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B. A. KELLY, Esq.

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She had the jacket with her, sealed in a great stone jar. It was thin and flat, and had rolled easily into a shape that would pass through the jar's neck. She took the boat in through the opening, and made for a spot on the east of the circle. There was a funnel-shaped fissure in the rock wall here, which even at low tide contained a fathom of black water. She had sounded it on the last occasion on which she had visited the Ring-Rock, and it was this funnel shaped fissure that she meant to use for her hiding place. She had painted the jar black, so that it should not be visible against the basalt, and she had tied many loops of strong picture wire about its neck so that she could recover it by grappling within or without as she pleased. She brought her boat close to the rock wall and was feeling with a boat-hook for the mouth of the fissure, when a sound from the outside struck her ears.
"Yes," said Elsa.
"I expect you wonder why we haven't one of our own. There's a simple explanation, but you can hear it by and by. Meanwhile I daresay you'll trust us. We're honest, you know. We haven't stolen this ship."
Mona laughed as she said this, but Elsa answered gravely:
"You may use my boat if you can get it out."
"Get it out? What do you mean?"
"You will have to get the boat out of the water, and launch it again over the stern. There is only one way into or out of the circle of the Ring-Rock and your schooner is blocking it."
"Is this the Ring-Rock?"
"Yes. Didn't you know?"
"Hadm't a notion," said Mona lightly. "I see it marked on the chart, but I thought we were a good five miles from it. Val B. will say nasty things about my navigation when he hears. I'm his pupil in that subject, you see!"
She laughed softly again and then with a quick movement, came closer to Elsa, and peered into her face.
"Aren't you Elsa Carrington?" she asked in a low voice.
"Yes."
"Do you know who I am?"
"You are Margaret Ryan."
"I was. I'm Mona de la Mar now. Come down to my cabin. Sambo, you heard what the lady said about the boat. Can you do it?"
"Got to, Missy Mona," said Sambo cheerfully. "Can't stay here till the wind comes. Oh, yes, we'll do it all right."
"Then be quick as you can. Let me know when you've done it. I shall be in my cabin."
She led the way down below, and Elsa followed her.
As she lit a lamp in the pretty little cabin she said with a smile:
"It's a funny meeting here, isn't it? I wish I could have shown you over my home under less wobbly conditions, but the circumstances are peculiar. Do you think you can sit on the edge of that bunk without being shot at with a rifle?"
"Why are you here?" said Elsa.
"Why am I here?—I, Mona de la Mar, late Margaret Ryan? Is that what you mean? Or do you mean why is the good ship Sea-Horse piled on the Ring-Rock, and making it necessary for Sambo and me to rescue you from a watery prison? Incidentally, of course, you rescue us from a possible watery grave, which would be even more unpleasant. So we are grateful. But in my sense am I to understand your question?—Me or the Sea-Horse?"
"Both," said Elsa.
Mona laughed again.
"I'm here because—oh, because of a variety of reasons. It's a long story though, and I think you know most of it already. The Sea-Horse is here because I didn't allow enough for drift and piled her up. There, I've answered your question, haven't I?"
"Not in the sense in which I asked it," said Elsa.
"No, I know that. But I shall have to explain at great length to Val B. Montague presently, and explanations are fatiguing. I want to talk about you just now. I want to know you, if I can. Do you wonder why?"
Elsa looked straight at the laughing face of her questioner, and after a brief pause, said coldly:
"No."
"You understand why?" said Mona, nodding.
"I don't understand. It is merely that the question does not interest me."
Mona clasped her fingers behind her head, and leaned her back against the heavy wall of the cabin. Her brown eyes showed a sparkle of amusement, and a smile played about her lips. She was a girl who made a habit of taking life with a laugh, and even the fact that she had just piled her employer's ship on a ledge of sharp volcanic rock did not seem to have made a break in the habit. Elsa regarded her with a

CHAPTER XI

The Piling-Up of the Sea Horse

Elsa drew back her boat-hook from the fissure, and stood up in the boat, listening with a strained intensity of concentration. She was quite sure that they were men's voices that she had heard; but were the men a long way off or close to her? She knew how deceptive is the nature of sound in a fog on the water. Probably some boat was passing in the distance. She heard the voices again, and this time they were closer. She could almost distinguish the actual words, and she could hear plainly that the language was English. The fog swept down upon her again in a thick blanket. She could not see three yards ahead. The thickening of the gloom was sudden, and probably only local. But while it lasted she was safe from observation.
She must finish her work before it lifted to betray her.
She lowered the stone jar into the fissure, and pushed it quickly away from the side. Hardly had she done so, when by some caprice of the air currents, the fog cleared away so completely, that from the middle of her little harbor, she could see the whole circle of the basalt walls. It was only a local clearing in the gathering dusk of the evening she could see through the narrow entrance that the heavy billowing masses of whiteness were still twisting and heaving on the sea outside.
She put an oar in the stern-notch, and began sculling towards the entrance. A voice from close at hand rang sharply on her ears.
"Rocks dead ahead! Starboard!"
She heard the rattle of a wheel, and the sharp rattle of the rudder chains. A shadowy form loomed out of the vapors, and came slowly on towards the entrance. The next moment the bowsprit of a large vessel passed between the rock walls of the narrow opening, there was a grating noise, and a sharp jerk; the vessel heeled till her bulwark touched the basalt, shivered a moment, and swung back again the other way; the bell on her foremast tolled with the violence of the oscillation. She was balanced on the fulcrum of the ground, and she settled down with long slow swings like some giant metronome, or like the dead rolling of a derelict in the trough.

There was a confusion of shouting on her deck, and Elsa thought that she saw a woman's form. The fog crept round again, and blotted out the view of the stranded vessel.
She sculled nearer, as quietly as she could. It did not seem that there was any immediate danger, the vessel apparently was not sinking, and as the sea outside was calm, her people would easily make the shore in their boats. She did not wish to be seen, so she waited until they were gone. But meanwhile she must know whether it was possible for her to get out at all.
It was not possible. Under the light air the ship had taken ground slowly, but her weight had carried her well into the opening. There was no room on either side of her for a boat to pass out. Elsa was a prisoner.
She looked up at the name painted on the bows. It was almost dark now, but she could just make out the white letters. She nearly betrayed herself by a cry of dismay. The vessel was the Sea-Horse, the circus people's schooner.
She pushed back quickly, but a head appeared over the forward bulwarks, and a woman's voice calling her told her that she had been seen.
"Boat ahoy! We want help. Bring your boat alongside."
It was Mona de la Mar.
Elsa drew back further into the fog. Her first impulse was to refuse help. Mona shouted again, and Elsa brought her boat alongside.
"Do you need help?" she asked.
"Yes."
"Are you filling?"
"No. I don't think so. But we're hard ground. If it comes on to blow, we shall break up."
"You had better take to your boats."
"We haven't any boats, that's why we need yours. Can you come aboard if we let down a ladder?"
"Yes."
A rope ladder was thrown over the side. Elsa fastened the end of it to the painter of her boat, and then, waiting till the pendulum swing of the schooner brought the bulwarks to their lowest point, put her feet in a rung and took a firm hold with her hands. There was an almost motionless second as she went the down swing and the up, and then she was carried swift of foot towards. At the same time she was pressed hard against the schooner's side, and the cold iron took the skin off her knuckles. It was all she could do to hold on; she could not climb until once more the fall of the roll swung her outwards again. In the brief pause between the two move-

ments she raised herself two rungs, but it was not until she had been hoisted and lowered eight times that she reached the bulwark level. Then two black arms grasped her and lifted her on the deck, and a soft voice murmured:
"All right, missy, now yo's safe. You very brave lady."
"I didn't think you would manage it," said Mona de la Mar, who was standing close by. "Sambo is right. You are a very brave girl. But I don't suppose you need us to tell you that, your nose is precious. May we use your boat?"
"Yes," said Elsa.
"I expect you wonder why we haven't one of our own. There's a simple explanation, but you can hear it by and by. Meanwhile I daresay you'll trust us. We're honest, you know. We haven't stolen this ship."
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could disapprove, but at the same time with a certain admiration. There had been no examination of the extent of the damage. For all that this laughing girl knew to the contrary, the Sea-Horse might in a few minutes slip off the ledge and take her to the bottom.
"I want to talk to you," said Mona—to learn, if I can, what sort of girl you are; and though you are not interested in my reason, I'm going to give it to you. It is because you are the daughter of the man who robbed me of twenty thousand pounds."
Elsa sprang to her feet with quivering lips.
"That is not true," she said.
"Oh, come! You don't deny the relationship!" said Mona mockingly. "And as for the robbery—"
"My father did not rob you," said Elsa hotly.
"Didn't he? I think the term is accurate. At any rate Richmond Carrington accepted his substantial accuracy as a description of what he had done when I taxed him with it yesterday."
"Yesterday?" cried Elsa. "You saw him yesterday? You admit it?"
"Of course I admit it. Why shouldn't I? I have been very anxious to see him, you know. I knew he was in San Miguel, and I had the luck to run up against him in the course of the very first bicycle ride I took in the island. However, that was what happened."
"Where did you meet him?" Elsa demanded.
"About a mile from the village of Furnas. I had gone there to see the famous geysers, you know. Romantic district for a defrauded heiress and the defaulting trustee to meet in, wasn't it?"
Elsa decided at once that the girl was lying. Furnas is ten miles from the Caldera de Morte. The tale was impossible.
"I thought the defaulting trustee was looking very prosperous," Mona went on mockingly. "He has put on flesh since I last met him. But he didn't seem to be as glad to see me as he might have been, considering all that he owes to me. He spoke of you, by the way, and actually had the folly to appeal to what he called my finer feelings, my generous heart, on your behalf. That was a false move which I should not have expected from a man of his proved ability. Do you know, Miss Carrington, that your father is a very plausible impostor?"
Elsa answered her with a glance of contempt.
"I recognize," she said, "that he made a mistake in crediting Margaret Ryan with finer feelings. Will you allow me to return to the deck? You shall have the use of my boat."
"But you would prefer not to have any more of my company than is necessary," said Mona, laughing. "I suppose that's natural. But I've something more to say. Your father made a ridiculous proposition to me. Will you tell him that it is declined, with Margaret Ryan's best love and thanks."
"Let me go!" said Elsa fiercely. "How dare you mock at him like that? You know that he is dead!"
Mona de la Mar started forward with a cry.
"Dead? Do you say he is dead?"
"Do you say that you did not know it?"
"Dead! Your father is dead!" repeated the girl, with a scared face.
"Of course I did not know. And I have been saying all these things to you. Oh, what a brute you must think me!" She came close to Elsa and tried to put her arm about her, saying softly: "I am so sorry. I would give anything to be able to unsay all I have said in the last few minutes. But I did not know. You believe me, don't you? You don't think I could be so utterly heartless!"
Elsa drew back from her touch.
"I think," she said, coldly, "that you are a finished actress."
Mona shuddered, and her brown eyes were wide with a real distress.
"You don't believe that I am sorry, that I would not have said a word of all this to you if I had known, as she cried passionately; and then, as she noted the fixed look of scorn on Elsa's face, she added: "You think that I did know? You think that I did know? I do not believe anything that you have said," was Elsa's answer.
A voice from above, shouted down the companion.
"Missy Mona, the boat am launched, and the stars am shining. I think there is a breeze coming."

CHAPTER XII

Mona de la Mar Terminates Her Contract

"It is only by the special favor of the elements," said Val B. Montague impressively, "that we have been able to do it. I am told that a whole week without a westerly gale is almost unprecedented at this time of the year."
Mona helped herself to salad. She and Montague were lunched together in the Cafe Marques, de Pombal, the dining-room of which overlooked the port of Ponta Delgada. The Sea-Horse had been brought safely into harbor that morning.
"Is the damage very serious?" she asked.
"Her foretop is crumpled up," said Montague; "but the diver reports that it will not take more than a fortnight to put her all right again for the sea. Still a delay of a fortnight is somewhat embarrassing, because Val B. Montague's American Circus Combination is billed to appear in Funchal, Madeira, exactly a fortnight from tomorrow. But I don't repine—you understand clearly, I hope, that Val B. Montague does not repine?"
"I recognize that you've been a brick," said Mona warmly. "I have very nearly ruined you, and you haven't even scolded me. If the westerly gale had come, and the Sea-Horse had broken up on the Ring Rock and gone to the bottom, it would have meant ruin to you, wouldn't it?"
"Yes," said Montague. "This venture represents my capital and a bit over, and I was fool enough to compromise on insurance. If the Sea-Horse had gone to the bottom, Val B. Montague would have had to begin life over again—from the bottom."
"I am glad that the westerly gale did not come," said Mona.
"So am I uncommonly glad. But see here—before we go farther, there is one thing I want to straighten out. You think I blame you for what has happened?"
"I don't. I blame myself."
(To be continued)

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