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The Courage of Captain Plum

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Illustration by Eugene C. Ketner

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SYNOPSIS.

Capt. Nathaniel Plum, of the sloop Tryphena, sails secretly on Bonyet Island, stronghold of the Mormon. He is sailing for Winnemucca, Nevada, to arrest a favorite old man and a member of the Mormon council, who tells him that he is expatriated. Prince Ignosse Nat's protestations that he has got the wrong man, and that he is a Mormon missionary, fall on deaf ears. Nat has been commissioned to deliver a package to Franklin Pierce, President of the United States. Prince Nat's pride Nat sees the rightness of his mission, and he promises to help. In the darkness, Nat hears a strange voice, and develops that Plum's visit to the island is to Samuel Gulliver, brother of the Prince. Nat, the leader of his ship mates, Ahab Sawyer, Jim Hawkins, Long Tom Coffin, Billy Bones, Tom Redding, Chaney, the mate, has been left in charge of the sloop, with orders to bombard Bonyet if Nat does not return. Nat, Prince Ignosse, Gulliver, Plum, Chaney, and Redding, are brought to the king's home, and introduced to the king's daughter and his wives, among whom is the lady of Gulliver's dreams. Nat is left in the care of Redding, and Chaney, the lady of his fine, where he is warned by a young woman that his life is threatened. He is received by the king, proclaims himself a Mormon, and is given a wife, Gulliver, and a woman to assist the Prince. Plum again receives warning of his danger. He receives a letter from Gulliver, Billy whispers, The king orders Arrow Head, the king's chief, to take Plum's wives, the king's council Nat's life, Plum and Nat Gulliver, Prince Ignosse, Billy, Chaney, and Redding are captured and set on the ship. Nat approving.

CHAPTER VI—Continued.

Horror, not fear, sent an involuntary shiver through Nathaniel.

"They reach us!" he answered Neil. There was the glitter of triumph in his eyes. "I'll wait no longer here my way of escape after I killed Starang. A quarter of a mile deeper in the swamp I have a canoe." He pulled up the gun and box and began forcing his way through the tangled vines along the edge of the stream. "I'd like to stay and monument these dogs," he called back, "but it wouldn't be policy."

For a time the crashing of their bodies through the dense growth of the swamp drowned all other sound. Five minutes later Neil stopped at the edge of a wide bog. The hounds were giving fierce tongue in the forest on their left, and their nearness made Nathaniel's hand to his pistol. Neil saw the movement and laughed.

"Don't like the sound, eh?" he said. "We get used to it on Beaver Island. They're just about the dogs I had when they tore little Jim Schredder to pieces a few weeks back. Schredder tried to kill one of the elders for stealing his wife while he was away on a fishing trip."

He plunged to his knees in the bog. "They caught him just before he reached the swamp," he flung back over his shoulder. "Two minutes more and he would have been safe."

Nathaniel, sinking to his knees in the mire, forced up beside him.

"Lord!" he exclaimed, as a breath of air brought a sudden burst of blood-curdling cries to them. "If they'd loosed them on us sooner—"

He shivered at the terrible grimace Neil turned on him.

"Had they slipped the leashes when we escaped, we would have been with poor Schredder now. Captain Plum. By the way—" Neil stopped a moment to wipe the water and mud from his face—"three days after they captured Schredder's bones with much out there, the dogs came back without him. She was too pretty for a fisherman." He started on, but halted suddenly with uplifted face. "No longer could they hear the baying of the dogs. "They're crossed the creek" said Neil. "Listen!"

After an interval of silence there came a long drawn wail.

"Treed—treed or in the water, that's what the hounds are saying. How Chaney and his devils are howling now!"

A curse was mingled with Neil's laugh as he forced his way through the bog. Twenty rods farther on they came to a shallow pool of water on which was floating a dugout canoe. "Now we have nothing to relieve the anxiety in Nathaniel's face as he climbed into it. At that moment he was willing to give a hundred men for Marion's sake, but makes and bogs and shoulders and swamps and thickets his pale of argument and he exhibited no hesitation in betraying this fact to his companion. For a quarter of a mile Neil forced the dugout through water weeds and through a mire of substance before the clearer channel of Crooked Creek was reached. As they progressed the stream constantly became deeper and more navigable until it finally became a stream of a rod in breadth. Neil, a little later, under the powerful impetus of his paddle, let the boat drift from between the dense shores into the open lake. A mile away Nathaniel discerned the point of forest beyond which the Tryphena was hidden. He pointed out the location of the ship to his companion.

"You are sure there is a small boat waiting for you on the point?" asked Neil.

"Yes, since early morning."

Neil was absorbed in thought for some time as he drove the canoe through the tall rice grass that grew thick about on the edge of the shore.

"How would it be if I landed you on the point and you walked through to Obadiah's?" he asked suddenly. "It is probable that after we get Marion aboard your ship I will not return to the island again, and it is quite necessary that I run down to Charlevoix a couple of miles—for—" He did not finish his reason, but added: "I can make the whole distance in this rice so Lora is no danger of being seen. I'm sight for you, if you don't ponder and I would join you early this evening."

"That would be a better plan if we must separate," said Nathaniel, whose voice betrayed the reluctance with which he assented to the project. He had grasped eagerly at Neil's offer. "Is it possible that we may have another young lady passenger?" he asked hopefully.

There was no answering humor to this in Neil's eyes.

"I wish we might!" he said quietly. "But it's impossible," exclaimed Nathaniel. My ship—"

"It is impossible. I am speaking of Winnemucca. Arbor Crossing is right in the heart of the town and guarded by dogs. I doubt if they would know any." She has always been like a little sister to Marion and me and she has come to believe everything—as we do. I hate to leave her."

"Obadiah told me about her mother," ventured Nathaniel. "He said that some day Winnemucca will be a queen."

"I knew her mother," replied Neil, "through he had my age. She was a little Indian girl. Marion's mother. He looked frankly into the other's race. "I worshipped her!"

"Oh-ho!"

"From a distance," he hastened. "She was as pure as Winnemucca is now. Little Wilan looks like her. Some day she will be as beautiful."

"She is beautiful now."

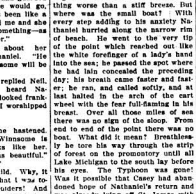
"Yes, she is a mere child. Why, it seems only a year ago that I was telling her about my shoulder-piece—by George, that was a year before her mother died! She is sixteen now."

Nathaniel laughed softly.

"I wonder what she is making love. Neil, and before you know it she will be married and have a family of her own." Neil was in the bow of the boat. If you are not a fool you will take her away with Marion."

With a powerful stroke of his paddle Neil brought the canoe in to the bank.

"There!" he whispered. "You have only to cross the point to reach your boat." He stretched out his long arm



Neil Forced the Dugout Through the Water.

and in the silence the two shook hands. "If you should happen to think of a way—that we might get Marion—" he added, coloring.

The sudden grip of his companion's fingers made him flinch.

"We must!" said Nathaniel.

He climbed ashore and watched Neil force the dugout through the tall rice. Then he turned into the woods. He looked at his watch and saw that it was only 2 o'clock. He was conscious of no fatigue; he was not conscious of hunger. The whole world had suddenly opened with glorious promise and in the midst of the forest he felt like singing out his rejoicing. He had never stopped to ask himself what might be the end of this passion that had overwhelmed him. He lived only in the present. In the knowledge that Marion was not with Neil, and that it was to whom that had chosen for her deliverance. He reasoned nothing beyond the sweet joy that had called him back to life, had burned their gratitude, their hope and their desperate love into his soul, leaping beyond the thought that the world soon be free from the mysterious shadow of the Mormon king and that for days and nights after that she would be on the same island with him. He had emptied the pockets of the boat for the last time, and had brought forth the old letter which Obadiah had rescued from the sands. He read it over and over again as he sat for a few moments in the cool of the forest and there was no trouble in his face now. It was from a girl. He had known that girl, years ago, and he knew Winnemucca was wandering he had almost forgotten Winnemucca. Marion, he had brought many memories back to him with shocking distinctness. The days were still in the little home under the hill; they received his letters; they received the money he sent them each month—but they wanted him. The girl wrote with merciless candor. He had been away four years and it was time for him to return. She told him why. She wrote what they, in their loving fear of inflicting pain, would never have dared to say. At the end, in a postscript, she had asked for his consent to marriage. Marion was to marry Nathaniel this letter had been a torment. He saw the truth as he had never seen it before—that his place was there in the little home with his father and mother; and that there was something unpleasant in thinking of the girl as belonging to another. The years matters had changed. The letter was a hope and inspiration to him and he smoothed it straight for the last time. What a refuge that little home among the Vermont hills would be—with Marion! He trembled at the thought and his heart sang with the promise of it as he went back to the shore to the boat. The growth of the woods.

He had never felt more before he came out upon the beach. Fragrance he scanned the sea. The Tryphena was nowhere in sight and for an instant the gladness that had been in his heart turned to a shadow of fear. But the direction of the wind reasoned him from the shadow. Beyond the jutting promontory, that swung in the form of a cart wheel, there was a little bay in which the ship might have sen room in case of some sudden gale of the land breeze. Into where was the small boat? With every step adding to his anxiety Nathaniel hastened to the point and lifted the canoe from the sand. He went to the very tip of the point and discovered the footprints of a lady's hand into the sea; he passed the spot where he had lain the morning of the preceding day; his brain came faster and faster. He was at the point where he had last hailed in the arch of the cart wheel and his heart leaped into his breast. Over all those miles of sea there was no sign of the sloop. From the point he ran back to where the boat. What did it mean? Breathless, he ran back to the point from thirty of forest on the promontory until all Lake Michigan to the south lay before him. Not a sail, not even a gone. Was it possible that Casey had abandoned the ship and returned to the island? Was it possible that Chaney, the mate, was a mutineer? Was it possible that he was sure that the old man would help him to reach his ship; he was the easiest thing in the world to get out of the island. Nathaniel's face was pale. He ran back to the point and looked again. He ran back to the point and looked again. He ran back to the point and looked again