

# Plot That Failed;

## Love That Would Not Be Denied.

CHAPTER XIV.

The table glittered with cut glass, plate, flowers, and a luncheon fit for the Caliphs of Bagdad himself.

Never had that little bower of luxury ever been filled with sweeter voices or lighter laughter.

It was all delightful, from the lobsters that would roll about as if they were alive to the champagne which popped about the cabin like mimic guns of distress, Violet declared; and Leicester, seated next her, was heard to laugh aloud at one of Bertie's jokes—a thing unknown hitherto.

"Now, suppose," said Leicester to Lady Ethel, "we turned out to be pirates, and all this while were carrying you off to the Mediterranean."

As he spoke the sails flapped against the mast, and the vessel rolled suddenly.

He looked up at the sky through the window with a sharp glance.

"The wind is changing," he said, quietly. "We shall have a clam."

"A calm," said Lady Ethel to Bertie. "Then we shall not be able to get on."

"Yes," he said, with a secret thrill of exultation. "I am afraid not. Where are you going, Leicester?"

"On deck," said Leicester, and he sprang up the companionway.

Presently he returned.

"What news?" said Fitz.

"Doubtful," said Leicester, pouring out a glass of wine for Mrs. Mildmay. "A calm, I say—my sailing master says a—storm."

"A storm!" said Mrs. Mildmay, with dismay.

"Only a summer storm," said Leicester, lightly.

He quietly ran up on deck, and they heard his deep voice giving the command to tack round.

Then there followed a hurried tramping on deck and suddenly a voice called out:

"Tumble up! All hands on deck!"

Fitz ran up the gangway, and Bertie would have followed, but Mrs. Mildmay seemed rather alarmed, and he stayed talking and laughing to reassure her.

Presently Leicester came down and with a smile said:

"The rain is coming and some more wind. Mrs. Mildmay, you are in the pirates' clutches, so make yourself comfortable on the sofa."

She obeyed, for she was really frightened.

Violet sat beside her, and Bertie and Lady Ethel did their best to con-

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vince her that there was no danger.

Then Violet stole to the door of the cabin and looked longingly toward the dark sky.

As she looked, Leicester, passing, saw her.

"Let me come up with you, please," she said.

"I couldn't think of it," he said.

But he called down to ask Mrs. Mildmay if she would permit it, and then handed Violet up.

All the sails were furled, yet the yacht drove along at tremendous pace before the gale.

Leicester's voice was scarcely deep enough to drown the wind, and the little vessel tossed like a nutshell as it forced its way along the breakers.

So anxious had Leicester grown that he seemed to have forgotten the ladies.

But he had not, for presently, after a colloquy with the skipper, he shrugged his shoulders and came up to Violet, who was standing, not in the least wet or frightened, by the forecastle.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing much," he said, with a smile. "I have resigned command; that's all. My skipper knows this coast better than I do, and I have left him to steer us right."

"Is there any danger of going wrong, then?" she asked.

"Well—" he hesitated.

At that moment the skipper shouted out something that sounded dreadfully sharp and stern in the wind. Leicester caught Violet's arm and drew her to him, glancing as he did so to Bertie and Fitz, who were both guarding Lady Ethel.

The yacht sprang forward under the press of sail which the skipper had ordered to be put on.

"Right now," said Leicester, cheerily. "We shall fly home to Fenruddie; I can almost see the white cliffs. Ah!" he broke off, sharply, "port your helm! Breakers ahead! Great Heaven! we are on the north reef!"

He sprang to the helm, Violet paled with a sudden fear, covered, and dropped to her knees.

The next instant she felt an arm round her, and a voice in her ear whispered, passionately:

"You are not frightened! We are safe!"

Then she felt herself lifted up and carried down the gangway.

She had not fainted—or had she, and were the words, "Oh, my darling, my Violet!" only creations of fancy?

CHAPTER XV.

It is not to be supposed that Captain Howard Murpoint had deserted his post of observation at this critical time on a matter of no moment. The captain had commenced to play his game in earnest, and that he might be able to throw down one of his trump cards he had declared his intention of riding on the chestnut to the market town of Tenby.

Had he even been aware that Mr. Leicester would carry out his yachting intentions on that day it is probable that he would still have kept to his plan, for the captain was a firm believer in the proverb, "Delays are dangerous," and once assured that a step was necessary never hesitated about taking it.

Consequently after breakfast, he mounted the chestnut and rode off,

swaying his white, well-gloved hand to the ladies, and smiling with the serenity of a mind at ease and a heart innocent of guile.

When he had got beyond the village, the smile disappeared, and the chestnut felt the whip, in which the captain tied three good hard knots, across its sleek sides.

He was in a hurry, and he soon impressed it upon the horse, who tore into Tenby all on fire with surprise and anger at its novel treatment.

The captain stabled his steed, drank a glass of ale at the "Royal George," and then strolled through the town.

It was an old-fashioned place, but there were some good shops, among them an apparently well-stocked stationer's.

To this the captain directed his steps, and, sauntering in, purchased some paper and envelopes, also some ink, pens and pencils, and seemed inclined to purchase anything to which the shopman—an obliging fellow—called his attention.

"Have you any parchment? I am going to make a list of goods—curiosities, and such like—to send over seas and I am afraid that paper might be destroyed," he explained.

"Oh, parchment is the thing, sir," said the man, and he took a roll of the same from a drawer.

"There is some, sir," said he, "but it is rather faded. The fact is we are not often asked for it, and this has been in the house for some time. If it is of any use to you I will charge you less than the usual price for it."

The captain turned it over indifferently, and separated the sheets with his finger.

"No," he said, "I think paper will do." Then he raised his eyes to a shelf behind the shopkeeper's head and said, suddenly: "Is that sealing wax up there? I think I'll have some."

The man reached a ladder and climbed up for it.

While his back was turned Captain Murpoint skillfully abstracted a chest of parchment from the heap and slid it into his pocket, coughing the while to cover the sound of the crisp rustle, and flinging his umbrellas down upon the remainder so as to account for the sound if his cough had not covered it.

The shopman descended quite unsuspectingly, however, and the captain, having added the sealing wax and some red tape to his purchases, took his leave, refusing all the obliging stationer's offers to send the parcel home, and carrying it in his hand.

From the High Street he then made a slight divergence to one of the smaller thoroughfares, and paused before a small general shop which displayed in its little window a sample of its varied stock.

He purchased several small articles and then inquired in the most natural manner for a flour dredger.

"I do not know what it is," he added, with a smile, as the good woman looked rather surprised; "but I have been commissioned to purchase one for a lady."

"Certainly, sir," said the woman; natural manner for a flour dredger. The captain examined it with a smile.

"I suppose it is all right," he said, and he had it packed up with his other purchases.

With a sigh of absolute relief, for though the incident was seemingly trivial, he had effected a good deal in obtaining a sheet of parchment and a flour dredger without attracting attention, he returned to the "Royal George," and set down to a nice little luncheon.

Then ordering his horse, he mounted again.

On his way home, a very little distance from his route, lay Coombe Lodge. The captain was a gallant gentleman, and he thought it would only be a delicate piece of attention if he called to inquire after Lady Lackland's health.

Lady Lackland, whose eyes had been averted, sought his face with a mild but astute look of inquiry.

(To be Continued.)

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After earnest inquiries after her ladyship's headache the captain gave an amusing and highly colored account of his trip to Tenby, introducing and inventing half a dozen little serio-comic incidents, which, though they did not occur, highly amused the countess.

"I am sorry Ethel and Fitz are out," she said as the captain rose to go. "I suppose however, you did not expect to find them at home?"

She smiled interrogatively.

"No," he said. "I was not aware—"

"Indeed!" said the countess. "Did you not know that they were going yachting with Mr. Leicester Dodson and Mrs. Mildmay?"

The captain certainly did not know it, and shrugged his shoulders with a smile.

"No, indeed," he said. "Ah, my dear Lady Lackland, these very young people are so impulsive! They arranged their little pleasure trip after I had started this morning, seeing that the weather was fine—though," he added, glancing at the window, "I think we may have a storm."

Lady Lackland looked at him very thoughtfully.

She thought him a man worth consultation, and perhaps of confidence.

"Mrs. Mildmay has gone," she said. "Mr. Dodson rode over this morning and fetched Fitz and Ethel."

"Oh!" said the captain, significantly. "Very impulsive young man, my dear lady; very excellent, clever young man but impulsive. He has been badly brought up, in a selfish circle, and I am afraid has acquired a considerable amount of willfulness, and—shall I add, fickleness?"

"What do you mean?" asked Lady Lackland, with soft abruptness. "Do you think Mr. Leicester is obstinate and a flirt?"

"The very word, my dear lady," said the captain, softly, as he sank into the seat beside her. "I am very interested in Mr. Leicester," he continued, swiveling his hat gently and looking up into the countess' face under his deeply penciled eyebrows.

"Very, I could tell you why—perhaps you can guess. To be candid, my dear Lady Lackland, as I told you the other evening, I am poor John Mildmay's oldest friend. I was to have been his daughter's legal guardian; and though his sudden death prevented him bequeathing her welfare to my care I still feel for her the affection and anxiety of a father. Ah, how can I do otherwise when by her every look and gesture, by her every smile and tone she reminds me of my dear lost friend?"

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