

## HARRY MARTIN'S WIFE.

BY G. B. STUART.

"I'M afraid I've finished all my yarns," said the Lieutenant, thoughtfully drawing a match across the sole of his boot as he spoke, for we were smoking in the verandah of his mother's house at Southsea.

"Then tell us a true story," I suggested innocently.

The Lieutenant took no heed of my impudence, but pulled away at his pipe for full five minutes, in a manner which was supposed to assist the deepest reflection. Presently he began:

"Did I ever tell you how I got Harry Martin's wife for him?"

"No!" very incredulously from everybody; and from a chair in the background, "I should think Captain Martin was perfectly well able to get a wife for himself."

"There you are wrong," said the Lieutenant, so superbly that we all felt abashed, and humbly begged for the story.

"Believe it or not," asserted the somewhat mollified sailor, "but I can assure you it's as true as—as true as—Old Boots!"

This was the Lieutenant's usual formula before beginning one of his wonderful adventures, and it never failed to convince us—outwardly, at least; for who can withstand the undeniable existence of old boots? Having thus successfully closed all interrupting mouths, the Lieutenant graciously proceeded to recount the following episode in the life of Mrs. Henry Martin:—

"The *Valeria* was lying in the bay at St. Michael's, one of the dullest holes we ever put into in all my experience. Harry Martin was first lieutenant and I was second. Cripps was our captain—a good old sort enough, only he bothered us rather with reading out sermons on a Sunday, for he was a rigid Presbyterian, and was for ever inveighing against the errors of Rome. Rather a queer line for a thoroughgoing sailor to take up, wasn't it?"

"Of course I could get frequent leave when I wanted a run on shore, but I didn't much care about taking it, for really there was nothing earthly to do in the place. I had a bad leg at the time, I remember, the remains of a frightful hack at football when we played the *Excellent* and beat them into fits, in this very place, the autumn before; so I wasn't up to much walking, and couldn't visit the places beyond the town which Martin was always talking about and sketching.

"By-and-by I began to notice that though he spoke of the general beauties of the island scenery, he appeared by his sketch-book to haunt one spot almost exclusively—the convent of Santa Agata, on

the top of a hill just behind the town. There were pictures of Santa Agata from all points of the compass. It was only to me, as an old chum, that he showed those pictures; and it wasn't long before I got out of him, by dint of a little chaff and a little judicious sympathy, that he was madly in love—or fancied he was, which is just as bad, every bit, while it lasts—with one of the sisters at Santa Agata. Why, you might just as well have been in love with the moon, for all the response you could get to your finest feelings, if you centred them on a Spanish nun. And so I told Martin, for I had been through the very identical same case myself at Vera Cruz, aboard the *Rapid*.

“‘But, Jim,’ said Martin quietly, looking quite shy and red in the face, for he was an awfully modest man and not half as well seasoned in these matters as I am: ‘suppose there has been some response?’

“‘You don't mean to say you've spoken or corresponded with her?’

“For answer Martin pulled a little packet of letters out of the breast-pocket of his jacket, tied with a piece of brand-new blue ribbon which the poor old duffer must have bought for the purpose.

“By degrees the whole story was told. He had seen Doña Dolores for the first time three weeks before, when he had strolled into the convent, at the visiting hour, to buy some of the nuns' famous lace for his people at home. That was how the acquaintance began: by looks of admiration on the one side and apparent appreciation of them on the other. After this Martin confessed he was always buying lace every visiting day, until the old gorgoness who assisted at the lace-selling began to grow suspicious and changed her companion for another sister more of her own calibre than pretty little Dolores. With the latter, however, our precious first lieutenant was by this time on pretty intimate speaking terms, and by means of a market-woman or a mule-girl, or some such emissary, managed to carry on a correspondence of frequent notes.

“I stared in astonishment when he told me all this, but really, there are no lengths that a shy man won't go to when once he's roused. Of all lovers, I've heard a girl say, there's nothing to come up to a shy man when he's in earnest.

“Well, so far the affair had gone and there it had stuck: for who was to say what could be the end of such a hopeless attachment? Hopeless, in so far that there was no chance of the girl ever being released from the convent, which, she now intimated to Harry Martin, she cordially hated. She was an orphan and had a lot of money, and though she had not taken the vows as a professed sister, you might just as soon expect a shark to leave hold of your leg when he had once grabbed it, as the Priests and the Sisters of Santa Agata to let poor Miss Dolores out of their clutches. There was nothing to advise Martin to do but to cut the whole affair; not see the girl again, but just keep close by the ship until we got our sailing orders, which most of us were hoping for every day. It's a thing sailors have to do, all

the world over, for one *can't* marry everybody, and it's astonishing to find how in a short time you don't want to.

"But you should have seen the fury Martin got into when I suggested this everyday course to him. He talked about honour and Christian feeling exactly as if I hadn't got either one or the other. Upon my word if he hadn't been my senior officer, and such an old chum, and such a big fellow, too, I should have knocked him down for what he said. At the same time I was sorry for him, for by this time I saw he was in earnest in the affair, so when he had quieted down a bit I said to him: 'What do you say to a rescue?'

"He jumped as if he'd been shot, and seized me by the hand. 'Do you really mean it, Jim? Will you lend a hand to help her out?'

"'Are you going to marry her?' I asked, severely: 'for it's all very good fun rescuing the young lady, only goodness knows what we're to do with her afterwards. You may be sure St. Michael's will be rather too hot to hold her or us if our share in the matter gets wind. You won't be able to marry nearer than Lisbon, and I don't exactly know how you're to get her there, either, unless the boss gives her a passage, which perhaps is a little too much to expect. It might interfere with the efficiency of his first officer.'

"Poor Martin stood speechless, for though he had jumped at my suggestion, and evidently had considered the possibility of rescuing Dolores from her prison, his plans had here evidently stopped short. He had not reflected that the English Consul would never marry them in the teeth of the Spanish authorities, who would probably tear us to pieces for meddling with one of their ewe-lambs.

"Well, Martin may be a very smart officer—indeed, there is no doubt about that—and he may have been a red-hot lover, but he certainly was not much of a strategist. So while I was maturing the plan, in which I was now almost as much interested as he, I set him to write to the lady and formally offer her marriage, to be arranged for and carried out as soon as ever she could be conveyed safely to Lisbon: always provided that she herself could elude the vigilance of the sisters, and join her lover outside the convent walls on an appointed evening. Back came her answer through the medium of old Carmen of the market, a friendly old hag who carried vegetables up to the convent every day. The escape would be difficult, but not impossible. Carmen was to leave certain doors and windows of the back premises unlocked, and Dolores was to slip out at the time appointed. But, oh! were the English señors certain that she would not be caught afterwards, for she knew that if she were the penalty would be death—or next door to it.

"Meanwhile, I had been laying out the whole plot, and very prettily I had dovetailed one thing in with another. There was an old Irishwoman, married to a Portuguese Jew fruit merchant, who

lived in the Jews' quarter of the town. I had heard her tongue going one day like a mill clapper, as I passed by, and there was no mistaking her accent. I often used to stop and have a chat with her about the beauties of Queenstown, which she upheld against all comers. What her religion was I never discovered, for she held the priests in as great detestation as Captain Cripps himself; whilst she spoke with high disdain of her Jew husband and his religious exercises, though she allowed he had more religion than a "Pratestant." But she was a good old creature in the main, and her house, though rather an unsavoury retreat, was the only safe asylum I could think of where Dolores might be concealed until the Lisbon steamer could carry her off from St. Michael's.

"Perhaps you'll ask why didn't we postpone the adventure altogether till the very day of the Lisbon steamer's sailing, but this we did not dare do, for the *Valeria* was under orders to sail at a moment's notice, and at any minute the orders might come and the *Valeria* weigh anchor, leaving the poor little nun unrescued on the top of the hill. In my heart of hearts I shouldn't have thought this any great misfortune, for I was well aware that what we were undertaking was a terrible risk, and like enough to land us in no end of difficulties; but once entered on the undertaking I was not going to draw back, and the heartfelt gratitude of Martin for my co-operation, combined with the enthusiasm of old Mother Zachary when I let her by degrees into the secret, kept up my courage for the adventure. I couldn't divest Madame Zachary's mind of the idea that I was really the principal in the affair, and I had to undergo a considerable amount of chaff and much Hibernian humour before I managed finally to arrange that Martin and I were to bring the young lady on a mule to her house on the night appointed, where she was to hide the runaway, and provide a disguise for her in which she could be hustled on board the Lisbon steamer, accompanied by her hostess as duenna.

"Once safe in Lisbon, the girl could be placed with friends of Martin's (we had been hanging off and on thereabouts for six months or so, and knew all the English residents in the Portuguese capital) until the marriage could take place, and Mrs. Martin be sent home to England. We did not anticipate any further trouble would be taken about her if she once got clear of St. Michael's, and Martin, unlike some other poor fellows that I could mention, could afford to marry whom he pleased.

"Everything was well in train. The night arrived, and Miss Dolores was appointed to make her exit from the Convent at half-past eight precisely. Martin and I were to be in hiding outside, with mules to carry us down the hill by a circuitous route to the Jews' quarter—a deserted part of the town, where Mother Zachary and her fruit merchant lived.

"But at the last moment came a terrible hitch! When Martin and

I applied for leave on shore for the evening, old Cripps told us that he intended dining and sleeping on shore himself, at the Consul's, and he could not give leave to both his senior officers to absent themselves the same evening. We could decide between ourselves which was to remain, but one must certainly do so.

"We dared not show the Captain how dreadfully we took his sentence to heart, but withdrew with our usual bows, looking unutterable things at each other.

"'You must go,' whispered Martin; 'I'm no good at all; I should lose my head and spoil it all. You *must* go, Jim, old fellow, if you're still game for it, though goodness knows how I shall get through the time till I know you are safe!'

"There was nothing for it but for me to go as Martin said, for he was so excited he would have 'boshed' the whole thing. So, by-and-by, having given the Captain, in his full-dress togs, the precedence by about half an hour, I was rowed ashore, just about sunset, and told my men to be ready to take me off again to the *Valeria* at ten that evening. I went round to the Plaza and hired a mule, avowedly for a ride into the country: and a miserable brute I got, for all the animals were out except this one, at the consular dinner party. I dawdled about the town for a while: then, after the Angelus had finished singing and the dusk began to creep down, I turned my beast's head up a narrow side street, which led to the very walls of Santa Agata.

"There was scarcely anyone about, for the natives have an idea that the hour after sunset is unwholesome in the outer air; so I made my way up the street unnoticed by anyone, except that at a turn of the road I saw the sharp eyes of Carmen, the market woman, glancing at me, first suspiciously, then knowingly, as she descended the hill with her empty baskets piled on her back. Very soon I was safely landed at the appointed spot, a thick clump of coarse elder bushes which grew close under a small stone window belonging to some outer buildings of the convent kitchen department. The window was a good bit above my head, and so deeply imbedded in the thickness of the wall that it was only by standing well out from the building that I could see into the aperture, which was secured on the inside by a screen of wire trellis-work, such as is often used over larder windows.

"This was the opening which Carmen was to have loosened, and sure enough, after a short spell of waiting, I could plainly hear a rustling and rummaging inside. Then a hand pulled back the screen, and a minute after, something soft and black, of no particular outline whatever, filled up the window frame, and came creeping outwards towards the edge of the wall. 'Are you ready?' asked a soft voice, and almost before I could reply, something jumped bang into my outstretched arms. I declare to you she was not much bigger than a good sized kitten. Such a little bit of a

thing as Martin's Dolores I never saw in my life. For my part, I like them tall, and broad too," observed the Lieutenant, in the confidential rather than the narrative strain; "but this Dolores was a wonderful beauty though there was so little of her.

"She was a bit frightened and shy at first, especially when she discovered, by catching hold of my whiskers, that I was not Martin, who shaved clean in those days. But very soon I had got her on the mule and explained matters in my best Spanish, and we were creeping stealthily down the hill the best of friends, and Dolores, who was not more than seventeen, apparently in childish high spirits at the success of our enterprise.

"But though she had done her part so easily, I didn't feel at all sure that the adventure was ended. There were lights moving to and fro at the upper windows of the convent, and at any moment her presence might be missed, whilst the open window, with its piled stools and boxes on the inside, would declare which road she had taken.

"Just at this juncture, the confounded mule, that up to this had behaved himself pretty decently, began to tack about in a manner simply fiendish. He was all over the road at once, and you never knew whether his head or his heels would be uppermost. I suppose it was the girl's clothes that excited him, unless the beast was in league with the priests, and was doing his little best to stop the affair—those Spanish mules are artful enough for anything. Added to this, Miss Dolores got frightened, and I could hardly keep her from screaming out; and my leg, which had not done so much work for a long while, began to ache and throb so that I could scarcely keep up with the mule's vagaries.

"We hadn't made more than a quarter of our journey, when I saw plainly enough, by the sudden appearance of lights and torches in front of the convent above us, that the little sister's escape was discovered, and that the holy ladies were in hot pursuit. I wasn't so frightened of the ladies themselves, for I flatter myself I have rather a knack of managing *them*, but I had an unpleasant idea that they might have called in the assistance of hardy peasants armed with pitchforks, the thought of whom I did not relish so much.

"In vain I dug my dirk into the hindquarters of the mule: we could not keep the pace: and soon cries and noise behind us in the darkness, told us that our pursuers were close upon us. At the top of the steep vineyard path I seized the end of the nun's black cloak, and wrapping it round her head, to prevent her cries being heard—for she was by this time quite beside herself with fear—I jumped off the mule and dashed with her into the vineyard which edged the road on either side with stumpy thick bushes.

"The mule, released from restraint, and maddened by a last prod from my dirk, galloped with astonishing clatter down the narrow road, followed almost instantaneously by a shouting mob of people, all in pursuit of what they believed to be the heretic and his captive. I

could not help chuckling as they tore by, the old jackass leading the way at a speed to which I had been vainly urging him all the evening.

"But there was no time to be lost, for the road which the pursuers had taken was the one that led straight to the entrance of the Jews' quarter, and it was clearly impossible to try and make that port. I had not a moment to reflect, or probably I should not have dared to do what I did. Raising and disentangling Dolores from her heavy cloak, I half dragged, half carried her across the vineyards, down to the seaboard, and thence, by the quickest and quietest road, to the steps where I had told the men to meet me with the boat. It was lying in waiting, for the big clock of the cathedral had just gone ten, and without ceremony I tumbled my living bundle into it, and jumping in after her, gave the word to be off.

"Not a minute too soon—for the quay was all at once alight and alive with people and lanterns. The news of the escaped nun had just reached the town, and I saw my old enemy the mule being dragged into the Plaza and surrounded by a crowd of gaping Spaniards, who seemed to expect he would open his mouth and tell them what had become of the runaway. Our boat did not altogether escape notice, for someone ran along the quay with a lantern, and cast a long bright flash across our course; but we had pulled through it before anyone could have recognised that the dark mass in the stern of the boat was the lost lady.

"My men pulled on in steady, stony British silence, just as if their officers were in the habit of making a dash for it every two or three evenings a week, with some young lady or other. But I was beginning to feel horribly uncomfortable as to the reception Captain Cripps would give me and our fair visitor, and I recollected with relief, that for this night at all events, he was safely disposed of. I thought it best to give the men my version of the story: so, before we reached the *Valeria*, I told them, in the most businesslike manner possible, that the young lady was detained against her will in a convent, and had appealed for protection to the British man-o'-war. 'Where she'll find it, lads, of course!' I ended, with a confidence which I'm bound to say I was very far from feeling.

"Wasn't I glad just to find myself safe aboard the *Valeria* again, handing over Dolores, who by this time was quite frightened and cowed into silence, to my superior officer, as in duty bound, and retiring a bit aft myself until their first greetings should be over. Then I came forward and explained briefly how it was that the plan of boarding Mother Zachary in the Jews' quarter had fallen through, and exonerated myself for taking the dangerous step of bringing the girl to the *Valeria*, which would in all probability be searched the first thing next morning by the local officials with a warrant from the English Consul.

"Naturally the presence of the lady could not be concealed from

the other officers and the ship's company, most of whom were already agog to know who was this mysterious female who had suddenly appeared on the quarter-deck. Martin, calling the men together, gave them much such an explanation of the affair as I had made in the boat, keeping his own and my special part in the business cleverly out of sight, and leaving each of his auditors with a pleasing impression that it was in consequence of his own remarkable honour and gallantry that the poor distressed Spanish girl had flown for protection to the men of the *Valeria*.

"Martin then conducted Doña Dolores to his own cabin, where she was entreated to make herself as much at home as possible, for though an untoward accident had marred the completion of our plans for her safety, there was not a man on board the ship that night who would not prevent her return to the convent if necessary with his life. Martin was to turn in along with me, but though I was almost dead beat, it was a long time before he would let me get to sleep for discussing a hundred different ways of concealing the young lady during the search which we knew was inevitable next day, and for appeasing the wrath of the Captain, a rigid disciplinarian and martinet, which was only one degree less terrible. I fell asleep in the middle of the discussion, and Martin, I believe, went up on deck to star gaze, or else stationed himself on guard outside his own cabin-door, within which he had cautioned the girl to remain until something was decided for her safety.

"I was roused out of what seemed only like half an hour's sleep by the knock and entrance of Mat, one of the mess waiters: a clever, handy chap, whom I had several times thought of taking into our confidence when the rescue scheme was at first undeveloped. Having coughed and hemmed once or twice, and fidgetted about with my things, which lay in a heap on the floor, as I had kicked them off at night, Mat looked at me very knowingly and said, pulling his forelock:

"'If you please, sir, don't you nor the first officer be in any taking about the young lady. With your permission me and some of the other chaps have a plan which'll beat the Papishes hollow. Just you give us leave, sir, and the thing's done, and the young lady as safe as a bird, sir.'

"'But what's your plan?' said I, for I was beginning to feel I'd done enough in the concern, and would willingly shove off the rest of the responsibility upon Martin, or Mat, or anyone who liked to take it.

"'Music, sir,' said Mat, coming confidentially nearer, and chuckling so that I could hardly make out what he said. 'We'll receive the gentlemen, or deputation, or what not, with all the ropes manned, and the colours flying, and the band playing on deck, just as if it was the Admiral or the Dook himself.'

"'Well, and what then?' I asked rather crossly: for I couldn't



quite see the point of his wonderful reception, nor how it was to relieve us of anxiety on the score of Dolores' and our own safety.

" 'Why, the big drum, sir !' said Mat, triumphantly, as if now he had mentioned something so crushingly conclusive that all further explanation was unnecessary. 'I plays it, as you know, and I'll play it to-morrow, but not so hard as to hurt the young lady inside, sir !'

" And in the big drum Dolores was actually concealed next morning when old Captain Cripps, as innocent as a lamb of what had occurred during his absence, conducted a strong party of priests and police officials over and into every nook and corner of the *Valeria* in search of the missing nun. We were all in fits of laughter while the old fellow did the honours of his vessel, and the Spaniards' faces grew longer as their search proved fruitless and unavailing. They left not a cranny unnoticed, while the band played gaily on deck, and the big drum appeared to do quite as much duty as usual, though the broad grins of the faces of some of the bandsmen, and the preternatural solemnity of Mat's countenance might have led anyone to suspect that something was up.

" Martin was of course introduced to the visitors as first officer of the ship, and one old priest asked him suspiciously if this were the usual state of things on board an English vessel, band playing and flags flying as if for a holiday ?

" 'Oh, no,' Martin answered coolly ; ' we saw that the Captain was bringing off a boatload of distinguished visitors the first thing this morning, and I instantly set about having the ship dressed and the music playing to do honour to their arrival !'

" The old chap couldn't but be pleased at this compliment, and at last they all cleared out, making a thousand apologies for having for an instant suspected any of our honourable number of complicity in the nun's escape. We heard them as they left deciding to make for the opposite side of the island, where dwelt a wild tribe of fisher people who might have given the girl shelter. How we laughed as they were rowed ashore ! Although there was still old Cripps to tell, which to my mind was the worst part of it all, our spirits began to rise with the success of our last move.

" The bandsmen cleared up their instruments and retired, and Dolores was huddled back into Martin's cabin, where breakfast was spread, and the key turned on her. I believe the Captain was the only man on board his own ship who did not see the whole transaction : but he was tremendously taken up with our immediate sea-going orders, which had just arrived, and the anchors were to be weighed and the *Valeria* off to Lisbon without an hour's delay.

" We all had to look alive that morning, and I declare it wasn't till we sat down to dinner in the afternoon, by which time we were almost out of sight of St. Michael's, that I had time to think of the little prisoner in Martin's cabin ; though to judge from his moony

look Martin had never thought of anything else. Naturally the conversation at the Captain's table, at which the senior officers likewise dined, turned upon the examination of the morning, and in answer to a mute appeal from Martin opposite, who was unable to say a word, I boldly asked old Cripps, pointblank, what he would have done if the poor little girl *had* run for refuge to the *Valeria* from the tyranny of the priests.

"'Done, sir!' thundered the old gentleman, spluttering over his grog in his excitement, 'I'd have done what every other Christian and officer and gentleman would have done; given the poor little creature shelter and protection from the rascals that were hunting her, and a chance of becoming a sensible British Protestant! Why, by jove, when those smooth-faced blackguards went sneaking over my ship this morning and I had to palaver and speak civilly to them, I just wished the girl *had* been aboard, that I might have had a hand in saving her. I'll warrant you we'd have managed to keep her out of sight!'

"Martin gave a gasp, like a whale coming up to blow, and jumping up from table unceremoniously rushed out. In a moment he was back again holding the little nun by the hand.

"Of course old Cripps couldn't say anything, after the manner in which he had committed himself beforehand. And though he gave us a tremendous jawing about the serious risk, &c., we had run, I believe he enjoyed the lark as much as anyone: especially as his part in it didn't begin until all the danger was over. I'm not sure that he would have liked driving that jackass down the vineyards: but he was wonderfully polite to Doña Dolores and made her as comfortable and welcome as possible, lent her some sermons to read, which she took very demurely, and evidently felt he had scored one to himself off the Pope by that move. We got into Lisbon the next day and the girl was handed over to the English chaplain's wife, who rigged her out for her wedding with Martin, which took place a few days afterwards.

"After that she was sent home to Martin's mother at Southampton, and I believe she went to school for a bit; anyway, Martin got his promotion shortly and left the service to settle down in Hampshire with Madam. And a rare little handful he's found her, I believe, for she can't help flirting any more than she can help breathing, though I really think she likes old Harry Martin best in the main.

"Now you may argue," concluded the Lieutenant, putting his pipe back permanently into his mouth and speaking through one corner of it, to signify that his tale was nearly finished: "you may argue that marriages are made in Heaven, and I devoutly hope Providence is settling a good match for me up aloft, but you'll allow, after listening to this yarn, that I had a pretty good lot to do with getting Harry Martin his wife!"