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Stella Mordaunt;
 —OR—
The Cruise of the "Kingfisher."

CHAPTER XX.

Though Stella strained every muscle in her efforts to work the boat back to the island with her single oar she made no headway; the wind was too strong for her, and drove her before it like a cork; and presently the storm raged so furiously and rocked the boat so violently that she could not keep her footing, and was compelled to slip the oar and sink on to the thwart helpless and exhausted.

But though she was in such terrible straits, she did not give in.

Most girls would have been half dead with terror; but Stella was composed of sterner stuff than her sex are usually made of, and she had been living the kind of life that hardens the muscles and steels the nerves. She had been the constant companion of a man who did not know what fear was, and she had learnt, perhaps unconsciously, a contempt for cowardice—unless it was in the presence of a wild animal—and a desire to emulate Rath's calm, cool courage.

So, breathlessly, she sat and waited, hoping that the storm would soon abate, and buoyed up with the conviction that Rath would come in his canoe to her rescue.

But the storm held on, and the boat, tossing on the mountainous waves, was blown farther out to sea; and presently, as she grew chilled by the rain and half dazed by the motion of the boat, her heart began to fail her.

If Rath had been with her, she would not have known fear; but she was alone—alone, a mere speck on the vast ocean whose waves threatened to engulf her at every moment; and as the awful solitude pressed upon her, and she realized that Rath might not be able to come out to her, the sense of her loss struck her like the stab of a knife, and with a cry of "Rath! Rath!" she covered her face with her hands to shut out the sight of the storm.

And even at that moment it was the dread of death that terrified her, but the loss of Rath, and the thought of all that he must be suffering on her account. Every fibre of her being ached for him. She felt that if he were there by her side, she could face the worst, and meet death, if die they must, with gratitude; but to be tossing on these hideous waves, without Rath to cheer and encourage her, added to the terror and misery which had now got fast hold on her. She had felt her mother's death

keenly, had mourned for her as deeply as a tender-hearted girl could mourn; but this feeling of bereavement was even more intense than that which had overwhelmed her on the loss of her mother; and in the howling of the wind and the fierce beating of the rain came the revelation that Rath was dearer to her than life itself.

How long the storm lasted, how many hours she crouched half deafened by the roar of the elements, she did not know; but after awhile the wind lessened somewhat, the rocking of the boat became less violent, and the rain ceased.

She rose trembling to her feet, caught up the oar, and tried to scull towards the land; but fate seemed against her; after two or three minutes of struggle, the oar broke in her hand.

With a cry of despair, she sank down again, and clasping her hands, gazed at the waste of sea with vacant eyes.

The storm cleared, but presently a haze crept over the horizon, and before long a dense fog surrounded her.

The wind dropped, and the boat seemed motionless; but it was still drifting, and drifting farther from the land—and Rath—every moment.

The fog was more depressing than the hurricane of wind and rain; and as she sat and shivered with the cold she became almost unconscious from exhaustion and want of food. A dreamy apathy took possession of her, and she lay back, her arms hanging limply at her side, small incidents of her life on the island with Rath passing like a panorama across her mind.

She recalled the day she had been washed ashore in this same boat, Rath's misapprehension of her sex, their strange bargain; how honourably he had carried out his part of the singular contract; how tender and good he had been with her! How patiently he had borne with her whims and caprices and temper! He had worked for her, taken care of her, watched over her as surely no other man had ever done for any other girl! And how ungrateful she had sometimes been! She remembered how he had risked his life over the cliffs to get her the flowers she fancied; how he had taken her in his arms and kissed her when her mother had died.

And at this remembrance of his tenderness and pity, the tears welled to her eyes and rolled unheeded down her cheeks. Oh! if she could but get back to him, if she could but see him, if it were only for a moment, to tell him how grateful she was, how much she loved him! It was the despair of love, not the dread of death, that held her in thrall as the boat drifted through the fog which cloaked round her like a thick white blanket; and her one prayer was, not that she might be rescued, but that she might be restored to Rath, to the old life by his side, in which she knew now she had been the happiest of girls. Once, as she grew weaker, and her heavy lids drooped like lead over her tired eyes, she slowly and painfully slid her hand into her bosom, and took out a few faded flowers tied together with a piece of cotton.

They were the flowers Rath had risked his life for, the flowers she had found lying beneath him under the cliff, and she had hidden them from him, and carried them in her bosom ever since. She raised them to her lips and kissed them now; it was all she had of Rath, and they were precious to her and comforted her even in that supreme moment.



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As she restored them to their hiding place, she murmured: "Good-bye, Rath; good-bye, dear Rath!"

Her eyes closed and she fell back, one hand pressed on her bosom where the flowers lay.

She was unconscious for some little while. When she came to, slowly and painfully, the fog had lifted and the sea was rippled by a gentle breeze. She slowly raised herself on one arm—she was too weak to sit up—and gazed vacantly over the ocean.

She was almost sorry that she was still alive, for with the return of consciousness the remembrance of Rath, the acute agony of her longing for him, came rushing back upon her; and the awful solitude, the terrible loneliness overwhelmed her. Then, as she lay there, a new dread, a fresh misery tortured her. Rath would be sure to try and rescue her; the canoe could not have lived in the storm through which, by a miracle, the boat had passed; he was, in all probability drowned. If Rath was dead, then only death remained for her to long for. She closed her eyes and prayed that it might come quickly, that she might not linger through many more such hours as those through which she had suffered.

But death does not come when we call upon him; he chooses his own time; and, with a sigh, she opened her eyes again, slowly, reluctantly. As she did so, she saw something white in the distance.

It was like a cloud on the sea-line; but while she gazed at it apathetically, she knew that it was not a cloud. Presently the vague fleecy whiteness took the shape of sails.

For a moment her heart leapt with the instinct of self-preservation; but it sank again. The vessel, if vessel it were, might not see her; and if it did, and came down upon her, Rath was not on board, and what was the use of life without Rath? But after a moment or two she began to realize that if she were rescued she might get back to the island; and struggling to her feet, she tied her handkerchief to the broken oar and waved it.

She tried to call out, though no sound she could make would have reached the vessel; but her voice failed her, and, after a minute or two, her strength also; so that she could not hold up the oar. But she stuck it in the mast-hole and then dropped back, panting with her weakness. She closed her eyes, resolved not to open them till she had counted a hundred.

For they ached with the intensity of her gaze, the mingled hope and dread. When she looked again, a cry of despair rose from her white lips. The sails, if sails they were, had disappeared; the sea was once more a hideous blank. She must have become half unconscious again, for it seemed to her that only a few minutes had passed when, vaguely and dimly, she heard the sound of voices near her. She knelt and clung to the edge of the boat, and saw a yacht bearing down upon her.

The white sails were all set, and it looked like a huge swan breasting the green waves, and in her dazed condition she was more sensible of its beauty than the fact that it was coming to save her.

Presently an order was shouted from the deck, the sails slid down, as if by magic, the vessel slackened, and came floating beside the boat. Stella looked up with heavy eyes, and saw that the side of the yacht was lined with faces, that men were rushing to and fro in excitement, and then she heard a voice exclaim: "By Heaven! it's a woman—a girl! Quick with that rope! Take care!" A rope with a grappling-iron was thrown and caught the boat, and the

next instant a young man had leapt into it, and was supporting Stella in his arms.

A cheer rose from the crew, a ladder was lowered, and she was borne on deck.

Two days afterwards, when she opened her eyes and struggled half reluctantly with returning intellect, she found herself lying in a berth in a luxurious state-room. A voice murmured sweetly: "Oh, I am so glad! Are you better?" And she saw a fair-haired girl bending over her.

"Where am I? Where—where is Rath?" asked Stella, feebly, yet half wildly.

She tried to sit up; but the girl beside her gently forced her down again.

"You are all right, dear," she said, soothingly, pityingly. "You are on board the 'Kingfisher,' my brother's yacht—amongst friends. Can you hear me? Are you quite conscious?"

—for Stella gazed at her vacantly for a moment or two; then, as she realized that this was not the island, that Rath was not here, she closed her eyes again and fell back and sighed.

There was a knock at the door, and the young man who had leapt into the boat looked in.

"How goes it, Cis?" he asked, in a hushed voice.

The young lady nodded, and smiled with infinite satisfaction.

"She has come to; but she is scarcely conscious yet, poor girl!" He stood in the doorway and looked towards the berth anxiously.

He was a handsome young fellow, almost as fair as his sister, but, unlike her, with a bronzed face and bright eyes that were eloquent of health and strength. He was not above the average height, but so well made that his slight figure, in its white yachting kit, did not seem short or under-sized.

"Poor girl!" he echoed. "Anything I can do, Cis?"

His sister smiled again. He had asked the same question a hundred times during the last two days.

"No, nothing, Cecil," she answered in the words she had used so many times.

"Well, call me if I can do anything," he said.

Stella heard all this vaguely, and with a kind of indifference; but presently she looked round again.

"Have I been—ill long?"

"Two days, dear," said the young lady. "And we have been so anxious! Some day, when you are quite well and strong, you shall tell us how you came to be in that boat. But you must not think of it now." She added, quickly, as Stella shuddered, "We are all so anxious—my brother and I, and, indeed, all the men, that you should get well, that you must try and do so for our sakes," she went on; for she was alarmed by Stella's weakness and apathy, and was anxious to arouse her interest.

"I can not tell you how glad and grateful we are that we lost our reckoning, and—saw you! You must take some of this beef tea, and try and sleep, dear."

Stella sat up and took a little of the beef tea. She was too weak to hold the spoon, and her nurse had to feed her.

"That's right. You will soon be better now," said the fair-haired girl, with tears in her eyes.

"You are very good to me," said Stella, feebly. "Will you tell me the name of the ship again? I have forgotten already."

(To be continued.)

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WORST OF GERMAN ARE HE

British Commission Bryce, After Full Present Detailed Report ter and Outrage in France—Women and Huge List of Victims.

(Conclude)

Murders Most One witness saw a German cut a woman's breast and murdered her, and saved dead bodies of women in the Hofstadt two witness having seen the body pierced by bayonet through wrists cut also.

"On a side road the German was seen on his dog, bayonet wound in his chest by his side the dead body of five or six with his hands severed.

"Two young women were the backyard of a house, her breasts cut off, the child stabbed.

"In Sempt the corpse of his legs cut off, who was seen by a witness, a girl dressed only in a sheet great distress. She herself and other girls had been into a field, stripped, violated, and that some had been killed with bayonets. "At Elwey a man's neck tied up to a ring in the backyard of a house. His and his corpse was in a manner too horrible to describe man's naked body was also stable abutting on the same. "At Haesch, a child of its stomach cut upon his was lying near a house. the corpses of a man and four younger persons in one house. It is said to have been murdered because of a girl, who would not permit men to outrage her."

Children Crucified Taking up conditions a district during September says:

"At Haecht several children murdered, one or two years old was found hanging of a farmhouse by its hands a crime which seems almost like, but the evidence feel bound to accept. In this house was the body of who had been shot in the chest. "At Eppenheim the dead child of two was seen pinned ground with a German. same witness saw a mutilated alive near Yeerde on the spot. A chapter is given to the conditions at Louvain, where port states, "massacre, destruction went on. . . . shot and others taken prisoners compelled to go with the soldiers went through the village 'Man had geschossen, died was seen going along in the air."



JOHN J.