

## CHAPTER XXI

IT was an axiom of John Woden's that every man had his price, although some were more expensive than others. His "pull" with the shipowners had been amply sufficient to get him a passage on the *Malvina* at a moment's notice; Board of Trade regulations had not then come to weave red tape between him and such a desire. Putting back to port, once started, was, however, a different matter even in those leisurely days. It would probably be costly.

He came on deck to find it blowing half a gale from the N.E., and the ship rolling and plunging under practically bare poles, running before it. The wind was tearing through the rigging with a menacing howl.

John Woden paused. He was not a sailor, but it was perfectly clear that putting back to Liverpool was out of the question for the time being. The wind was almost dead astern, and the *Malvina* could never have tacked against it, even were her master willing.

Old Turner, a grey-bearded veteran of the seas, shook his head emphatically when John approached him.

"Put into port? Can't be done, sir."

"A thousand pounds to be divided according to rating is my price," said John Woden.

"I will have you know, sir, that the safety of my ship and crew is not to be bought by you."

John looked at him quizzically. "Is he so honest, I wonder, or does he seek to put up his price?" he thought sardonically. Aloud, he replied quite mildly:

"I should have thought that a harbour would be the safest place in such weather."

"You have all a landsman's notion, Mr. Woden, that hugging the shore makes for safety," said Turner contemptuously. "I know my course and shall keep to it."

"Believe me," John leaned forward, "I do not ask you to imperil your ship; I would not have you do so. For myself I would go on. But for the sake of a woman who is below——"

"A woman aboard the *Malvina*? Who brought her here?"

"I did," said John, not wishing to involve Mr. Purcell. "She is my wife."

"You are a friend of my owners," answered the old man, very stiffly. "It may make a prejudice against me if I do not fall in with your wishes, Mr. Woden. But once aboard the ship I command, I am master. You came on the *Malvina* of your own will; you stay at mine. I am for Charleston."

John saw that the other was deeply offended at the introduction of a lady passenger unknown to him. It was necessary to temporise.

"Listen to me, Captain Turner. We are getting at cross-purposes. You regard me as a landsman who has brought his wife on board, and believe that we are now frightened at the weather and think differently of the adventure. That is not so. These are the facts." He gave him rapidly a brief outline of the facts, sparing nothing essential.

Turner knitted his brows. "It would appear, Mr. Woden, that you quarrelled with your wife over your mistress and that she has come after you to be reconciled?"

"Broadly speaking," said John, quite smoothly, "those are the facts; put with refreshing directness, and if I may say so, a little over-coloured. I do not wish my wife to undertake the hazard of a voyage on a gun-runner. I am not a fool who expects you to 'bout ship in this sea; my

suggestion is that, if the weather moderates, we might be landed at Waterford or Queenstown. I am sorry you were offended at my offer, but I always endeavour to pay for services rendered."

"It sounded like a bribe," answered old Turner, grimly. "I have been at sea nearly fifty years, sir, man and boy, and there is no man afloat or ashore, Mr. Woden, who can say that John Turner was ever bribed to forget his duty either to his God or to his owners."

John looked at him with increasing respect. He had met many types, but this was one new to him. He thought that if this man had considered more his duty to himself, he would not have still been a master-mariner on another man's ship. What folly did men weave into their lives; duty to the brazen heavens; duty to those who paid their small wages! In his old age, to refuse John Woden's money and gain his respect!

"If the weather moderates, Mr. Woden, I shall endeavour to land yourself and your lady at an Irish port. But, if we have to run before it, you are for the other side of the Atlantic."

"So be it," said John. The old man sat sternly at the side of a table in his small cabin; the lamp above was wildly swinging until the globe almost hit the upper deck.

"And now, sir, I must ask you to go. My duty lies on deck."

John Woden bowed and left him.

"Duty again. We are an obstinate race, we Johns," he thought as he went back to Angeline. "I wonder why I have earned his dislike; is it because I have money? I think, in this life, a man cannot make money without making enemies; it is better to make both than neither. But I like old Turner; and if we are for Charleston, he shall arrive at that port my friend."

He returned to find a very seasick Angeline.

"John, I think I am going to die."

"Not you, dearest. Have some more brandy and lie quite still."

"How soon will we be ashore?" she asked in a faint voice.

"I don't know—as soon as possible, lady love. You leave it to me. Let me sponge your head with cold water. . . . No, I can't open the porthole—it's against orders in such a sea as this. But I'll fan you. Is that better?"

He watched with her throughout the night, whilst the gale got steadily worse. For four long dreadful days there was nothing but a world of great green seas. They were then far out in the Atlantic, and it became evident to John that landing on this side of it was a very forlorn hope. He decided to drop the matter and let it go by default.

A white-faced and very tired Angeline was now feeling much better, and able to go on deck and breathe in the keen salt air.

On the sixth morning they went up into brilliant sunshine to find the *Malvina* thrusting through blue seas with whole topsails and top-gallants, the cutwater cleaving the surface, a pearly stream of foam abreast of the catheads.

"There, Angeline. Not worrying about anything now, are you?"

"Only the children, John."

"They'll be safe enough, little mother. You make up your mind to have a jolly voyage to Nassau."

"Why, John, I thought we were going to Charleston."

"So we are—eventually. But Nassau is our jumping-off place, and that is where the cargo is consigned—nominally. It is a great idea and saves a lot of impertinence from Federal cruisers. Incidentally, it is making the fortune of the Bahamas. I wonder whether they will ever have such times again?"