

THE LADY OF THE TOWER

A Continued Story of Romantic Adventure

CHAPTER VII.

An Unwelcome Visitor.

LANCE entered the dining-room with his mother, who had been on the look-out for him at the front door. He was in high spirits at the prospect of the morrow's venture. Having greeted Hilda and Diaz, he at once plunged into his final arrangements.

"I shall up anchor and steam out of Falmouth harbour to-morrow at sundown," he began. "We shall proceed along the coast dead slow, so as to ensure that it is dark by the time we are off the cove. Then I shall order all lights out, alter the course, and run the steamer in as near as it is safe to go. Fortunately there is deep water close in shore, so that our boats will have to make short trips. Two boats, doing two journeys each, ought to finish the job unless there is some unforeseen hitch."

"You will come up from the beach to superintend the lowering of the cases yourself?" said Mrs. Pengarvan wistfully.

"Well, mother, I had meant this to be good-bye, because I thought that I should be better employed in seeing the stuff into the boats," Lance replied. But, perceiving the swift disappointment on Hilda's face, he affected to glance critically at the imposing array of cases ranged round the derrick, and added: "Perhaps you would be short-handed with only Craze and Pascoe and Tony to work the tackle. Yes, I'll run up from the shore and lend a hand. Then when it's all down Tony and I will clear out and go aboard with the last shipment."

"I hope you have chosen a crew you can trust," said Mrs. Pengarvan. "To use the mildest phrase, this will seem very irregular to them, and you've got to think of when you come home, you know."

"There will be no trouble with the crew—thanks to Tony's dollars. They are most of them devoted to me, and the new hands won't peach on a deal that will bring them back with full pockets."

"What about Mr. Polgleaze? He is a very cunning old man," said Hilda. "It would not only be short shrift to me as nominal owner of the Tower, but to you as captain of 'The Lodestar,' if he did."

"No, Jacob does not suspect," replied Lance with a dry intonation that puzzled his hearers. "But," he went on, turning to Diaz, "that reminds me, Tony, I have told you that my cheese-paring owner has a flashy rip of a son who was not to be reckoned with seriously. I must take that back. Wilson Polgleaze has taken to haunting the office lately, and has developed general signs of uneasiness. I'm not sure of him. He may have smelt a rat, and for that reason I want you not to show out of doors again before we sail."

Hilda glanced at the South American, sympathy getting the better of her amusement. For by the light of their recent talk she guessed that this prohibition was a blow to him. If so, he did not show it, and she realized that the shipment of his guns meant more to him for the moment than his "interest," as he had called it, in Marigold Craze.

"Right you are, my friend. You are in charge, and it is for me to obey," his response came firmly.

"Then everything is in trim and the conclave is adjourned till to-morrow night," said Lance gaily. "Let the conspirators feed if the varlets, in the shape of dear old Martha, will bring in the viands."

Two hours later Lance left to return to Falmouth, and the rest of that day and the whole of the next was a period of feverish inactivity to those at St. Runan's Tower. At sundown on the eventful day, Nathan Craze arrived to help with the cases, and was shown by Martha into the dining-room, where Hilda, Mrs. Pengarvan and Antonio

By HEADON HILL

PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

JACOB POLGLEAZE, ship-owner, holds a mortgage on St. Runan's Tower, the home of Hilda Carlyon. His son Wilson proposes marriage to her, but is met with refusal, and swears revenge. At this time Lance Pengarvan, a ship-captain, arrives home from a voyage with his friend, Antonio Diaz, who is on a secret mission. The two men conceal a load of iron-bound boxes in a room in the tower, with the help of Nathan Craze, an old fisherman. Diaz meets and falls in love with the old man's daughter, Marigold.

Diaz were already assembled. Pascoe was waiting in the kitchen till he should be wanted.

"Here you are, Nathan!" cried Hilda, as the old fisherman entered. "The band of law-breakers is now complete."

"I don't hold it law-breaking to break bad laws, and a law that hinders a brave people fighting to be free is a danged bad law, Miss," replied Craze, in what was for him a lengthy speech. He was in a state of restrained excitement, the smuggling blood of his ancestors craving for the coming outlet. "Any strangers prowling about?" Diaz inquired.

"I've kept a good look-out on the beach all day, and I ain't seen any," was the cautious reply.

After this they settled down to watch for the steamer's lights, where they would appear round the distant headland. A better night for the purpose could not have been chosen. The sky was densely overcast with sullen, stationary clouds, but there was neither wind nor rain, and the sea was in a state of flat calm. The trips of the boats between ship and shore would be easy, and the alteration of "The Lodestar's" course when off the cove would not be noticed from the main track of vessels further out. From the land there would be no witnesses of the secret shipment on that desolate coast, unless they were there with intent, since the coastguard station a mile away had been abolished the year before.

It was about eight o'clock when Nathan Craze, perched on the sill of the great oriel window, stiffened his huge frame and strained forward for clearer vision.

"That's her!" he pointed to a yellow light and a faint blur of green below. "Masthead and side lights. Nothing else would be so close in."

Almost as he spoke both lights went out, and they knew that out there in the darkness Lance Pengarvan was steering his ship towards them by "dead reckoning," creeping inshore over the shallowing water of the bay. Their patience was severely taxed. Pascoe was fetched from the kitchen, but it was a long hour before they heard the scraping of a boat's keel on the shingle far below.

A quarter of an hour later Lance, who had been admitted by Martha, entered the room, and wasting no time on more than a general greeting, took charge of the operation. One by one the iron-bound chests were hooked on to the derrick, slung out of the window and lowered to the shore. Lance himself controlled the winch, while the other men got the cases into position, ready to feed them in turn to the derrick, so soon as the chain was wound up again. The subdued hum of voices below and the trampling of feet on the shingle told that the shipment was going merrily forward.

And then, suddenly, while Lance was winding up the chain for the last case, there came an alarm that set them all staring at each other. The front door began to ring a jangling peal, ceased for a few moments, and then started again, filling the whole house with harsh, metallic discord.

"Who can it be at this time of night? It is past ten o'clock," said Mrs. Pengarvan with ill-concealed anxiety.

"I expect that it is William Penalva, come up from the cove for some medicine for his sick boy," said Hilda. "No, Martha, I'll go and see myself. If it should be anyone else diplomacy may be needed, and it isn't your strong point."

"Better let 'em ring till we get this last case out," suggested Lance from the winch. "Five minutes will do it."

"Little Jem was worse to-day, and it may be serious," Hilda insisted in the tone of "Mistress of the Tower," which she so rarely assumed. "I do not wish Penalva to be kept waiting. If it should be someone whom I do not trust I shall refuse admission. Leave it to me."

With the air of taking no denial she walked out of the room, crossed the hall, unbolted the front door, and for once found that she had over-rated her powers. For no sooner had she begun, very cautiously, to open the door than it was pushed wide with such force as nearly to knock her down, and Wilson Polgleaze entered. His dissipated face was flushed with triumph, and he bore himself with an insolent familiarity that he had never used towards Hilda before.

"You forget yourself, sir. I cannot receive you so late," said the girl, her first impression being that the intruder was drunk.

"You'll have to," came the loudly uttered reply. "I have a heap of things to say to you, my proud lady, and they're going to be said to-night, so you'd best knuckle under and listen."

Still believing that the man was intoxicated, and knowing that his blustering voice must have reached the others, Hilda retreated at first slowly towards the dining-room door. But when Polgleaze followed her she started running, hoping that she might shut the door in his face before he saw what was going on in the room. She was a fraction of a second too late. She reached her refuge, but not in time to exclude her pursuer. He slipped in after her, and then came to an abrupt halt, taking in with malignant eyes the scene that was being enacted.

But he had no chance to master more than a general view of the derrick at the open window, with the last case attached to its hook, and of four men busy around it, when he found himself confronted by Lance Pengarvan. The captain of "The Lodestar," on hearing the commotion in the hall, had surrendered the winch to Nathan Craze, and had held himself ready for the emergency.

"Lance, this man forced his way in and insulted me; I couldn't keep him out," Hilda panted breathlessly.

"As part owner of the ship this servant of mine is supposed to be taking down channel it is a jolly good thing I did force my way in," said Wilson Polgleaze, trying to pierce the gloom by the window, so as to identify the dim shapes clustered round the derrick, but failing in the short time allowed him.

For Lance Pengarvan's great brown fist shot out, and, catching him full between the eyes, felled him like a pole-axed bullock.

CHAPTER VIII.

I Can Prove It.

HILDA and Mrs. Pengarvan uttered a simultaneous cry of alarm, but Lance, laying his hand on the heart of the fallen man, quickly re-

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See Inland Revenue Bulletin No. 305, page 5, table II., for comparisons.

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