

## *The Mysterious Mark*

“Roll on, thou dark and deep blue ocean,—roll!” shouted a cheerful passenger, casting patronizing glances at the billowy waste on whose heaving bosom our good ship was tossed like a plaything.

“Roll on, and behanged to it!” grumbled I, “if only to roll me.”

It was my first acquaintance with Neptune, and we didn’t get on together. To say the truth, I was in no amiable mood. I had disagreed with the steward about the quality of steak he had sent me for breakfast, and finally, had disagreed with my breakfast itself and parted company with it.

It was while leaning over the traff-rail at this point that my feelings were harrowed by the poetical passenger’s quotation.

“You’re sea-sick,” he remarked.

“You see I am,” I answered gruffly, intending no pun, but a decided criticism of the self-obviousness of the statement.

“I’ve a sovereign specific for that malady,” said the stranger.

“You are a lucky man,” I answered.

“I should be happy to furnish you with it,” he replied; “I have an abundant supply of it.”

“Anything,” said I; “I’ll take anything—even arsenic to put me out of misery.”

“Come below,” said he, taking my arm. “Where’s your state-room?” he inquired, when he had descended the stairway.

I led the way to it.

“Now lie down,” said he, “and I’ll fix you up directly.”

I threw off my coat and tumbled into the berth. The benevolent gentleman went out and returned quickly with something which he put into a glass with some water and gave to me. I swallowed it without a question. The effect was almost instantaneous. A gentle languor stole over me, then followed what a little before I should have hailed as the acme of bliss, complete unconsciousness.

Whether it was the effect of the medicine, or because the weather grew mild—much obliged to the weather if that was it— I knew not, but when I awoke, which was after the lapse of several hours, I found myself, if not recovered, at least convalescent. Next day I had gained my legs, and found no further inconvenience. Mr. Rolikson—the name I learned to know my Byronic

benefactor—and myself grew to be intimate friends. He was an exhaustible talker. With men he was an agreeable companion; with ladies he was captivating, charming, fascinating.

We had an exquisite young creature on board, scarcely out of her teens, on her way to join an elderly aunt, in an inland English town, said to have testamentary designs upon her, which, if carried out, would place her in the front rank of matrimonial prizes. To this young lady Mr. Rolickson paid special attention. He read, talked, and quoted poetry to her, till her pretty little head was turned, and before the voyage was over, their engagement began [to be] talked of on the ship.

Stress of weather made the voyage a slow one. It was more than two weeks after we lost sight of the highlands of Neversink before we landed at Liverpool.

I had hardly set foot on shore, and hadn't had time to congratulate myself on the fact, when a hand was laid briskly on my shoulder.

"You must come with me," said a determined voice in my ear.

I turned about quickly, and found myself confronted by a man who might have set for Dickens' portrait of Inspector Bucket.

"The fewer words here the better," he added, as I was about to speak. "Will you come quietly, or shall I summon assistance?"

I demanded an explanation.

"You shall have it in due time," was the answer.

"Do you intend to come peaceably or not?"

A short staff, surmounted by a crown, produced by the speaker, convinced me that he had the authority to enforce my obedience, and I walked along by his side.

"Your name is Roach," said a thin, sharp man into whose presence I was at length ushered.

"It is not," I answered.

"Probably you will deny having three stars tattooed on the back of your left arm, just above the elbow? He sardonically added.

"I do deny it," I said; "I bear no such mark."

"That is easily tested," was the reply. "Turn up his sleeve, Jarvis!"

The assistant obeyed.

“I think we have the right man,” said the latter.

“Quite sure of it,” replied the sharp man, after a glance at the exposed member.

I twisted my arm so as to gain a view of the part in question, and was utterly amazed to find the mark described by the officer.

“I—I—never saw it before,” I stammered confusedly.

“Such statements will do you little good,” said the officer; “first you deny your name, and next the existence of a mark, which is impossible you should have borne upon your person without knowing it. It so happened that it is the mark by which we were instructed to identify Roach, the famous American bank robber, for whose arrival we have been watching. It also happens that your appearance tallies with descriptions in other respects.”

“All this is inexplicable,” I said hopelessly.

“Except on the theory that we have got the right man,” the other answered.

I was a total stranger, without friends on whom I could call for assistance. If I could only find Rolickson! His quick wit might aid me. He had gone ashore before me, and I had seen him in private conference with a man whom I now identified as the one who arrested me. I remembered, too, that waking from the sleep into which I had been cast by the drug with which he had relieved my sea-sickness, my left arm felt stiff and sore for several days. Might not Rolickson be the real Roach, and might he not have taken advantage of my stupor to place upon me a mark similar too that borne by himself; and had he not, on landing, pointed me out to the detectives as the object of their search, for the purpose of averting attention from himself? To that conclusion my mind came by one of those sudden intuitions which often times instantaneously produce deeper conviction than the most careful process of reasoning.

Just then a cab passed the window, and in it was seated Rolickson himself.

“Stop that man!” I exclaimed, starting up and pointing out.

The exclamation surprised those present.

“Quick!” I cried, “for heaven’s sake!”

Impelled by my earnestness, a couple of policemen darted into the street. The cabman stopped in answer to their hail; and soon Rolickson was escorted into the room in which I was a prisoner.— He turned pale at the sight of me.

“Strip his arm!” I exclaimed eagerly.

He drew back as an officer approached, and it was only after a struggle, and my main force, that he was compelled to submit to an inspection, which revealed a mark the exact counterpart of that found upon myself!

Before I had finished the narrative of my acquaintance with Rolickson, and the circumstances under which it began, an American detective entered the office and fully identified my late friend as the criminal for whom I had been so singularly mistaken. I may add, that when the blond wig and whiskers were removed, with which he had disguised himself, the likeness between Rolickson and myself was quite marked.

I was released from custody, and the real roach detained in my stead. The next steamer carried him back to America, to stand his trial for numerous burglaries. And the young lady, it is hoped, was cured of falling in love with strangers at first sight.

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