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THE SEA HAWK

By RAFAEL SABATINI.

CHAPTER I.
The Huckster.

Sir Oliver Tressilian sat at his ease in the lofty dining-room of the handsome house of Penarrow, which he owed to the enterprise of his father, of lamented and lamentable memory, and to the skill and invention of an Italian engineer named Bagnolo, who had come to England half a century ago as one of the assistants of the famous Torricelli.

This house deserves, together with the story of its construction a word in passing.

The Italian Bagnolo had the mischance to kill a man in a brawl in a Southwark tavern. As a result he fled the town, nor paused in his headlong flight from the consequences of that murderous deed until he had all but reached the very ends of England. To the fugitive, Ralph afforded shelter; and Bagnolo repaid the service by offering to rebuild the decaying half-timbered house of Penarrow. Having taken the task in hand he went about it with all the enthusiasm of your true artist, and achieved for his protector a residence that was a marvel of grace in that crude age and outlandish district.

The main doorway was set in a projecting wing and was overhung by a massive balcony, the whole surmounted by a pillared pediment of extraordinary grace, now partly clad in a green mantle of creepers. Above the burnt red tiles of the roof soared massive twisted chimneys in lofty majesty.

But the glory of Penarrow was the garden fashioned out of the tangled wilderness about the old house that had crowned the heights above Penarrow point. Time and nature had smoothed the lawns to a velvet surface, had thickened the handsome boxwood hedges, and thrust up those black spear-like poplars that completed the very Italianate appearance of that Cornish demesne.

Sir Oliver took his ease in his dining-room considering all this as it was displayed before him in the mellowing September sunshine, and found it all very good to see, and life very good to live. Now no man has ever been known so to find life without some immediate cause, other than that of his environment, for his optimism. Sir Oliver had several causes. The first of these—although it was one which he may have been far from suspecting—was his equipment of youth, wealth and good digestion; the second was that he had achieved honor and renown both upon the Spanish Main and in the late harrying of the Invincible Armada, and that he had received in that the twenty-fifth year of his life the honor of knighthood from the Virgin Queen; the third and last contributor to his pleasant mood was Dan Cupid who had so contrived matters that Sir Oliver's wooing of Mistress Rosamund Godolphin ran an entirely smooth and happy course.

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THE SEA HAWK

By Rafael Sabatini

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THE ADVERTISER

WOMEN and THE HOME

A sneer flickered over the younger man's face.

"You pay me a compliment, sir, which I fear me 'tis not mine to return you."

"Time enough for that when I come to seek it," said Sir Oliver with easy, if assumed, good humor.

"When you come to seek it?"

"The hospitality of your house."

"It is on that very matter I am come to talk with you."

"Will you sit?" Sir Oliver invited him, and spread a hand toward the chair which Nicholas had set.

In the same gesture he waved the servant away.

Master Godolphin ignored the invitation.

"You were," he said, "at Godolphin Court but yesterday, I hear."

He paused, and as Sir Oliver offered no denial, he added stiffly—

"I am come, sir, to inform you that the honor of your visits is one we shall be happy to forego."

In the effort he made to preserve his self-control before so direct an affront Sir Oliver paled a little under his tan.

"You will understand, Peter," he replied slowly, "that you have said too much unless you add something more."

He paused, considering his visitor a moment.

"I do not know whether Rosamund has told you that yesterday she did me the honor to consent to become my wife."

"She is a child that does not know her mind," broke in the other.

"Do you know of any good reason why she should come to change it?" asked Sir Oliver with a slight air of challenge.

Master Godolphin sat down, crossed his legs and placed his hat on his knee.

"I know a dozen," he answered.

"But I need not urge them. Sufficient should it be to remind you that Rosamund is but seventeen and that she is under my guardianship and that of Sir John Killigrew."

Neither Sir John nor I can sanction this betrothal."

"Good lack!" broke out Sir Oliver. "Who asks your sanction or Sir John's? By God's grace your sister will grow to be a woman soon and mistress of herself. I am in no desperate haste to get me wed, and by nature—as you may be observing—I am a wondrous patient man. I'll even wait."

And he pulled at his pipe.

"Waiting can not avail you in this, Sir Oliver. 'Tis best you should understand. We are resolved, Sir John and I."

"Are you so? God's light! Send Sir John to me to tell me of his resolves, and I'll tell him something of mine. Tell him from me, Master Godolphin, that if he will trouble to come as far as Penarrow I'll do by him what the hangman should have done long since. I'll crop his ears for him, by this hand!"

"Meanwhile," said Master Godolphin whetingly, "will you not essay your rovers' prowess upon me?"

"You?" quoth Sir Oliver, and looked him over with good-humored contempt. "I'm no butcher of deadlings, my lad. Besides, you are your sister's brother, and 'tis no aim of mine to increase the obstacles already in my path."

Then his tone changed. He leaned across the table.

"Come now, Peter. What is at the root of all this matter? Can we not compose such differences as you conceive exist? Out with them! 'Tis no matter for Sir John. He's a curmudgeon who signifies not a finger's snap. But you, 'tis different. You are her brother. Out with your plans, then! Let us be frank and friendly."

"Friendly?" The other sneered again. "Our fathers set us an example in that."

"Does it matter what our fathers did? More shame to them if being neighbors, they could not be friends."

Shall we follow so deplorable an example?

"You'll not impute that the fault was with my father!" cried the other, with a show of ready anger.

"I impute nothing, lad. I cry shame upon them both."

"Swounds!" swore Master Peter. "Do you malign the dead?"

"If I do, I malign them both. But I do not. I no more than condemn."

"I shall expect your condemnations to your own father, with whom no man of honor could have lived at peace."

"Then, sir, condemn your condemnations to your own father, with whom no man of honor could have lived at peace."

"Softly, softly, good sir."

"There's no call to go softly. Ralph Tressilian was a dishonor, a scandal to the countryside. Not a hamlet between here and Truro, or between here and Glaston, but swarms with big Tressilian noses, like your own, in memory of your debauched parent."

Sir Oliver's eyes grew narrower; he smiled.

"I wonder how you came by your own nose?" he wondered.

Master Godolphin got to his feet in a passion, and his chair crashed over behind him.

"Sir," he blazed, "you insult my mother's memory!"

Sir Oliver laughed.

"I make a little free with it, perhaps, in return for your pleasant-ies on the score of my father."

Master Godolphin pondered him in speechless anger; then, swayed by his passion, he leaned across the board, raised his long cane and struck Sir Oliver sharply on the shoulder.

That done, he strode off magnificently toward the door. Halfway thither he paused.

"I shall expect your friends and the length of your sword," said he. Sir Oliver laughed again.

"I don't think I shall trouble to send them," said he.

Master Godolphin wheeled, fully to face him again.

"How? Will you take a blow?"

Sir Oliver shrugged.

"None says it given," said he. "But I shall publish it abroad that I have caved you."

"You'll publish yourself a liar if you do, for none will believe you."

Then he changed his tone yet again.

"Come, Peter, we are behaving unworthily as for the blow, I confess that I deserved it. A man's mother is more sacred than his father. So we may cry quits on that score. Can we not cry quits on all else? What can it profit us to perpetuate a foolish quarrel that sprang up between our fathers?"

"There is more than that between us," answered Master Godolphin. "I'll not have my sister wed a pirate."

"A pirate? God's light! I am glad there's none to hear you, for since her Grace has knighted me for my doings upon the seas, your words go very near to treason. Surely, lad, what the queen approves Master Peter Godolphin may approve, and even your mentor, Sir John Killigrew. You've been listening to him. 'Twas he sent you hither."

"I am no man's lackey," answered the other hotly resenting the imputation—and resenting it the more because of the truth in it.

"To call me a pirate is to say a foolish thing, Hawkins, with whom I sailed, has also received the accolade, and who dubs us pirates insults the queen herself. Apart from that, which, as you see, is a very empty charge, what else have you against me? I am, I hope, as good as any other here in Cornwall; Rosamund honors me with her affection; and I am rich, and shall be richer still ere the wedding bells are heard."

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"Does Sir John say that?" asked Sir Oliver in a soft, deadly voice.

"I say it."

"I heard you; but I am asking where you learned that pretty lesson?" is Sir John your preceptor? He is, he is. No need to tell me. I'll deal with him. Meanwhile let me disclose to you the sure and disinterested source of Sir John's rancor. You will see with an upright and honest gentleman is Sir John, who was your father's friend and has been your guardian."

"I'll not listen to what you say of him."

"Nay, but you shall, in return for having made me listen to what he says of me. Sir John desires to obtain a license to build at the mouth of the Fal. He hopes to see a town spring up above the haven there under the shadow of his own manor of Arwenack. He represents himself as nobly disinterested and all concerned for the prosperity of the country, and he neglects to mention that the land is his own, and that it is his own prosperity and that of his family which he is concerned to foster. We met in London by a fortunate chance whilst Sir John was about his business at the court."

"Now it happens that I, too, have interests in Truro and Penryn; but, unlike Sir John, I am honest in the matter, and proclaim it. If any growth should take place about Smithick, it follows from its more advantageous situation that Truro and Penryn must suffer, and that suits me as little as the other matter would suit Sir John. I told him so, for I can be blunt, and I told the queen in the form of a counter-petition to Sir John's."

He shrugged.

"The moment was propitious to me. I was one of the seamen who had helped to conquer the unconquerable armada of King Philip. I was, therefore, not to be denied, and Sir John was sent home as empty-handed as he went to court. D'ye marvel that he hates me? Knowing him for what he is, d'ye marvel that he dubs me pirate and worse?"

"'Tis natural enough to misrepresent my doings upon the sea, since it is those doings have afforded me the power to hurt his profit. He has chosen the weapons of calumny for this combat, but those weapons are not mine, as I shall show him this very day. If you do not credit what I say, come with me and be present at the little talk I hope to have with that curmudgeon."

"You forget," said Master Godolphin, "that I, too, have interests in the neighborhood of Smithick, and that you are hurting those."



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