

THE GRIP OF HONOR

CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY



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The Grip of Honor

Cyrus Townsend Brady

BOOK I

THEY MEET AND PART

CHAPTER I

A Stern Chase on a Lee Shore

"The wind is freshening; we gain upon her easily, I think, sir."

"Decidedly. This is our best point of sailing, and our best wind, too. We can't be going less than ten knots," said the captain, looking critically over the bows at the water racing alongside.

"I can almost make out the name on her stern now with the naked eye," replied the other, staring hard ahead through the drift and spray.

"Have you a glass there, Mr. O'Neill?" asked the captain.

"Yes, sir, here it is," answered that gentleman, handing him a long, old-fashioned, cumbrous brass telescope, which he at once adjusted and focused on the ship they were chasing.

"Ah!" said the elder of the two speakers, a small, slender man, standing lightly poised on the topgallant forecastle with the careless confidence of a veteran seaman, as he examined the chase through the glass which the taller and younger officer handed him; "I can read it quite plainly with this. The M-a-i-d--Maidstone, a trader evidently, as I see no gun-ports nor anything that betokens an armament." He ran the tubes of the glass into each other and handed it back, remarking, "At this rate we shall have her in a short time."

"She is a fast one, though," replied the other; "it's no small task for anything afloat to show us her heels for so long a time; let me see--it was six bells in the morning watch when

we raised her, was it not, sir?"

"Yes, 'tis rather remarkable going for a merchant vessel, but we have the heels of her and will get her soon unless she goes to the bottom on those reefs round the Land's End yonder. It's a nasty place to be tearing through in that wild way," he added thoughtfully.

"Shall I give her a shot, sir, from the starboard bow-chaser?"

"Not just yet; it would be useless, as we are not quite within range, and she would pay no heed; besides, we shall have her without it, and 'tis hardly worth while wasting a shot upon her at present."

The brief conversation took place forward upon the forecastle of the American Continental ship *Ranger*, between her captain, John Paul Jones, and her first lieutenant, one Barry O'Neill, Marquis de Richemont, sometime officer in the navy of his Most Christian Majesty, the King of France. O'Neill was the son of a marshal of France, an Irish gentleman of high birth and position, who had gone out as a mere lad with the young Stuart in the '45, and whose property had been confiscated, and himself attainted and sentenced to death for high treason.

Fortunately he had escaped to the Continent, and had entered the service of the King of France; where, through his extraordinary ability and courage, coupled with several brilliant opportunities he had made and enjoyed, he had risen to exalted station and great wealth. He had always continued more or less of a conspirator in the cause of the royal Stuarts, however, and his son, following in his footsteps, had been mixed up in every treasonable Jacobite enterprise which had been undertaken, and was under the same ban of the British throne as was his father.

When Paul Jones in the historic ship *Ranger* came to France, O'Neill, moved by a spirit of adventure and his ever present desire to strike a blow at King George, received permission to enter the American service temporarily, with

several other French officers. The Ranger was already some days out on her successful cruise, when, early on a morning in the month of April in the year 1778, they had sighted a ship trying to beat around the Land's End. Sail had at once been made in chase, and the stranger was now almost within the grasp of the American pursuers.

"It seems to me, sir," said O'Neill to the captain, "that unless she goes about presently, she won't weather that long reef over beyond her, where those breakers are."

"Ay," said Jones; "and if she goes about, she's ours, and--" He paused significantly.

"If not, sir?"

"She's God's!" added the captain, solemnly.

The wind was blowing at a furious rate. The Ranger had a single reef in her topsails, with her topgallant sails set above them. The masts were straining and buckling like bound giants, and the ship quivered and trembled like a smitten harpstring, as she pitched and plunged in the heavy seas. The wind roaring through the iron-taut rigging, and the wild spray dashing over the sides, rendered conversation almost impossible. The motley crew of the Ranger were gathered forward, clustering on the rail and lower shrouds, keeping of course at a respectful distance from their captain and his first lieutenant, and some of the other officers grouped near them.

"She must tack, now," said Jones at last, "or she's lost. I know these waters; I have sailed them many times when I was a boy. I doubt if they can weather that reef even--By heavens! There's a woman on board of her, too!" he exclaimed, as his keen eye detected the flutter of drapery and a dash of color among a little group of men on the deck of the Maidstone, evidently staring aft at her relentless pursuer.

"See everything in readiness for quick work here.

Gentlemen," continued the captain, "to your stations all. Mr. O'Neill, remain with me." The men hastened to their

places at once, and a little silence supervened.

"You may give her a shot now, Mr. O'Neill," said Jones at last; "it may bring them to tacking and save them from wreck. Pitch it alongside of her; we don't want to hurt the woman, and it's not necessary to touch the ship."

"Clear away that starboard bow-chaser," called the lieutenant; and the men, scarcely waiting for his word of command, cast loose the gun. "Aft there, stand by to give her a touch of the helm!" he cried with raised voice.

"Ay, ay, sir," came the prompt reply.

"Price," continued O'Neill to the captain of the piece, "you need not hit her; just throw a shot alongside of her. Are you ready?"

"All ready, sir," answered the old seaman, carefully shifting his quid and squinting along the gun.

"Luff!" shouted O'Neill, in his powerful voice. The quartermaster put the wheel over a few spokes, and the Ranger shot up into the wind a little and hung quivering a moment with checked way.

"Give her a touch with the right-hand spike, lads," said old Price. "Steady, shove in that quoin a little; easy there, overhaul those tackles! All ready, sir."

"Now!" cried O'Neill.

A booming roar and a cloud of smoke broke out forward, and the ball ricocheted along the water and sank just under the quarter of the chase.

"Let her go off again," cried O'Neill to the quartermaster, and a moment later, as the sails filled and she heeled once more to the wind; "very well dyce, enough off," he cried.

"A good shot, Master Price, and a glass of grog for you presently in reward," said Jones, quietly "Ah! we shall have some answer, at any rate."

At this moment a small red flag broke out from the gaff of the English vessel.

"Show our own colors aft there, though they can scarcely see them," cried the captain; "he's a plucky one, that fellow."

What's he doing now? 'Fore Gad, he's got a gun over the quarter, a stern-chaser. Must have arms on board."

The Ranger was rushing through the water again at a rapidly increasing rate, almost burying her lee cathead in the foaming sea under the freshening breeze, and was now very near the Maidstone, which at this moment discharged the small stern-chaser which had been dragged astern, the shot from which passed harmlessly through the bellying foresail above their heads.

"Give her another, Price," said O'Neill, upon a nod from Jones.

"Into her this time, sir?"

"Yes, anywhere you like."

The Ranger luffed again, losing a little distance as she did so, but weathering appreciably on the stranger, and this time the flying splinters from the stern of the chase showed that the shot had met its mark. There was a sudden scattering of the men upon her quarter, and most of them disappeared, but the young girl could be seen holding on to the weather spanker vang, and apparently looking defiantly at them. O'Neill took up the glass and examined her.

"Faith, sir, she looks as pretty as she is brave. See for yourself, sir," he added, as he handed the telescope to the captain, who took a careful look at her through the glass.

"You have a good eye for the beautiful," he replied, smiling, "even at a long range. Secure the bow-chaser, sir; we are within musket range of her."

While this was being done, the Ranger had crept up on the stranger till her bow began to overreach the weather quarter of the other vessel. As they held on recklessly together, suddenly the speed of the chase was diminished. Her helm was put down, and with sails quivering and swaying she swung up into the wind.

"We have her now," said Jones, springing on the rail and leaning over forward; "nay, it's too late. Missed stays! By Heaven, she's in irons! She's doomed! Aft there! steady

with the helm! Give her a good full."

In the next instant, with a crash heard above the roar of the storm even upon the other ship, the ill-fated Maidstone drove upon the reef broadside on. The shock of meeting was tremendous: her masts were snapped short off like pipe stems; the howling gale jerked them over the sides, where they thundered and beat upon the ship with tremendous force. The girl disappeared.

"Breakers ahead!" on the instant roared out a half-dozen voices in the forecastle.

"Breakers on the starboard bow!" came the wild cry from all sides.

"Down with the helm, hard down!" shouted O'Neill, with a seaman's ready instinct, without waiting for the captain. There was a moment of confusion on the deck.

"Steady with the helm, steady, sir!" cried Jones, in his powerful voice, with an imperious wave of his hand.

"Silence fore and aft the decks! Every man to his station! Keep her a good full, quartermaster. Keep that helm as you have it. Look yonder, sir," he added, pointing to larboard to another danger. "Ready about, stations for stays! Aft with you, Mr. O'Neill, and see that the helm is shifted exactly as I direct. Make no mistake! Lively, men, for your lives!"

The eager crew sprang to their stations. There was another moment or two of confusion; and as they settled down, the silence was broken only by the wind and the waves. The water was seething and whirling under the forefoot of the Ranger. The reefs upon which the Maidstone had crashed were dangerously near. But the keen eye of the captain had seen on the other side a slender needle of rock over which the waves broke in seething fury as it thrust itself menacingly out of the angry ocean. They were right among the reefs, and only the most complete knowledge and consummate seamanship could save them. It was there. To tack ship now and come up in the wind would throw them on the rocky needle; to go off would bring them down

upon the other reefs. Jones, entirely master of the situation, perfectly cool in appearance, though his eyes snapped and sparkled with fire, leaned out above the knightheads and keenly scanned the sea before him. There was just room for the Ranger to pass between the two reefs. A hair's breadth on either side would mean destruction. As the captain watched the boiling water he seemed to detect, through a slight change in the course, a tremor in the hand on the wheel.

"Aft there!" he shouted promptly, "what are you about? Steady with that helm! No higher--nothing off!"

"Ay, ay, sir," replied O'Neill, standing watchfully at the con; "I will mind it myself."

The crash of the breakers, as they writhed their white-crested heads around the ship's bows and on either side, was appalling to every one. They were right in them now--passing through them. The rocky needle on the larboard hand slipped by and drew astern. The wreck of the Maidstone was lost sight of in the flooding waves and driving spray of a rising gale. The ship was roaring through the seas at a terrific rate; the strain upon everything was tremendous; a broken spar, a parted rope, meant a lost ship.

"Very well dyce," cried the captain, casting a glance aloft at the weather leech of the topsails shivering in the fierce wind, the quivering masts and groaning yard-arms, the lee shrouds hanging slack, the lee braces and head bowlines taut as strung wires, the tacks and sheets and the weather shrouds as rigid as iron bars, the new canvas like sheets of marble. The ship was heeled over until the lee channels were almost awash, the spray coming in, in bucketsful, over the lee cathead. She was ready if ever she would be; their fate was at the touch.

"Now!" shouted Jones, in a voice of thunder "Down with the helm! Over with it! Hard over!"

The old experienced seamen put the wheel over spoke by

spoke, slowly at first, then faster, until they finally hauled it down hard and clung to it with all the strength of their mighty arms.

"Helm's-a-lee, hard-a-lee," cried O'Neill at this moment.

"Rise tacks and sheets," roared the captain.

The ship shot up into the wind, straightened herself as its pressure was removed from the sails, lost headway, the jibs swinging and tugging in the gale, as she began to swing to larboard away from the reef on the starboard side. She worked around slowly until the wind began to come in over the starboard bow.

"Haul taut!" shouted the watching captain; "mainsail haul!"

The great yards, with their vast expanse of slatting, roaring, threshing canvas, whirled rapidly around as the nimble crew ran aft with the sheets and braces. The Ranger fell off quickly and drifted down toward the needle, the after-sails aback.

"Board that main tack there! Man the head braces; jump, men, lively! Let go and haul!"

There was a frightful moment,--would she make it? She stopped-- Ah, thank God, they gathered way again, slowly, then faster.

"Right the helm! Meet her--so. Steady! Get that main tack down now, tail on to it, all of you, sway away! Get a pull on the lee braces, Mr. O'Neill, and haul the bowlines. Ah!

That's well done."

They were rushing through it again; the white water and the breakers were left behind. A sigh of relief broke from the reckless men, and even the iron captain seemed satisfied with his achievement as he walked aft to the quarter-deck.

"Get a good offing, Mr. O'Neill," said the captain, "and then heave to. First send the hands aloft to take in the to'gallant sails, and then you may get a boat ready; we must see if there are any poor creatures left on that ship yonder."

"Very good, sir," replied the lieutenant, giving the

necessary orders, when presently the ship, easier under the reduced canvas, was hove to in the beating sea.

"Shall I take the weather whaleboat, sir?"

"Yes," returned the captain, "I think you would better try to board under her lee if it be possible to do anything among that wreckage. I doubt if there be anybody left alive on her, but we can't afford to risk the possibility, especially in the case of that woman whom you found so beautiful," he added with a smile.

"Ay, ay, sir," said the lieutenant, blushing beneath the bronze in spite of himself, as he directed the boatswain to call away the whaleboat, which, manned by six stout oarsmen, with himself at the tiller, was soon cast into the heaving sea. Meanwhile the Ranger filled away again and beat to and fro off the coast, taking care to preserve the necessary offing, or distance from shore to leeward.

CHAPTER II

The Captor Captured

It was a long hard pull, and only the great skill of the officer prevented their capsizing, before the whaleboat finally drew near the Maidstone. The ship had hit the reef hard at flood-tide, and the waves had driven her farther on. Every mast and spar was gone, wrenched away by the storm and the waves. It was manifestly impossible to approach upon the weather side without staving the boat, so O'Neill cautiously rounded the stern of the wreck, and briefly considered the situation.

He did not dare bring the boat near enough to enable him to leap upon the deck through some of the great gaping openings in the sides made by the tremendous battering of the massive spars, and he finally concluded that the only practicable access to the Maidstone was by means of some of the gearing trailing over the side and writhing about snake-like in the water. Intrusting the tiller of the whaleboat to old Price, the veteran gunner, he directed that it be brought alongside as close as consistent with safety; and at exactly the right moment, as they rose upon the crest of a wave, he sprang out into the water, and clutched desperately at a rope hanging over the side of the wreck. The men swung the boat away from the ship instantly, and he found himself clinging to a small rope wildly tossing about in the tumultuous sea. He was dashed to and fro like a cork, the waves repeatedly broke over his head, the life was almost buffeted out of him, but he held on like grim death. Fortunately, the other end of the rope was fast

inboard.

With careful skill, and husbanding his strength as much as possible, he pulled himself along the rope through the water until he drew near the side of the ship. Then, though the operation was hazardous in the extreme, as he saw no other method, he began to pull himself up hand over hand on the rope along the side. In his already exhausted state and with the added weight of his wet, sodden clothing, the effort was almost beyond his strength.

He endeavored by thrusting with his foot to keep himself from being beaten against the side by the waves, but without success, for when he had hardly reached the rail, an unusually large breaker struck him fairly in the back and dashed his head against a piece of jagged timber, cutting a great gash in his forehead. Blood filled his eyes, his head swam, a sick, faint feeling filled his breast, he hesitated and nearly lost his grasp of the rope. The men in the tossing boat a little distance away held their breath in terrified apprehension, but summoning all his resolution to his aid, he made a last desperate effort, breasted the rail, and fell fainting prone upon the deck of the ship.

A few moments in the cold water which was flooding over it revived him somewhat, and he rose unsteadily to his feet, and looked about him in bewilderment. The change from the tossing boat to the motionless rigidity of the vise-held wreck was startling. There was not a sign of life on the ship. She was breaking up fast; rails were stove in, boats were gone, three jagged stumps showed where the masts had been, and only the fact that she had been driven so high on the reefs prevented her from foundering at once. There was a dead body jammed under the starboard fire-rail forward, but no other sign of humanity. In front of him was a hatchway, giving entrance to a small cuddy, or cabin, the roof of which rose a few feet above the level of the deck.

As he stood there, striving to recover himself, in a brief lull

in the storm he thought he heard a faint voice; it seemed to come from beneath him. He at once turned, and with uncertain steps descended the hatchway. Reaching the deck below, he stood in the way a moment, brushing the blood from his eyes. As he gradually made out the details of the cabin, dimly illuminated by a skylight above, he saw a woman on her knees praying; she had her face buried in her hands, and did not see him until he spoke to apprise her of his presence.

"Madam," he began thickly.

The woman raised her head with startled quickness, and gave him one terrified glance. The glass had told him truly,--she was beautiful, and young as well, scarcely more than a girl apparently; even the dim gray light could not hide those things. As for him, he was an awful-looking spectacle: wet, hatless, his clothing torn, a great red wound in his forehead intensifying his pallor. He had a heavy pistol in his belt and a cutlass swinging at his side.

She stared at him in frightened silence and finally rose to her feet deathly pale and apparently appalled; he saw that she was a little above the medium height. At the same moment, from an obscure corner, there rang out shriek after shriek, and another woman rushed forward, threw herself on the deck at his feet and fairly grovelled before him.

"Oh, sir, for God's sake, sir," she cried frantically, "good mister pirate, don't hang us, sir! We never hurt nobody. Oh, sir, take us away, we'll do anything, we--"

"Silence, you coward!" commanded the other woman, imperiously. "Get up! Prayers are of no avail with such as--" "Nor are they necessary, madam," replied O'Neill; "we are not pirates, and I am come to save you and shall do it. Will you please come on deck?"

"I had rather gone down on the ship," said the girl, defiantly, evidently disbelieving him; "but you are here, and you are master. Give your orders, sir."

"Very well," returned the lieutenant, calmly accepting the situation; "you will go up on deck at once." The girl motioned him forward.

"After you, madam," he said, bowing courteously, and she stepped haughtily up the companion-way, followed next by her shivering, shrinking, terrified maid, and lastly by O'Neill.

"Are there any others left alive on the ship, think you, madam?" he asked.

"No one," answered the girl; "many were thrown overboard or killed when we struck on these rocks here, and the rest abandoned us--the cowards," was the reply.

"Do you wait here a moment, while I take a look forward to assure myself," said O'Neill, stepping rapidly across the raffle of rope about the decks, and making a hasty inspection to make sure that no unfortunate was left.

Quickly satisfying himself that they were alone, he returned to the quarter-deck where the two women stood. He looked at them in some perplexity. It would be a matter of great difficulty to get them back in the boat, but he promptly determined upon his course of action; they would not like it, but that would be no matter.

Signing to the coxswain, old Price, the boat which had been riding to a long rope from the ship was skilfully brought alongside again as near as was safe. One end of a long piece of loose gear was thrown over to the boat, where it was made fast. A bight of the rope, properly stoppered to prevent undue constriction, was passed around the waist of the maid, at which all her terrors were resumed.

"Oh, for God's sake, sir, for the love of Heaven, as you have a mother or wife, do not hang us here! If we must die, let us drown on the ship like good Christian people. Oh, please, good mister pirate--"

But O'Neill was in no mood to pay attention to such trifling, and he summarily fastened the bight around her waist, and lifting her upon the rail, bade her jump. She clung to him

with the tenacity of despair, crying and shrieking in the most frantic manner, until finally her overwrought nerves gave way, and she fainted. That was just what he wanted. Singing out to old Price to haul in on the line, and having taken a turn around a belaying pin with his end of it, he promptly threw the girl into the water. Of course she was dragged under at once, but in a moment was lifted safely into the whaleboat, where she was shortly revived from unconsciousness by the ducking she had received.

"Now, madam, you see you need fear nothing," said O'Neill, peremptorily, to the other woman. "I trust I shall not be compelled to throw you in, too?"

"Not at all, sir," she replied trembling violently, but striving to preserve her self-control; "I presume you reserve me for a worse fate."

The young lieutenant started violently at the insult, and his face clouded darkly at her suspicion.

"I--no matter, I came to save you," he said, as he stepped toward her to assist her to make the leap.

"Please do not touch me," she answered disdainfully; "I am no fainting fool. Give me the rope. What is it you wish me to do?"

"Pass it around your waist. Allow me. Now stand there, madam, and when I say the word, jump!"

"Very well," she said, stepping upon the rail resignedly, where perforce he was compelled to hold her to keep her from falling.

How glorious and splendid she looked, he thought, with her unbound hair floating like golden sunlight in the wind against the background of the gray day, while her sea-blue eyes looked boldly over the black water from her proud, white, handsome face.

"Now!" he said, as the boat rose toward them. Without a moment's hesitation, she leaped into the air, and after a swift passage through the water she was hauled into the boat by the rough but kindly hands of the old sailor. Making

the end of the rope fast around his own waist, O'Neill, watching his opportunity, sprang after; but he seemed fated for misfortune that day, for a bit of timber torn that moment from the wreck struck him in the head just as he touched the water, and it was a fainting, senseless man Price hauled into the boat. The old seaman laid his officer down in the stern-sheets where the young girl was sitting with her maid crouching at her feet. Necessarily he lay in a constrained position,--there was nothing to support his head but a boat-stretcher.

She gazed upon his pallid face with its disfiguring wounds; he was a murderous pirate, no doubt, and deserved it all, still he had saved her life; the Maidstone was breaking up; he was so handsome too, and he looked like a gentleman. She was a woman, well--then the womanly instincts of the girl asserted themselves, and she finally moved her position and lifted the head of the unconscious sailor to her knee. Taking a handkerchief from her neck, she dipped it in the salt water and bathed his head and then poured between his lips a few drops from the flask of rum which Price handed her, after the old man had insisted that she take a draught of the fiery liquid herself.

Under these pleasant ministrations O'Neill opened his eyes for a moment, gazed up into her face with a smiling glance, and closing his eyes immediately, lest she should release him, he lay quite still while the men pulled away toward the Ranger, and in that manner they reached her side. His heart was beating wildly; that look had been enough. She was his prisoner--but her captor was captured!