

Ellis Edward Sylvester

Adrift on the Pacific: A Boys [sic] Story of the Sea and its Perils



Edward Ellis

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Edward S. Ellis

Adrift on the Pacific

CHAPTER I

CAPTAIN STRATHMORE'S PASSENGER

A few hours before the sailing of the steamer *Polynesia*, from San Francisco to Japan, and while Captain Strathmore stood on deck watching the bustle and hurry, he was approached by a nervous, well-dressed gentleman, who was leading a little girl by the hand.

"I wish you to take a passenger to Tokio for me, Captain Strathmore," said the stranger.

The honest, bluff old captain, although tender of the feelings of others, never forgot the dignity and respect due to his position, and, looking sternly at the stranger, said:

"You should know, sir, that it is the purser and not the captain whom you should see."

"I have seen him, and cannot make a satisfactory arrangement."

"And that is no reason, sir, why you should approach me."

The captain was about moving away, when the stranger placed his hand on his arm, and said, in a hurried, anxious voice:

"It is not I who wish to go—it is this little girl. It is a case of life and death; she must go! You, as captain, can take her in your own cabin, and no one will be inconvenienced."

For the first time Captain Strathmore looked down at the little girl, who was staring around her with the wondering curiosity of childhood.

She was apparently about six years of age, and the picture of infantile innocence and loveliness. She was dressed with good taste, her little feet being incased in Cinderella-like slippers, while the pretty stockings and dress set off the figure to perfection. She wore a fashionable straw hat, with a gay ribbon, and indeed looked like a child of wealthy parents, who had let her out for a little jaunt along some shady avenue.

When Captain Strathmore looked down upon this sweet child, a great pang went through his heart, for she was the picture of the little girl that once called him father.

Her mother died while little Inez was an infant, and, as soon as the cherished one could dispense with the care of a nurse, she joined her father, the captain, and henceforth was not separated from him. She was always on ship or steamer, sharing his room and becoming the pet of every one who met her, no less from her loveliness than from her childish, winning ways.

But there came one awful dark day, away out in the Pacific, when the sweet voice was hushed forever, and the rugged old captain was bowed by a grief such as that which smites the mountain-oak to the earth.

The little girl who now looked up in the face of Captain Strathmore was the image of Inez, who years before had sunk to the bottom of the sea, carrying with her all the sunshine, music and loveliness that cheered her father's heart. With an impulse he could not resist, the captain reached out his arms and the little stranger instantly ran into them. Then she was lifted up, and the captain kissed her, saying:

"You look so much like the little girl I buried at sea that I could not help kissing you."

The child was not afraid of him, for her fairy-like fingers began playing with the grizzled whiskers, while the honest blue eyes of the old sailor grew dim and misty for the moment.

The gentleman who had brought the child to the steamer saw that this was a favorable time for him to urge his plea.

"That is the little girl whom I wished to send to Tokio by you."

“Have you no friend or acquaintance on board in whose care you can place her?”

“I do not know a soul.”

“Is she any relative of yours?”

“She is my niece. Her father and mother are missionaries in Japan, and have been notified of her coming on this steamer.”

“If that were so, why then were not preparations made for sending her in the care of some one, instead of waiting until the last minute, and then rushing down here and making application in such an irregular manner?”

“Her uncle, the brother of my wife, expected to make the voyage with her, and came to San Francisco for that purpose. He was taken dangerously ill at the hotel, and when I reached there, a few hours ago, he was dead, and my niece was in the care of the landlord’s family. My wife, who is out yonder in a carriage, had prepared to accompany me East to-morrow. Her brother had made no arrangements for taking the little one on the steamer, so I was forced into this unusual application.”

While the gentleman was making this explanation, the captain was holding the child in his arms, and admiring the beautiful countenance and loveliness of face and manner.

“She does look exactly like my poor little Inez,” was his thought, as he gently placed her on her feet again.

“If we take her to Japan, what then?”

“Her parents will be in Tokio, waiting for her. You, as captain, have the right, which no one would dare question, of taking her into your cabin with you, and I will compensate you in any manner you may wish.”

“What is her name?” asked Captain Strathmore.

“Inez.”

“She shall go,” said the sailor, in a husky voice.

CHAPTER II

THE CAPTAIN AND INEZ

The steamer *Polynesia* was steaming swiftly across the Pacific, in the direction of Japan—bravely plunging out into the mightiest expanse of water which spans the globe, and heading for the port that loomed up from the ocean almost ten thousand miles away.

Although but a few days out, little Inez had become the pet of the whole ship. She was full of high spirits, bounding health—a laughing, merry sprite, who made every portion of the steamer her home, and who was welcome wherever she went.

To the bronzed and rugged Captain Strathmore she was such a reminder of his own lost Inez that she became a second daughter to him, and something like a pang stirred his heart when he reflected upon his arrival at his destination and his parting from the little one.

Inez, as nearly as the captain could gather, had been living for several years with her uncle and aunt in San Francisco, from which port her parents had sailed a considerable time before. The stranger gave a very common name as his own—George Smith—and said he would await the return of the *Polynesia* with great anxiety, in order to learn the particulars of the arrival of his niece in Japan.

However, the captain did not allow his mind to be annoyed by any speculations as to the past of the little girl; but he could not avoid a strong yearning which was growing in his heart that something would turn up—something possibly in the shape of a social revolution or earthquake—that would place the little girl in his possession again.

And yet he trembled as he muttered the wish.

“How long would I keep her? I had such a girl once—her very counterpart—the sweet Inez, my own; and yet she is gone, and who shall say how long this one shall be mine?”

The weather remained all that could be wished for a number of days after steaming out of the Golden Gate. It was in the month of September, when a mild, dreamy languor seemed to rest upon everything, and the passage across the Pacific was like one long-continued dream of the Orient—excepting, perhaps, when the cyclone or hurricane, roused from its sleep, swept over the deep with a fury such as strews the shores with wrecks and the bottom with multitudes of bodies.

What more beautiful than a moonlight night on the Pacific?

The *Polynesia* was plowing the vast waste of waters which separates the two worlds, bearing upon her decks and in her cabins passengers from the four quarters of the globe.

They came from, and were going to, every portion of the wide world. Some were speeding toward their homes in Asia or Africa or the islands of the sea; and others living in Europe or America, or the remote corners of the earth, would finally return, after wandering over strange places, seeing singular sights, and treading in the footsteps of the armies who had gone before them in the dim ages of the past.

Now and then the great ship rose from some mighty swell, and then, settling down, drove ahead, cleaving the calm water and leaving a wide wake of foam behind. The black smoke poured out of the broad funnels, and sifted upward through the scant rigging, and was dissipated in the clear air above. The throbbing of the engine made its pulsations felt through the ponderous craft from stem to stern, as a giant breathes more powerfully when gathering his energy for the final effort of the race. A few drifting clouds moved along the sky, while, now and then, a starlike point of light, far away against the horizon, showed where some other caravansary of the sea was moving toward its destination, thousands of leagues away.

Although Captain Strathmore was on duty, and it was against the rules for any passenger to approach or address him, yet there was one who was unrestrained by rules or regulations, no matter how sternly they were enforced in other cases.

The captain was standing on the bridge, when he felt some one tugging at his coat, and he looked down.

There was Inez demanding his attention.

“Take me up, pop,” said she.

“Bless your heart!” laughed the captain as he obeyed the little empress; “you would ruin the discipline of a man-of-war in a month.”

While speaking, he perched her on his shoulder, as was a favorite custom with him.

The day had been unusually warm, and the night was so mild that the steady breeze made by the motion of the steamer was scarcely sufficient to keep one cool. Little Inez had thrown aside her hat with the setting of the sun, and now her wealth of golden hair streamed and fluttered in fleecy masses about her shoulders.

The steamer was plowing straight to the westward, cutting the waves so keenly that a thin parabola of water continually curved over in front of her from the knife-like prow.

Perched aloft on the shoulder of the captain, Inez naturally gazed ahead, and the figure was a striking one of innocence and infancy peering forward through the mists and clouds toward the unknown future. But Inez was too young to have any such poetical thoughts, and the captain was too practical to be troubled by “æsthetic meditations.”

He chatted with her about their arrival in Japan, saying that she would be glad to see no more of him, when she replied:

“If you talk that way, I’ll cry. You must go home and live with us. Uncle Con says papa has a big dog, and if we haven’t room in the house, you can sleep with him, and I’ll feed you each morning—oh, look!”

CHAPTER III AN ACCIDENT

That which arrested the attention of the little girl in the arms of Captain Strathmore, was a sight—unique, rare and impressively beautiful.

All around the steamer stretched the vast Pacific, melting away into darkness, with here and there a star-like twinkle, showing where some ship was moving over the waste of waters. Overhead, the sky was clear, with a few stars faintly gleaming, while the round, full moon, for whose rising so many on the steamer had been watching, had just come up, its disk looking unusually large, as it always does when so close to the horizon.

Just when the moon was half above the ocean, and when the narrowing path of the illumination stretched from the ship to the outer edge of the world, a vessel under full sail slowly passed over the face of the moon.

The partial eclipse was so singular that it arrested the attention of Inez, who uttered the exclamation we have recorded. It was seen by nearly all the passengers, too, most of whom were looking toward the horizon for the rising of the orb, and expressions of delight were heard from every quarter, for such a sight, we say, is rare.

When observed by the passengers on board the *Polynesia*, the moon had barely cleared the horizon, as we have stated, and the top of the mainmast just reached the uppermost portion of the periphery, while spars, rigging and hull were marked against the yellow disk as distinctly as if painted in India ink.

Such an obscuration, like a total one of the sun, could last but a few seconds, for the *Polynesia* and the other ship were moving in opposite directions, while the moon itself was creeping upward toward the zenith. Slowly the black ship glided toward its destination—hull, masts and rigging gradually mingled with the gloom beyond, until the moon, as if shaking off the eclipse, mounted upward with its face unmarred, excepting by the peculiar figures stamped there when it was first launched into space.

When the wonderful exhibition was over there were murmurs of admiration from the passengers, who, grouped here and there, or promenading back and forth, had stood spellbound, as may be said, while it was in progress.

Captain Strathmore and two of his officers had seen the same thing once or twice before, but they had been favored in this respect above others, and could hardly expect anything of the kind again.

The captain now prepared for an interesting and novel ceremony, which he had announced would take place that evening by moonlight.

Descending to the deck, and approaching the stern, where the expectant passengers had gathered together, the group were silent a minute, while he stood among them holding little Inez by the hand. A few minutes later the purser came aft, carrying a parcel in his hand, which he carefully placed upon the taffrail. Then he spoke in a sepulchral voice.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we all have lost minutes and hours, but it is seldom that we deliberately throw away a day. But we are to do so now. We are about to bury a day. To-day is the Twentieth, to-morrow will be the Twenty-second, and where, then, is the Twenty-first? There it lies” (pointing to the parcel on the taffrail). “Life is short enough, without deliberately casting an entire day into the sea; but there is the consolation of knowing, on your return, that it shall be restored to you, and thus beautifully does nature preserve the equilibrium throughout the world. What more fitting than that the day should be buried by the hands of one whose life is as spotless as the snow upon the peaks of the Sierras we have left behind us?”

All now uncovered their heads—that is, the gentlemen did—and the captain advanced, leading Inez Hawthorne by the hand. Holding her up a short distance from the deck, she called out:

“Good-by, Twenty-first of September!”

She repeated the words correctly, for the captain whispered them in her ear, and as she spoke she gave the parcel a slight shove, and overboard it went, striking the water with a splash, and instantly sinking out of sight. The package was nothing but some old iron, wrapped about with coarse brown paper.

The ceremony of burying a day, as the reader knows, is a common, and it may be said, a necessary, one with vessels sailing westward over the Pacific, as the picking up of a day is necessary on the return. At first sight it seems incongruous, but it is in fact the only way in which the reckoning of time can be kept correctly.

The little ceremony naturally caused the matter itself to become one of discussion, and probably a goodly number of young ladies and gentlemen picked up more knowledge of the matter than they had ever dreamed of before.

Two curious things happened within a half hour of this novel ceremony.

The *Polynesia* was driving along with that steady motion in which the throbbing of the vessel can only be detected by carefully standing still and watching for it, when every passenger, and especially the captain and his officers, suddenly felt an alarming jar, which shook the steamer from stem to stern. It was noticed that the engine instantly stopped and the enormous ship gradually came to rest upon the long, heaving swell of the Pacific.

In a few minutes it was ascertained that the steamer had broken the shaft of her propeller, thus rendering the all-important screw useless. This necessitated the hoisting of her sails, and a monotonous voyage to her destination, a return to San Francisco, or a long deviation to Honolulu for repairs.

While the necessary investigation was going on, a sail had been sighted bearing down upon them, and in half an hour it came-to, a short distance off, in the hope of being able to afford some assistance—as the sight of a steamer lying motionless on the water meant that something was amiss.

This new craft was the schooner *Coral*, a stanchly-built, sharp-bowed little vessel of forty tons burden, built for the Honolulu trade. She was about seven years old, very fast, and constructed as strongly as iron and wood could make her. The forecabin, cook’s quarters and cabin were all under deck, so that in heavy weather there was no danger of being washed from one’s bunk whenever a big sea came thundering over the rail.

The skipper or captain of this trim little craft was Jack Bergen, of Boston, and he with his mate, Abram Storms, had made the trip across the continent by rail to San Francisco—thus saving the long, dangerous and expensive voyage around Cape Horn.

In the Golden Gate City they—for the mate and captain were joint partners—bought the *Coral* at auction, paying just two-thirds the sum they expected to give for the vessel they needed. However, when she was fitted up and provisioned, they found very little of their funds left, and they could but feel some anxiety as to the result of the extraordinary enterprise upon which they were engaged. The crew of the little schooner consisted of the two sailors, Hyde Brazzier, Alfredo Redvigne, and a huge African, Pomp Cooper, who shipped as cook and steward, with the liability of being called upon to do duty in an emergency.

But of these, more hereafter.

Captain Bergen, after his craft came-to, was rowed across the short, intervening distance with his mate, and they were assisted upon deck, where they were received most courteously.

“Is there anything I can do to help you?” he asked after he and his brother officer were received by Captain Strathmore.

"I'm obliged to you, but I'm afraid not," was the courteous response. "You know, there's no way of telling when a piece of iron is going to fracture, and so there is no way of providing against such an accident."

"Is the shaft broke?"

"Yes; broken clean off."

"Where?"

The captain of the steamer smiled, for he saw no need of such a question, since he considered the damage irremediable.

"Quite a distance from the screw, and it's a curious fracture. Would you like to look at it?"

"I would, indeed. You see, we have got considerable out of our course—being too far west—and we shall make a pretty sharp turn to the south, toward Honolulu."

"I am debating whether to go there, turn back to San Francisco, or keep on under sail to Tokio."

"This is my mate, Abram Storms, from Enfield, Connecticut," said Captain Bergen, introducing the two. "I bring him along because he is the most ingenious man ever turned out by that home of ingenuity; and when I saw that something was the matter with you, I came alongside, more because I believed he could help you, than in the expectation that I could be of any service."

"Captain Bergen does me too much honor," protested the stoop-shouldered New Englander, who, had there been more of daylight, would have been seen to blush under the compliment.

"I have no doubt he speaks the truth," replied Captain Strathmore, leading the way below to where the broken shaft rested motionless; "but this trouble is too much like a broken neck for any surgery to help."

A minute later, a group of half a dozen stood about and stooped over the broken shaft, and examined it by the aid of lanterns, the chief engineer showing a more courteous spirit than is usual under such circumstances.

As one looked at the huge cylinder of solid iron, gleaming with a silvery whiteness all over the jagged face where it had been twisted off, the wonder was how it could be possible for any force to be tremendous enough to do such damage. The peculiarity about the breakage, however, was that, instead of snapping nearly squarely off, the fracture extended longitudinally for fully eighteen inches, so that the face of each part was a great deal broader and longer than is generally the case in such accidents.

The group surveyed it a minute or two in silence, stooping down and feeling of the innumerable jagged protuberances, the indentations, and the exceedingly rough surface, the minute particles gleaming in the lamp-light like a mass of silver ore split apart.

The first remark came from the New Englander, Abe Storms.

"That is curious, for there are no signs of crystallization, nor can I detect a flaw."

"Nevertheless, it must be there, for perfect iron would not have broken in that manner," said the chief engineer.

"I beg your pardon," said the mate, courteously, "but it frequently happens. There has been some peculiar combination of the movement of the steamer on the swell of the sea, with the position of the screw at that moment—a convergence of a hundred conditions—some almost infinitesimal, but necessary, and which convergence is not likely to take place in a million revolutions of the screw—that has brought an irresistible strain upon the shaft—one that would have wrenched it off, had the diameter been twice what it is."

The group looked wonderingly at the speaker, for every intelligent man felt that the theory of the New Englander had a stratum of truth beneath it. It was hard to make clear what the mate meant, but all to a certain extent understood, and no one ventured to gainsay it.

"However," added Abe Storms, "there's one good thing about this; it will be easy to mend it."

Captain Bergen smiled, for he expected something of the kind, and he knew that that wonderful Yankee mate of his never boasted, and would demonstrate every assertion he made. But the others stared at the speaker with something like consternation, and seemed to be debating whether he was crazy or a natural born idiot.

CHAPTER IV

MISSING

“Mend a broken shaft?” repeated the chief engineer, in amazement. “How do you expect to do that?”

“I will show you,” replied the mate of the little schooner, who immediately proceeded to business.

The first thing he asked for was several coils of wire, which were immediately furnished him. Then, with great labor, the two parts of the shaft were fitted together and the wire was twisted tightly around the fractured portion over and over again.

As the tenacity of iron is tremendous, the shaft was securely fastened, but this was not enough. Ropes and chains were bound around the iron in turn, until there was really no room to bandage the broken shaft further.

“There, sir!” exclaimed Storms, as he stepped back and viewed his work. “That is as secure as before, though, if you can possibly do so, you should avoid reversing the screw until you reach Tokio, for you can understand that to reverse and start will wrench the shaft to a dangerous degree.”

The captain now told the engineer, who had been assisting in the operation, to start the engine slowly and with great care.

Captain Bergen ran on deck to see that the *Coral* was in position to receive no harm from the forward motion, while the rest of the group watched the movements with intense interest, standing away from the shaft so as to escape the “splinters,” that more than one thought might be flying about their heads the next minute.

There came the sound of steam, of plunging rods and cylinders from ahead, then there was heard a furious splash at the stern, and all saw that the shaft in its entirety was revolving.

The keen eyes of Abe Storms, who had leaned directly over his handiwork, lamp in hand, his nose almost touching the gleaming chains, detected the very yielding which he had prophesied. He heard the creaking of the chains, the faint gasping, as it may be called, of the rope, and the soft grinding of the fine wire beneath.

All this showed what an enormous strain was brought upon them, and almost any other person detecting the rasping of the ragged edges of iron against each other would have started back appalled, believing that everything was about to fly apart. But it was precisely what the mate expected, and what was inevitable under the circumstances. Then, at his request, the engineer was ordered to put on a full head of steam, and the *Polynesia* plowed forward, cleaving the water before her.

Abe Storms knelt down and bent almost lovingly over the round mass revolving on its axis. Then he beckoned to the engineer to approach and do the same. He obeyed, as did several others, and placing their ears close, they listened intently to the revolution of the shaft.

Not even the faintest noise could be detected to show that there was anything but a normal movement of the shaft. Every one saw, too, that the revolutions were not only going on regularly, but would continue so for an indefinite time. The shaft was practically whole again, with the exception that a reverse movement would be likely to undo everything, and by scraping the corrugated surfaces of the fractures, render it impossible to do anything of the kind again.

Captain Strathmore and his officers stood for a full hour more steadily watching the revolving shaft, and at the end of that time they were satisfied. Then the new acquaintances saluted and bade each other good-by, the officers of the *Coral* passing over the rail, and were rowed back to their own vessel, which had followed in the wake of the steamer, as may be said.

By this time it was midnight, and the captain returned to his station on the bridge, reflecting to himself that some of the most insurmountable difficulties, apparently, are overcome by the simplest means, and that there are some persons in the world who really seem capable of inventing anything.

The hour was so late that all the passengers had retired, and little Inez, as a matter of course, had become invisible long before. She had declared several times that she was going to sit up with the captain, and she tried it, but, like most children under such circumstances, she dropped off into slumber by the time it was fairly dark, and was carried below to the cabin.

The child was like so much sunshine flitting hither and thither upon the steamer, and whose presence would be sorely missed when the hour came for her to go. But Captain Strathmore was a disciplinarian, who could never forget his duty, and he remained at his post until the time came for him to go below to gain the few hours' sleep which cannot be safely dispensed with by any one, no matter how rugged his frame.

Tumbling into his berth, he stretched out with a sigh of comfort, and went to sleep.

"Inez will be in here bright and early to wake me," was his conclusion, as he closed his eyes in slumber.

But he was disappointed, for when he was called from his couch, it was not by the little one whom he expected to see. At the breakfast-table she did not appear, and then Captain Strathmore, fearing that she was ill, made inquiries. He heard nothing, and filled with a growing alarm, he instituted a thorough search of the vessel from stem to stern and high and low. Not a spot or corner was omitted where a cat could have been concealed, but she was not found.

And then the startling truth was established that little Inez Hawthorne was not on board the steamer.

"Oh!" groaned poor Captain Strathmore, "she became my own child! Now I have lost her a second time!"

CHAPTER V

THE NEW PASSENGER

Captain Strathmore rewarded Abe Storms liberally for the service he had rendered them, and the mate and captain of the schooner, as we have said, were rowed back to the boat by Hyde Brazzier.

Reaching the deck of the *Coral*, they watched the progress of the great steamer until she vanished from sight in the moonlight, and then the two friends went into the cabin to “study the chart,” as they expressed it.

It may be said that this had been the principal business of the two since leaving the States, though the statement is not strictly correct. The hum of conversation went on for hours; the night gradually wore away, but still the two men sat talking in low tones, and looking at the roll of paper spread out between them, and which was covered with numerous curious drawings. The theme must have been an absorbing one, since it banished all thought of the passage of time from their minds.

“I tell you,” said the captain, as he leaned back in his chair, “there isn’t the remotest doubt that a colossal fortune is awaiting us, and unless some extraordinary accident intervenes, we shall gather it up.”

“So it would seem,” replied the mate, with a weary look, “and yet I sometimes feel certain that it will never be ours—Good gracious!”

The two men almost leaped out of their chairs, and their hair fairly rose on end. They were absolutely certain that no one else was in the cabin besides themselves. Redvigne was at the wheel, and Brazzier awaited his call in turn at the end of the watch. But just then both heard a rustling, and saw a movement in the berth of Captain Bergen, which showed something was there. It couldn’t be a dog or cat, for there was nothing of the kind on board. Besides which, just then, the two men caught sight of the little white hand which clearly belonged to some one of their own species. Then the covering was thrown back; a mass of tangled golden hair was observed, and instantly after, the fair face of a young child peered wonderingly out, as if seeking to learn where she was.

Of course the little one was Inez Hawthorne, though neither of the two men had ever seen or heard of her before, and it is, therefore, idle to attempt to picture their overwhelming astonishment when they became aware so suddenly of her presence in the cabin.

Neither of the two men was superstitious; but there was good excuse for their being wonder-struck. If an individual in the middle of a desert should suddenly become aware of the appearance of a strange person at his elbow, a situation apparently in which he could only be placed by supernatural means, it would be a very mild word to say he would be surprised.

Flinging the coverlet from her shoulders and throwing back her mass of rich golden hair, Inez assumed the sitting position, with her dimpled legs swinging over the side, and her little hands resting on the rail, as if to steady herself during the long swells of the sea, while she looked at the two men as if trying to recollect where she was and who they were.

“Well, if that doesn’t beat anything that was ever heard or read of before!” exclaimed the captain, turning about and staring at her. “Where in the name of the seven wonders did you come from?”

Abe Storms, the mate, did not speak, but seemed to be waiting to see whether the child had a voice, and thus settle the question in his mind as to whether it was mortal or not.

The problem was quickly solved, for Inez was never backward in asserting her individuality.

“How did I come here? That’s a great question to ask! I got tired and lay down to sleep, and have just woke up. I think this is a real nice boat. Are you the captain? My name is Inez Hawthorne—what is yours?”

These questions, uttered with childish rapidity and ingenuousness, threw some light upon the apparent mystery.

“She belongs to the steamer,” said Abe Storms, with his eyes fixed wonderingly upon her. “She has managed to get in our boat in some way, and we have carried her off. Did you ever see anything so pretty?”

As the reader has learned, there was good cause for this admiring question. Both of the men were bachelors, but they possessed natural refinement, and they could reverence the innocence and loveliness of childhood. With the discovery that she was an actual human being, the awe-struck wonder of the two men vanished, though their curiosity was great to learn how it was she was carried away from the steamer.

“Won’t you come here and talk with me?” asked Storms, reaching out his arms invitingly, but a little doubtful whether she would respond, though the stoop-shouldered inventor was always popular with children. The answer of Inez was a sudden spring, which landed her plump into the lap of the mate, while she flung her arms around his neck with a merry laugh, and then wheeled about on his knee, so that she could look in the face of either of the men, who, not unnaturally, felt a strange and strong attraction toward the beautiful child.

Then the two began a series of questions that were answered in the characteristic fashion of childhood, but from which the friends succeeded in extracting something like a clear explanation of her presence on board the *Coral*—so many miles from the steamer on which she had set sail at San Francisco.

They learned that Inez—who was such a pet on the *Polynesia* that she was allowed to do as she chose—was invited by one of the crew to visit the *Coral*, while she lay so close to the disabled steamer. The one who gave this invitation was Hyde Brazzier, and he was struck with the wonderful loveliness of the child, when she questioned him about the schooner.

There is no nature, however steeped in crime, in which there is not a divine spark which may be fanned into a flame—which, perchance, may illumine the whole soul; and but for the subsequent strange events, little Inez Hawthorne might have proved, in the most literal sense, a heaven-sent messenger upon that craft, which carried so much wickedness in the fore-castle.

Brazzier rowed the short intervening distance, and then took the child by the hand and showed her through the schooner, there being little to exhibit. Finally she was led into the cabin, where she said she was tired and wished to lie down. Thereupon Brazzier lifted her upon the captain’s berth and drew the coverlet over her. A minute later the weary eyes closed in slumber and he left the cabin.

Brazzier had no intention, up to this time, of using any deception in the matter; but, under the persuasion of Redvigne, he gave way to the innate wickedness of his nature, and chuckled over the lamentable occurrence. They felt pleasure in the certainty that what they were doing was sure to make other hearts ache.

CHAPTER VI

“PORT YOUR HELM!”

When a thorough search of the steamer *Polynesia* made known the truth that little Inez Hawthorne was nowhere upon it, the sorrowful conclusion was that she had fallen overboard in some manner and been drowned.

But the belief was scarcely formed, when the discovery was made that such was not the case; that in fact she had been taken away by the schooner *Coral*, whose mate performed such good service in mending the broken shaft of the *Polynesia*.

The story as told Captain Strathmore was as follows:

The two officers of the schooner were rowed to the steamer by one of the crew, who climbed up the ladder at the side of the *Polynesia*, and spent a few minutes in inspecting the broken shaft. He then came back. His attention was attracted to little Inez, whose childish curiosity was excited by the appearance of a stranger who had but one eye, and who looked so different from the trim-looking members of the steamer's crew. The two fell into conversation, and Inez asked so many questions about the schooner that the stranger invited her to take a look at it. He was heard to say that the captain and mate would be engaged for two or three hours, and there would be plenty of time to row the child over the intervening distance, explore the *Coral*, and come back before Captain Bergen and his mate would be ready to leave.

Naturally, Inez gladly accepted the invitation, and the sinister-looking man, picking her up, carefully descended the ladder to his small boat, and rowed away to the schooner.

This story, it will be observed, corresponded with that told by Brazzier himself.

No one thought anything of the proceeding, which was one of the most natural in the world, and there was nothing to arouse misgiving on the part of those who witnessed it.

Inez was almost a spoiled child from the indulgence shown her by every one with whom she came in contact. She distrusted no one, because she had never had any reason to do so. It was night when the officers of the schooner were rowed back, and those who had seen Inez taken away did not observe that the boat returned without her. Holding no thought of anything wrong, they gave no further attention to the strange sailor.

The moment Captain Strathmore learned these facts, he caused an abrupt change to be made in the course of the *Polynesia*. For he was determined that no effort should be spared to recover the lost child, who had so endeared herself to every one on board the steamer.

The precise point where the accident had befallen the shaft was recorded on the log, as a matter of course, and it was within the power of the chief officer to return wonderfully close to that spot. If the schooner *Coral* should remain anywhere in that latitude and longitude, she could be found and Inez recovered.

“But it is not likely the schooner is near there,” reflected Captain Strathmore, as he swept the horizon with his glass and failed to catch sight of a sail. “They could not have taken away the child ignorantly, and instead of remaining there or attempting to find us, the captain has headed in some direction which is not the one he named, as if by accident, when he was aboard.”

The captain was in that mood that it would have been dangerous for him to come upon the daring thieves. He could conceive of no explanation that would relieve them from his wrath, and as the steamer described a huge curve in the sea and headed toward the point where he hoped to gain sight of the sail, full steam was put on, and she ran at a rate of speed which, in the condition of her shaft, was certainly dangerous to a high degree.

It may be said there was not a heart on board the *Polynesia* that did not share in the general anxiety, and there was scarcely an eye that did not scan the broad ocean again and again in the hope of catching sight of the schooner.

Several sails were descried in the course of the day, but not one was that of the *Coral*, and when the night descended not only had there been a complete failure, but the captain was convinced that it was useless for him to delay the steamer by hunting further.

With an angry and sad heart he gave over the search, and the *Polynesia* was headed once more toward the far-off imperial Japanese city of Tokio.

"I would give a thousand dollars to know what it all means," said Captain Strathmore, as he stood on the bridge debating the matter with himself. "There is something about the whole business which I don't understand. In the first place, Inez came under my charge in an extraordinary way. I don't believe that that man who brought her down to the wharf told the truth, and I very much doubt whether the parents of the little one have ever been in Japan. She may have been stolen from some one, and this means has been resorted to in order to get her out of the way. I wish I had questioned her more closely," continued the perplexed captain, following up the train of thought, "for she let drop an expression or two now and then that showed she had some remembrances which it would have been interesting to call up. It's too late now," added the old sailor, with a sigh, "and probably I shall never see her again. She had nestled down into that spot in my heart which was left vacant many weary years ago, when my own Inez died and my only boy became as one dead, and there is no sacrifice I would not make would it but bring this one back to me. It is curious, but the feeling is strong upon me that somewhere at some time we shall meet again."

"Port your helm!"

This was the startling order which the quartermaster sent to the wheel-house at that moment, and which was obeyed with as much promptness as is possible on such a gigantic craft as an ocean steamer.

The night, for a rarity, was dark and misty, a peculiar fog resting upon the water, and shutting out the view in every direction. It would seem that there could be little danger of a collision on the broad bosom of the mightiest ocean of the globe, but there must always be a certain ratio of danger, and none realized this more than Captain Strathmore.

The *Polynesia* had been running at half speed ever since the sun went down, and her whistle blew at irregular intervals. At the moment the startling order was communicated to the man at the wheel, the lights of another steamer were discerned directly ahead. And these were scarcely observed when the mountainous hull loomed up to view in appalling proximity, and a cold shudder ran through every officer and sailor at the sight, for there was just a single second or two when it seemed certain that the two crafts would come together with an earthquake shock and such an irresistible momentum as would crash the two prodigious hulls to splinters, and send the crews and passengers to join the multitudes who have gone before them to the bottom of the sea.

Signals and commands were rapidly exchanged, and the slight misunderstanding which existed between the two steamers at first was quickly removed. The shouts and orders, the tinkling of the engineer's bell, and even the sound of hurrying feet, were heard on one ship as distinctly as on the other.

Most fortunately the officers of each were sensible men, who enforced discipline, and who, therefore, did not lose their heads when sudden peril came upon them.

There was desperate need of haste on the part of all, but the haste was intelligent, and something was accomplished.

The stranger instantly reversed her screw, while the *Polynesia* was equally prompt in her backward movement. They escaped by a chance so narrow that it was terrifying. The bow of the *Polynesia* grazed the side of the stranger as they passed upon their diagonal courses, and every one on the two ships who understood the dreadful peril drew a deep breath and uttered a prayer

of thankfulness when it swept by, and the two steamers vanished from each other's sight in the misty darkness.

The engineer of the *Polynesia* was signaled to go forward again, and the screw was started; but, if the one who uttered the order had forgotten the contingency against which they had been warned, the one who executed that order had not, and he gave the engine just enough steam to start the shaft.

As he did so, listening intently the meanwhile, he heard an ominous crunching, grinding and jarring in the after hold, and he knew too well what it meant. He instantly shut off steam, and with the captain hastened to make the investigation. As they feared, the broken shaft had been wrenched apart again, and it looked as if it were injured beyond repair.

But what man has done, man can do, and the ingenious recourse of Abe Storms was resorted to again. With great care the fractured pieces were reunited and bound, but the task was, in reality, harder than before, since the terrific grinding and wrenching to which it had been subjected broke off much of the corrugated surface.

The work was completed after many long hours of hard work, and once more the *Polynesia* started slowly under steam for the strange island-empire of Asia. This unexpected delay, as the reader will see, doubtless had much to do with the failure of the schooner to find the steamer, since it threw out all possibility of calculating where the larger craft could be.

"Now, if we have no more vessels trying to run into us," muttered the captain, as he resumed his place on the bridge, "we stand a chance of reaching Japan after all, without calling on our sails to help us."

But, standing at his post, with everything going well, his thoughts naturally reverted to the strange mischance by which little Inez Hawthorne was lost to him.

"I don't believe Captain Bergen or his mate, Abe Storms, would knowingly take off the child in that fashion, though the girl was enough to tempt any one to steal her. There is something about the whole business which I don't understand. We ought to have found each other, though, if he is still hunting for me. This second breakage of the shaft will tend to keep us apart."

The long voyage of the steamer to Japan terminated without any incident worth the recording, and Captain Strathmore naturally became anxious to meet the parents of Inez, though sorrowing very much over the story he would be forced to tell them. But no one appeared at Tokio to claim the child, and the wondering captain proceeded to make inquiries.

It was easy to obtain from the church authorities a list of the names of the Christian missionaries in Japan, and they were scanned carefully by the captain, who was given such assistance by the officials themselves that there could be no mistake. Among them was no one by the name of Hawthorne. It was plain then that deception had been used when the man in San Francisco declared that the parents of Inez were missionaries in Japan.

As day after day passed and the steamer *Polynesia* was gradually prepared for her return voyage to California, there was one strong, harrowing conviction which forced itself upon the distressed captain:

"Had Inez not been stolen from the steamer, no one would have come to claim her, and she would have been mine."

His heart thrilled at the thought of how close he had come to obtaining such a priceless prize for his possession, and then he added, as if to cheer himself:

"Never mind; the earth is far and wide. She is alive somewhere upon its face, and at some time, at heaven's own pleasure, she and I shall meet again."

Brave and rugged Captain Strathmore! Was the spirit of prophecy upon you when you muttered the cheering words?

CHAPTER VII

THE REASON WHY THE VOYAGE WAS UNDERTAKEN

At this point it is necessary that the reader should be made acquainted with what has been only hinted up to this point. We mean the reason why it was that the little schooner *Coral*, under the charge of Captain Bergen and Abram Storms, the mate, was on the Pacific Ocean, voyaging toward the South Seas.

The skipper was fond of telling the strange story, and the mate heard it many times, as repeated to him one stormy night, around the roaring fire of Captain Bergen's hearthstone in New England. It ran thus:

"You see, Abe, I was going down Washington Street, in Boston, one day, when I came upon a drunken sailor, who was suffering a terrible beating at the hands of a couple of land-sharks, that were evidently determined to rob him, if they had not already done so.

"It r'iled my blood to see such scandalous proceedings going on, and I sailed in.

"Then I helped pick up Jack tar, and he was taken to the hospital, where his wounds were found to be of a dangerous nature. His assailants were so badly hurt that they went to the hospital, and when they came out they were shifted to the penitentiary, where they're likely to stay for a good many years to come.

"Having taken the part of Bill Grebbens, as he told me his name was, I called at the hospital to see him every day, for I wasn't busy just then. The poor fellow was very grateful for the service I had done him, though sad to say I was too late.

"Bill had been on such a terrible spree that his system wasn't in condition to resist disease, and before long it was plain he was going to make a die of it. He was a plucky fellow, and when the doctor told him he had to go, he didn't weaken.

"Just before he died, he took me by the hand, and told me he hadn't a living relative in the world, nor one who had been such a friend to him as I had proved to be. By that time my own eyes were getting misty, and I begged him to say nothing about it.

"I told him I would see that he had a decent burial, and would attend to anything he wanted me to do. He said there wasn't anything, for it could make no difference to him what became of his body after his death, and for his part he would as lief the doctors should have it.

"However, he took this paper from under his pillow and showed it to me, and told me all about it. I thought at first his mind was wandering, but I soon saw that his head was level, and he knew what he was talking about."

The paper which Captain Bergen produced at this point of his narrative was covered with some well-executed drawings, which, having been done by the sailor himself, showed that he was a man of education.

"Those dots there represent the King George Islands of the South Pacific, lying in about fifteen degrees south latitude and one hundred and forty-three degrees west longitude. To the north here is Mendina Archipelago, and here to the east are the Paumotu Islands, sometimes known as the Pearl Islands. There are a good many of them, and away to the northeast of the group is another island, which, although much the larger on the map, is really a small coral island, with a lagoon, and so unimportant that it has no name, and cannot be found on any map I ever saw.

"You will observe the figure and directions marked on this paper," added Captain Bergen, who invariably became excited at this point in his narration, "which, with his explanations, are so easily understood that no one can go astray.

"Well, Bill Grebbens once belonged to a party of mutineers of a British vessel, who found it growing so hot for them that they put in to this island, scuttled and sunk their ship, and lived

there two years. It was uninhabited, and they led a lazy, vagabond life in that charming climate till a strange sort of sickness broke out among them and carried off eight, leaving only Grebbens and a single shipmate.

“These two spent several months longer in wandering about the island looking for and yet dreading to see a sail, when one day they discovered a bed of pearl-oysters, which they examined and found to be of surpassing richness. The majority of the shells contained pearls, many of them of great size, and the two men saw that an immense fortune lay only a few fathoms under the surface.

“They instantly set to work with great eagerness; but it is seldom that a man obtains wealth in this world by walking over a path of roses.

“Within the first half-hour, a huge man-eating shark glided into the clear water, and with one snap of his enormous jaws actually bit the body of the other sailor in two. The horrified Grebbens managed to get out just in time to save himself.

“He had enough of pearl-diving, and he shudderingly turned his back upon the spot, and began looking out to sea again for a sail, determined now to leave, no matter if he should be carried to England and executed.

“He managed to set up the topmast of the wreck, and to catch the attention of a whaler a few days later, and was taken off. Before going, however, he made a careful drawing of the place, and by studying other charts on the American whaler which took him away he was able to locate the island with such correctness that he could return to it at any time, his intention, of course, being to do so at some period when he could go provided with means to prosecute his search without such frightful risk.

“But Bill never saw the time, for he was too fond of liquor when ashore. He met his death just as I told you, and he gave me this chart or map of the locality, telling me that a fortune lay at that point where my finger is resting to whosoever should go after it.”

Such was the story of Captain Bergen, as he related it to his friend, Abe Storms, to whom he proposed that they should fit out an expedition to go to the South Seas in quest of the fortune that awaited them in the shape of pearls.

Abe was slower and more deliberate, but he finally fell in with the scheme, and the two, as we have already stated, became joint partners in the grand enterprise.

Both were frugal men, and they now decided to invest all their funds in the scheme, which promised to make or break them. Instead of sailing from the port of Boston, they took an important cut “across lots” by going by rail to San Francisco, thus saving the longest and most dangerous portion of the voyage, which otherwise would be necessary. In San Francisco, at a sale of bankrupt property, they bought the schooner, which has already been described, and shipped their crew.

The wonder was that two men possessing the shrewdness of Storms and Bergen should have been so deceived respecting their men.

Hyde Brazzier was an American sailor, with blotched, bleared face, with one eye gone, while over the sunken, sightless cavity he wore a green patch, his face covered by a scraggly beard, and his single eye, small and deep-set, added to the sinister expression of his countenance.

He had the reputation of being a good seaman, and undoubtedly he was, and being strong and vigorous, in the prime of life, he was considered an especially valuable man to Captain Bergen, who paid him five dollars more per month than he expected.

Since Captain Bergen had pursued a rather original course from the beginning, he continued to do so. He engaged his men without any help from the shipping-master, and had hardly reached an understanding with the American when Alfredo Redvigne put in an appearance and applied for a berth, saying that he had heard the best kinds of accounts of the captain’s seamanship and humanity—even in far-away Boston.

Redvig—so called for convenience—said that he had been employed in the East India trade, and was a sailor of nearly twenty years' experience. It struck both Captain Bergen and Mate Storms that, as they were going to the tropics, he was likely to prove a useful man, and he was engaged.

The captain ventured to ask Brazzier's opinion of the other sailor, but the American said he had never heard of him before—though he liked the cut of his jib, and was glad he had been hired. But had any one been watching the faces of the American and Spaniard, he would have detected several suspicious signals which passed between them; and this, added to the fact that, in a very short time, they became intimately acquainted, as may be said, looked as if there had been deception on that point.

The fact was, the two had arranged the matter beforehand, so as to go together in this business—somewhat on the same principle that their employers entered into partnership. They were both serving under assumed names, and were obliged to take no little precaution to keep their identity concealed, for they were “wanted” for serious crimes in more than one port.

Redvig was a small, swarthy, muscular man, with coal-black, curling hair, short, curly beard and mustache, black eyes, with an aquiline nose, and both he and Brazzier had a fashion of wearing small gold ear-rings. Their arms and breast were plentifully tattooed, so that but for the great exception of their evil dispositions, they might well have passed for good specimens of the proverbial Jack tar.

It was different with the huge colored man, Pomp Cooper, who had been known about the wharves of San Francisco for a number of years. He was jolly and good-natured, possessed of prodigious strength, and had been on shipboard enough to acquire a fair knowledge of navigating a coasting vessel.

While many believed he possessed the proverbial loyalty of his race, and could not be induced to commit any grave crime, yet it must be admitted that there were ugly rumors afloat concerning him. It was asserted by more than one that he was a river and harbor pirate, and belonged to one of the worst gangs that ever infested the harbor of San Francisco.

While Captain Bergen was not ignorant of these rumors, yet he placed no credence in them, and believed Pomp to be one of the most valuable men he could obtain. Such in brief was the crew of the *Coral*, when she sailed on her long voyage to the South Seas, in quest of pearls—the location of which had been given by the dying sailor in the Boston hospital.

CHAPTER VIII

VOYAGING SOUTHWARD

It was certainly very wonderful that little Inez Hawthorne should have been transferred from the steamer to the schooner, and that many hours should have passed before the discovery was made by the respective captains of the craft.

Yet such was the fact, and Captain Bergen and Mate Storms had no sooner learned the real situation than Hyde Brazzier was sent for to tell how it occurred. As he was the one who rowed the small boat, there could be no doubt that he knew. The story he told was the true one, with the exception of the supplement—that he actually forgot about the little girl after she went into the cabin and fell asleep.

It was impossible, it may be said, that such could be the fact, and the officers looked knowingly at each other. They knew he was falsifying, but they made no comment, except to declare that she must be taken back to the steamer without an hour's delay.

Captain Bergen learned from Inez that she had no relatives on board the steamer, and she did not show any special distress over being where she was. But, for all that, the honest New Englander felt that she should be restored, and he immediately took every means for doing so.

His supposition was that she would be speedily missed from the *Polynesia*, which would at once make search for the schooner. Accordingly, the *Coral* was headed northwest, under all sail, the sun just rising at the time this change of course was made.

"The steamer will go so much faster than we," said the captain, "that there is no possibility of overhauling her, unless her shaft should give out again."

"There's no danger of that. More likely she'll turn about and look for us."

As the sun climbed the heavens, the horizon was anxiously scanned for some point where the black column of a steamer's smokestack could be seen staining the clear sky. Far away to the northward, a vapor was observed, which at first was set down as the sight for which they were searching; but it was soon learned that it was a peculiarly-formed cloud, resting almost upon the water.

The upper rigging and sails of possibly an American whaler were descried a long distance to the northward, and a full-rigged ship was detected closer in, and further to the eastward. But no sign of the *Polynesia* was discovered through the powerful binocular glasses with which Captain Bergen swept the horizon. There was strong hope, in spite of this, that she would be seen before sunset, and the *Coral* held to her course toward the southwest, not only for that day and night, but for the two succeeding ones. But it is useless to dwell upon the search made by the smaller vessel, which was without the faintest glimmer of success.

Captain Bergen and Mate Storms did their utmost to undo the wrong act of their sailors, but at the end of the third day they held an anxious consultation as to what was the right course left to pursue. They had given up hope of meeting the *Polynesia* except by chasing her all the way to Japan, they having learned that Tokio was her destination.

Should the *Coral* follow her there, or first fulfil its own destiny in the Paumotu Islands? This was the all-important matter to be settled.

When a man makes a great invention or discovery, his first dread is that some one else will anticipate him and gather to himself all the glory and profit. This had been a constant fear in the case of the captain and mate of the schooner *Coral* ever since they began their preparations for the journey to the South Seas. It cost them a pang of dread when, therefore, they headed the schooner about in the hunt for the steamer, for, as will be readily understood, the apprehension of which we have spoken intensifies the nearer one gets to the goal.

There were other considerations which entered into the question as to whether they should go on or turn about. Inez Hawthorne had, as might have been expected, adapted herself to her new position as passenger on the schooner, and ran hither and thither at will, just as she did on the *Polynesia*, and she climbed all over the captain and mate, as if they were Captain Strathmore and his officer, or some of the passengers.

She occasionally expressed a longing to see the grizzled old sea-captain, whom she called her second, or new “papa,” but there was no one else for whom she particularly longed. Her affection was distributed so equally and spontaneously that among several hundred it could not be very profound. Only in the case of the brave old Captain Strathmore was it deep and steadfast.

It would delay the voyage to the Pearl Islands not for weeks, but for months, to sail away to Asia, and then turn about and put back to the southern seas, and during that interval what might not take place? What assurance could there be that the precious pearl-bed would not be devastated?

With the plans which Abe Storms had perfected on the way from home, it was believed that a week’s time after their arrival at their destination would be sufficient to make them enormously wealthy, and thus the voyage which they would afterward take to Japan would be delayed only a month or two, perhaps. Furthermore, the parents and friends of Inez would have every reason to believe she was in safe hands, and would soon be restored to them. All these were weighty considerations, it must be confessed, and they decided the question.

“We have done all that can be done,” said Captain Bergen, standing at the stern with his hand upon the wheel, while Abe Storms, thoughtfully smoking his pipe, was at his elbow, with his arms folded and his eyes gazing dreamily toward the western horizon, where the sun was about to dip into the ocean.

“I agree with you,” was the reply of his mate, who was as conscientious in everything he did as was the captain. “I consider that the chance is as one in a thousand that we shall meet the steamer this side of Tokio, and if we undertake to follow, we shall lose several months of most precious time, without accomplishing any commensurate good. The child is contented and happy here.”

As if to emphasize this assertion, the laugh of Inez was heard at that moment as she came bounding up the steps of the cabin, and ran toward the bow, where the giant negro, Pomp, was leaning against the gunwale, his arms also folded, and an expression of contentment upon his broad, shiny countenance.

The instant he caught sight of Inez his face lighted up and his white, even teeth were displayed with pleasure, as she ran toward him.

It was singular, indeed, that, ever since her first awaking on board the *Coral*, Inez had shown not a positive dislike of Redvig and Brazzier, but what may be called a lack of friendship toward them. She was trusting and loving to Pomp and the two officers, but it was evident that she avoided the others. Possibly she could not have told the reason had she tried, and it is equally possible that she was not aware of it herself. But every one else on board saw it plainly.

When two men in authority talk as did the captain and mate of the schooner *Coral*, the conclusion is inevitable. The decision was made to go on to the Paumotu Islands, after which the voyage would be made to Japan, and, alas! that it was so.

CHAPTER IX

GROPING IN THE DARK

Life on board the schooner *Coral*, bound for the South Seas, now became like one delightful dream.

The sails, fanned by the steady trade-wind, hardly ever required attention, since the course of the craft never varied more than a few points for days at a time, and whoever it was at the wheel, he might as well have lashed it fast and gone to sleep, for all the necessity there was of keeping awake.

There had been some elemental disturbances which required seamanship to weather, but nothing like that usually encountered in the Atlantic. But there came a long spell of weather, faultless in every respect, and whose only drawback was the dread that each day would be the last of such delight. The sun rose clear and bright, and at high noon, as they approached the equator, it was sometimes hot, but the breeze which continually swept the deck tempered it to the crew and passenger. Had they been caught in a calm the heat would have been suffocating; but Providence favored them, and they sped along like a seagull toward their destination. There seemed to be times when the green surface of the sea was at perfect rest; but the regular rising and sinking of the *Coral* showed that the bosom of the great deep was heaving as it always does, though the long swells came only at extended intervals.

The water was of crystalline clearness, and, looking over the gunwale, one could see far into the depths, where strange-looking fish were sporting, sometimes coming to the surface and then shooting far down beyond the reach of human vision. Now and then, too, as little Inez leaned over the side of the vessel and peered downward, she caught sight of something like a shadow, gliding hither and thither, apparently without the slightest effort to keep pace with the schooner, which was bowling along at a rapid rate. It was one of those monstrous sharks, that will snap a man in two as quickly as if he were but an apple, should he fall overboard.

Not a day passed without descrying one or more sails at varying distances, but our friends did not hail or approach any. Both Captain Bergen and Mate Storms were in a nervous condition, and were morbidly apprehensive of being anticipated by some one in dredging for the invaluable pearl-oysters. They were afraid their errand would be suspected, or they would be attacked after they should secure their prize.

One day, under the pretense of wanting medicine, Hyde Brazzier suddenly appeared at the cabin door. The mate and captain were, as usual, studying the chart, and while the mate was ransacking the medicine chest for the drug, that single eye of the sailor secured five minutes' sharp scrutiny of the all-important map.

Redvigne and Brazzier were not much together, as a matter of course, for one was in the captain's watch and the other in the mate's, but during the long, pleasant days and nights when they were voyaging toward the South Seas, they obtained many opportunities for confidential talks. All this might have been in the natural order of things on board the schooner, where the discipline was not strict, but Abe Storms had become pretty well satisfied that harm was meant, and mischief was brewing. He saw it in the looks and manner of these two men, who, while they were watching others, did not suspect they were watched in turn.

About Pomp he was not so certain. The steward and cook seemed to be on good terms with the two sailors, and he frequently sat with them as they formed a little group forward, on the bright moonlight nights, when they preferred to sit thus and smoke and spin yarns to going below and catching slumber, when it was their privilege to do so.

"I believe he is in with them," was the conclusion which Storms, the mate, finally reached, after watching and listening as best he could for several days. "They're hatching some conspiracy—

most likely a mutiny to take possession of the ship. Captain Bergen doesn't suspect it—he is so absorbed in the pearl business; and I'll let him alone for the present, though it may be best to give him a hint or two to keep him on his guard.”

It never can be known what the restraining power of little Inez Hawthorne was on board that vessel on her extraordinary voyage to the Paumotu Islands, in the South Seas. She lived over again the same life that was hers during the few days spent on the *Polynesia*. She ran hither and thither, climbing into dangerous places at times, but with such grace and command of her limbs that she never once fell or even lost her balance. She chatted and laughed with Brazzier and Redvig, but she preferred the others, and showed it so plainly in her manner, that, unfortunately, the two could not avoid noticing it.

“See here,” said Captain Bergen, one evening while sitting in the cabin with the child on his knee, “I want you to try and think hard and answer me all the questions I ask you. Will you?”

“Of course I will, if you don't ask too hard ones.”

“Well, I will be easy as I can. You have told me all about the big steamer that you were on when we found you, and you said that you lived with your Uncle Con in San Francisco, and that it was he and your Aunt Jemima that put you on board.”

“I didn't say any such thing!” indignantly protested Inez. “I haven't got any Aunt Jemima—it was my Aunt Letitia.”

The captain and mate smiled, for a little piece of strategy had succeeded. They had never before got the girl to give the name of her aunt, though she mentioned that of her uncle. But she now spoke it, her memory refreshed by the slight teasing to which she was subjected.

“That's very good. I'm glad to learn that your uncle and aunt had two such pretty names as Con and Letitia Bumblebee.”

“Ain't you ashamed of yourself?” demanded Inez, turning upon him with flashing eyes. “I never heard of such a funny name as that.”

“I beg pardon. What, then, is their name?”

The little head was bent and the fair brow wrinkled with thought. She had tried the same thing before, though it must be believed that she could not have tried very hard, or she would not have failed to remember the name of those with whom she lived but a short time before. But she used her brain to its utmost now, and it did not take her long to solve the question. In a few seconds she looked up and laughed.

“Of course I know their name. It was Hermann, though he sometimes called himself George Smith.”

“The other sounds German,” remarked Storms, in a lower voice. “Go ahead and get all you can from her.”

“How long did you live with them?”

“Let me see,” said Inez, as she turned her lustrous blue eyes toward the roof of the cabin, as if she expected to read the answer there. “I guess it was about two—three hundred years.”

She was in earnest, and Storms observed:

“She must be a little off on that; but take another tack.”

The captain did so.

“Do you remember living with any one excepting your Uncle George and Aunt Letitia?”

Inez thought hard again, and replied, after a few seconds:

“I don't know. Sometimes he was Uncle George and sometimes Uncle Con. We lived in the city a good while, where there were, oh, such lots of houses! but there was a time before that when we come such a long, long way in the cars. We rode and rode, and I guess we must have come from the moon, for we was ten years on the road.”

“Do you remember what sort of looking place the moon was?”

“It was just like San Francisco—that is, it was full of houses.”

The officers looked at each other with a smile, and the mate said:

“It’s plain enough what that means. She has come from New York, over the Union Pacific, and her trip was probably the longest of her life.”

“Do you remember your father and mother?”

“I don’t know,” said Inez, with a look of perplexity on her young face which it was not pleasant to see. “Sometimes I remember or dream of them, before we took such a long ride on the cars. My mother used to hold me on her lap and kiss me, and so did my father, and then there was crying, and something dreadful happened in the house, and then I can’t remember anything more until I was on the cars.”

“It may be all right,” said Captain Bergen to his mate, “for this could occur without anything being amiss.”

“It is possible; but I have a conviction that there is something wrong about the whole business. I believe, in short, that the person who placed her on board the steamer *Polynesia* had no claim upon her at all.”

“That, in fact, the man stole her?”

“That’s it, exactly; and still further, I don’t believe she has any father or mother in Japan, and that if we had gone thither we should have lost all the time and accomplished nothing.”

“It may be, Abe, that you are right,” said the captain, who held a great admiration for his mate, “but I must say you can build a fraud and conspiracy on the smallest foundation of any man I ever knew. But, Abe, you may be right, I say, and if you are, it’s just as well that we didn’t go on a fool’s errand to Tokio, after all.”

“The truth will soon be known, captain.”

CHAPTER X

THE MUTINEERS

A few degrees south of the equator, the schooner *Coral* ran into a tempest of such fury that with all the skilful seamanship of her captain and crew, and the admirable qualities of the schooner itself, she narrowly escaped foundering.

There were two days when she was in such imminent peril that not an eye was closed in slumber, excepting in the case of little Inez Hawthorne, who felt the situation only to the extent that it compelled her to stay close in the cabin, while the vessel pitched and tossed from the crest of one tremendous billow, down, seemingly, into the fathomless depths between, and then laboriously climbed the mountain in front, with the spray and mist whirling about the deck and rigging like millions of fine shot. But the gallant *Coral* rode it out safely, and the steady breeze caught her and she sped swiftly in the direction of the Pearl Islands.

The little girl had run hither and thither, until, tired out, she had flung herself upon the berth in the cabin, where she was sleeping soundly, while the captain was doing the same; Abe Storms, the mate, being on deck at the wheel. It was yet early in the evening, and Hyde Brazzier and Alfredo Redvigne were sitting close together, forward, smoking their pipes and conversing in low tones. The breeze was almost directly abeam, so that the sails carried the craft along at a rapid rate, the water foaming and curling from the bow, while the rising and sinking of the schooner on the enormous swells were at such long intervals as almost to be imperceptible. As far as the eye could extend in every direction, no glimpse of a sail or light could be perceived, nor had any been observed through the day, which confirmed what Bill Grebbens, the sailor in the Boston hospital, said, to the effect that, despite the location of the Paumotu Islands, the approach to them from the direction of California took one in a section where the sails of commerce were rarely seen.

The captain and mate had been consulting their chart, and had taken their reckoning more frequently and with greater care than ever before. The conclusion at which they arrived was that they were already south of the northernmost island of the Paumotu group, and were close to the Coral Island, along whose shore were to be found the precious pearls which were to make them all, or rather the two, wealthy.

"It's a curious business," reflected Abe Storms, while holding the wheel motionless. "When I consider the matter fairly, I don't see why the expedition should not succeed. But it is so different from the coasting business, in which the captain and I have been engaged for years, that it is hard to believe we're going to make anything out of it."

He listened a minute to the murmur of the voices forward, and then he added, pursuing the same train of thought:

"What an extraordinary thing it is that we should have this little girl for a passenger! Suppose we carry her back to Tokio after this pearl hunt, and fail to find her parents?"

He took but a minute to consider the question, when he answered:

"It can never make any difference to Inez herself, for her sweet face and winning ways will secure her a welcome and a home in a hundred different places."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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