

THE ICELANDER BY MORGAN ROBERTSON

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Attention was first attracted to him by the ease with which he pulled the bartender over the bar at Fat Anna's boarding house at Calcutta, and then my admiration was aroused by the skill, strength and agility with which he handled himself in the mix-up that followed, when four runners, the bartender, and old Anna herself with her broom, set upon him. But he was thrown bodily into the street, and I followed as quickly, for I had talked too much in a strange boarding house for a young man that drank too little, beside the added offence against good taste of twisting Anna's broom away from her and smiting a runner over the head. We picked ourselves up in the middle of the street and mustered under a lamp post to get acquainted, unmindful of Anna's screeching injunction to "go py your own boarding house, you loafers, and stay there, mine house is respectable."

"Come and have a drink," he said, curly. "No," I answered, "I drink very little, and I've had enough."

I left him and went to my boarding house, but before I got to sleep a man came in and reported a lively scrap at Fat Anna's in which a big, angry "Scotchman" had cleaned up the place and had been arrested. "My friend," I thought, and went to sleep.

In the morning, though, I attended the police court. The whole boarding house force was there, the bartender as prosecuting witness and Mistress Anna with her runners to assist. The prisoner was brought in, none the worse for his experiences, and his eye held the same twinkle as on the evening before. The bartender told his story.

"For why," demanded the magistrate, "did you hit this man?"

"Because he was Scotch, your honor," answered the prisoner, calmly.

"He's a liar," yelled the bartender. "I'm an Irishman, I am!"

But his clamor was silenced by the magistrate.

"Scotch," he roared. "Scotch! And is that a reason for hitting a man? I'm Scotch myself. Thirty days—you—you—glared at the prisoner—"Officer," he called. "Take you this man, and lock him up. Scotch, is it? Scotch. Thirty days for you."

He was led out, and we all departed. And in a few days, having secured a berth as second mate of an American ship, I forgot about him in the rush of work that, at sea or in port, never slackens in these ships. The captain was a Scotchman named McTavish, but this did not bring him to my mind, nor did the fact that the first mate, shipped a week after myself, was also Scotch and named McLeod, a call to remembrance my friend and his antipathy to Scots. It was only when the crew came aboard on the day of sailing, and I read their names at the captain's, finding two thirds of them Scotch, that I thought of him, and wondered what he would do if the Fates had condemned him to this ship; then, as though in humorous response to my wonder, when I read off the last name on the articles, "Dennis Finnegan," I was answered by a hearty "Here, sir," and there he stood, big, blond and clean, with the merry twinkle in his eyes and a brand new sheath knife and belt strapped around him. I nodded recognition, but that was as far as I could go, I was a second mate.

We got down the Hooghly after the usual trouble, and soon were at sea, where, before two days had passed, Dennis Finnegan, Ice-lander, had left his mark on most of the Scotch contingent forward, though he made no demonstration against the skipper or mate, he was civil and efficient, anticipating orders to a great extent and showing himself an expert able seaman. But his pugnacity did not last long, it departed with the liquor in his system, and with it went the twinkle in his eye. He relapsed into a quiet, moody man, seldom speaking except in answer to an order, but none the less masterful and efficient. He was not in my watch, yet I had some opportunity to observe him, though none to talk with him.

And soon I was interested in Finnegan on account of a larger and healthier interest. I had known that the skipper's daughter was on board, but had seen her only as a "looked and veiled" figure that he escorted carefully on the gangway and into the cabin on sailing day. Three days after she came up in the last log watch, while the mate and his watch were "sweating up" braces and halyards, and as it was time weather she came without hat or cloak. I suppose she had tired of the stifling air of the cabin, or she would not have appeared without her father. Then, too, it may have been her father who caused that stifling air, for in my few meetings with him since sailing he radiated an odor of whiskey that was decidedly unpleasant and spoke thickly from laxened faculties. I had last seen him at four bells, when he lifted his head up through the after companion, said, "How ye hidden?" to the man at the wheel, and stumbled drunkenly down before the man could answer.

The girl stood beside the after companion, swaying easily to the slight heave of the ship, and supporting herself with one hand lightly resting on the house. Finnegan was at the

wheel, and being behind her, stared openly and brazenly at her.

I felt my hair roots tingle with indignation and when I caught his eye he saw something in my face that induced him to look closely at the compass for a while. The girl seemed to be about sixteen, tall and well developed for her age, and with a face like that of a child. She had a wealth of black hair, which she seemed to take little care of, for it blew around her face in the wind, and was innocent of pins or hair pins—only a bit of ribbon showed now and then. Her complexion was somewhat dark—tanned, in fact, but there was a rich, creamy tint to it, and there was color in her cheeks. But it was her eyes that impressed me most; they were large and luminous, black as night, and with a frank, direct stare in them that was disconcerting to me when they fell upon me. I stood up, lifted my hat politely, and would have joined her had she returned my greeting. But she did not; she stared at me a moment longer, faced to windward, and slowly moved over to the weather rail, reaching this she moved aft, her hands sliding along the rail until her outstretched left hand touched the quarter butt; then she slipped behind it, found the tailrail and left her way along this to a grating along side the wheel box. And by this time the truth had dawned upon me, also upon Finnegan. His eyes sought mine, wide open in pity, and as he looked at me his lips seemed to frame the unspoken word upon my own: "blind."

Mr. McLeod came aft, hoarse from bawling to the men at their watch tackle and strap. It had grown nearly dark now, and I was glad of it because I did not care to have this fellow see the tears in my eyes. He was a tall, good-looking sort of a man, about thirty years old, a first-class seaman, and we had got on very well together, even though I did not like him. He joined me in the alley.

"Hello, the birdie's up. Seen her yet?" "You mean the skipper's daughter," I answered. "Yes, I've seen her."

"She's blind as a bat, the old man says. For all that, she's a peach, as they say in your country. Guess I'll take a kiss in the dark. She'll never know who it is."

"Mr. McLeod," I said, standing erect. "What are you thinking of?"

"Oh, h—! The old man's dead drunk, and she'll never know. It'll keep her guessing."

"Mr. McLeod, I won't permit it!" "You won't permit, you say—" he had started, but turned back. "You'll remember that I'm over you here and have charge of the deck. Get down off the poop, to the main deck, or to your room."

I weakly yielded, so strong is the influence of nautical etiquette upon a seafaring man. It was well for me, perhaps, that I did, for another man took up the burden and bore the punishment. I had reached the foot of the steps in obedience to his order when I heard a scream, then a snarling, growling sound, and I mounted the steps again in two bounds.

The girl was erect, clinging to the quarter butt, the wheel was deserted, and I saw by the stars that the ship was rounding to. And in the clear space between the wheel and the house two forms, locked in a close embrace, were writhing to and fro. As I hurried aft I heard Finnegan's voice, highly accented, expressing his opinion of the mate in explosive sentences punctuated with lurid oaths.

"Tamm yer miseraple, Sawnee heart and soul," he growled. "You hunter o' weemen—cowardly sneak, you kisser o' leetle girls. I kill you. I kill you. Tamm you."

"Finnegan," I yelled. "Stop it. Take your wheel, man. This isn't your affair."

"Take der wheel yourself, sir, till I kill dis Scotchman!"

I took it, for the weather leaches were shaking, and by hard heaving got the ship off to her course. And by this time the struggle was about over. Looking up from the compass, I saw McLeod bent back nearly double, Finnegan's right arm around his waist, which he hugged tightly to himself, and his left wrist under the other's chin. Farther and farther back went the mate until there was an unmistakable cracking sound. Something inside of him a tendon, a vein, a bone, possibly some joint of his vertebral column, had given way. He dropped like a log and lay still, while Finnegan, first giving him a kick, approached the wheel.

"Now, I take it, sir," he said, calmly. "He won't hunt any more, the Scotchman!"

"Have you killed him?" I asked, horrified at the situation.

"Sure. I have broken his back. He deserved it, the wretch!"

His excitement was gone, and his diction again correct. He took the wheel and I bent over the mate, feeling his heart. There was not a beat, nor a sign of breath from the nostrils.

"The mate has been killed, captain," I said, when I had his attention.

"What?" he answered. "Killed! Who's killed?"

"The mate. Dennis Finnegan killed him near the wheel. He's lying on the deck up there now."

"Mr. McLeod killed?" He was coherent now. "And Finnegan killed him? Is he in irons?"

"No, sir. I was waiting for you to order that."

"Get the irons and your gun," he said, as he hoisted himself out of the berth.

"Wait, captain," I said, with a dim idea of helping Finnegan. "You should know why he killed him before you act. It was for an assault upon your daughter."

"What!" he roared. "The mate assaulted my blind girl! Where—how was it? Tell me, mon, and donna waste sympathy on me. I desairve little."

I told him all that had occurred, omitting my emotions on discovering the girl's blindness. He listened gravely, then answered: "I am no the law, and the law demands that a man that kills a fellowman shall be im-



The sea sent me within three fathoms of the girl, and with a few strokes I reached her.

pressed on once until the proper authorities may deal wi' him."

I secured the irons and my pistol, though I knew I would not need it. Then I called a man to relieve Finnegan.

"My man," said the captain, as Finnegan, releasing the wheel to this man, stepped over the body and extended his hands for the irons. "I'm sorry for this, for we acted the man in defense of a woman. But ye went too far, and I must confine ye till the consul fees ye, which nadoot he'll do when I state the circumstances. Ye'll be fed well—the usual allowance, and exercised every day on deck."

"Which is the law, I believe, captain," answered Finnegan, with a smile.

"I see ye no realize the enormity o' your offence," said the captain. "It's a woful thing to kill a fellow creature. I should na have it on my conscience."

"Mine is clear, captain," said Finnegan. "He wasn't fit to live, and besides—he was Scotch!"

The captain saw no significance in this speech, which I was glad of, for he could render Finnegan's life a burden to him, even under the law, should he so choose. We shut Finnegan up in the lazarette, sewed the body in a sack, and next morning burned it with the usual ceremonies. Then the captain got drunk again, and for a while it was with great difficulty that I roused him at midday to take the sun, and kept him sober after breakfast long enough to take chronometer sights. As I was not a navigator I needed him for this, but nothing else. I could handle the ship and the men, and the "boson" stood his watch.

I saw Finnegan often, and he invariably asked about the girl.

"It's common enough, sir," he explained in apology, "for a fellow to get fond of some helpless thing he has protected. Small boys do that, even when they'll kill and maim other helpless creatures."

"Yes, Finnegan," I said. "But can you explain other contradictions in yours?" This girl is Scotch, and you seem to hate the Scotch. And while you admire yourself a woman chaser, you protect a woman from another. And your name is not Finnegan, either. Why, if I may inquire?"

"Sign a different name in call-shit, sir," he answered. "The reason I hit to be sure that I'm called, and am willing to forget my own. And I drink for the same reason, but out here at sea there's nothing to drink, and so what's the use?" He paused, raised his manna led wrists and looked at them.

"Go on," I enjoined. "Tell me what you care to about yourself. We're no married men, and you know I'm your friend!"

He waited a moment then went on his far, rugged face gloomy with memories of the past that I was drawing from him.

"It's the old story," he said. "I never drank at first, but I always admired women. It was born in me, and I could not help it. I had my ship at twenty-two—a bark out of Dundee, and my wife and child. And I foolishly left them where the Dutchman left his anchor, at home, among the Scotch. My wife was more to me than any woman on earth, but she could not understand, and one time, when the little girl was four years old—the most lovable age, you know, she ran away with some fellow, and took the child—my little Hedwig."

The tears were in his eyes now, and I could say nothing.

"Little Hedwig," he continued. "She thought more of me than she did of her

mother, and that perhaps made the trouble. A mother's a mother, you know. At any rate I found my house stripped when I came back that voyage, wife and child gone, and a letter in the post office saying she was through with me, and had gone with a man that loved her."

"And did you never get trace of him?" I asked.

"Only that he was a Scotchman. A year later, however, I got another letter from the wife, sent from London, saying that the child had died and that I had a right to know it. That's all. My leetle girl—my leetle Hedwig! The first word she learned to speak was

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The men forward needed no introduction to their new first mate, nor any inspection of 'discharges' to know that he was their master. His orders came in crisp, explosive nautical terms that a greenhorn could not have understood, and his voice, when he raised it for the benefit of a crowd on the foretopgallant-yard, sounded like the blast of a trumpet. There was no mistaking his caliber, and no man required the repetition of an order.

It struck us squarely from astern when it came, and for a few moments there was a snapping, singing and whistling of things that made us think the spars were going. But nothing carried away, and we sped on, dead before it, for it was a fair wind, until the rising sea threatened to board us. Until now the captain was loath to heave to, but when he did decide he chose the port tack.

But the wind increased, and with it the sea. Again we reefed that spanker, then took in the mizentopgallant, leaving the ship snug enough for anything short of a hurricane—under maintop, reefed spanker and foretopmast staysails. But even this was too much, and soon we thought that hurricane was hardly the word for the solid pressure of wind that hove us down until the lee rail was buried, and the water up to the combings of the main hatch. The captain ordered the maintopmast goose-winged—that is, furled on the weather side, and I started forward to rouse the men to this task, barely saving myself at the main rigging from going over to leeward with a sea by clinging tightly to the coils. But the next sea took something else; before I had shaken the water out of my eyes, I dimly saw a cloaked figure creep cautiously out of the forward companion, groping with outstretched hands for the weather rail; then that sea, breaking over my head with a stunning force, swept on over the lee rail, and when I looked again, the black cloak framed a frightened, white face on the water, a half a length to leeward. I threw off my oilskins and boots, sang out "man overboard," and when the next sea came I went with it. The sea was a great help; it sent me within three fathoms of the girl, and with a few strokes I reached her. Her clothing had supported her head out of water, and she was screaming.

"All right, Miss McTavish," I said, cheerily as I could. "I'm here, and they'll send a boat." She quieted as she heard my voice and trustfully obeyed my instructions not to struggle, to permit me to remain behind her and beneath, with my hands under her arms.

Had that topsail been furled or even goose-winged, there is no doubt that the ship, with no headway except from the staysail and spanker, would have drifted down upon us; as it was she forged ahead, and we passed under her stern, the agonized face of Captain McTavish looking down upon us. He threw the end of the spanker sheet, but it fell short and was soon dragged away. There were no life buoys.

And so it lasted—an hour to me, but possibly ten minutes—until a peep over my shoulder showed me the white boat drifting stern first away from the ship's quarter, six men shipping the oars, and Finnegan erect in the stern sheets, directing them. I shouted, and they must have heard, for they heaved my way, and pulled furiously. But it was my swimming that brought us together, and I was nearly exhausted when the bow oarsman shipped his oar and seized the girl. Next I was seized myself and we were both pulled in.

"You did well, tamm well, Mr. Williams," shouted Finnegan, his eyes sparkling with excitement, and his voice taking on the accent that excitement always brings to the speech of Anglified foreigners. "Lift the young lady aft, where there's room!"

She was conscious, but weak, and the men tenderly lifted her back to the stern sheets, where she sat, trembling and white of face, near Finnegan. The boat was in the trough, and he was about to straighten her back to a curve for the ship, now a quarter of a mile away, when he strooped over the girl and fingered a locker that had been drawn with its chain from beneath her dress.

"Where, Miss McTavish," he asked in a shaken voice, "did you get dis locker?" I could hear his voice indistinctly over the wind, but though I saw her lips move, I could not hear her response.

"Your mother?" he shouted, in answer. "Your mother gave it to you?" He opened it, looked at the inner face, and said, "Is dis your mother's picture?"

Her answer seemed to be negative. Perhaps she did not know of a picture.

"And your name, your first name?"

Again I saw her lips move. The men near me began grumbling at the delay, but I silenced them.

"Not Mary," continued Finnegan, his face strained and intense. "Der name they call you when leetle—when you were a leetle girl?"

She had hardly replied when he dropped the tiller, and put both big arms around her. "Hedwig, Hedwig," he groaned. "My leetle girl Hedwig!"

He drew her white, wondering face to his own, kissing her repeatedly on cheek and lips, until the wonder in her face gave way to fright. He took her in his arms, and rocked back and forth, the tears streaming down his face, and her name coming brokenly from his lips. Then she screamed, and he stopped, placing her tenderly on the seat, and faced us.

"Men," he said, wiping his eyes with the

back of his hands. "I've found mine own leetle daughter, that I t'ought was dead. That's all. Give way starboard. Back port."

There was little trouble now in reaching the ship and at last this was accomplished and we saw Captain McTavish clasp the girl in his arms at the rail. Then, as we backed to the hanging falls, Finnegan, directing two to remain and hook on, the rest to climb, swarmed up the bow tackle hand over hand, and reached the deck. I and the others followed, and in a short time we had the boat up and secured. Though over-seeing the job I paid little attention to it, being keenly interested in what was happening on deck. The captain, with one arm around the girl, stood at the main rigging holding himself steady with a grip on the fall of the maintopmast halyards, whose iron block and wire whip were but six feet above his head. Finnegan was facing him. "I don't follow you," the captain was saying. "What are you talking about? I know nought o' your wife."

"You lie," said Finnegan. "Where is the wife you stole from me when at sea? Dere is the leetle girl—my leetle girl. Where is der mutter? Speak, before I kill you with mine hands."

A cloud of anguish passed over the captain's face. He straightened up, looked wildly around at his crew, and said: "Come into the cabin if you want to talk in this manner. We are before the men."

"And we are before God Almighty," answered Finnegan, advancing a step. "We speak it out right here. Where is mine wife that you stole?"

"Who are you? What is your real name?" asked the captain, hoarsely.

"Father of dat leetle girl. Who made her blind? Where is her mutter?"

Captain McTavish reeled, hanging tightly to the halyards.

"You are Gurth Erickson," he said. "I am compelled to believe you. The mother is dead; she died ten years ago."

It was the mate's turn to reel now, but he recovered himself as quickly.

"And why did she say in der letter from London dat der leetle girl was dead? Answer me, or I kill you now."

"To stop your possible pursuit." "And what made my leetle girl blind?"

"A sickness that left a blood clot on the brain. She will never see again."

"Nefter see again!"

Erickson—as he must be called now—stood silent, his face growing darker and his eyes more lurid with thoughts that found a fit accompaniment in the rumbling thunder and fitful flashes around us.

"Nefter see again," he snarled. Then with the whole expanse of his upper teeth showing under the upcurled lip, with fingers extended like claws, he sprang at the captain. But he did not reach him.

A report like that of a hundred-ton gun struck our ears, and in a blinding flash of light we all went down. There was a crackling crashing sound aloft, and even on my back I knew that the mainmast had been struck by lightning. As I scrambled to my feet, unhurt, the whole fabric above the lower masthead went by the board, and, as the topsail halyards slackened, Captain McTavish, still supporting the girl, sank to the deck. I looked for Erickson; he was picking himself up with the fiendish look gone from his face, and I sprang to the girl. But Erickson was there a second behind me.

She was unhurt, but frightened, and her eyes turned from my face to Erickson's, then back. We lifted her up, and her eyes wandered about, resting on this object and that.

"What is it?" she asked. "What happened? I can see. My blindness is gone, but—oh, it hurts!" She covered her eyes with her hands.

"You can see!" roared Erickson, joyously. "My leetle Hedwig! You can see! Look at me. Tell me who I am, Hedwig?"

She uncovered her eyes, looked closely at his face, and doubtfully said, "Gurth? I think I remember. Gurth."

"Your father, Hedwig," he said, soberly. "Your real father, from whom you were stolen."

I seemed to be a third party. Turning away for a moment I examined the captain. He was stone dead from the bolt that had reared sight to the girl, and across his body lay the steel wire maintopmast halyards.

Three months later Captain Erickson and a bright-eyed young lady stepped aboard after a visit to the consul.

"Exonerated," he said, dryly, "from the charge of murder, or manslaughter, because of good seamanship in rigging a jury mainmast and getting the ship out of a storm center and to port. Also, made permanent skipper by cable from the owners. But I almost lost my case—" he looked quizzically at the smiling girl—"on account of this young person. I ought not have shown her to the consul. He said he didn't blame the mate, and if it wasn't sudden death he'd kiss her himself."

"And he is an old, gray man," she said, earnestly.

"And I am a young one," I said. "We are all alike, Hedwig."

"That's all right, young man," said Erickson, grimly. "But you'll learn navigation before you get this girl."

I have learned it.