

CLARA BELLE LEE.

A ROMANCE OF THE SEA.

Written for THE SCOUT, by C. F. Hinkley.
CHAPTER V.

THE noise that I made, in my excitement, startled her, and she glanced around and perceived me. The look she gave me—of joy, remembrance, relief and love—I shall never forget. With a joyful cry she threw herself into my arms, crying: "Tom, Tom Chase, dear Tom, is it really you. Thank God, I am saved," and went to hugging and kissing me, and I, her, for that matter, in our joy and excitement, before all of the men. Mr. Swain appeared to have lost his power of speech and was as bashful as a young girl, before the woman he loved.

"But, Clara," I exclaimed, "for God's sake, calm yourself; my dear, you are safe now. Tell us, in the name of all that is wonderful, how you came here. What ship is this? Are you alone on board?"

To all my questions she would make me no reply; she only clung the closer to me, and sobbed and laughed and kissed me, entreating me not to leave her. It was a long time before I could comfort her; the strain on her nerves had been fearful for the last five or six days, since that tidal wave caused such awful disaster. She had borne up bravely until rescued. But now the relief was so great that it had completely prostrated her for the time being. I carried her to our boat and held her in my arms, trying to comfort and console her.

As we lifted her on board her namesake, Captain Coffin came hurrying to the gangway, and exclaimed:

"Great God! Miss Lee, Clara Lee, my owner's daughter. What riddle of the sea is this?"

"Poor father is dead; washed overboard from that ship," she sobbed.

Our entire ship's crew stood around in dumb silence. Somehow, boy that I was, I had more presence of mind than the officers, on this occasion.

"Captain Coffin, we had better take my cousin down in the cabin," I said quite sharply, for he appeared dazed.

"Yes, yes; do so at once, Chase," he exclaimed, recovering himself with an effort.

I led her by the hand down into the cabin—and, by the way, she had never relinquished her hand since she first discovered me on board the "Potomac"—and seating her by my side, on the sofa in the main cabin, I awaited patiently her story. She soon recovered command of herself sufficiently to relate her story, and we listened with breathless interest to her tale. It was some time after the wave had swept the people overboard before she realized the fact. It seemed as though the hurricane knew that it could do no more mischief, for the sea and wind gradually went down, and when the sun rose in the morning it was good weather again.

The poor girl had suffered terribly in her mind during the time she had been alone on the wreck, but those Nantucket girls are used to the sea, and she stood it better than a country girl would have done. Fortunately the cook's galley, being bolted to the deck, had not washed away, and she was able to cook all the food she wanted. During the time she was on the wreck she had seen ships in the distance several times, but owing, probably, to the "Potomac" being dismasted and lying low on the water, they had sailed by without noticing the wreck.

"For a wonder I had not observed your ship, and the first knowledge I had of help being near was when I looked up from the stove and saw you, dear Tom," said Clara, and she squeezed my hand warmly.

We laid that night have aback, close to the "Potomac," Mr. Chadwick with his boat's crew being on board that ship, with a light hoisted on the stump of her foremast.

Captain Coffin had a long conversation with Miss Lee in regard to her wishes and plans, for the poor girl was now an orphan, and owner of both ships and great wealth.

Bright and pleasant was the sky, balmy the air and beautiful was the sea, as the sun rose in its splendor, throwing its bright and shining light on the two ships, on the morning following the rescue of Clara Belle Lee.

Mr. Swain, after a few moments conversation with Captain Coffin, came hurrying along to the break of the quarter deck, and ordered all hands to lay aft to the mainmast. When all hands were gathered in the waist, Captain Coffin stepped to the edge of the quarter deck and addressed the ship's company in the following words:

"I have called you aft, men, to inform you that by Miss Lee's orders, as owner of this ship, and also by my advice, this voyage will be broken up, and as soon as we can rig up jury masts on the 'Potomac' we will square away for home. If we can sail the 'Potomac' with her valuable cargo safe to port, the salvage for saving her, combined with our oil, will make us a good voyage. Miss Lee requests me to inform you that in the event of the 'Potomac' having to be abandoned, she will pay you fifty dollars each for the run home. So you see, men, you stand to win either way. I shall place Mr. Chadwick, with two boat's crews, in command of the 'Potomac' and I shall expect every man to do his duty."

The crew seemed well pleased with the captain's speech, and gave him and Miss Lee three rousing cheers, and turned to, with a will, getting the spare yards, masts and sails on board the "Potomac."

After three day's hard working the "Potomac" made sail for home. We kept in company with her for a few days, and then, seeing that she was doing as well as could be expected with her short sail, gave Mr. Chadwick and his crew three hearty cheers for luck, crowded sail after sail on the "Clara Belle Lee" and scudded away from the "Potomac," as though she was at anchor, and soon left her hull down astern, as we buzzed through it, homeward bound.

In a few days Clara Lee became cheerful and like herself again.

Mr. Swain was in paradise. Every moment that he could spare from his duty was devoted to her. He would parade the quarter deck with her and make himself her shadow. I thought he would gain the prize before we arrived at Nantucket, for I could not see how any woman could resist such a handsome and manly lover. He was very much in love. Mr. Swain caught me once, behind the wheelhouse, kissing Clara, and he turned pale with envy, and lectured me about it later. He allowed that I should not take advantage of her in her trouble; though, to be sure, I was nothing but a mere boy.

"Boy," I exclaimed in my anger, "I am three weeks older than Clara, and we have grown up together, Mr. Swain. I have always kissed Clara whenever I wanted to, and always shall. It is none of your business. She is not your wife yet."

"None of your impudence, young man," said our first officer, and there was silence between us.

Nothing worthy of recording happened to us for weeks. We had fair wind and plenty of it. The good ship seemed to realize that her fair owner was on board, and as for Clara, she was never tired of watching her namesake straining through the wild waves, as she made rapid progress, day after day, towards dear old Nantucket. Clara watched with unwearied interest the hundreds of things there was to admire and wonder at. The clewing up and furling of light sails to a passing squall. The setting of canvas afresh as the squall passed by. The shrilling and roaring of the rising sea; the loud cries of boatsteerers; the wild, hoarse shouts of the mates; the leaping aloft of the seamen and the posture of their forms as they overhung the moving yards, rolling up the canvas or tying the reef points, with a man astraddle of each yard arm hauling out the eerrings—these and a thousand of like sights supplied her with abundant entertainment.

On the tenth day of August we raised the American coast and that evening was off the entrance of Vineyard sound, just as the lighthouse keeper at the gay head light on the island of Martha's Vineyard lit the lamp. It was blowing a fresh breeze, which reefed our canvas for us, and set the ship to dancing wildly with her yards braced fore and aft. We had our ensign flying for a pilot, and soon the little pilot boat put out from shore, and with a feeling of relief by all on board, the pilot was soon on board our ship, and we had an anxious and wild night of it, beating up Vineyard and Nantucket sound. The wind blew half a gale that night and the ship thrashed through it, beating to windward, under double reefed topsails and courses, making short boards in that narrow sound, with all hands on deck all the night long, working hard at the braces as we constantly tacked ship to avoid going on shore, or swung her off to clear a Marblehead fishing schooner, or a Philadelphia collier, that would loom up out of the darkness and flash by us like a whirlwind.

We had our ship's lights out and all hands looking out to keep from running into something, for thousands of ships of all descriptions pass through Nantucket and Vineyard sound. Once in the mid watch we were startled by

a large ship right athwart our jibboom. The long black hull rushed past us, so near that her main yard almost struck our flying jib stay, and she was gone, like an ocean spirit, leaving a foaming line astern.

We were only a few fathoms from death, for such a ship coming upon us in that gale would have sent us whirling to the bottom. At three o'clock in the morning we were off Nantucket bar, with Bryant Point light flashing at us, from out of the sea and spray, to leeward, as if to warn us to look out and keep well off of that dangerous lee shore.

But it was all we could do to hold our own; the gale had become terrific, and at every tack we could see that we were losing and slowly drifting ashore. It lacked one hour of being flood tide, and we dare not venture in over the bar until then. Our pilot was only a sound pilot and was not acquainted with the channel into Nantucket harbor, and there was no one on the ship but myself that knew the channel. My grandfather was a Nantucket pilot, and in my numerous trips with him in his pilot boat, piloting in ships, I had thoroughly learned the channel, and I informed Captain Coffin that I could take her in, providing she did not draw too much water, for, if she got stuck on the bar, it would be all day with us. At daybreak we were on our last tack off shore, and the next time we tacked ship we would have to try the forlorn hope of getting over the bar or go ashore. The old town never looked so dear to us as it did then. Sitting on its throne, down there to leeward, looking out on us lovingly as though anxious to help us, but powerless to do so.

Captain Coffin was a man of decision. "There is but one way," he shouted, through the storm. "We shall be lost as we are. I will try it. Tom Chase, pilot this ship in if you can, and God be with you. Mr. Swain stand by for stays."

"Aye, aye, sir," answered our first officer, and his voice rose in a hurricane roar as he ordered the crew to "man the weather head braces, weather main brace, weather main topsail brace, lee cross jack braces." Hard down there with your wheel," and as our noble ship obeyed her helm, and came slowly around in stays, in the face of that awful gale, his voice rose shrill and exultantly in pride for her magnificent performance as he gave the last command to "let go and haul." We fairly flew before the gale and in a very short time we were to the bell buoy, and I pointed her straight for Brant Point. The wharves and water front were black with people, watching us anxiously, and wondering how the "Clara Belle Lee" came there, instead of being off the coast of Africa.

Captain Coffin had ordered the American flag and our ship's flag—blue, white and blue—hoisted, "for," he said, "if we go ashore we will be wrecked with our colors flying."

We struck once very lightly on the bar, and that was all, and in a very few minutes we were in safety in the harbor, and we came to the wind off Commercial wharf, let go both anchors and our short, eventful voyage was ended.

One month later the "Potomac" arrived safely and our voyage was all settled, and we all did well financially. The crew was soon scattered to the ends of the earth. Some of them shipped for the Arctic ocean after bowheads, a species of right whale, others on Pacific, Indian and Antarctic voyages.

Mr. Hussey is now in command of a fine steam whale ship. I noticed, last fall his arrival in San Francisco, from the Arctic ocean, with a great voyage—20,000 pounds of whalebone and oil in proportion. Whalebone is now worth \$5 per pound while in the year 1850 it was hardly worth saving.

Old Bill Francis married the widow Chase and they live as happily together as could be expected, considering their temperament. He is an honorable, obstinate, truthful, high-spirited, intensely prejudiced, perfectly unreasonable man, and the widow—I beg her pardon, Mrs. William Francis—is as near like him as can be.

About one year after their marriage as I was walking down Orange street, I noticed a crowd of people, principally women, standing in groups or hurrying into the widow's house, and they all appeared to be highly excited. Curiosity prompted me to enquire of an old fellow standing on the sidewalk, what the trouble was, and he informed me in a dazed sort of a way that the widow Chase had a baby.

"Well," said I, "is there anything strange about that. Why should she not have a baby if she wants one?"

He looked at me and never answered, but turned away and went slowly down the street, shaking his head and muttering to himself, as

though perfectly unable to grasp the situation. The occurrence was absurd, I laughed long and heartily. The people, especially the ladies, had known the widow Chase for so many years without a baby of her own; and she had always been so kind, loving and cheerful to them when their dear babies were born—waiting on and tending them like a mother—that it took them by surprise when the widow, Mrs. Francis, came to the front with a baby of her own. It was an encroachment on their preserves, they thought, but they turned out in force, and there never was a baby born on Nantucket that had so much attention shown to it as that baby of the widow Chase's.

Captain Peter Coffin retired from the sea and lived to the ripe old age, honored and respected by his fellow citizens. One of his sons joined the noble band of pioneers along in the fifties and emigrated to the Pacific coast, and has done much in reclaiming the West to civilization. He now resides in the beautiful town of Union, in Eastern Oregon.

Mr. Chadwick is captain of the South Sheol light ship and Bill Francis is mate, and those two worthies often relate to their shipmates, on board, the cruise of the "Clara Belle Lee."

Mr. Swain, after a suitable interval, proposed in due form for the heart and hand of sweet Clara Belle Lee. Standing before her, looking handsome and manly though white as a sheet, he received his dismissal firmly and bravely as became the man. Clara informed him, with tears in her eyes, that she could not love him in that way; she would always respect him, and if he would allow, would be a sister to him, but could not marry him. This strange and original expression helped greatly to arouse Mr. Swain from the trance he had fallen into on receiving his dismissal. He shook himself together, bowed, wished her well, turned on his heel and walked out of the house and has never seen her from that day to this. Mr. Swain in time recovered from the blow and married a charming Nantucket girl. On the breaking out of the war of the rebellion he, along with a number of sea-officers and navigators, armed with first-class letters of recommendation, proceeded to Washington and offered their services to the government as acting masters in the United States navy, but young and inexperienced sons of politicians received the situations. Though soon after the administration saw its mistake of placing inexperienced men in places of trust in the navy and the officers of the wailing fleet of New England were in great demand for the navy. Many Nantucket whalemens rose to positions of trust in the United States navy. Mr. Swain, however, disgusted at his rebuff, emigrated to the beautiful valley of the Grand Ronde, in Eastern Oregon, and has never seen salt water from that day to this. The service lost a first-class sea-officer and navigator and the farmers of Oregon gained an indifferent farmer.

The ship "Clara Belle Lee" made a great many successful voyages from Nantucket, until on one voyage, under the command of Captain Charles Worth, she was captured and burnt off the Azores islands by the confederate cruiser "Alabama."

As for myself I never made another voyage. I went to school, studied hard and graduated from the Nantucket high school with honors, and then entered Harvard college, finished my studies there and entered a respectable law firm in Boston as junior partner.

The years rolled around and still my charming cousin did not marry, though not for the want of offers, for she had many, some from love of her and some probably from mercenary motives.

On a fine spring morning, on the first day of May 1855, the fifth anniversary of my voyage on the "Clara Belle Lee," I sat in my office on State street, Boston, reading a letter from Clara. Her letter was full of interest for me, as it related to her approaching marriage with the man she loved. In a postscript at the end of her long letter, Clara adds: "Now be sure and leave Boston in time, for you know, dear Tom, I could not think of being married without your presence, ha, ha."

And I did not disappoint her. The ancient church was crowded with the people of Nantucket. Fully 2,500 people were in the building to witness the marriage of their favorite to the man that she loved. As the minister finished reading the beautiful marriage service and pronounced us man and wife, I turned and clasping Mrs. Thomas Chase in my arms imparted a loving kiss on her dear lips, and whispered in her ear, "Farewell to sweet Clara Belle Lee."

[THE END.]

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