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Scott's Sarsaparilla is a Boon.

MONTREAL, August 29th, 1895.

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Yours sincerely,
Hortense Gavilliere.

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AFTER ✳ ✳ THE FACT

By E. W. HORNUNG.

(Concluded.)

His face darkened. As he showed me his teeth I thought I had never seen so vile a mouth. It had degenerated dreadfully since boyhood.

"Take care," he snarled; "you're being done pretty well so far. You've the best state room aboard, and the cuddy tucker's all right. But don't you forget we've got a hold and irons and rats and rancid pork as well!"

He turned on his heel, and I walked to the binnacle. Next moment he joined me there, dropping a hand upon my shoulder.

"East-by-south-a-quarter-east," said he; "we cleared the Heads at last—bound for Rio Grande, or something like it—and that chunk on the port bow is Wilson promontory. So now you know; and look here, Beetle, old chap, you've been good to me, I'm hanged if I'll be rough to you. Did you really think I was going to do as we said? My good fellow, how could you? See here, Beetle. The yacht's a well-known yacht; Watson's a well-known yachtsman, and he was in Melbourne to divert suspicion the day I did the trick. He stands in for his share. Why not stand in yourself? You've earned your little bit, if anybody has!"

"You promised not to be rough on me," said I, wearily "That's rough. Have you got it all aboard?"

"Have I not! Every penny piece!"

"And who's Watson?"

I was at once introduced to the big man in blue, with the superfluous comment: "I believe you've met before. Cap. Watson owns and skips ths ship, and I skip and own the money; I'm purser, so to speak, but there'll be fair do's at the end of the voyage. You'd much better stand in, Beetle. The captain and I are both quite clear on that point."

"MISS I'ANSON!" I FAIRLY SHOUTED.

"Oh, so am I!" cried I, ironically. "When one of you two has knifed the other for his share, I intend sticking to the one who's left!"

"I consider that remark," said the captain, coloring, "in the worst of taste, and if you weren't a friend of Mr. Deedes I should kick you off my quarter deck."

Mr. Deedes looked thunderous, but said nothing

"Oh, come," said I; "if we can't have our joke what can we have? I admit, if there's been any truth in what I said, any chance or possibility of truth, I should have merited a visitation from the captain's boots; but as I was talking arrant nonsense, what did it matter?"

I expected a blow for that, and tried to look as though I did not, being extremely anxious to return it with effect. I was in fact the slave all this time of emotional cross-currents which made my revulsion from these villains the stronger because it was not continuous. I had more than tolerated them at first, but all at once, found myself desiring hold and rats and irons rather than a continuance of their society. At this moment, however, the old and evil-looking steward was to be seen carrying dishes to the house. The sight appealed to me in another place, and I will own to having changed my manner with some abruptness and to adding an apologetic word on top of that.

"All right," said Deedes, savagely. "You've said about enough, and in the cuddy I'll trouble you to hold your tongue altogether. The mate's asleep in the other stateroom. Look out you don't lose yours! Look out this isn't your first and last meal up here!"

After breakfast I smoked a pipe in the cross-trees and looked in vain for a passing funnel. There were but few and insignificant sails in sight, and those in the wrong direction. The sea was like a great blue plate, the schooner a white ant crawling in the center. The wind had freshened; it had always been fair; white horses rode the sea, but the wavelets were never waves; but for the heads we might have been in Corio bay. Should I ever see it again, I wondered, with the straight street loping to the brink? And I wondered if Deedes had the same thought as he leaned over the taffrail studying the wake; or had he more pangs and fears than he pretended, and were we less safe?

Presently he turned, exchanged a few words with the captain, who was doing a short trick at the wheel, disappeared for a moment in the house, and then came aloft as if to join me. He did join me, but without a word. He was armed with a telescope, but not, I thought, with the cool assurance of the early morning. And so I left him, perched against the sky, sweeping the horizon with his glass, a prey poisonous apprehensions which were meat and drink to me.

Yet my eyes were good, and they had descried no sign of sail or smoke to windward. Why then this change in our bold buccaneer? It puzzled me as I reached the deck and looked up at Deedes once more with my hand upon the brilliant brass knob of the house door; but the puzzle solved itself as I opened it and stepped inside. Ethel I'Anson was seated at the table.

CHAPTER V.

"Miss I'Anson!" I fairly shouted.

"Yes, it is I. He said I should not see you. Do go—do go before he comes!"

"Go!" I cried. "Not see you! I shall see you and stay with you until I'm dragged out by force. That is," I added, suddenly, "unless you are here of your own free will. Of course, in that case——"

"No, no!" cried the girl. "By trickery! By wicked, heartless, abominable lies! Nothing else. O, my God, nothing else would have brought me to this!"

"Then we're in the same boat with a vengeance" I said, seating myself on the opposite side of the table. "Tell me how it happened and quickly. He has talked already of putting me in irons. He'll do it, after this!"

"Oh, where am I to begin? There is so much to tell—but he shall not do it!" vowed Miss I'Anson. "He shall not separate the only two honest people in the ship! Oh, yes it was lies, but lies so clever and so fiendish! Let me tell you all! I'll try and be quick. He has been in the bank about a year. You know him perhaps better than I. They say you were at school together. You must know his good points Mr. Bower. I mean the points that would attract a girl. They attracted me. I made a fool of myself. You must have heard about it in Geelong. Well it's quite true; but it wasn't yesterday, or the day before, or last week. It was in the very beginning. I got over it long ago. But he has always fascinated me—you know him—you can understand? Well, when the bank was robbed I knew he had done it; I can't tell you how I knew, but I did. His voice was not real. I have been made love to in that voice —there! Well, I went to his rooms. He lunched there every day. I saw his landlady. He had come in to lunch as usual, and said he would ring when he wanted his pudding. He did ring, but was longer than usual in ringing; that was all. His room was the back room of the house on the ground floor; the landlady lives in front; quite a short time ago it was the other way about, and he suggested the alterations. He also made her promise to keep the blinds down in the kitchen, and the windows shut, to keep out the sun in the heat of the day. He could make her do what he liked. Now listen The bank garden adjoins his landlady's garden. I found soil on his window sill, soil on the woodwork. This was in the afternoon when the excitement was at its height; he was in the bank. I came away, making the woman promise not to say a word; but she broke her promise that night, and that was what started the hue and cry. Meanwhile I wrote him a note telling him I knew all, refusing to see him, but solemnly undertaking that if he would put a note where he had once put other notes (because my mother never liked him), and say in it where the money was, nobody should ever know from me that he had touched it. Remember, Mr. Bower, I was once fond of him; nay, you did much as I did yourself; you will understand. He has told me all that passed between you; how he gave you the note to put in the tennis pavillion. And what do you think he said in it? That if I would come to the beach at ten last night he would tell me where the money was. He did tell me. He told me it was sunk among the rocks at Queenscliff. He told me he was escaping in the Mollyhawk—this vessel—but he would land me at Queenscliff and show me where the place was; because he meant to take gold, but the notes he dared not. It was the notes that mattered to my father and the bank. They were nine-tenths of the stolen sum. Oh, I know I was a fool to believe or listen to a word he said, I should have had him put in prison at the first. But I am punished as I deserve; they will break their hearts, they will never get over it. And here I am—and here I am!"

She broke down, breathless, and I glanced toward the door. Deedes stood there in my ducks, his face the blacker by contrast; he glared at me, and his evil mouth worked spasmodically; but now more than ever I seemed to discern some foreign trouble in his blazing eye; and instead of ordering me out of the deckhouse he slammed the moor upon us both. Ethel I'Anson whipped her face from her hands.

"That's all right," said I. "He's seen us and he doesn't care. There's something else upon his nerves; when thieves fall out, you know—perhaps they've done so already. I feel hopeful: it's bound to come. There's just one thing I don't size down. I know why I am here; he wouldn't kill me, and alive on land I'd never have let him clear the heads That's why I am here; but why are you? You didn't know about the schooner?"

"No, but—how can I tell you?"

"Don't," said I, for she was clearly in a new distress.

"I must! He wants to marry me—so he says. He never wanted before, but I did not betray him; I have saved him—he will have it so—so I am to be his wife! Oh, Mr. Bower, it is the worst insult of all! I told him so just before you came in."

"Then that was the trouble," said I. "It rather disppoints me; I am counting on a row between those two. But it will come. Cheer up, Miss I'Anson; let him leave me out of irons twenty-four hours longer, and I'll play a hand myself—for you and the bank!"

And so I talked, trying with all my might to comfort this sweet child in her extremity. She was little more; 19, she told me; there were older sisters married, and a brother gone home to Cambridge. He would have to leave there now; and who would pay his passage back to Melbourne? The robbery seemed to spell certain ruin to the I'Ansons, at all events in their own belief; but now at least we knew who had drawn the cartridges from the bank revolver; and I fancied they all exaggerated the element of personal responsibility. I did my best to reassure Miss Ethel upon the point; nor did I leave a comfortable word unsaid that I could think of; and noon, and afternoon, found us talking still across the cuddy table. Luncheon in this pirates' craft was evidently a movable feast, to-day indefinitely postponed. Ethel looked at her watch and found it after three o'clock; we had thought it one; but about half-past three the house door was flung open and in strode Deedes. He did not look at us, but snatched a repeating rifle out of a locker, and would have gone without a word but for Ethel I'Anson.

The girl was terrified. "What are you going to do with it?" she cried; and he paused in the doorway, filling it with his broad shoulders, so that I could see nothing but the sky without.

"There's a big bird in our wake—another Mollyhawk!" said Deedes, as I thought with a lighter look. "I'm going to have pots at it, that's all."

"Cruel always," said the girl, as we hear shot after shot in quick succession. But I went to the door, and then turned back as if with an altered mind. I had found it locked.

Ere I could regain my seat a new thing happened. A bullet came clean through the deckhouse, passed over Ethel's head, and must have abode in my brain had I sat a minute longer where I had been sitting for hours.

"Coward!" gasped the girl; but only with her word came the report.

"The chase!" I shouted. "Down on the floor I with you—flat down—that was a government bullet!" and on the cabin floor we crouched.

Voices hailing us were now plainly audible. But Deedes vouchsafed no answer, save with his Winchester, and from the spitting of a revolver (doubtless handled by the captain) I gathered we were at pretty close quarters. So the chase had been going on for hours; that was why we two in the house had been left undisturbed and dinnerless; but what amazed me most was the evident good discipine on deck. We must stand some chance; my soul sickened at the thought; it must be canvas that was after us, not steam; but I would not look out to see; my brave comrade would only remain where she was on condition I did the same. Lastly, every man aboard the schooner, myself excepted, must center his hopes, perhaps his designs, upon the nineteen thousand and odd pounds that lay snug somewhere bewteen her keels on and her trucks.

I have done livelier things than lie there listening to the shots; many more had struck the house, and even where we lay there was no superfluous safety; but my comrade bore herself throughout with incredible spirit, and made a sweet, strange picture, there on that matted floor. The sun streamed in through the skylight, and the schooner's motion was such that the girl's face was now bathed in the rays, and anon lighted only by its own radiance. I did not know how I liked it best; nor do I to this day, although I see her always as I saw her then, her blue eyes bent on mine, the kind of look with which a man might aspire to meet his death. Her very hand was cool.

The firing on both sides continued intermittently; but once we heard a very heavy thud upon our deck, and the revolver spat no more.

"That's not Deedes," said I shaking my head. "I only wish it was."

"Don't say that," my comrade answered; "it would be too dreadful! He is not fit to die; he has fine qualities—you know it yourself—and could play a man's part yet in the world." Even as she spoke the door was unlocked, flung open, and Deedes himself stood looking down upon us across his folded arms. I dare say we cut an ignominious figure enough, crouching there upon the cabin floor. Deedes looked very sick and pale, but the sight of us elicited a sardonic smile.

"There will be no more fighting. Watson's stiff. I've struck my flag. Your father will be aboard in a minute, Ethel."

"My father!"

"Yes." said Deedes, leaning back against a bulkhead, with his arms still folded. "It's a pilot's cutter—the first thing handy, I suppose—with the police and your father aboard her. One word before he comes. Once you'd have come fast enough to my arms. Ethel—I'm done for—come to them now!"

He unfolded and flung them wide as he spoke; a great look lit his face, half-mocking, half-sublime; and down my

"GET UP!" SAID HE. "THERE WILL BE NO MORE FIGHTING."

duck jacket, where his arms had been, a dark stream trickled to the deck. Before I could get to him he fell in a white heap under our eyes.

Deedes was dead. Watson was dead. Two constables in the cutter were badly hit; and with their ghastly burden the little ships tacked home in consort to Port Philip Heads.

It was midnight when we saw the lights. The bank manager and I stood together on the cutter's deck, he with a brace of heavy bags between his heels. His daughter was down below, but the thought of her troubled him still. As he said, the money was the bank's, and it was safe; but his daughter was his own, and this scandal would attach forever to her name. I denied it hotly, but the old man would have it so.

"Don't tell me," he grumbled. "I know the world, and my daughter will step ashore with something unpleasantly like a slur upon her name."

"Then it won't be for long," I at last retorted. "I meant to keep it until we got there; but with your permission, sir, Ethel will step ashore my affianced wife!

THE END.

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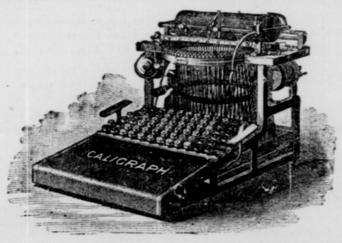

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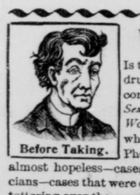

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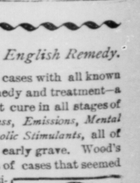

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