

## ABOARD THE COUNTESS

By M. QUAD

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The other day I saw a notice in a Liverpool paper to the effect that the courts had decided to rehear the case of the brig Countess. To the general reader these lines meant nothing. I do not suppose there are fifty people in all England today who can recall the case of the Countess, although the particulars were published far and wide and finally appeared in book form.

The Countess was a Bristol brig, owned in part and commanded by Captain Thomas, who was not only a thorough seaman, but a man of excellent heart. We were bound out to Georgetown, in British Guiana, with orders to call at Jamaica. This was my third voyage with Captain Thomas, the other two extending only to ports in Spain and return. I was an apprentice, or ship's boy, having nothing to do with the cabin, but living with the crew in the fo'castle and learning to be a sailor.

After we left port and got things shipshape I had opportunity to look over the crew and see what they were made of, and I was not long in making up my mind, boy as I was, that we had shipped a hard lot. There is always a leader in the fo'castle, and in those days it was the best fighter. Seaman-ship and education had to bow to brute strength. It wasn't three days before a big, burly fellow, who went by the name of Bristol Bob, but whose real name was Havens, had established himself as "boss." If he had had the good of the brig in view this would have been for her benefit, but it soon transpired that he had plans of his own.

Before reaching Jamaica the crew had been on the point of mutiny half a dozen times.

One afternoon—it was on the fourth day, I believe—I was aroused from my sleep by a conversation between Bob and a man named Jackson. They knew I was in the bunk, but believed me to be sleeping soundly.

"This is the plan as I have thought it out," Bob was saying. "After we have got the brig we will cruise to the eastward for a spell. The island I am after is not down on the chart. It is northeast of Trinidad and maybe 200 miles away from here."

"Don't Mizner know?" asked the other.

"Never heard of it, but this is his first trip this way."

The men presently went about their business, but I made the pretense of sleeping soundly until called to relieve the other watch. I was all in a tremble over what I had heard and had no idea of what course I should take. While it seemed proper for me to go to the captain or mate with my information, the reader must not overlook the difficulties in the way. I planned a dozen different ways to reach headquarters, and that I didn't put the captain on his guard was his own fault.

One night during our watch he called to me to bring something from his room. Bob and his friends were forward at the heel of the bowsprit, and as I came out of the cabin the mate was at the water cask. As I reached him I whispered:

"I should very much like to speak to you or the captain, sir."

"If you don't get forward I'll speak to you in a way you'll remember for a year to come!" he growled.

No doubt he imagined I had some complaint to make, but if he had permitted me to speak it might have pre-

vented the tragedy which followed.

A few nights later Bristol Bob called the mate forward, and shortly afterward he came to me and said:

"Boy, run down and tell the captain that the first mate is ill."

I found the captain sound asleep, but as soon as I had told him what I had overheard in the fo'castle and what I suspected had just happened on deck it was wonderful how coolly he took the exciting news. As he reached for his pistols he ordered me to bolt the doors of the companion-way. The men stood at the entrance, and as they caught sight of me they stepped back, supposing the captain was following. I slammed and bolted the swinging doors.

The fellows cursed and yelled, and though we could hear them moving around the decks from that time until daylight, they made no attack. Finally we heard some one working with an ax on the cabin door, and the captain made ready to fire a bullet through it. By some carelessness the weapon was prematurely discharged, and he received the bullet in his throat, dying a few moments later. I was so overcome and frightened now that the captain was gone that I hid in his stateroom, and the mutineers no longer had any one to resist them.

The first thing I knew it was night, and it was so very quiet that I knew there could be no wind outside. I crept out into the cabin, but everything remained as I had left it. For two hours I listened for sounds from the deck, but heard nothing and finally fell asleep. I was aroused by men dropping into the cabin through the skylight. They belonged to the Scotch whaler Bruce, which was lying near by and had had us in view since daylight.

The mutineers had taken the long-boat and abandoned the brig, which was driving at her own sweet will. And to this day no one of the men has ever been heard of. No doubt they met with some accident and all perished at sea.

Women are seldom what they seem—and we ought to be glad of it.

A woman could keep a secret if there were no one to tell it to.

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