

**IN A SILVER SEA. IN
THREE
VOLUMES. VOL. II**

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In a silver sea. In three volumes. Vol. II by B. L. Farjeon

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B. L. FARJEON

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THREE
VOLUMES. VOL. II**

IN A SILVER SEA.

BY

B. L. FARJEON,

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IN A SILVER SEA.

CHAPTER I.

THE RECORD OF RANF THE HUNCHBACK.

“COME, Ranf, while you have the power, set upon paper a sign that shall remain when you have passed away. While I live no eye but mine shall see what I write. When I am dead, it is Evangeline’s, with all that I possess. It is not that I believe I shall die to-night or to-morrow, but it is as well to think of things. It is right that Evangeline should know something of my inner life, so that she may give men the lie who speak ill of me. There are plenty of them; let them have their way, but do not let them step into mine. A spirit within me might cry ‘Strike!’ and they would not live to rue.

“No, I shall not die to-night, but I will be prepared. Only up to a certain point

are we our own masters; though steadfastness and determination will achieve most human desires, we are for ever at the mercy of chance, which at any unexpected moment may snap the mortal thread. This morning I slipped upon a stone, and fell to a depth of a thousand feet before I recovered myself by catching at a branch of a tree which grew out of the rocks for my preservation. I slid down over the sharp stones which cut my hands when I endeavoured to clutch them, but Death was not waiting for me in the depths below. Scores of years ago a seed was blown into a crevice, and a tree grew and forced the rocks asunder, that I might be saved for my life's purpose. Those who pretend to study the science of Divine things, and who really understand them as well as a beetle, would dispute this, if it paid them to do so. I have my beliefs, and am content with them. If in the world's scheme there is any sort of design, all things possible must be admitted. Even the unseen agencies by which we are surrounded, and whose mysterious power derides our highest efforts, play their direct part in our lives. Sometimes they drive men mad.

Human judgment has passed such a verdict upon me; but I have long learnt to accept with scorn the judgment of mankind.

“I am quite calm, though sorely wounded. Bodily pain does not distress me; I can trifle with it, argue with it, laugh at it, defy it, and conquer it. I have in my time suffered torments, but it has been the anguish of the soul that has conquered me and made me groan. I am bruised and cut, and shall not be able to descend the mountain for two or three days at least.

“I saw a flower that shone like gold, with a dusky mellow lustre such as I see in the autumn sunsets as I stand upon the highest peak of this mountain of snow. Its peculiarity was that its inner cup reflected a light of burnished silver. It was not within easy reach, and I could only hope to obtain it by stepping on a large stone which projected from the outer surface of the precipice. I established a foothold, and with a firm grasp of the earth behind me, leant forward to detach the flower by its root, when the stone slipped from beneath me. I slipped

with it, and was saved by the tree. Wounded as I was, I could not possibly have reached the mountain's top by climbing the surface of the rock, but to my surprise I found in the rear of this tree an easier path to safety. It could not have been made by human hands——

“I am arrested in the current of my thoughts by a notch. Why could this hidden path not have been made by human hands? There can be no doubt that the islanders speak the truth when they say that no man but myself has ventured into these strange regions for generations. But two hundred years ago there lived upon the mount a man, self-banished, whose life was cursed by love and jealousy. He grew old here, and passed his days in loneliness, without human or other visible companionship. The mountain was his then, as it is mine now. He essayed a wonderful task, and may have cut this path to assist in its accomplishment. It is not an unreasonable idea. When I am able to move about I will convince myself whether the narrow way has been made by nature or man.

“What kind of life did he live upon this