

# Love Kept Its Faith;

Or, The Girl With the Nut Brown Hair and Dreamy Eyes.

## CHAPTER XIX.

Covered by an entanglement of blanket shreds and counterpane rags, The Captain stretched his lanky length upon his shakedown and stared through the attic skylight into the eye of the moon. In this there was nothing unusual, for much of The Captain's meditation was done by night, with the darkness to help in mental concentration; but now The Captain's eyes were shiny, his lips twitchy, his whole attitude effervescent, and these conditions were decidedly above the common. An explanation of this disturbance centered in the fact that that very afternoon, while engaged in Michael Strang's business at Routendale Harbor, he had come face to face with Margery Manesty as she passed on her way to Cap'n Dan's house, with the additional circumstance of a look, which, although merely one of curiosity, yet burned into him as one of condemnation and reproach.

"It's not fair," he argues softly to himself, "that I should put David Graham right now; he doesn't deserve it. He'd a good name, a mountain o' luv, the promise of one of the bonniest lasses in Cumberlan'—and all the lot he's dropped like dirt for the sake of a heap of miserable money. Now he's lost the luv and the respect and the peace—and why should I set myself to give them back to him? If a man gets what he's worked for why should he grumble?"

"And yet there's something wrong. That notion doesn't seem half as sound now as it did yesterday. The licks have got to be shared—David Graham's carrying a weary load of his own shouldering—but Margery Manesty's being simply crushed to the ground by the weight of it. I never bargained for that. I've got to do something; I can't bide the memory of that look I got at Routendale Harbor, Lord, why should men be given the power of joy and sorrow—we're none of us fit to lay a finger on it."

"Anyhow, I've settled one point—mum's no longer the word. But I'll not go to him with my tale—whatever I do or say I'll deal with her. The question is—how?"

Having thus conceded the principle of intervention, The Captain applied himself to the selection of method. At the end of half an hour he fixed a thoughtful gaze upon the skylight and murmured—

"That'll do fine. Treat her according to my own rule—help her if she shows that she deserves help. Yes, I will. If Margery Manesty'll do a bit to set David Graham

straight, then I'll do all I can to give her back the happiness she's parted with. Bargain, eh, Captain? Point number two settled; now for the last stroke."

Then The Captain threw the bed coverings over his head and positively rolled upon the mattress in an ecstasy of mirth.

"It's a squelcher, this, an' no mistake. Oh, Michael Strang, Michael Strang, I've rigged up a bonny bit o' music for you to dance to, and even when the fiddles have stopped you'll not be able to drop your jig. Oh, it's a bonny bit o' music, a fine, lively tune, and the name I've given to it is—Fear."

A little later The Captain softly laughed himself to sleep.

## CHAPTER XX.

Beyond a doubt, Michael Strang was deeply disturbed. Furrowed brow, lowered lids and puckered lips all conspired in the creation of a frown. Stronger proof still of mental distraction, a little dab of color showed redly upon his yellow cheeks. In his hand he held a scrap of dirty paper, on the floor lay an envelope of corresponding hue, and his treatment of the one suggested that it contained but the fraction of a secret, and that behind its message lay something that his eyes might not yet behold. Again and again and again he read the note, then threw it upon the table, but only to instantly snatch it up and once more peruse its three lines of pencilled scrawl—

"Be careful. D. G. may get his peepers opened. Am lying by on the Hercules. Expect you to-night at 9 o'clock.—M.M."

He turned the paper over, though he knew that its underside was bare of sign in pencil or in pen; rescued the envelope from the floor and ripping it open, examined it inside and out.

"Curse the fool who wrote it," he exclaimed; "who can he be, and what has he got hold of? M.M.—not a soul in Allerdale I can fit the letters on to. D. G.'s clear as daylight. D. stands for David and G. stands for Graham. And he knows something, eh? I wonder what and how much. I wish now that I'd—"

"Shaf! What a ninny I'm going into. Why didn't I see it at first. It's Tom Tinion, and no one else. The Noah would come in last night, and this is a dodge to frighten a bit more money out of me. But I'll show him. And aboard the Hercules, too, actually got the

check to invite me to a blackmailing meeting on board one of my own ships. A likely thing, indeed. I'll not go, I'll not—not another penny shall he have.

"And yet"—this after a few moments further thought—"if it's Tinion why this secrecy, why aboard the Hercules, and why M. M.? Besides, if it should be Tinion there's no telling what he may do. What if he took his secret to David Graham?" Strang positively shivers with apprehension. "It's worth money in that quarter. Graham would pay and pay handsomely, and, fool though he is, Tinion knows it. And I won't be baulked now; I've got him down in the mud and he shan't wriggle out of its slime. I suppose I'd better go—yes, there's no help for it—I'd better go."

Down upon the harbor he blunders on to the wrong side of the mooring posts, stumbles against the tautened ropes that bind the reluctant ships to the land, curses them, and crosses again into the zone where safety lies.

Now he can see the triple lights for whose gleaming triangle the home-coming mariner looks and longs, now the briny breath of the Solway meets him, and here, at last, is the Hercules.

The Hercules, be it known, is one of Allerdale's derelicts, and years ago her name should have been expunged from the register. In Michael Strang's lexicon, however, the word "derelict" had no place, and one of the counts in the indictment against him was that he had never been known to hand a vessel over to the knackers.

Bending low over the harbor-side, Strang peers with apprehensive eyes upon the deck, but the night lies thick and heavy, and all detail is blended into mass.

Once, twice, thrice he walks the length of the ship, fore and aft he searches the hull for glimmer of lantern ray, but finds none, and finally he grips the mizen shrouds and swings himself on board.

What shall he do now? Await on deck the coming of his man or go below? Better seek the cabin, the deck is too open; there conversation may be overheard. So he shoots back lock and hood and doors and is swallowed in the maw of the empty brig. Down upon the lower deck he fumbles on the shelf above his head for a lantern, and having found one, coaxes the wick into feeble life.

He looks at his watch. The fingers inform him that impatience—or can it be fear?—has brought him to the trysting place ten minutes in front of the appointed hour.

Five now—four, three, two! A footfall beats lightly on the planks above his head. Now Tinion—or, if not he, then the man who wrote that note—is on the stairs.

Now! Crash! Michael Strang's watch is on the floor, its glass shivered into countless fragments.

In the doorway a girlish form is framed.

Margery Manesty! Face to face, merely the span of a ship's tiny table between them; shadows, black, brown, grey, massed behind, below, everywhere; thus, down in the pestiferous ca-

bin of a rotting ship, they meet; thus Michael Strang keeps his tryst.

At last the strain becomes intolerable. She enters the cabin, and smiling wistfully into his face, begs for speech—

"Won't you speak to me, Mr. Strang?"

"Speak—oh, yes, certainly, certainly," he stammers. "I—I—I—how d'ye do?"

A frown sweeps the smile away. "What is it you want with me, Mr. Strang?"

"Want with you? Want with you?"

"Yes; you sent for me, you know, else I shouldn't have been here."

"Sent for you?" he repeats. "Oh, no, there's a mistake somewhere. I never sent for you."

"But I have your note. I didn't know that you had sent it, but it bears your initials, and it bids me come here to-night, so that I may hear something about—about David Graham and the terrible wrong that is being done to him."

David Graham—terrible wrong—a second note! Verily here is disaster most complete; he sees himself routed, the stones of his fortress flung upon the ground.

He is sorry, but—ah, yes, this is the note, is it; received by post only this morning. He spreads the slip out upon the table where the lantern light may fall on it. The paper is different, cleaner, but the pencil scrawl is the same as in the one reposing in his wallet and the initials his own—

"If you want to help David Graham, meet me on the brig Hercules, now in the old dock at Allerdale, nine o'clock to-morrow night. Tell no one; come alone.—M. S."

Bending low so that Margery may not detect the working of his features, he reads it again and again.

"I'm afraid that someone has made you the victim of a cruel hoax, Miss Manesty," he says, confronting the girl again. "The initials are certainly mine but the writing is not. I know nothing about the note; I never sent it, this is the first I have seen of it."

"You didn't send for me?" Stunned by the avowal, the Castle of Hope, on whose sun-kissed towers her eyes have been fixed throughout the day, thus rudely crumbled into dust, Margery regards him with shocked and unbelieving eyes; after a fashion, too, her brain makes shift to sort the tangled threads of circumstance.

"You haven't called me here to-night," she says, "you haven't asked me to meet you? Then will you tell me why you are here yourself?"

"A mere coincidence, Miss Manesty. Some clumsy fool sent you that note; I desired to see that my ship was all right; we selected the same hour—and that is all."

"All?" she repeats, rather to herself than to Strang, "and I had expected so much. What must I do now?"

"Better go back home, Miss Manesty," he advises her; "go back and pay no more heed to anonymous invitations to secret conferences; go home and forget to-night's meeting, forget the Hercu-

les, forget me, and—if I may offer a little friendly counsel on a matter of such deep personal interest—forget David Graham."

"Ah, you are no friend of David's," she tells him.

"Miss Manesty, those words are not fair. I—"

"You are no friend of David's," she interrupts, with the emphasis of conviction, "else you would not advise me to desert him now when his friends are only a handful and his need is so great."

"Then, I presume, your ambition is to place him again on the throne which he has so willingly abdicated?"

"I don't know much about thrones, Mr. Strang," she replies sadly, "it seems to me that there has been too much of this regal dreaming. I want to help David to his name again, I want to help him to become a good man once more, to realize that power and gold are not life's choicest prizes. David and I are friends."

Nothing more than that; no heroics, no vaunting prophecy.

He picks up his hat and lantern, and, coaxing from his reserve another bland smile, offers to light her ascent of the cabin stairs.

But Margery, not yet felled in her quest, checks him with uplifted hand.

"Not just yet, Mr. Strang; a few minutes longer, please. There is something else I want to say, something to ask. What have you to tell me about David Graham?"

"Tell you about David Graham?" he snarls. "Miss Manesty, you are compelling me to be rude. Will you oblige me by leaving my ship?"

He moves towards the stairs. Margery retreating, bars his progress.

"When you have answered my question, Mr. Strang. What do you know of David? You can give me some of the knowledge I'm seeking—I'm sure of that. Something tells me that our meeting here is not an accident? Who wrote that note? signed with your initials? Why are you here? Shipowners are not in the habit of inspecting derelicts by lantern light. For whom were you waiting? Why were you smitten with fear when I entered your presence? You have no cause to fear me—I'm only a girl—but I'm David's friend—and you shall tell me what you know."

"You must pardon me, Miss Manesty, but—ha, ha,—but this is uncommonly like playacting."

Proof against his gibes, her purpose unshaken, she meets him—

"What do you know about David Graham?"

"This," he savagely retorts, "this, that he is a mean, miserable screw, one who is grinding gold out of the bones of his men—a wrecker of ships, a something for which the scum of the harbor side revile him. That is what I know of David Graham."

"Is that all?" His callous outburst she turns aside with a smile.

"Why, I know more than that myself. I know at least that David is not a wrecker; I know that he didn't cast the Habakkuk away nor scuttle the Noah; and I think I have found the man who did—and one of these days I shall find out why he did it."

(To be continued.)

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