

CHAPTER XXXV

Ah, Annatoo!

In order to a complete revelation, I must needs once again discourse of Annatoo and her pilferings; and to what those pilferings led. In the simplicity of my soul, I fancied that the dame, so much flattered as she needs must have been, by the confidence I began to repose in her, would now mend her ways, and abstain from her larcenies. But not so. She was possessed by some scores of devils, perpetually her to mischief on their own separate behoof, and not less for many of her pranks were of no earthly advantage to, her, present or prospective.

One day the log-reel was missing. Summon Annatoo. She came; but knew nothing about it. Jarl spent a whole morning in contriving a substitute; and a few days after, pop, we came upon the lost: article hidden away in the main-top.

Another time, discovering the little vessel to "gripe" hard in steering, as if some one under water were jerking her backward, we instituted a diligent examination, to see what was the matter. When lo; what should we find but a rope, cunningly attached to one of the chain-plates under the starboard main-channel. It towed heavily in the water. Upon dragging it up--much as you would the cord of a ponderous bucket far down in a well--a stout wooden box was discovered at the end; which opened, disclosed sundry knives,

hatchets, and ax-heads.

Called to the stand, the Upoluan deposed, that thrice he had rescued that identical box from Annatoo's all-appropriating clutches.

Now, here were four human beings shut up in this little oaken craft, and, for the time being, their interests the same. What sane mortal, then, would forever be committing thefts, without rhyme or reason. It was like stealing silver from one pocket and decanting it into the other. And what might it not lead to in the end?

Why, ere long, in good sooth, it led to the abstraction of the compass from the binnacle; so that we were fain to substitute for it, the one brought along in the Chamois.

It was Jarl that first published this last and alarming theft. Annatoo being at the helm at dawn, he had gone to relieve her; and looking to see how we headed, was horror-struck at the emptiness of the binnacle.

I started to my feet; sought out the woman, and ferociously demanded the compass. But her face was a blank; every word a denial.

Further lenity was madness. I summoned Samoa, told him what had happened, and affirmed that there was no safety for us except in the nightly incarceration of his spouse. To this he privily assented; and

that very evening, when Annatoo descended into the fore-castle, we barred over her the scuttle-slide. Long she clamored, but unavailingly. And every night this was repeated; the dame saying her vespers most energetically.

It has somewhere been hinted, that Annatoo occasionally cast sheep's eyes at Jarl. So I was not a little surprised when her manner toward him decidedly changed. Pulling at the ropes with us, she would give him sly pinches, and then look another way, innocent as a lamb. Then again, she would refuse to handle the same piece of rigging with him; with wry faces, rinsed out the wooden can at the water cask, if it so chanced that my Viking had previously been drinking therefrom. At other times, when the honest Skyeman came up from below, she would set up a shout of derision, and loll out her tongue; accompanying all this by certain indecorous and exceedingly unladylike gestures, significant of the profound contempt in which she held him.

Yet, never did Jarl heed her ill-breeding; but patiently overlooked and forgave it. Inquiring the reason of the dame's singular conduct, I learned, that with eye averted, she had very lately crept close to my Viking, and met with no tender reception.

Doubtless, Jarl, who was much of a philosopher, innocently imagined that ere long the lady would forgive and forget him. But what knows a philosopher about women?

Ere long, so outrageous became Annatoo's detestation of him, that the honest old tar could stand it no longer, and like most good-natured men when once fairly roused, he was swept through and through with a terrible typhoon of passion. He proposed, that forthwith the woman should be sacked and committed to the deep; he could stand it no longer.

Murder is catching. At first I almost jumped at the proposition; but as quickly rejected it. Ah! Annatoo: Woman unendurable: deliver me, ye gods, from being shut up in a ship with such a hornet again.

But are we yet through with her? Not yet. Hitherto she had continued to perform the duties of the office assigned her since the commencement of the voyage: namely, those of the culinary department. From this she was now deposed. Her skewer was broken. My Viking solemnly averring, that he would eat nothing more of her concocting, for fear of being poisoned. For myself, I almost believed, that there was malice enough in the minx to give us our henbane broth.

But what said Samoa to all this? Passing over the matter of the cookery, will it be credited, that living right among us as he did, he was yet blind to the premeditated though unachieved peccadilloes of his spouse? Yet so it was. And thus blind was Belisarius himself, concerning the intrigues of Antonina.

Witness that noble dame's affair with the youth Theodosius; when her

deluded lord charged upon the scandal-mongers with the very horns she had bestowed upon him.

Upon one occasion, seized with a sudden desire to palliate Annatoo's thievings, Samoa proudly intimated, that the lady was the most virtuous of her sex.

But alas, poor Annatoo, why say more? And bethinking me of the hard fate that so soon overtook thee, I almost repent what has already and too faithfully been portrayed.