

A POSSIBLE CASE.

By Frank Stockton.



On the fall of 1888 the steamship Sunda, from Southampton, was running along the southern coast of Long Island, not many hours from port, when she was passed by one of the great British liners outward bound. The tide was high, and the course of both vessels was nearer the coast than is usual—that of the Sunda being inside of the other.

As the two steamers passed each other there was a great waving of hats and handkerchiefs. Suddenly there was a scream from the Sunda. It came from Signora Rochita, the prima donna of an opera troupe which was coming to America in that ship.

"I have lost my bracelet," she cried in Italian, and then turning to the passengers she repeated the cry in very good English. The situation was instantly comprehended by every one. It was late in the afternoon; the captain had given a grand dinner to the passengers, at which the prima donna had appeared in all her glories of ornamentation, and the greatest of these glories, a magnificent diamond bracelet was gone from the arm with which she had been enthusiastically waving her lace handkerchief.

The second officer, who was standing near, dashed into the captain's office and quickly reappeared with chart and instruments and made rapid calculation of the position of the vessel at the time of the accident, making an allowance for the few minutes that had passed since the first cry of the signora. After consultation with the captain and recalculations of the distance from land and some other points, he announced to the weeping signora that her bracelet lay under a little black spot he made on the chart, and that if she chose to send a diver for it she might get it, for the depth of water at that place was not great.

By profession I am a diver, and the next day I was engaged to search for the diamond bracelet of Signora Rochita. I had a copy of the chart, and having hired a small schooner, with several men who had been my assistants before, and taking with me all the necessary accoutrements and appliances I set out for the spot indicated, and by afternoon we were anchored, we believed, at it or very near it. I lost no time in descending. I wore of course, the usual diver's suit, but I took with me no tools nor any of the implements used by divers when examining wrecks, but carried in my right hand a brilliant electric lamp, connected with a powerful battery on the schooner. I held this by an insulated handle, in which there were two little knobs, by which I could light or extinguish it.

The bottom was hard and smooth, and lighting my lamp I began to look about me. If I approached the bracelet I ought to be able to see its sparkle, but after wandering over considerable space, I saw no sparkles nor anything like a bracelet. Suddenly, however, I saw something which greatly interested me. It was a hole in the bottom of the ocean, almost circular and at least ten feet in diameter. I was surprised that I had not noticed it before, for it lay not far from the stern of our vessel.

Standing near the rocky edge of the aperture, I held out my lamp and looked down. Not far below I saw the glimmering of what seemed to be the bottom of this subterranean well. I was seized with a desire to explore this great hole running down under the ordinary bottom of the sea. I signalled to be lowered, and although my comrades were much surprised at such an order, they obeyed, and down I went to the well. The sides of this seemed rocky and almost perpendicular, but after descending about fifteen feet they receded on every side, and I found myself going down into a wide cavern, the floor of which I touched in a very short time.

Holding up my lamp and looking about me, I found myself in a sea cave of some thirty feet in diameter, with a dome-like roof, in which, a little to one side of the centre, was the lower opening of the well. I became very much excited; this was just the sort of place into which a bracelet or anything else of value might be expected to have the bad luck to drop. I walked about and gazed everywhere, but I found nothing but rocks and water.

I was about to signal to be drawn up when above me I saw what appeared to be a flash of darkness coming down through the well. With a rush and a whirl it entered the cavern and in a moment I recognized the fact that a great fish was swooping around and about me. Its movements were so rapid and irregular, now circling along the outer edge of the floor of the cavern, then mounting above me until its back seemed to scrape the roof that I could not form a correct idea of the size of the creature. It seemed to me to be at least twenty feet long. I stood almost stupefied, keeping my eyes as far as possible fixed upon the swiftly moving monster.

Sometimes he came quite near me, when I shuddered in every fibre, and then he shot away, but ever gliding with powerful undulations of his body and tail, around, about and above me. I did not dare to signal to be drawn up, for fear that the terrible creature would enter the well hole with me. Then he would probably touch me, perhaps crush me against the wall, but my mind was capable of forming no plan. I only hoped the fish would descend and disappear by the way he came.

My mind was not in its strongest condition, being much upset by a great trouble, and I was so frightened that I really did not know what I ought to do, but I had sense enough left to feel sure that the fish had been attracted into the cavern by my lamp. Obviously, the right thing to do was to extinguish it, but the very thought of this nearly drove me into a frenzy. I could not endure to be left alone with the shark in darkness and water. It was an insane idea, but I felt that whatever happened I must keep my eyes upon him.

Now the great fish began to swoop nearer and nearer to me, and then, suddenly changing its tactics, it receded to the most distant wall of the cavern, where, with its head to-

wards me, it remained for the first time motionless. But this did not continue long. Gently turning over on its side, it opened its great mouth, and in an instant, with a rush, it came directly at me. My light shone full into its vast mouth, glistening with teeth, and there was a violent jerk which nearly threw me from my feet, and all was blackness. The shark had swallowed my lamp! By rare good fortune he did not take my hand also.

Now I frantically tugged at my signal rope. Without my lamp, I had no thought but a desire to be pulled out of the water, no matter what happened. In a few minutes I sat divested of my diving suit and almost insensible upon the deck of the schooner. As soon as I was able to talk I told my astonished comrades what had happened, and while we were discussing this strange occurrence one of them, looking over the side, saw, slowly rising to the surface, the body of a dead shark.

"By George," he cried, "here is the beast. He has been killed by the current from the battery."

We all crowded to the rail and looked down upon the monster. He was about ten feet long and it was plain that he had died for making himself the connection between the poles of the battery.

"Well," said the Captain presently, "I suppose you are not going down again?"

"Not I," I replied, "I give up this job."

Then suddenly I cried:

"Come boys, all of you. Make fast to that shark and get him on board. I want him."

Some of the men laughed, but my manner was so earnest that in a moment they all set about to help me. A small boat was lowered, lines were made fast to the dead fish with block and tackle, and we hauled him on deck. I then got a butcher's knife from the cabin and began to cut him open.

"Look here, Tom," exclaimed the Captain, "that's nonsense. Your lamp's all smashed to pieces, and if you get it out it will never be any good to you."

"I don't care for the lamp," I answered, working away energetically; "but an idea has struck me. It's plain that this creature has a fancy for shining things. If he swallowed a lamp there is no reason why he should not have swallowed anything else that glittered."

"Oh!" cried the Captain, "you think he swallowed the bracelet, do you?"

And instantly everybody crowded more closely about me.

I got out the lamp. Its wires were severed as smoothly as if they had been cut by shears. Then I worked on. Suddenly there was a cry from every man. Something glimmered in the dark interior of the fish. I grasped it and drew it out. It was not a bracelet, but a pint bottle, which glimmered like a glowworm. With the bottle in my hand I sat upon the deck and gazed at it. I shook it. It shone brighter. A bit of oiled silk was tied tightly over the cork, and it was plain to see that it was partly filled with a light colored oil, into which a bit of phosphorus had been dropped, which, on being agitated, filled the bottle with a dim light.

But there was something more in the bottle than phosphorus and oil. I could see a tin tube, corked at each end, the exposed parts of the corks spreading enough to prevent the tin from striking the glass. We all knew that this was one of those bottles containing a communication of some sort, and float about until they are picked up. The addition of the oil and the phosphorus was intended to make it visible by night as well as by day, and this was plainly the reason why it had been swallowed by a light-loving shark.

I poured out the oil and extracted the tube. Wiping it carefully, I drew out the corks, and then from the little tin cylinder I pulled a half sheet of note paper rolled up tightly. I unrolled it and read these words:

"Before I jump overboard I want to let people know that I killed John Polhemus. So I have fixed up this bottle. I hope it may be picked up in time to keep Jim Barker from being hung. I did think of leaving it on the steamer, but I might change my mind about jumping overboard, and I guess this is the best way. The clothes I wore and the hatchet I did it with are under the woodshed back of Polhemus's house."

"HENRY RAMSEY."

I sprang to my feet with a yell. Jim Barker was my brother, now lying in prison, under the sentence of death for the murder of Polhemus, all the circumstantial evidence, and there was no other, had been against him. The note was dated eight months back. Oh, cruel fool of a murderer!

The shark was thrown overboard, and we made best speed to port, and before the end of the afternoon I had put Ramsey's note into the hands of the lawyer who had charge of my brother's case.

Fortunately he was able to identify the handwriting and signature of Ramsey, a man who had been suspected of the crime, but against whom no evidence could be found. The lawyer was almost as excited as I was by the contents of this note, and early the next morning we started together for the house of the Polhemus family. There, under the woodshed, we found carefully buried a blood-stained shirt and vest and the hatchet.

My impulse was to fly to my brother, but this my lawyer forbade.

Returning to the city, I thought I might as well make my report to Signora Rochita. The lady was at home and saw me. When I had finished my story she looked at me steadily for a moment, and then said:

"I have something to tell you, but I hardly know how to say it. I never lost my bracelet. I intended to wear it at the Captain's dinner, but when I went to put it on I found the clasp was broken, and as I was late I hurried to the table without the bracelet, and thought of it no more until, when we were all waving and cheering, I glanced at my wrist and found it was not there. Then, utterly forgetting that I had not put it on I thought it had gone into the sea. It was only this morning that opening what I supposed to be the empty box I saw it. Here it is."

I never saw such gorgeous jewels. "Madam," said I, "I am glad you thought you lost it, for I have gained something better than them."

"You are a good man," said she, and then she paid me liberally for my services. When this business had been finished, she asked: "Are you married?" I answered that I was not.

"Is there any one you intend to marry?" "Yes," said I. "What is her name?" she asked. "Sarah Jane McElroy." "Wait a minute," said she, and she retired into another room. Presently she returned and handed me a little box. "Give this to your lady love," said she, "when she looks at it, she will never forget that you are a brave man."

When Sarah Jane opened the box, there was a little pin with a diamond head, and she gave a scream of delight. "I don't need anything," she said, "to remind me that you are a brave man. I am going to buy furniture with it."

MISSING LINKS.

Vincent Griest, of Lower Oxford, Pa., witnessed a combat between an owl and a smaller bird, and when the little one seemed to be getting the worst of the battle he went to her assistance. The owl thereupon attacked him and bit him in the arm and face.

A German gastronomic publication gives the following account of the origin of the menu: At the meeting of electors in Regensburg in the year 1489, Elector Henry, of Braunschweig, attracted general notice at a state dinner. He had a long paper before him to which he referred every time he ordered a dish. The earl of Montfort, who sat near him, asked him what he was reading. The elector silently handed the paper to his interrogator. It contained a list of the viands prepared for the occasion, which the elector had ordered the cook to write out for him. The idea of having such a list so pleased the illustrious assembly that they introduced it each in his own household, and since that time the fashion of having a menu has spread all over the civilized world.

The project of holding an international musical and theatrical exposition in Vienna is making rapid progress toward realization. The originator of the plan is the Princess Metternich, and her idea of what the exposition should be, together with an official programme, will be made known shortly to the world through 100,000 circulars which will be distributed throughout Europe and the United States. Committees for the management of the exposition's interests have been formed in several countries. In England the duke of Edinburgh is the chairman; in Bavaria, Prince Ludwig; in Prussia, the director of the Royal Opera House; in Paris, M. Berger and M. Proust, formerly minister of the fine arts, and finally, as the Munich Allgemeine Zeitung says, "for North America the energetic and money strong Mr. Bennett."

One of the largest pearl fishing grounds in the world is in the Gulf of California. "The pearls," says a correspondent, "are not generally regular in shape or very pure in color, but some are of large size, and many of the rare black pearls are found. The divers are nearly all Indians and their equipment is of the simplest kind, consisting only of a basket hung around the neck, in which to collect the oysters, a knife to detach them from the rocks and a stone with a cord attached. When the diver goes down he takes the cord between his toes, the weight of the stone carrying him at once to the bottom. Hogathers oysters as long as his breath holds out, and then rises to the surface, to descend again in fifteen minutes. Some of the divers are wonderfully expert, and can remain under water for as much as two minutes before rising to the surface. The mortality among them is fearful, for the Gulf of California is infested with huge man-eating sharks, which carry off scores of men every year."

How to be Happy in Summer.

- Read the latest books.
- Bathe early and often.
- Seek cool, shady nooks.
- Throw fancy work away.
- Wear lightest, lowest shoes.
- Ride at morn and walk at eve.
- Believe that waiters are human.
- Let hats be light and bonnets airy.
- Eschew kid gloves and linen collars.
- Hurry never, thus being at leisure ever.
- Dress in cambrics, lawns and gingham.
- Be lavish with laundresses, fruit men and fans.
- Court the sea breezes, but avoid the hot sands.
- Let melons precede, and berries follow the breakfast.
- Store up the sweet and give small place to the bitter.
- Remember that seeming idleness is sometimes gain.
- Retire when in the mood and arise when most inclined.
- Order freshest fish and corn-cake; never mind the heavy fritters.
- Remember that nine-tenths of the people are at the seashore for rest.
- If you feel like doing a good deed, treat a dozen street children to ice-cream. That is mission work.
- Do not tell your hostess how sweet the butter and cream were at your last summer's boarding place.
- Remember that children are only small editions of older people, and that they have feelings quite as acute.
- Look pleasantly at the tired stranger who looks wistfully at the part of your car seat occupied by your wraps, even if you do not offer her the seat.—Anna P. Payne, in The Ladies' Home Journal.

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