when compared with the one upon which they were now fully embarked.

They could only hope and pray for the full measure of success which their daring warranted them in expecting.

Fortunately the night was dark, and it would take the keenest of eyes to have detected the presence of the boat that glided like a spectre barque over the water of Santander harbour.

Sounds came from the shore, such as may be heard from Spanish cities far into the small hours of the night—the strains of music, of laughter and loud voices.

But silence seemed to surround the little steamer that lay at anchor in the quiet waters after buffeting the stormy deep.

Nearer they drew, and those who were so deeply interested held their very breath, for fear lest a sudden hail from on board might bring about discovery and possibly ruin for their plans.

It was already arranged that in case such a contretemps occurred they were to advance to the side of the steamer, addressing the man on guard in Spanish, which the marquis was easily capable of doing, announcing themselves officers of the port, bent upon their duties, who wished to come aboard.

Once alongside, they could speedily clamber over the low waist of the little steamer, whether invited or not.

As to the rest, they were armed, and meant to carry out their object through the heavens fell.

Men in times past have gone forth upon all sorts of crusades—in pursuit of the Holy Grail; to seek the Golden Fleece; to redeem the Holy City from the Saracen usurper, and hosts of other like causes have drawn them into the jaws of danger; but, in all probability, there never was an expedition planned that better deserved success than the venture upon which they were now embarked.

Closer still, and no harm. Every moment the captain knew meant more life to their plans, and in his heart the passage of each segment of time was marked by a fervent expression of thanksgiving. *benenberx oba en*

It seemed as though all the nervous intensity of feeling, of anxiety, hope and fear were concentrated in this small space of time, and that he lived long years in a brief minute.

Now they were under the overhanging stern of the steamer, and all seemed well thus far.

The sailors were to manage the task of using the chain, which they had carried, so that it would be wound about the propeller with the first few revolutions made.

They had been selected on account of their knowledge of such marine matters and were well coached by the Scotch skipper ere starting forth.

It was well done. Not a single clanking sound betrayed them.

The chain was lowered into the water until from certain indications they knew it lay upon the propeller, and then it was made fast above so that no ordinary jerk would dislocate it.

So far everything was lovely, and if this good luck only continued no one could complain.

Their next task required an abundance of nerve, which, fortunately, was not lacking.

It is a recognised fact that in any part of the world, should men who are not empowered by law attempt to board a vessel at anchor in a harbour, they are looked upon in the light of pirates and dealt with accordingly.

Hence it was taking their lives in their hands when they came to boarding the steamer in this surreptitious manner.

Were the danger ten times as great not one would have wavered.

The marquis had been using his eyes as well as the darkness allowed, and he saw that the steamer was built in a manner that made the task of boarding her more difficult than he had anticipated.

They might be compelled to rely upon some chance rope dangling over the side.

The sailors knew what to expect, and foot by foot the boat was worked along close to the hull of the steamer until the groping hand of the man

who searched came in contact with what they sought, a rope, by means of which any sailor ashore could, upon arrival at the vessel, clamber aboard.

There is something in knowing the tricks of the trade—set a thief to catch a thief—the sailors who served under the Scotch captain were men of great Britain, but they could give a shrewd guess as to what these Jack Spaniards would do upon reaching a home port.

At any rate, that rope was worth a thousand times its weight in gold to them, and the marquis has it occupying to-day the most honoured position upon the wall of his library.

He was the first to take hold of it after the sailor had fastened one end to a thwart.

Fortunately Jack Overton had lost none of his agility, and he passed over the rail of the steamer in a jiffy.

Crouching there he awaited the coming of the others, ready to defend the expedition if necessary to the bitter end.

Then came the man from Scotland Yard, who also made the passage easily enough.

With Livermore it was a serious business, for he had accumulated much avoirdupois since his last equatorial tramp through the African wilderness. However, the same game spirit as of yore resided in his body, and while he puffed considerably, making sounds that Jack feared would draw attention from the watch, the discovery did not come, and he was given the privilege of assisting his friend aboard.

It was lucky, indeed, that such a lack of discipline prevailed on board the Spanish boat. Perhaps this was partly due to the effects of the recent storm, the men being completely exhausted.

At any rate, no matter from what it sprang, our friends were only too glad to accept the favour and be thankful.

They began to move toward the stern of the boat, seeking the cabin, for it was there those they sought would be found if still on board the boat.

This latter point was a question which gave the marquis a cold chill when it came before his mind—he dreaded lest the Spanish woman had ere now carried out her diabolical plot to rid herself of those who stood between the object she sought to attain and herself.

Fortune favoured them in that they were able to reach the cabin without meeting any one. Looking back at the venture and calculating how many chances there were against such success, the marquis was always amazed at their luck. Perhaps they were favoured by Providence because of the sacred nature of their mission.

It was pleasant to think so at least.

Once at the saloon door, they looked its length without discovering a single soul.

Evidently those whom they sought must be in their state-rooms opening off the cabin, and there was nothing left to them but to open these, one at a time, to discover the truth.

This was the crucial time.

The marquis, bold enough to take advantage of the slender opportunity fortune had granted them, stepped to the first door and opened it.

Was ever a prayer answered more quickly?

The light from the cabin entering disclosed Fedora seated on a chair, having refused to retire to the berth after the terror of the last two nights.

She was awake, and the astonishment felt at seeing the marquis almost caused her to faint.

He advanced to her side and said in a low but earnest tone:

—Do not cry out or all is lost! We have come across the water to save you. He is close at hand—your husband. Come to him now, and please utter no sound above a whisper.

Then she suffered him to lead her out, not sure that it was a dream or some delusion.

There stood the captain awaiting his own, and with a cry she could not repress she threw herself into his extended arms.

The marquis rightly feared that discovery was now sure to come, and realising that not a second man he had begged Fedora to tell him if she had a companion in her captivity.

Unable to speak, she pointed to a door opposite to the stateroom she had occupied, and as Jack turned to it he saw Mazette standing there, with

pale face and dishevelled hair—but, Mazette, alive, thank Heaven!

Another instant and he had clasped her to his heart—it was one of those moments when words are useless to convey the sentiments of the soul, for Mazette knew he loved her, even as she had for years adored her former comrade and instructor in Bohemia.

No doubt this made a charming picture, and the detective could not but admire what was spread before his eyes; at the same time he realised that while there was a serpent in Eden's Garden, so this Paradise would very likely be disturbed.

Nor was he at all out of the way in his calculations.

Just as the marquis, overwhelmed by his sentiments, threw the mask aside and betrayed his love for Mazette by straining the miniature painter to his heart, another door flew open and there issued forth a figure that in its warlike demeanour might have stood for a modern Joan of Arc—a figure that, at sight of the marquis and Livermore, uttered savage little cries in Spanish, and with blazing eyes and heaving bosom rushed toward the former, waving desperately in her hand a revolver, which he knew full well she had learned how to use under the palms of Gautier, since he himself, as wretched luck would have it, had taught her the first principles of marksmanship.

(To be concluded.)

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