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THE ISLAND OF THE STAIRS Being a True Account of Certain Strange and Wonderful Adventures of Master John Hampdon, Seaman, and Mistress Lucy Wilberforce, Gentlewoman, In the Great South Seas.

By CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

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"You are the only navigator among us, Mister Hampdon," began Pimball, after the men got measurably quiet again, "and if you are with us, you will take the ship there to that island. We'll git the treasure aboard, sail away and sink her on the South America coast and then every man for himself with all be can carry."

"Am I to be captain?" I asked. "There'll be no captain. Every man for himself, I say, but me and the bo's'n's mate, Glibby, will take the watches in turn. You'll navigate the ship and whatever is necessary for our safety we'll do at your order. Is it

understood?" "Yes," said I, "under one condition." "We make no conditions," said Pimball darkly, "we are masters of the ship, remember, and this is our last

"It is not mine," said I composedly. for I had yet the hardest part of the bargain to drive.

"Well, it's got to be," said Pimball menacingly, starting toward me with the marlinspike he carried.

"Now, my friend," said I, "we might just as well understand each other. You can kill me if you want to. It would be easy enough, but when you have killed me you have killed your last chance at the treasure. You don't know what latitude or longitude we are in now. There is not one of you that knows enough to take a sight or to sail the ship to the island. You are completely helpless. My life means the difference between treasure and no treasure to you. You are smart enough to see that."

"He speaks right," said an old seaman at the back of the crowd.

"There speaks a man of sense," said I. "Therefore you will hear my conditions and accede to them."

"Heave ahead," said Pimball roughly enough, evidently not liking the sitnation, but failing utterly to see how it could be amended since I completely held the whip hand of them all.

"What I stipulate is very simple. First of all, I am to have my full and equal share of the treasure with the rest. I am to be treated exactly like the others in the division, and my life and liberty, which are just as valuable to me as to any of you, are to be treated with respect, as I respect those of others."

"Why, we told you that in the first place," growled out the boatswain. "If that's all you've got to say"-

"Ah, the woman!" said Pimball

"The woman!"

"What had you proposed to do with

ber?" I asked. "Why-er-1-er," the man faltered. He actually did not dare to say what had been in his mind, and I've no doubt that my pistol never looked bigger than it did when I quietly laid my band on it.

It was probable that the others had not as yet decided what was to be done with her, whatever l'imball may have concluded. I took advantage, therefore, of their hesitation and pushed the matter to a speedy conclusion.

"Well," I said quickly, "I want her for myself." Did I bear a groan in the cabin back of me? If I did, I could not afford to hesitate. I could not let them hear. "You saw how she treated me," I cried, raising my voice and banging on the table. "She struck me. She had me imprisoned. I want her to be given over to me alone."

"But"- began Pimball, not relishing the abandonment of this prize which be had evidently marked for his own.

"I tell you what it is, mates," said I, disregarding him and addressing the rest directly, "I am a poor man and the treasure, or my share of it, means a great deal to me, but revenge means much more. You give the woman to me and I will divide my share of the reasure among the crew."

"Well," began Pimball uncertainly, but the sentiment of the crew was palpably against him. "Don't be a fool, man," cried the man

who had spoken before. "Give him the wench." "Aye, let him have her," cried a sec-

"He'll bring her to her knees," said

"Stop it " I cried, doubling my fistthis was no assumed rage either, for my blood was bodding "This is my

The men fell back. They forgot for the moment their advantage in num Well that is agreed at last," said

framail relactantly enough "You take the woman, we take the treasure" "Agreed" said I

"Is that right, mates?" he asked of

"Right-o," was the answer. "It's all settled, then," said I, "bu

"Bring out the gal, then, and let us see her," suddenly began one of the men, stepping forward.

The door back of me was thrown open wide and she stepped out into the cabin. How I thrilled to see her, erect, fearless, more beautiful than ever. The men recoiled, and I stepped back my

"I have heard all," she cried. "You murderous villains, to have killed my captain and seized my ship, and youyou"-she turned to me, "to have bargained for me and to have bought me like an animal, a horse, a dog oh, if I had a weapon!"

CHAPTER VIII.

Wherein I Make All Clear to My Little Mistress.

Y pistol was still in my hand, and she made a street but i was too quick for ber. I caught her by the wrist The spell she had cast upon us by her sudden entrance, her beautiful presence, ber proud, brave demeanor, was broken by that touch. The men laughed. The remembrance of that laugh makes my blood boil even-now.

"I wish you joy of her," said one. "You will have a time taming her." cried a second.

"Ah, you think so!" I cried, determining to carry out the deception to the bitter end and to leave no chance for the least suspicion to arise. I seized her by the shoulders, secretly praying God to forgive me for what I was about to do, and shook her violently back and forth. It was easy enough. A baby in my hands would not have been more helpless. "Silence, you fools?" I cried as the men began to laugh again, and then to her: "You belong to me, woman. Do you hear? I've bought you. I am your master. Get back into your cabin I wid have speech with you later." Helpless, she could do nothing. I thrust her into the cabin, shut the door and faced the men. Will you gentlemen leave me alone to tame this she devil for a little while, and I will be on deck pres-

ently." I panted out. "Very well," said Pimball, "but before we go'- he pointed to a heavy bottle in the rack "I propose that we drink the health of the new navigator

and his lady." "Right-o!" said I.

I reached for the glasses that were in the rack and poured out a stiff dram for each man and added mighty little water to it. The room was soon filled with mocking, jeering toasts to my health and happiness. I drank with the rest, although I would rather have swallowed poison. They went out one by one. Pimball last.

"I wish you joy of your woman," he sneered.

"You will see how tame she is tomorrow," I laughed as he climbed up the ladder and soon disappeared.

To throw open the door of the cabin was the work of a minute. There she stood. She had twisted some kind of a rope out of the sheets which she had hastily torn up. Her purpose was plain. She had intended to end her life by banging herself from the book in the deck beam above to which one end of her rope was secured, and she would have done it, too, if I had not

come in in the nick of time. I stared at her for a moment and then reached forward and tore the plaited strands out of her hand and from around her neck and threw them to the deck. It was evidence to me of the deepness of her despair that she had attempted such a thing. It showed me for one thing the excel-



"You take the woman, we take the treasure."

tence of my acting I had convinced even her of my villainy, I realized with a sudden pang

Hard as I stared at her, the glance that she shot back at me in intensity, if not expression, matched my own. never want to see such loathing, such contempt, such scorn on a buman countenance again. It cut me to the

"A moment," she said wildly, "and I had done it, traitor!" "Nay, nay," I protested, "I am a

true man." "You bargained for me; you bought

me!" "I was not in earnest," I cried, but she interrupted me in a perfect tem-

pest of outraged feeling. "My God!" she burst out. "Why didn't you stay away a little longer?

You dog! You vile, low"-But at that I found voice again, for was getting angry myself, my temper naturally being none the sweetest, save ordinarily when she was con-

cerned. "Hear me," I interrupted in turn. "Not a word."

"But indeed you must," I persisted, | stepping within her cabin and careful- | ly closing the door after me. "It is | your welfare alone that I seek. think you should have known that."

"After the insult on the quarterdeck last evening?" she asked cuttingly.

"Madam," said 1, controlling myself again, but with added difficulty, "our concern is not with kisses, but with"-"What?"

"Life and"-I hesitated.

"What else? Speak on!"

"Your honor," I said slowly, whereat she stared at my face, doubtless stern enough in all conscience.

What I had to say concerned us both so deeply that I cared not what she said, and perhaps that closed cabin into which I had penetrated was the likeliest place for privacy in the whole ship. I could by no means be overheard, so I determined to speak freely in a way not to be misunderstood.

"I mean you no harm. Can you not see it?" I burst out. "It was all a plav."

"A play!" she panted. "The murder 1. of the captain, the mutiny of the men, the seizure of the ship, the giving up the chart, your purchase"-she drew herself up-God, she was a brave little thing-"of me," she continued, "with your share of the treasure-was that a play?"

"Part of it, madam," said I, stung by her scorn and stunned again by the thought that she could ever have believed me capable of such baseness, who had loved her, worshiped her and -but for that fleeting moment when I had kissed her-bad ever treated bei with such humble consideration. bought not you."

"What then?" "The right to live and serve you the right for you to live unharmed

"And what?"

"And be served by me with no thought but for your safety and happiness."

She stared at me in deep consterna tion, her brow furrowed. I had wit enough to be silent and let the speech

"Have I wronged you?" she asket 4 falteringly at last

"What would your fate be if you were left to that murderous mbble or the deck yonder?" She shuddered as I pressed the

thought home to her. "You should have known me better," I continued reproachfully, "than to have suspected"-

"But your insult to me this very night on the quarterdeck?"

"Is a man to be condemned beyond pardon who has served you truly be cause he snatches a kiss in a moment of madness and forgets it when your life and honor tremble in the bal-

"I do not think even you could for get that ever," she said, and I could & not fathom exactly her purpose in that

Did she not want me to forget it? Or would she have me remember it? But this seemed like trifling. I turned away bitterly, but she caught me by the arm instantly.

"What are you about to do?" she began. "Don't abandon me now. believe in you. I see now why you did it. It was to save me and help

Continued on page 7.

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