

In a few words Mr. Renshaw briefly but plainly related the details of the attempt upon the Pontiac, from the moment that he had been awakened by Nott, to his discovery of the unknown trespasser's flight by the open door to the loft. When he had finished, he hesitated, and then taking Rosey's hand, said impulsively, "You will not be angry with me if I tell you all? Your father firmly believes that the attempt was made by the old Frenchman, De Ferrières, with a view of carrying you off."

A dozen reasons other than the one her father would have attributed it to might have called the blood to her face. But only innocence could have brought the look of astonished indignation to her eyes as she answered quickly:

"So *that* was what you were laughing at?"

"Not that, Miss Nott," said the young man eagerly; "though I wish to God I could accuse myself of nothing more disloyal. Do not speak, I beg," he added impatiently, as Rosey was about to reply. "I have no right to hear you; I have no right to even stand in your presence until I have confessed everything. I came to the Pontiac; I made your acquaintance, Miss Nott, through a fraud as wicked as anything your father charges to De Ferrières. I am not a contractor. I never was an honest lodger in the Pontiac. I was simply a spy."

"But you did n't mean to be — it was some mistake, was n't it?" said Rosey, quite white, but more from sympathy with the offender's emotion than horror at the offense.

"I am afraid I did mean it. But bear with me for a few moments longer and you shall know all. It's a long story. Will you walk on, and — take my arm? You do not shrink from me, Miss Nott. Thank you. I scarcely deserve the kindness."

Indeed so little did Rosey shrink that he was conscious

of a slight reassuring pressure on his arm as they moved forward, and for the moment I fear the young man felt like exaggerating his offense for the sake of proportionate sympathy. "Do you remember," he continued, "one evening when I told you some sea tales, you said you always thought there must be some story about the Pontiac? There *was* a story of the Pontiac, Miss Nott — a wicked story — a terrible story — which I might have told you, which I *ought* to have told you — which was the story that brought me there. You were right, too, in saying that you thought I had known the Pontiac before I stepped first on her deck that day. I had."

He laid his disengaged hand across lightly on Rosey's, as if to assure himself that she was listening.

"I was at that time a sailor. I had been fool enough to run away from college, thinking it a fine romantic thing to ship before the mast for a voyage round the world. I was a little disappointed, perhaps, but I made the best of it, and in two years I was the second mate of a whaler lying in a little harbor of one of the uncivilized islands of the Pacific. While we were at anchor there a French trading vessel put in, apparently for water. She had the dregs of a mixed crew of Lascars and Portuguese, who said they had lost the rest of their men by desertion, and that the captain and mate had been carried off by fever. There was something so queer in their story that our skipper took the law in his own hands, and put me on board of her with a salvage crew. But that night the French crew mutinied, cut the cables, and would have got to sea if we had not been armed and prepared, and managed to drive them below. When we had got them under hatches for a few hours they parleyed, and offered to go quietly ashore. As we were short of hands and unable to take them with us, and as we had no evidence against them, we let them go, took the ship to Callao,



turned her over to the authorities, lodged a claim for salvage, and continued our voyage. When we returned we found the truth of the story was known. She had been a French trader from Marseilles, owned by her captain; her crew had mutinied in the Pacific, killed their officers and the only passenger — the owner of the cargo. They had made away with the cargo and a treasure of nearly half a million of Spanish gold for trading purposes which belonged to the passenger. In course of time the ship was sold for salvage and put into the South American trade until the breaking out of the Californian gold excitement, when she was sent with a cargo to San Francisco. That ship was the Pontiac which your father bought."

A slight shudder ran through the girl's frame. "I wish — I wish you had n't told me," she said. "I shall never close my eyes again comfortably on board of her, I know."

"I would say that you had purified her of *all* stains of her past — but there may be one that remains. And *that* in most people's eyes would be no detraction. You look puzzled, Miss Nott — but I am coming to the explanation and the end of my story. A ship of war was sent to the island to punish the mutineers and pirates, for such they were, but they could not be found. A private expedition was sent to discover the treasure which they were supposed to have buried, but in vain. About two months ago Mr. Sleight told me one of his shipmasters had sent him a Lascar sailor who had to dispose of a valuable secret regarding the Pontiac for a percentage. That secret was that the treasure was never taken by the mutineers out of the Pontiac! They were about to land and bury it when we boarded them. They took advantage of their imprisonment under hatches *to bury it in the ship*. They hid it in the hold so securely and safely that it was

never detected by us or the Callao authorities. I was then asked, as one who knew the vessel, to undertake a private examination of her, with a view of purchasing her from your father without awakening his suspicions. I assented. You have my confession now, Miss Nott. You know my crime. I am at your mercy."

Rosey's arm only tightened around his own. Her eyes sought his. "And you did n't find anything?" she said.

The question sounded so oddly like Sleight's, that Renshaw returned a little stiffly:

"I did n't look."

"Why?" asked Rosey simply.

"Because," stammered Renshaw, with an uneasy consciousness of having exaggerated his sentiment, "it did n't seem honorable; it did n't seem fair to you."

"Oh you silly! you might have looked and told *me*."

"But," said Renshaw, "do you think that would have been fair to Sleight?"

"As fair to him as to us. For, don't you see, it would n't belong to any of us. It would belong to the friends or the family of the man who lost it."

"But there were no heirs," replied Renshaw. "That was proved by some impostor who pretended to be his brother, and libelled the Pontiac at Callao, but the courts decided he was a lunatic."

"Then it belongs to the poor pirates who risked their own lives for it, rather than to Sleight, who did nothing." She was silent for a moment, and then resumed with energy, "I believe he was at the bottom of that attack last night."

"I have thought so too," said Renshaw.

"Then I must go back at once," she continued, impulsively. "Father must not be left alone."

"Nor must *you*," said Renshaw, quickly. "Do let me



return with you, and share with you and your father the trouble I have brought upon you. Do not," he added in a lower tone, "deprive me of the only chance of expiating my offense, of making myself worthy your forgiveness."

"I am sure," said Rosey, lowering her lids and half withdrawing her arm, "I am sure I have nothing to forgive. You did not believe the treasure belonged to us any more than to anybody else, until you knew *me*" —

"That is true," said the young man, attempting to take her hand.

"I mean," said Rosey, blushing, and showing a distracting row of little teeth in one of her infrequent laughs, "oh, you know what I mean." She withdrew her arm gently, and became interested in the selection of certain wayside bay leaves as they passed along. "All the same, I don't believe in this treasure," she said abruptly, as if to change the subject. "I don't believe it ever was hidden inside the Pontiac."

"That can be easily ascertained now," said Renshaw.

"But it's a pity you did n't find it out while you were about it," said Rosey. "It would have saved so much talk and trouble."

"I have told you why I did n't search the ship," responded Renshaw, with a slight bitterness. "But it seems I could only avoid being a great rascal by becoming a great fool."

"You never intended to be a rascal," said Rosey, earnestly, "and you could n't be a fool, except in heeding what a silly girl says. I only meant if you had taken me into your confidence it would have been better."

"Might I not say the same to you regarding your friend, the old Frenchman?" returned Renshaw. "What if I were to confess to you that I lately suspected him of knowing the secret, and of trying to gain your assistance?"

Instead of indignantly repudiating the suggestion, to the young man's great discomfiture, Rosey only knit her pretty brows, and remained for some moments silent. Presently she asked timidly:

"Do you think it wrong to tell another person's secret for their own good?"

"No," said Renshaw, promptly.

"Then I'll tell you Monsieur de Ferrières'! But only because I believe from what you have just said that he will turn out to have some right to the treasure."

Then with kindling eyes, and a voice eloquent with sympathy, Rosey told the story of her accidental discovery of De Ferrières' miserable existence in the loft. Clothing it with the unconscious poetry of her fresh, young imagination, she lightly passed over his antique gallantry and grotesque weakness, exalting only his lonely sufferings and mysterious wrongs. Renshaw listened, lost between shame for his late suspicions and admiration for her thoughtful delicacy, until she began to speak of De Ferrières' strange allusions to the foreign papers in his portmanteau. "I think some were law papers, and I am almost certain I saw the word Callao printed on one of them."

"It may be so," said Renshaw, thoughtfully. "The old Frenchman has always passed for a harmless, wandering eccentric. I hardly think public curiosity has ever even sought to know his name, much less his history. But had we not better first try to find if there *is* any property before we examine his claims to it?"

"As you please," said Rosey, with a slight pout; "but you will find it much easier to discover him than his treasure. It's always easier to find the thing you're not looking for."

"Until you want it," said Renshaw, with sudden gravity.



"How pretty it looks over there," said Rosey, turning her conscious eyes to the opposite mountain.

"Very."

They had reached the top of the hill, and in the near distance the chimney of Madroño Cottage was even now visible. At the expected sight they unconsciously stopped—unconsciously disappointed. Rosey broke the embarrassing silence.

"There's another way home, but it's a roundabout way," she said timidly.

"Let us take it," said Renshaw.

She hesitated. "The boat goes at four, and we must return to-night."

"The more reason why we should make the most of our time now," said Renshaw with a faint smile. "To-morrow all things may be changed; to-morrow you may find yourself an heiress, Miss Nott. To-morrow," he added, with a slight tremor in his voice, "I may have earned your forgiveness, only to say farewell to you forever. Let me keep this sunshine, this picture, this companionship with you long enough to say now what perhaps I must not say to-morrow."

They were silent for a moment, and then by a common instinct turned together into a narrow trail, scarce wide enough for two, that diverged from the straight practical path before them. It was indeed a roundabout way home, so roundabout, in fact, that as they wandered on it seemed even to double on its track, occasionally lingering long and becoming indistinct under the shadow of madroño and willow; at one time stopping blindly before a fallen tree in the hollow, where they had quite lost it, and had to sit down to recall it; a rough way, often requiring the mutual help of each other's hands and eyes to tread together in security; an uncertain way, not to be found without whispered consultation and concession, and yet

a way eventually bringing them hand in hand, happy and hopeful, to the gate of Madroño Cottage. And if there was only just time for Rosey to prepare to take the boat, it was due to the deviousness of the way. If a stray curl was lying loose on Rosey's cheek, and a long hair had caught in Renshaw's button, it was owing to the roughness of the way; and if in the tones of their voices and in the glances of their eyes there was a maturer seriousness, it was due to the dim uncertainty of the path they had traveled, and would hereafter tread together.

## IX.

When Mr. Nott had satisfied himself of Renshaw's departure, he coolly bolted the door at the head of the companion-way, thus cutting off any communication with the lower deck. Taking a long rifle from the rack above his berth, he carefully examined the hammer and cap, and then cautiously let himself down through the forehatch to the deck below. After a deliberate survey of the still intact fastenings of the hatch over the forehold, he proceeded quietly to unloose them again with the aid of the tools that still lay there. When the hatch was once more free he lifted it, and, withdrawing a few feet from the opening, sat himself down, rifle in hand. A profound silence reigned throughout the lower deck.

"Ye kin rize up out o' that," said Nott gently.

There was a stealthy rustle below that seemed to approach the hatch, and then with a sudden bound the Lascar leaped on the deck. But at the same instant Nott covered him with his rifle. A slight shade of disappointment and surprise had crossed the old man's face, and clouded his small round eyes at the apparition of the Lascar, but his hand was none the less firm upon the



trigger as the frightened prisoner sank on his knees, with his hands clasped in the attitude of supplication for mercy.

"Ef you 're thinkin' o' skippin' afore I 've done with yer," said Nott with labored gentleness, "I oughter warn ye that it 's my style to drop Injins at two hundred yards, and this deck ain't anywhere more 'n fifty. It 's an uncomfortable style, a nasty style — but it 's *my* style. I thought I 'd tell yer, so yer could take it easy where you air. Where 's Ferrers?"

Even in the man's insane terror, his utter bewilderment at the question was evident. "Ferrers?" he gasped; "don't know him, I swear to God, boss."

"P'r'aps," said Nott, with infinite cunning, "yer don't know the man ez kem into the loft from the alley last night — p'r'aps yer did n't see an airy Frenchman with a dyed mustache, eh? I thought that would fetch ye!" he continued, as the man started at the evidence that his vision of last night was a living man. "P'r'aps you and him did n't break into this ship last night, jist to run off with my darter Rosey? P'r'aps yer don't know Rosey, eh? P'r'aps yer don't know ez Ferrers wants to marry her, and hez been hangin' round yer ever since he left — eh?"

Scarcely believing the evidence of his senses that the old man whose treasure he had been trying to steal was utterly ignorant of his real offense, and yet uncertain of the penalty of the other crime of which he was accused, the Lascar writhed his body and stammered vaguely, "Mercy! Mercy!"

"Well," said Nott, cautiously, "ez I reckon the hide of a dead Chineer nigger ain't any more vallyble than that of a dead Injin, I don't care ef I let up on yer — seein' the cussedness ain't yours. But ef I let yer off this once, you must take a message to Ferrers from me."

"Let me off this time, boss, and I swear to God I will," said the Lascar eagerly.

"Ye kin say to Ferrers — let me see" — deliberated Nott, leaning on his rifle with cautious reflection. "Ye kin say to Ferrers like this — sez you, 'Ferrers,' sez you, 'the old man sez that afore you went away you sez to him, sez you, 'I take my honor with me,' sez you' — have you got that?" interrupted Nott suddenly.

"Yes, boss."

"I take my honor with me," sez you," repeated Nott slowly. "'Now,' sez you — 'the old man sez, sez he — tell Ferrers, sez he, that his honor havin' run away agin, he sends it back to him, and ef he ever ketches it around after this, he'll shoot it on sight.' Hev yer got that?"

"Yes," stammered the bewildered captive.

"Then git!"

The Lascar sprang to his feet with the agility of a panther, leaped through the hatch above him, and disappeared over the bow of the ship with an unhesitating directness that showed that every avenue of escape had been already contemplated by him. Slipping lightly from the cutwater to the ground, he continued his flight, only stopping at the private office of Mr. Sleight.

When Mr. Renshaw and Rosey Nott arrived on board the Pontiac that evening, they were astonished to find the passage before the cabin completely occupied with trunks and boxes, and the bulk of their household goods apparently in the process of removal. Mr. Nott, who was superintending the work of two Chinamen, betrayed not only no surprise at the appearance of the young people, but not the remotest recognition of their own bewilderment at his occupation.

"Kalkilatin'," he remarked casually to his daughter, "you'd rather look arter your fixins, Rosey; I've left 'em till the last. P'r'aps yer and Mr. Renshaw would n't



mind sittin' down on that locker until I've strapped this yer box."

"But what does it all mean, father?" said Rosey, taking the old man by the lappels of his pea-jacket, and slightly emphasizing her question. "What in the name of goodness are you doing?"

"Breakin' camp, Rosey dear, breakin' camp, jist ez we uster," replied Nott with cheerful philosophy. "Kinder like ole times, ain't it? Lord, Rosey," he continued, stopping and following up the reminiscence, with the end of the rope in his hand as if it were a clue, "don't ye mind that day we started outer Livermore Pass, and seed the hull o' the Kaliforny coast stretchin' yonder — eh? But don't ye be skeered, Rosey dear," he added quickly, as if in recognition of the alarm expressed in her face. "I ain't turning ye outer house and home; I've jist hired that 'ere Madroño Cottage from the Peters ontill we kin look round."

"But you're not leaving the ship, father," continued Rosey, impetuously. "You have n't sold it to that man Sleight?"

Mr. Nott rose and carefully closed the cabin-door. Then drawing a large wallet from his pocket, he said, "It's sing'lar ye should hev got the name right the first pop, ain't it, Rosey? but it's Sleight, sure enough, all the time. This yer check," he added, producing a paper from the depths of the wallet, "this yer check for 25,000 dollars is wot he paid for it only two hours ago."

"But," said Renshaw, springing to his feet furiously, "you're duped, swindled — betrayed!"

"Young man," said Nott, throwing a certain dignity into his habitual gesture of placing his hands on Renshaw's shoulders, "I bought this yer ship five years ago jist ez she stood for 8,000 dollars. Kalkilatin' wot she cost me in repairs and taxes, and wot she brought me in

since then, accordin' to my figgerin', I don't call a clear profit of 15,000 dollars much of a swindle."

"Tell him all," said Rosey, quickly, more alarmed at Renshaw's despairing face than at the news itself. "Tell him everything, Dick — Mr. Renshaw; it may not be too late."

In a voice half choked with passionate indignation Renshaw hurriedly repeated the story of the hidden treasure, and the plot to rescue it, prompted frequently by Rosey's tenacious memory and assisted by her deft and tactful explanations. But to their surprise the imperturbable countenance of Abner Nott never altered; a slight moisture of kindly paternal tolerance of their extravagance glistened in his little eyes, but nothing more.

"Ef there was a part o' this ship, a plank or a bolt, ez I don't know, ez I hev n't touched with my own hand, and looked into with my own eyes, thar might be suthin' in that story. I don't let on to be a sailor like *you*, but ez I know the ship ez a boy knows his first hoss, as a woman knows her first babby, I reckon thar ain't no treasure yer, unless it was brought into the Pontiac last night by them chaps."

"But are you mad? Sleight would not pay three times the value of the ship to-day if he were not positive! And that positive knowledge was gained last night by the villain who broke into the Pontiac — no doubt the Lascar."

"Surely," said Nott, meditatively. "The Lascar! There's suthin' in that. That Lascar I fastened down in the hold last night unbeknownst to you, Mr. Renshaw, and let him out again this morning ekally unbeknownst."

"And you let him carry his information to Sleight — without a word!" said Renshaw, with a sickening sense of Nott's utter fatuity.

"I sent him back with a message to the man he kem from," said Nott, winking both his eyes at Renshaw significantly, and making signs behind his daughter's back.



Rosey, conscious of her lover's irritation, and more eager to soothe his impatience than from any faith in her suggestion, interfered. "Why not examine the place where he was concealed? he may have left some traces of his search."

The two men looked at each other. "Seen' ez I've turned the Pontiac over to Sleight jist as it stands, I don't know ez it's 'zactly on the square," said Nott doubtfully.

"You've a right to know at least *what* you deliver to him," interrupted Renshaw, brusquely. "Bring a lantern."

Followed by Rosey, Renshaw and Nott hurriedly sought the lower deck and the open hatch of the forehold. The two men leaped down first with the lantern, and then assisted Rosey to descend. Renshaw took a step forward and uttered a cry.

The rays of the lantern fell on the ship's side. The Lascar had, during his forced seclusion, put back the boxes of treasure and replaced the planking, yet not so carefully but that the quick eye of Renshaw had discovered it. The next moment he had stripped away the planking again, and the hurriedly restored box which the Lascar had found fell to the deck, scattering part of its ringing contents. Rosey turned pale; Renshaw's eyes flashed fire; only Abner Nott remained quiet and impassive.

"Are you satisfied you have been duped?" said Renshaw, passionately.

To their surprise Mr. Nott stooped down, and picking up one of the coins handed it gravely to Renshaw. "Would ye mind heftin' that 'ere coin in your hand — feelin' it, bitin' it, scrapin' it with a knife, and kinder seein' how it compares with other coins?"

"What do you mean?" said Renshaw.

"I mean that that yer coin — that *all* the coins in this yer box, that all the coins in them other boxes — and thar's forty on 'em — is all and every one of 'em counterfeits!"

The piece dropped unconsciously from Renshaw's hand, and striking another that lay on the deck gave out a dull, suspicious ring.

"They waz counterfeits got up by them Dutch super-cargo sharps for dealin' with the Injins and cannibals and South Sea heathens ez bows down to wood and stone. It satisfied them ez well ez them buttons ye puts in missionary boxes, I reckon, and, 'cepting ez freight, don't cost nothin'. I found 'em tucked in the ribs o' the old Pontiac when I bought her, and I nailed 'em up in thar lest they should fall into dishonest hands. It's a lucky thing, Mr. Renshaw, that they comes into the honest fingers of a square man like Sleight — ain't it?"

He turned his small, guileless eyes upon Renshaw with such child-like simplicity that it checked the hysterical laugh that was rising to the young man's lips.

"But did any one know of this but yourself?"

"I reckon not. I once suspicioned that old Cap'en Bowers, who was always foolin' round the hold yer, must hev noticed the bulge in the casin', but when he took to axin' questions I axed others — ye know my style, Rosey? Come."

He led the way grimly back to the cabin, the young people following; but turning suddenly at the companion way he observed Renshaw's arm around the waist of his daughter. He said nothing until they had reached the cabin, when he closed the door softly, and looking at them both gently, said with infinite cunning:

"Ef it is n't too late, Rosey, ye kin tell this young man ez how I forgive him for havin' diskivered THE TREASURE of the Pontiac."



It was nearly eighteen months afterwards that Mr. Nott one morning entered the room of his son-in-law at Mandroño Cottage. Drawing him aside, he said with his old air of mystery, "Now ez Rosey's ailin' and don't seem to be so eager to diskiver what's become of Mr. Ferrers, I don't mind tellin' ye that over a year ago I heard he died suddenly in Sacramento. Thar was suthin' in the paper about his bein' a lunatic and claimin' to be a relation to somebody on the Pontiac; but likes ez not it's only the way those newspaper fellows got hold of the story of his wantin' to marry Rosey."



