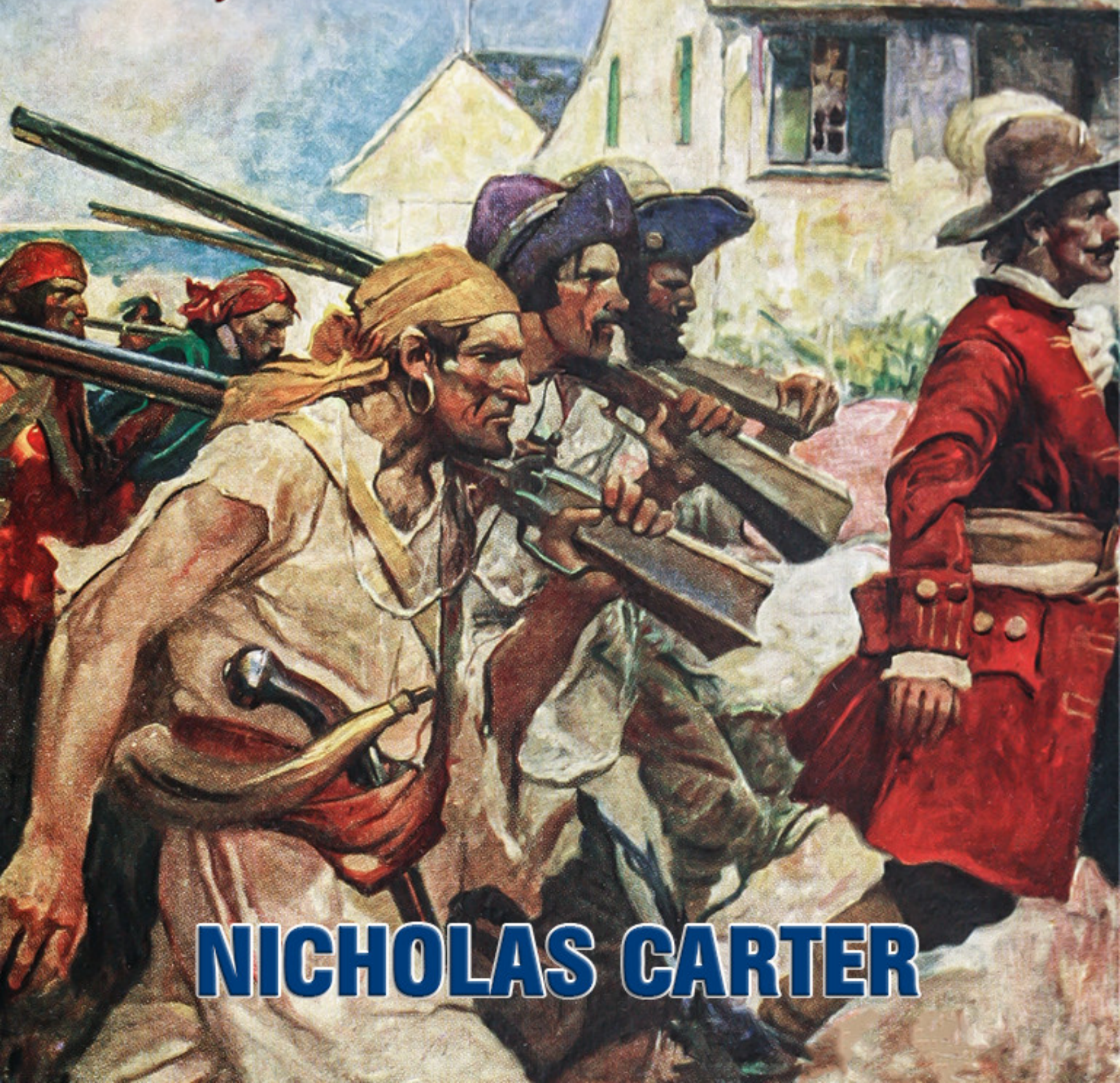


CLASSICS TO GO

**CAPTAIN SPARKLE, PIRATE,
OR, A HARD MAN TO CATCH**



NICHOLAS CARTER

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CHAPTER I.

CAPTAIN SPARKLE, THE PIRATE CHIEF.

“Mr. Maxwell Kane!”

The announcement was made by Nick Carter’s valet, Joseph, who threw open the door of his master’s study with a gesture as nearly approaching a flourish as any in which he ever permitted himself to indulge. Joseph had a wholesome respect for millionaires, and many a one of them came at one time and another to the detective for consultation; but it was rarely that Joseph admitted such a one as Maxwell Kane.

It was a name which was an open sesame at all doors, however exclusive; it was the name of a man who counted his millions by hundreds—of a man who, notwithstanding his great wealth, still found time to be a good fellow; of an athlete, a sportsman—in short, and in a word, a gentleman.

It was also the name of a man whom Nick Carter counted among his personal and intimate friends; but Joseph was not aware of that fact when he threw open the door and announced the caller. He had taken the card to his master a moment before, in his study, and had been directed to “show the gentleman here, Joseph”; and Joseph knew that only persons who were privileged, indeed, were ever permitted to penetrate to Nick Carter’s study.

Nick wore his house-coat, a short smoking-jacket, and had been engaged in consuming his after-breakfast cigar while he read the papers, when the caller was announced.

“Hello, Nick!” was the greeting he received from Kane. “I got up before breakfast this morning; as you will observe. What time is it, anyhow?” he added, as he dropped into a

chair which the detective indicated to him, and pulled out his watch. "Not yet eight o'clock, eh? Have you had your breakfast?"

"An hour ago," replied the detective.

"Have you got anything doing to-day?"

"No; I was just congratulating myself that I had not. All my assistants are out, however, so I can hardly call myself care free. I never am, you know."

"Yes, I know. Say, old chap, the *Goalong*"—he referred to his palatial steam-yacht—"is lying at the dock, over at the foot of West Twenty-third Street, waiting for us, and I want you to go aboard with me. Will you?"

"I'd like to do so, Kane," replied the detective; "but there are several things here to which I ought to give my attention to-day, now that I have a few moments at my disposal in which to do so. You see——"

"Hold on, Nick. I haven't finished yet."

"Well, go ahead, then."

"This is a business proposition I'm making. I was boarded by pirates last night, and I want you to see if you can't catch them."

"Boarded by—what?"

"Pirates—p-i-r-a-t-e-s—pirates. The real thing, too. Honest Injun, Nick! Did you ever read Cooper's 'Red Rover'? Well, I could take my oath that he has risen from the bottom of the sea and resumed business at the old stand. I hope to goodness he won't hear me; he might think I am joking, and I was never more in dead earnest in my life."

"Do you mean that the *Goalong* was boarded by pirates—really?"

“Do I mean it! Huh! Can’t you see that I’ve lost flesh? It takes a pretty good-sized man, with a mighty big proposition on his side of the question, to scare me, Nick, as you are aware; but that pirate chap did the act, without a hitch. I haven’t got over it yet.”

“You aren’t trying one of your jokes on me, are you, Kane?”

“No—on my honor, no!”

“Tell me all about it.”

“Not here, old man. Come aboard the yacht. I’d rather tell you there. You see, that is what I have come here for. When this thing happened, I said to my wife and her sister—they are aboard the *Goalong* with me, you know—I told them that there was only one thing for us to do, and that was to hurry to the city and find you; and so, if you don’t mind—and you have just admitted that you can spare the time—I’ll take you aboard with me now, and you can hear the story there, all at once. I won’t affront you by offering you anything for your services; but, all the same, if it were a question of bidding against another client in order to secure you to-day, I’d outbid Standard Oil. Can I put it any stronger than that, Nick?”

“Not very well.”

“And you’ll come, eh—for friendship’s sake?”

“Yes; I’ll be with you in a moment. Wait here.”

The detective left the room, but presently he returned, ready for the street, and, without more delay, the two friends left the house together.

“I came across in a car,” said Kane. “You don’t mind, do you?”

They boarded a west-bound Twenty-third Street car, and in a very short time were aboard the sumptuous yacht, which had been waiting to receive them.

As soon as their feet were pressed upon the deck, the plank was drawn in, and the lines cast off, and they had not advanced to the awning under which Kane's wife and two guests were seated while awaiting them, before the yacht was backing out into the river.

"I found him, as you see," said Kane, advancing rapidly. "Caught him alone, too, and with nothing to do. Think of that! Carter, have you ever met my wife's sister? Here she is. Miss Bessie Harlan. If I hadn't asked my wife to marry me before I met her sister, it would have been a toss-up between them. Now, I couldn't pay Bessie a greater compliment than that could I? And this is Count Jean de Cadillac. I made the count's acquaintance in Paris last winter. We were quite chummy there, and when he showed up over here, a couple of weeks ago——"

"We became even chummier," interrupted the count, with a smile, speaking in perfect English, and smiling so that he showed his perfect, white teeth.

He was a handsome man, too, this Count Cadillac, with his shining, black eyes, blacker mustache and imperial, gleaming teeth, and clear, white skin. And his manners were faultless, his dress perfect without being foppish.

Nick greeted Mrs. Kane, and acknowledged the introductions while the yacht was backing into the river; and then, turning to Kane, while he accepted one of the deck-chairs, he remarked:

"Now, Max, give us the pirate story."

"You will understand, before I finish," said Kane, "why I insisted upon your coming here before I told it. I wanted witnesses to support my statements, for I have an idea that

you wouldn't believe my unsupported word about this affair."

"Oh, yes——"

"Wait. You haven't heard the story yet. It's really the most incredible thing you ever heard of, from beginning to end. I'll give you my word that I wouldn't believe a word of it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes."

"It begins promisingly," said Nick.

"You wait. We left Newport yesterday, about noon, I think; between noon and one o'clock. We loafed along, for nobody was in a hurry, and last night, late in the evening, we ran in at the American Yacht Club anchorage—you know where that is, eh?"

"Yes."

"We ran in there, and anchored for the night."

"We were intending to go ashore to call upon some friends who live near there," said Mrs. Kane; "but we found that it was too late when we arrived, so we gave it up."

"It was a beautiful night," continued Kane, "warm, and as nearly perfect as it could be made; and we sat out here on the deck until almost one o'clock before anybody thought of turning in. You see, Carter, it happened that we were alone at the anchorage. I don't suppose that thing would happen once again in a dozen summers, but it happened last night, all right."

"I liked it," said Bessie Harlan. "It was a change."

"Well," continued Kane, "the Sound was as smooth as glass. There wasn't a ripple anywhere, and——"

"And the moon was just heavenly!" interrupted Bessie, again; but Kane did not even turn his eyes in her direction.

“I came back on deck after the others turned in,” he continued. “I wasn’t sleepy, the night was beautiful, and I wanted to smoke another cigar, all by my little lonesome. So I sat here—right where I am seated now—lighted my cigar, and smoked.

“I am going to take you right back to that anchorage, Carter, so that you can see things just as they are, so far as the surroundings are concerned. We are headed for there now.”

“That is a good idea,” said Nick.

“Well, my cigar was something more than half-smoked, and, as I am a slow smoker, it must have been something like half an hour after I was alone before anything happened; and then it all happened so suddenly that it was on me before I knew it.”

“What was?” asked the detective.

“The pirate. Wait.”

“I’m waiting.”

“The fellow made his approach from behind, which would account for my not seeing him or his craft until he was right there, on the deck, so to speak, but I don’t think that would account for my not hearing him, do you?”

“You might have been dozing in your chair,” suggested Nick.

“Bosh! I was never wider awake in my life!”

“You were, doubtless, so absorbed in what you were thinking about that you paid no attention to your surroundings.”

“That’s all bosh, too. I was just as alert as I ever am. As I always am; and I’m not generally known as a sleeper, or a dreamer, either.”

“That’s quite true, Kane.”

“I was just as wide-awake as I am now. I was just as much on the alert as I am now. The night was so still, and the yacht and everything aboard of her was so silent, that I could have heard a tack drop, the whole length of the *Goalong*. But the fact remains, all the same, that I did not hear a sound.

“I was seated right here, in this position and in this same chair, looking off, as you observe, almost astern. The bow of the yacht was pointed toward the open Sound, for the tide was coming in.

“My cigar was on the last quarter—I told you that once already; but never mind—and I had about made up my mind to light a fresh one, when I discovered that I hadn’t another one in my pocket, and would have to go below to get it. That settled it. If I had felt any doubt about smoking another cigar, the discovery of the fact that I had not another one in my possession made me want nothing on earth so much as that cigar. So I rose to go below.

“You will observe, from my present position, that I was obliged to turn in order to do so.

“The companionway is behind me.”

“I got up, stretched myself, chucked my two-thirds-smoked cigar into the water, and turned——”

He paused, as if to give emphasis to the concluding statement; and, after a moment of silence, the detective said:

“Well, what then?”

“The pirate stood directly in front of me.”

“On the deck of your own yacht—of this yacht?”

“Exactly. Right there—on that spot,” and Kane pointed with his finger toward a point on the deck directly in front of him, for he had risen while he was speaking, in order to act out this dramatic incident of his story.

“Was he alone?” asked Nick.

“No; there were six others directly behind him.”

“Six others!” exclaimed the detective. “Do you mean to tell me that seven men had succeeded in coming aboard your yacht, in the bright moonlight, when the Sound was as smooth as glass and the night was as still as a church, without rousing you, although you sat there on the deck smoking?”

“That is exactly what they did do.”

“How did they get aboard?”

“To answer that question now is to get ahead of my story,” said Kane. “I would rather tell you about it just as it happened, incident for incident.”

“All right. Go ahead.”

“You could have knocked me out with a crow’s feather when I discovered them,” continued Kane. “I hadn’t a leg left to stand on, Carter. I opened my mouth to speak—I haven’t the least idea what I intended to say, though—when the chief pirate raised one hand and touched his fingers to his lips.”

“Which you construed as a command for you to remain silent?”

“I think that gesture is so construed all over the world, isn’t it?”

“Quite so. Well, what next?”

“You see, Carter, I knew by their appearance that they were robbers. It did strike me for an instant that the whole

thing was some huge joke which somebody had put up on me, but I was quickly undeceived on that point.”

“What was their appearance?”

“Here is where I am going to test your credulity, old man. But my wife and my friends can testify that I tell you the truth.”

“So they saw the pirates, also?”

“Yes, as you shall hear.”

“Well, about their appearance, or how they appeared, eh? That part of the comedy seemed to impress you.”

“It did. And it was no comedy, either, I’ll beg you to understand! Carter, the pirate chief was dressed in red, from head to feet, and he looked as if he might have stepped down out of a Shakespeare tragedy, as far as the cut of his costume was concerned. I think if you were to dress *Romeo* in red, you would about get the proper idea. Eh, count? What do you say?”

“I think you have given a very good description,” replied the count.

“And the other six?” asked Nick. “Were they dressed the same?”

“No, indeed! They were only common truck alongside of their master, I suppose. At all events, they appeared in ordinary black. Every man jack of them wore a half-mask over his features. The chief’s mask was red, like his costume; those of the men were black, the same as their costumes. They also wore rather tight-fitting caps on their heads, but the chief wore a regular *Romeo* hat, with an eagle’s feather stuck in it.”

“H’m!” said Nick. “It makes quite a picture.”

“You’d have thought so if you had been in my place, Carter! I didn’t know whether I was scared, amused, angry, or bored; and I didn’t have time to analyze my sentiments, either, for when the chief touched his lips with his fingers, to signal me that he preferred that I should keep quiet, he remarked, quite calmly and in a perfectly natural tone:

“‘I don’t suppose you wish needlessly to frighten the ladies, do you?’

“‘Well, no,’ I replied, ‘I can’t say that I do. They have retired, however, and we need not disturb them.’

“‘On the contrary, my friend,’ he said, ‘it will be necessary that they are disturbed. But I am fond of the ladies. I do not like to frighten them—needlessly. Then, again, sometimes they faint away, or scream, and that offends me.’

“‘Indeed?’ I said. ‘Have I by mistake been smoking on the deck of your yacht, instead of my own?’ I intended that for sarcasm, Nick, but it fell flat. He didn’t see the point at all, for he replied, calmly, that I would find things much more to my taste for a few moments if I would take that view of it. ‘You may consider the *Goalong* as my property for the next half-hour,’ he said.”

“Were they armed?” asked Nick.

“The pirate said they were, and I have no doubt that they were, although I saw no sign of weapons of any kind, save that the chief wore a short, straight sword at his side, and while he talked to me he let his hand rest upon it, as if to call my attention to the fact.”

“What happened next?”

“Well, when he said that I could look upon my yacht as his property for the next half-hour or so, I didn’t seem to have any fitting argument with which to reply to him, so I

remained silent. His next question was rather more to the point.”

“What was it?”

“He asked me, plainly, how much money I happened to have aboard the yacht; and he added: ‘If you tell the truth about it, it will save both of us considerable trouble.’

“‘Oh, I suppose there are a couple of thousand dollars here, all told,’ I answered him.

“‘Very good,’ he said. ‘There is also some thousands of dollars’ worth of silverware, and goldware, isn’t there?’

“‘Yes,’ I admitted.

“‘And some very valuable cups, which you have won as trophies, from time to time, eh?’

“‘Why, yes, of course. But you wouldn’t be so low down as to take them, would you?’ I demanded.

“He laughed at that, as if he considered it a good joke; and he replied that he thought that part of the matter might be arranged satisfactorily. I didn’t see it, but I supposed he did, and the sequel proved that he did, too.”

“I am waiting for the sequel. What happened next?”

“He said to me: ‘Mr. Kane, you will oblige me by considering that, for the moment, I am master of this yacht, and you will, therefore, obey such orders as I give you. You need not look forward in the hope that any of your crew is astir, for they are all asleep below, save one, who was on watch, and he is now lying, bound and gagged, in the bow.’

“‘All right,’ I said. ‘What are your orders, Mr. Rover? You seem to have the drop on me, and I’ll take my medicine with a smile. Speak up. Don’t be bashful.’

“‘I have already informed you,’ he replied, without taking any notice of my facetiousness, ‘that it would be a pity to

frighten the ladies. It is, however, necessary that they should be called to the deck, as I care as little to affront them as I do to frighten them.'

"'Why not leave them where they are, then?' I asked.

"'Because it is necessary to make a somewhat thorough search of their sleeping quarters. I have come here to obtain their valuables, as well as your own,' he continued, 'and it would be decidedly ungentlemanly for me to do so without first having them called away.'"

"That was real considerate of him, don't you think so, Mr. Carter?" asked Mrs. Kane.

"Why, yes. But how did he carry out the idea?"

"He merely ordered me to go below and call them. He directed me to tell them that a party of gentlemen had called unexpectedly, and that I insisted upon their coming on deck at once, in order that they might meet with a great surprise, and that they were to promise me that they would not be frightened, no matter what they saw.

"'That,' he assured me, 'will arouse their curiosity, so that they will not consider it a bore to dress themselves again, and do as you ask.' You see, he knows something about women, that chap."

"Did he go below again?" asked the detective.

"Nay, nay—not on your life! The pirate stuck close beside me all the while, and he held that naked, flat sword in his hand, too. I didn't like the looks of it a little bit."

"So you called your wife and her sister, eh?"

"Yes; and the count."

"Didn't they protest?"

"Protest! I should say so! My wife flatly refused to come, at first; and she wouldn't have come, either, if I hadn't told

her that the whole blooming push would come down there and pull her out, willy-nilly, if she didn't obey. Bessie didn't raise a kick. She thought there was some fun on hand, and she is always ripe for that sort of thing. The count swore like a——”

“Now it is my turn to protest, Kane,” said the count.

“Well, I heard you, and it did me good, for I wanted to do a little swearing myself. I have never felt quite so small in my life as I did just then.

“Well, Nick, after I did the calling, we returned to the deck. The pirate's followers had not moved from their position in line, and they didn't until the chief waved his hand, and then they fell apart into groups, for all the world as if they were a lot of guests whom I had invited to the yacht. But he didn't join them—not he. Instead, he dropped into that chair where the count is seated, and said coolly:

““Mr. Kane, I am Captain Sparkle. When your guests come on deck, I will thank you to present me to them.””

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERY OF THE PIRATE CRAFT.

“Let me talk, now!” exclaimed Bessie. “I was the first one to reach the deck after you called us, Max.”

“All right. I’ve no objections. I feel like seven different kinds of a jay, anyhow, when I tell this story; and, by the great boot in Chatham Street, Nick, I’d willingly give up a million rather than go through with it again! All the same, I want those race cups back again, if I can get them.”

“So the pirate took them, did he? I thought he said it might be arranged so that you could keep them?”

“Oh, he took them, all right; and he did offer to make an arrangement; but I will tell you all about that when Bessie gets through.”

Nick turned so that he faced Miss Harlan.

“I was the first one to reach the deck,” she began, “and I saw a distinguished-looking man seated in that chair where the count is sitting. He wore a red mask over his face, as Max has described it, and his costume was strikingly like a Romeo get-up, only it was red. My first thought was that some of Max’s friends had discovered that we were at the anchorage, and had come aboard to treat us to an impromptu fancy-dress party. I really supposed that I would have known them, had they not been masked, and regarded the whole thing as a joke, so I went toward them, humming ‘Gaily the Troubadour.’ But when I drew nearer, so that I could get a view of Max’s face, I was startled; he looked so savage, and he was chewing away at his mustache, just as if he had not spent hours and hours in training it ever since it sprouted.”

“That will do, Bessie. Just keep to your story, if you don’t mind,” said Kane.

“Well,” she continued, “I saw then that something was the matter. My first thought was that Max was annoyed because his friends had come; but when he rose in his place, and, in an icy tone, said: ‘Miss Harlan, I am compelled, much against my will, to introduce a gentleman thief to you,’ I didn’t know what to say, or think. But before I could do either, the pirate had turned toward Max, and I could see the flash of his eyes through the holes in his mask, while he said icily:

“‘Mr. Kane, if I hear a repetition of your present offense, the consequences to yourself and your ladies will be upon your own head! I beg that you will present me properly, sir!’

“I was nonplused, Mr. Carter, and I could see that Max was swearing mad. However, he did as he was told.

“‘This is Captain Sparkle, a pirate,’ he said. And then he called out to my sister, who was just appearing, to go back and get his box of cigars for him.

“I turned to the pirate then, and said: ‘You have selected a late hour to make your call upon us, Captain Sparkle.’

“‘From necessity, believe me, madam,’ he replied, bowing.

“My sister and the count appeared at that moment, and Max introduced them by saying, between his teeth:

“‘My wife, and Count Cadillac—Captain Sparkle.’ Cora had brought the cigars with her, and Max lighted one of them. After that he seemed better.”

“And had you not guessed the true significance of the presence of the man in red?” asked Nick.

“No; I saw that something was wrong, but what it was or what it all meant, I had no idea. The pirate, however, did not

leave me long in doubt.”

“No? What did he say, and do?”

“Let me speak, now,” interjected Kane’s wife.

“By Jove!” muttered Kane. “One would think this was a prize composition tourney!”

“My first impression about the matter,” said Mrs. Kane, “was much the same as Bessie’s. And I suppose the count’s was the same.”

“Yes,” replied the count. “Quite so.”

“However,” she continued, “as Bessie says, we were not long left in doubt. Captain Sparkle, as he called himself, snapped his fingers, and his men, whom I had noticed when I came out of the cabin, came forward—or, rather, aft—at once, falling into line like trained soldiers.

“‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ said Captain Sparkle, then, ‘these are my followers. We have come here on an important errand. We are, in a word, collecting jewels, trinkets, money, and valuables of all kinds. In your own world you would designate us as robbers, or, perhaps, by the term which Mr. Kane has just now applied to me—pirates. I am about to send several of my men below to obtain what you have there, and you will each spare yourself unnecessary annoyance resulting from broken locks and ruffled wearing apparel, if you will produce your keys, and give me such directions as will aid us in our search.’

“It was quite a speech, Mr. Carter, and I think I have repeated it word for word. I was amazed. I did not know what to think. I was frightened, too; and then, for the first time, I saw that my husband was almost beside himself with rage and chagrin. I knew then that the strangely attired man had spoken the truth, and that they were robbers.

“I thought Bessie would faint.

“She uttered a cry, and came closer to me; and that act of hers led the pirate to make another speech.

“‘I beg, ladies,’ he said, ‘that you will not be needlessly alarmed. You are in no personal danger. You will not be molested in any way. You have only to remain seated here in the chairs until we have finished our business, when we will depart, as we came, in silence. And in the meantime I will direct one of my men to act as steward, and to bring wine to you. Now, if you please, the keys and the information I requested.’”

“Now wait, Cora,” said Kane. “It is my turn again.”

“Go on,” said Nick.

“The pirate left three of his men on deck to watch us while he took the others below with him. Of course, that was after we had given up our keys, and all the information he asked for about our valuables.

“The men he left to guard us were armed, too, this time. They each held a revolver. I don’t know where they got them, for I had not seen them before. Not one of them uttered a word, however. They simply stood there, with their pistols in their hands, like so many wax figures. The count spoke to them two or three times, but he got no reply at all.

“After a few minutes, one of the men who had gone below with the chief came back with a tray. The scoundrel had opened the steward’s pantry and helped himself; but he sent up a bottle of sherry, a bottle of whisky, and a siphon of seltzer.”

“But he did not come himself, eh?” asked Nick.

“Not until he was through below. Then he appeared. But in the meantime his men had come up, two by two, carrying stuff they had stolen; but they covered everything with