

# THE ISLAND OF THE STAIRS



Being a True Account of Certain Strange and Wonderful Adventures of Master John Hampdon, Seaman, and Mistress Lucy Wilberforce, Gentlewoman, in the Great South Seas.

By CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

Copyright, 1912, by Cyrus Townsend Brady

## PROLOGUE.

Here's a tale of the sea and the treasure isle, of long hid gems and bad men's guile, of perils on land and wave well met, 'spite storm and destiny's awful threat.

The way of a man with a maid is told as they voyage the seas in quest of gold—the man so brave and the maid so fair. For her sake naught he will not dare.

From English fields to south sea shore their path they follow while billows roar, but it leads them safe to their goal at last, with their love and their treasure tightly clasped.

## CHAPTER I.

Wherein I Bait the Duke Over the Dead.

I CANNOT say that I was greatly surprised when I stumbled across the body of Sir Geoffrey in the spinney, which is not for a moment meant to convey the impression that I was not shocked. I had expected that Sir Geoffrey would come to some such end; therefore I say that I was not surprised. But as I stood over him in the gray dawn, looking down upon him lying so quietly on his back with the handsome, silver-mounted, ivory-handled dueling pistol which had done the damage still clasped in his right hand I was fascinated with horror.

Sir Geoffrey had carefully put his bullet through his heart. It was less disfiguring and brutal, less hard on those left behind, less troublesome, more gentlemanly. His sword lay underneath him, the diamond hilt protruding.

I guessed that he was glad enough, after all, that the end had come, for there was not that look of pain or horror or fear which I have so often seen on the faces of the dead, but his features were calm and composed. He had not been dead long. As I bent over him I noticed that he had something in his left hand. A nearer look showed it to be an envelope. I drew it away and saw that it was addressed to Mistress Lucy. Thrusting it in the pocket of my coat, I rose to my feet.

At that instant I heard steps and voices. Now I had nothing on earth to fear from anybody. The death of Sir Geoffrey was too obviously a suicide for any one to accuse me even if there had been any reason on earth for bringing me under suspicion. The letter which I carried in my pocket addressed to Mistress Lucy would undoubtedly explain everything there was to explain. Something, however, moved me to seek concealment. I am a sailor, as you will find out, and can act quickly in an emergency by a sort of instinct.

Sir Geoffrey lay on the side of the path through the spinney, and beyond him the coppice thickened. The path twisted and turned. From the sound of the footsteps I judged that men were coming along it. I instantly stepped across the body and concealed myself behind a tree trunk in the leafy foliage of the undergrowth. I could see without being seen and hear as well.

I did not expect that any of the guests of the castle would make their appearance at that hour. The footsteps stopped. Two men, one of whom had been pointed out to me as Baron Luftdon, in the lead, followed by another who was strange to me, suddenly appeared. A voice which I recognized as Luftdon's at once exclaimed

showed some signs of human kindness.

At that point I intervened. I could bear no more. When they spoke so slightly of my mistress it was more than I could stand. I burst out of the brush and stood before them—mad, enraged all through. I will admit that I lacked the composure and breeding of these precious two. They started back at my sudden appearance, from which he of the slow speech speedily recovered.

"Now, who may you be, and what may you want?" he said.

"Who I am matters nothing," said I, "but what I want matters a great deal."

"Ah! And what is it that you want that matters so?"

"In the first place that sword."

"This?" said the man, holding Sir Geoffrey's handsome weapon up lightly by the blade.

"That," said I.

I am accustomed to move quickly as well as to think quickly, and before he knew it I had it by the hilt, and but that he released the blade instantly I would have cut his hand as I withdrew it. He swung round and clapped his hand on his own sword, a fierce oath breaking from his lips, his face black as thunder.

"Don't draw that little spit," I said, "or I will be under the necessity of breaking your back."

I towered above both of them, and I have no doubt that I could have made good my boast. The man had the courage of his race and station, he faced me undaunted, his hand on his sword hilt.

"Would you rob me of mine own?" he asked calmly.

"I might do so, and with justice," I replied. "You had no hesitation in robbing the living or the dead."

"Zounds!" cried the first man. "It was in fair play; we risked each what we had, and Sir Geoffrey lost."

"Yes; I see," I replied. "Having paid with everything else, he had to throw away his life. I heard what you said. You wonder how Mistress Wilberforce is to learn the situation. You wonder who is to tell her. I will."

"That is good; well thought of," said the drawler with amazing assurance. "I could not have wished it better. You are doubtless some servant of the house?"

"I am no man's servant," I interrupted in some heat.

"Somebody born on the place who probably cherishes a yokel's humble admiration for the lady of the manor."

I flushed like a girl at this. I never was good at the dissimulation that goes on in polite society.

"Tell her, my man," tell her," he cried, "tell her that she is a beggar and her father a suicide and that I have all her property without her. She can go to your arms. She is not meet for the Duke of Arcester."

So this was Arcester! I had heard of him, as I had of Luftdon, two of the most debauched, unprincipled rakes, idlers, fortune hunters, gamblers, men about town, in all England I stepped closer to him and struck him with the palm of my hand. His sword was out on the moment, but before he could make a pass I wrenched it from him, broke the blade over my knee and hurled the two pieces into the coppice.

"I can match you with swords," said I. "I have fought with men, not popinjays in my day all over the world, and I know the use of the weapon, but I would not demean myself, being an honest man though no gentleman, by crossing blades with such a ruffian."

"By God," cried the man, "I will have you flung into the mill pond. I will clap you in jail. I will!"

"You will do nothing of the sort," said I. "There is no man on the estate who would not take my part against yours, especially when I repeat what you have said about Mistress Lucy."

"And who would believe you?" queried the duke, whose anger was at a frightful height in being thus braved



"Don't draw that little spit."

and insulted. In his agitation he tore at his neck cloth. "I would be your word against mine, and—"

"For the matter of that, my word will not be uncorroborated," I interrupted swiftly.

"What do you mean?"

"This gentleman!"

"By gad," said Lord Luftdon, "you are right to appeal to me and you were right to strike Arcester. I'm sorry for the girl and for Sir Geoffrey and ashamed for my friend."

"Would you turn against me in this?" cried the duke.

"I certainly would."

"God," whispered his grace hotly, fumbling at the empty sheath. "I wish I had my sword!"

"There is Sir Geoffrey's sword," said Lord Luftdon, who did not lack courage, clutching his own blade as he spoke and making as if to draw it.

"No," said I, master of the situation as I meant to be, "there will be no more fighting over the dead body of Sir Geoffrey. You and Lord Luftdon can settle your differences elsewhere."

"On second thought, there will be no further settlement," said Luftdon, regarding his coolness and thrusting back into its scabbard his half drawn blade. "His grace and I are in too many things to make a permanent difference between us possible."

"I thought so," I replied.

"By gad," laughed Luftdon. "I like your spirit, lad! Who are you and what are you?"

"The late gardener's son."

"Do they breed such as you down here in these gardens?"

"As to that I know not, my lord. I am a sailor. I have commanded my own ship and made my own fortune. I come back here between cruises because I am devoted to—"

"The woman!" sneered the duke. And I marveled at the temerity of the man, seeing that I could have choked him to death with one hand.

"Mention her name again," I cried, "and you will be beside your victim, yonder!"

"Right!" said Luftdon approvingly.

"I come back here because I am fond of the old place; it is my home. My people have served the Wilberforces for generations. Their forbears and mine lie together in the churchyard around the hill yonder. You can't understand devotion like that," said I, turning to the duke, "and it is not necessary that you should."

"And indeed what is necessary for me, pray?" he sneered.

"That you leave the place at once."

"Without speech with my lady?"

"Without speech with any one. There is a good inn at the village. I will take it upon myself to see that your servants pack your mails and follow you there at once."

"I will not be ordered about like this!" protested the duke.

"Oh, yes, you will," said Luftdon. "The advice he gives is good. We have nothing more to do here. Don't be a fool, Arcester. You have got everything you wanted in this game, and it is only just that you should pay a little for it. What's your name, my man?"

"Never mind what it is."

"Are you ashamed of it?"

"Hampdon!"

"Hampdon, you may not be a gentleman," said Luftdon, "but by gad you are a man, and here is my hand on it!"

He had played a man's part so I clasped it.

And so they went down the path, leaving me not greatly relishing my triumph, for I had to tell Mistress Lucy all that had happened.

The scarlet of my lady's riding coat as she galloped up the tree covered road attracted my attention. I quickened my pace, and we arrived at the steps of the hall at the same instant. She was alone, for she had evidently chosen to ride unaccompanied.

I stood silent before her with that curious dumbness I generally experience when first entering her presence, while she drew rein sharply. She was a little thing compared to me—indeed, small compared even to the average woman, but in one sense she was the biggest thing I had ever confronted. I was almost afraid of her! I who feared nothing else. What she thought of me was of little moment to her.

It was Mistress Lucy's regular habit to take a morning gallop every day. It was that usual custom that caused her to look so fresh and young and beautiful, that put the color in her cheek and the sparkle in her eye.

She nodded carelessly, yet kindly, to me. It was her habit, that careless kindness. When she was a little girl and I had been a great boy we had played together familiarly, but that was long since over. Then she looked about for a groom. The steps that led to the terrace were deserted. Sir Geoffrey of late had grown slack in the administration of affairs on account of his troubles, and no one was present. Mistress Lucy stared at me, frowning.

(Continued next week)

## \$100 Reward, 3,000

The readers of this paper will be pleased to learn that there is at least one dreaded disease that science has been able to cure in all its stages, and that is Catarrh. Hall's Catarrh Cure is the only positive cure now known to the medical fraternity. Catarrh being a constitutional disease, requires a constitutional treatment. Hall's Catarrh Cure is taken internally, acting directly upon the blood and mucous surfaces of the system, thereby destroying the foundation of the disease, and giving the patient strength by building up the constitution and assisting nature in doing its work. The proprietors have so much faith in its curative powers that they offer One Hundred Dollars for any case that it fails to cure. Send for list of testimonials. Address: F. J. CLEMENT & CO., Toledo, Ohio. Sold by all Druggists, etc. Take Hall's Family Pills for constipation.

Are You a Woman?  
**Take Cardui**  
 The Woman's Tonic  
 FOR SALE AT ALL DRUGGISTS

For Fewest Changes of Cars, Best Schedules and the Very Lowest Rates to All Ports in the North, South, East and West, Travel via  
**SOUTHERN RAILWAY.**  
 Premier Carrier of the South.  
 For Further Information And Particulars Call On or Write J. H. WOOD, D. P. A., Asheville N. C.

Notice.  
 Owing to death of the manager of this firm it is necessary that all business handled by him be closed up immediately and we will ask parties indebted to this company to arrange their accounts at once. We will greatly appreciate the prompt attention our customers will give this request.  
 SYLVA SUPPLY CO.

**SOU. RY. SCHEDULE**  
 East Bound Train.  
 No. 20 Lv. Murphy 6:30 a. m. Ar. Sylva 10:43 a. m. Ar. Asheville 1:55 p. m.  
 No. 18 Lv. Murphy 11:30 a. m. Ar. Sylva 3:47 P. M. Ar. Asheville 6:55 p. m.  
 West Bound Train.  
 No. 17 Lv. Asheville 8:30 a. m. Ar. Sylva 11:13 a. m. Ar. Murphy 10:55 p. m.  
 No. 19 Lv. Asheville 3:30 p. m. Ar. Sylva 6:11 p. m. Ar. Murphy 10:55 p. m.  
 W. V. DORSEY,  
 Local Passenger Agent.

**Wood's High-Grade Seeds.**  
**Crimson Clover**  
 The King of Soil Improvers, also makes splendid fall, winter and spring grazing, the earliest green feed, or a good hay crop.  
 CRIMSON CLOVER will increase the productivity of the land more than twenty times as much as the same amount spent in commercial fertilizers. Can be sown by itself or at the last working of corn, cotton or other cultivated crops.  
 We are headquarters for  
**Crimson Clover, Alfalfa, Winter Vetch, and all Farm Seeds,**  
 Write for prices and Descriptive Fall Catalog, giving information about all seeds for fall sowing.  
**T. W. WOOD & SONS,**  
 Seedsmen, - Richmond, Va.

**FOLEY KIDNEY PILLS**  
 FOR RHEUMATISM KIDNEYS AND BLADDER

**FOLEY KIDNEY PILLS**  
 FOR BACKACHE KIDNEYS AND BLADDER