

THE GOOD SHIP "MOHOCK"

W. OLARK RUSSELL

"What do they intend to do with him?" I asked.

"I expect," said Monsignor, "that they have kept him to help them to navigate the ship. None of the fellows I saw looked educated and qualified as navigators."

"You'll find that's it," said the grasshopper. "But will he navigate the ship?" he proceeded with excitement. "Ought he to lift his sextant, or take a single peep at his barometer unless under circumstances which will provide for our safety and arrival in a reasonable time in America?"

"Trust him to know his business," said Monsignor, gently. "You are right, madam. It is comforting to know that he is on board. Yet what must be his feelings? His crew sent adrift, his ship captured, her course altered, himself a prisoner! He uprolled his eyes till nothing showed but the whites, and Mr. Macbride groaned in sympathy with that fine expressive face of misery."

At this moment the wiry man thrust his head into the skylight, and called in his hoarse note:

"Below there! Is Miss Hayes amongst ye?"

I started and felt myself turn ashen, yet I went at once to the table and looked up and said, "What do you want?"

"The captain wishes to have a talk along with you, miss," answered the fellow, persevering in his voice of studied hoarseness. "In plain words, we've given him his choice, and he wants you to help him to decide. I'll open the doors if you'll come up."

He withdrew his head.

"This is no ruse, I hope," cried the Colonel. "Miss Hayes is a fine young woman, and by thunder the ladies must be respected and protected, first and foremost." And now he seemed in earnest, for he sprang to his feet with his face full of blood, and a wild look at the frame where the man's head had been.

"I don't think Miss Hayes has any need to be afraid," said the hard-faced lady. "Pray consider," said she, addressing the others. "It's her stepfather who sends for her."

I went to my cabin without more ado and put on my hat and jacket, then knocked upon the doors; they were immediately opened by the wiry man who, on my stopping on deck, securely closed them again, by some arrangement of staples and padlock. I felt exceedingly frightened when the doors were closed and I found myself alone, that is, the only woman. The western light was a blaze of splendor, and the ship bowed stately before the breeze in the royal dress of crimson the sunset draped her with. Seven or eight fellows stood about the decks in two or three. One grasping a musket guarded the main hatch. I saw no other sentry. I sent one quick look seaward in search of the boat, but out in the direction she had been heading for, it was all melting dark blue water, flash with red gleams slipping from one crest to another, with the two sail on the verge of the deep showing full breasted, and as large again as from the cabin window.

The wiry man said roughly, "It'll be all right with them. One of those ships has shifted her helm; to pick the boat up. Now you'd better come along and see the captain. Us men are impatient and want him to decide quickly."

Thus speaking he led the way into the forepart of the ship.

CHAPTER VI

THE CAPTAIN VISITS THE PASSENGERS

The range of the ship's deck looked strange with the fresh crew of sunburned burly rogues; the 'tween-deck folk were under hatches, and the fellow who guarded them glared grimly at me as I passed. Possibly he was the hideous man the Colonel had spoken of. He squinted, and had a bare lip and red hair, and a huge knob of tanned wood doubled the girth of the neck under his left ear. His face, almost to the concealment of his eyes, was covered with small crawling red warts.

The others seemed of the average type of seamen, or rather of boatmen; you may see such men leaning along-shore against capstans, anchor-bitts, public-house fronts. They were variously attired, one in a mottled cap, another in a rusty wide-awake, here a pea-jacket, there a thick jersey. They trudged in short walks, their hands for the most part buried in their breeches' pockets, their backs bumped. A big deck-house stood behind or about the foremast. The after part was the ship's galley, and the fore division contained the boatswain's, sailmaker's, and carpenter's berths. The wiry man went to a door on the starboard side of this house, and, after knocking upon it, slipped it open, revealing in its grooves:

Here, the lady, an old lady's face, a woman of a certain age, with a rough, wrinkled face, and when I had entered the room, she looked at me with a stare, and I saw that she was the same woman who had been in the cabin with me, and I was rather bigger than an average salmon

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