

WOLVES of the SEA

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Geoffrey Carlyle, mariner, sentenced to twenty years of servitude in the American colonies for complicity in the Minamata rebellion, is put aboard ship. He sees among the passengers LeVerre, a former of Maryland and a Spaniard calling himself Captain Sanchez.

CHAPTER II—Life on the prison ship.

CHAPTER III—Carlyle meets Dorothy, who informs him that she has bought his services. Carlyle and Sanchez clash.

CHAPTER IV—Some information concerning Black Sanchez, pirate.

CHAPTER V—The Fairfax party, now in its own ship on the Potomac, encounters a mysterious bark, the Namur of Rotterdam.

CHAPTER VI—The Fairfax party lands for the night with a chest of gold. Carlyle investigates a mysterious call at midnight.

CHAPTER VII—Carlyle discovers Captain Sanchez in Black Sanchez, planning to steal the Fairfax gold and abduct Dorothy.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Victory and a Defeat.

I arose silently to my feet, fully aware that all hope of thwarting this villainy lay in immediate action. Sanchez had turned slightly and stood with his face toward the bay. I ventured a cautious step forward and stood on the open sand, scarcely a yard from his rear. Some vague sense of my presence must have influenced the man, for he swung suddenly about, uttering a stifled cry of startled surprise, as we met face to face. For an instant we were locked so closely within each other's desperate grip, his head bent beneath my arm, with my fingers clutching at his throat to block any call for help, that he possessed no knowledge of his assailant's identity. But the man was like a tiger. The surprise of attack was to my advantage, yet almost before I realized what was being done he had rallied, broken my first hold, and his eyes were glaring straight into mine. Then he knew me, his free hand instantly grasping at my knife. Even as he jerked it forth I crushed his wrist within my fingers, forcing his forearm back. There was no outcry, no noise, except that of my heavy breathing and tramping feet. Personal hatred had ascended in both our hearts—I doubt if he ever thought of night else but the desire to kill me there with his own hands. Only once did he even utter a word, hissing out the sentence as though it were a poison:

"To hell with you, you sneaking English cur!"

What followed has to me no clearness, no consistency. Never have I fought with deeper realization that I needed every ounce of strength and every trick of wit and skill. Now I knew the fellow possessed greater knowledge of the game than I and a quicker movement. I excelled in weight of body and coolness of mind. Twice he pricked me deep enough to draw blood, before I succeeded in twisting backward the arm with which he held the blade. He met the game too late, falling half back upon one knee, hoping thus to foil my purpose. There was the sharp crack of a bone as his useless fingers let the knife drop, a snarled curse of pain, and then, with the rage of a mad dog, Sanchez struck his teeth deep into my cheek.

With a thrill of exultation I gripped the knife, driving instantly the keen blade to its hilt into the man's side. He made no cry, no struggle—the set teeth unlocked, and he fell limply back on the sand, his head lapped by the waves.

The fellow lay motionless, his face upturned to the sky, but livid except in dim outline. I rested my ear



Glad No Cry, No Struggle.

Never his heart, detecting no murmur of response, touched the reins of his will. He found there no answering echo of life.

With the deadening knife still gripped in my hand I need forward along the narrow strip of sand, reckless of what I might encounter. I trod on nothing but the sand. Through the gloom came the deck I could

perceive only dim figures, a riot of men, battling furiously hand to hand, yet out of the rack loomed through the darkness in larger outlines than the others—Cochese, the negro, I leaped at the fellow and struck with the keen knife, missing the heart but plunging the blade deep into the flesh of the shoulder. The next instant I was in a bear's grip, the very breath crushed out of me, yet, by some chance, my one arm remained free, and I drove the sharp steel into him twice before he forced the weapon from my fingers. I thrust an elbow beneath the brute's chin, and then forced his head back until the neck cracked.

He was too strong, too immense of stature. Apparently unweakened by his wounds, the giant negro, thoroughly aroused, exerted his mighty muscles, and, despite my utmost effort at resistance, thrust me back against the stern rail, where the weight of his body pinned me helplessly. With a roar of rage he drove his huge fist into my face, but happily was too close to give much force to the blow. My own hands, gripping the neckband of his coarse shirt, twisted it tight about the great throat until, in desperation, panting for breath, the huge brute actually lifted me in his arms and hurled me backward, headlong over the rail. I struck something as I fell, yet rebounding from this splash into the deep water and went down so nearly unconscious as to make not even the slightest struggle. And yet I came up once more to the surface, arising by sheer chance directly beneath the small dory—which my body must have struck as I fell—towing by a painter astern of the sloop, and fortunately retained sense enough to cling desperately to this first thing my hands touched, and thus remaining conscious.

The dory caught in some current, floated at the very extremity of its slender towline, and in consequence the sloop appeared little more than a mere mound, when my eyes endeavored to discover its outlines. Evidently the bloody work had been completed, for now all was silent on board. Then came the voice of Estada in a gruff inquiry:

"So you are hiding here, Cochese? What are you looking for in the sea?"

"What? Why that d—d Englishman, Mon Dieu! He fought me like a mad rat!"

"The Englishman, you say? He was here then? It was he you battled with? What became of the fellow?"

"He went down there, señor, the dog stabbed me three times. It was either he or I to go."

"You mean you threw him overboard?"

"Ay, with his ribs crushed in, and not a breath left in his d—d body. He never came up even—I've watched. There has not been so much as a ripple where he sank."

"Two must have hung in silence at the rail staring down. I dared not advance my head to look, nor even move a muscle of my body in the least."

"How came you aft here?"

"Because that fellow leaped the rail from the wharf. I saw him, and we met at the wheel."

"From the wharf, you say? He was not aboard, then? Santa Maria! I know not what that may mean. Yet what difference, so he be dead. Anderson, Mendez, throw that carcass overboard—no, bullies, never mind; let them lie where they are, and sink an anger in the sloop's bottom. What is that out yonder, Cochese?"

"A small boat, señor—a dory, I make it."

"Cut the rope and send it adrift. Now come along with me."

The darker loom of the sloop vanished slowly, as the slight current sweeping about the end of the wharf drifted the released boat to which I clung outward into the bay. There was scarcely a ripple to the sea, and yet I felt that the boat was steadily drifting out into deep water. I was still strangely weak, barely able to retain my grasp. Finally I mustered every trace of remaining energy in one supreme effort and succeeded in dragging my body up out of water onto the boat's stern, sinking helplessly forward into the bottom. The moment this was accomplished every sense deserted me, and I lay there motionless, in a stupor.

I shall never know how long I remained there. Yet this time could not have been great. As I awoke, a faint consciousness returned. Then the sharp pain of my wounds, brought by the sting of salt water, brought me swift realization of where I was and the circumstances bringing me there. I had, evidently, lost considerable blood, yet this had scarcely seemed to faze me, and a very slight examination showed me convinced that the knife strokes were none of them serious. My other injuries were merely lacerations to add to my discomfort—the result of blows dealt me by Sanchez and Cochese, aggravated by the headlong fall in the sea.

Indeed, I awoke to the discovery that I was far from being dead; and, under the force of this knowledge,

the various incidents of the night flashed swiftly back into my mind. No gleam of light appeared in any direction; no sound echoed across the dark waste of water. It was clearly impossible for me to attempt any return to the wharf through the impenetrable black curtain which shut me in. What, then, could I do? What might I still hope to accomplish? Those fellows had swept the sloop clean, and had doubtless long ago scuttled it. They would surely find themselves leaderless, unguided. Would that suffice to stop them? Would the discovery of his body halt his followers and speed them rushing back to their boats, eager to get safely away? This did not seem likely. Estada knew of my boarding the sloop from the wharf, and would at once connect the fact of my being ashore with the killing of Sanchez. This would satisfy him there was no further danger. Besides, these were not men to flee in panic. Surely not with that ruffian Estada yet alive to lead them, and the knowledge that fifty thousand pounds was yonder in that unguarded house, with no one to protect the treasure but two old men asleep, and the women. The women!—Dorothy! What would become of her? Into whose hands would she fall in that foul division of spoils? Estada's? And I, affluent and helpless in this boat, what could I do?

CHAPTER IX.

A Swim to the Namur.

All was black, hopeless; with head buried in my hands I sat on a thwart, dazed. Before me, pleading, expressive of agonized despair, arose the sweet face of Dorothy Fairfax. No doubt by this time all was over—the dead body of Sanchez discovered, the projected attack on the house carried out, the two old men left behind, either dead or severely wounded, and the girl borne off a helpless prisoner. Ay, but this I knew; there was only one place to which the villains might flee with their booty—the Namur of Rotterdam. Only on those docks and well at sea would they be safe or able to enjoy their spoils. The thought came to me in sudden revelation—why not? Was not here a chance even yet to foil them? With Sanchez dead no man aboard that pirate craft could recognize me. I felt assured of this. I had fought the giant negro in the dark; he could not, during that fierce encounter, have distinguished my features any more clearly than I had his own. There was no one else to fear. If only I might once succeed in getting safely aboard, slightly disguised, perhaps, and mingle unnoticed among the crew, the chances were not bad for me to pass undetected. Such ships carried large crews and were constantly changing in personnel. A strange face appearing among them need not arouse undue suspicion. And I felt convinced I could locate the Namur. But could I hope to attain the ship in advance of the returning party of mariners? God helping me, I would try! My brain throbbled with fresh resolution—the call to action.

There were oars in the boat. I shipped the useless rubber inboard and chose my course from the stars. My boat had drifted considerably farther out into the bay than I had supposed, and it required a good half hour of steeply toiled at the oars before I sighted ahead of me the darker outlines of the shore. At first I could identify nothing, but finally there suddenly arose, clearly defined, the gaunt limbs of a dead tree, bearing a faint resemblance to a gigantic cross, that had been pointed out on the sloop. This peculiar mark was at the extremity of the first headland lying north of the point itself, and consequently a straight course across the bay would land me within five hundred yards of where the Namur had last been at anchor.

To a degree my immediate plan of action had been definitely mapped out within my own mind while toiling at the oars. I would beach my dory and strike out on foot directly across the narrow neck of land. The Namur was not so far out from shore as to make swimming to her a dangerous feat, and I could approach and board her with far less chance of discovery in that manner than by the use of a boat. The greater danger would come after I had attained the deck, wet to the skin. The sharp bow of the dory ran up on the soft sand of the beach, and I stepped ashore.

Then there came to me the first real consciousness of the reckless nature of this adventure. As I faced them the probabilities there scarcely opened one chance in a hundred. And yet I must admit there was the one chance; and in no other action could I perceive even that much encouragement. If Dorothy Fairfax was already in the hands of these men, then my only opportunity for serving her lay in my being close at hand. No alternative presented itself; no other effort could be effective. It was already too late to attempt the organization of a rescue party. No, the only choice left was for me either to accompany the girl or else abandon her entirely to her captors. I must either face the possibility of discovery and capture, which as surely meant torture and death, or otherwise play the coward and remain ignominiously behind. So I drove the temptation to faster away and strode on up the bank into the black shadow of the trees.

I found extremely hard walking as I advanced through tangled underbrush. Fortunately the darkness was even darker than I had anticipated. It was not until after I had advanced cautiously into the water and then swam slowly to this point closer vision along the surface that I succeeded in locating the vessel sought. Even then the Namur appeared only as a mere shadow, without so much as a light showing aboard, yet apparently anchored in the same position as when we had swept that previous afternoon, all washed straight out through the lines of surf, with all existing light being completely submerged. I was to reach the bark at all this was the one structural

I stood there, resisting the underflow tugging at my limbs and barely able to retain my footing, intent upon my purpose. Full strength had come back to my muscles and my head was again clear. With strong, silent strokes I swam forward, directly breasting the force of the incoming sea, yet making fair progress. Some unconsidered current must have swept me to the right, for when the outlines of the bark again became dimly visible through the night I found myself well to starboard of the vessel. Striking well under water and with only my eyes exposed above the surface, I changed my course to the left and slowly and cautiously drew in toward the starboard bow. A few moments later, unperceived from above, and protected from observation by the bulge of the overhang and density of the shadow,



Devising Some Means for Attaining the Deck.

my hands clung to the anchor hawser, my mind busy in devising some means for attaining the deck.

CHAPTER X.

On the Deck of the Namur.

It was here that fortune favored me, strengthening my decision and yielding a fresh courage to persevere. Forthout directly over where I clung desperately to the wet hawser, my eyes were able to trace the bow-stem, the rather heavily furled up jib flapping ragged edges in the gusts of wind. Suddenly, as I stared upward, I became aware that two men were working their way out along the foot-ropes, and, as they reached a point almost directly over my head, became busily engaged in tightening the gaskets to better secure the loosening sail. The foot of one slipped, and he hung dangling, giving vent to a stiff English oath before he succeeded in hauling himself back to safety. The other indulged in a chuckling laugh, yet he was careful not to speak loudly. "Had one drink too many, Tom?" he asked. "That will pay yer for finishing the bottle an' never givin' me another sip."

"You, h—l! Yer had the funst or it. There's no sorer luck yer don't git yer fair share of, Bill Haines—trust yer fer that. What I ain't got straight yet is whar that stuff cum from so easy."

"That was part of the luck, Tom. Did yer git eyes on that new feller Manuel Estevean brought back with him in the boat?"

"The one you and Jose carried aboard?"

"He's the lad. Ther wasn't nuthin' the matter with the cove, 'cept he was ood drunk. We was waitin' on the beach fer Estevean, an' three fellows he had taken along with him inter town ter cum back—the nigger, Jose an' me—when this yere chap hove 'longside. He never hailed us, ner nuthin'; just effin' over into the boat, an' lay down. I shook him, an' kicked him, but it wa'n't no use; so we just let him lie ther fer Manuel ter say what was ter be done with him. Only Jose he went through his pockets an' found three bottles o' rum. We took a few drinks an' hid what was left in the boat locker."

"So ther's how yer got it! Who was the party?"

"That's more'n I'll ever tell yer. I never got no sight o' him, 'cept in the dark. 'Bout all I know is he was white, an' likely a sailor. Enshure, when Manuel got back he told us to hand the lad forward out o' the way, an' fetch him along. So we polled out with the feller cuddled up in the bow."

"I never seed nuthin' more of him after he was hauled aboard. What became o' the lad?"

"Him! Oh, Jose an' me carried him inter the far'cabin, an' shoved him inter a berth ter sleep off his liquor. Ther was the last I ever see o' him fer 'bout six hours, when this yere feller must a woke up in the far'cabin an' crazy. He cum a charge' out on deck, whoopin' like an Indian, sayin' a knife in his hand, intellin' fer fer feller h—l. Well, it happened that the feller he cum up against, was LeVerre, who was cummin' barred fer another, an' 'bout a minute that was one h—l o' a night. It was so dark I couldn't tell whar did happen, but it was fust month, till the mate drove the poor devil, easily like mad, over'nath the rail, an' they heaved him out inter the water long-side. I seed the feller splash when he struck, but he never set out no more."

"What did LeVerre do?"

"Him? He didn't do nuthin'. Just started cum over the rail a bit, an' ther cum back, an' so on. He never even asked whar the feller was. Ther ain't nuthin' kin' like that black breeze."

"I ain't see no human in this, it's a—well, I ain't sayin' nothin' more."

for take orders from a d—d nigger, an' be knocked 'round if they don't jump when he barks. He's got 'ter go a life in his ribs sum day."

"Maybe he is; but yer better hold yer tongue, Tom. Sanchez don't stand fer that talk, an' he's back o' LeVerre. Let's go in them gaskets will hold all right now—cum 'long."

I could now perceive now clearly the character I was destined to assume when once safely aboard the Namur. Such an assumption would involve but slight danger of discovery. It was as though a miracle had opened the way, revealed to me by the unconscious lips of these two half-drunken, gossiping sailors. The story told fitted my necessities exactly. Had I planned the circumstances myself nothing could have been better arranged. No one on board had seen the missing man by daylight; he was believed to have sunk without a struggle. Yet no one knew positively that this was so, because no one cared. The death of the lad had simply been taken for granted when LeVerre had failed to see his body rise again to the surface. Yet it was quite within the realm of possibility for the fellow to come up once more in that darkness, beyond LeVerre's range of vision, and even to have remained afloat, buoyed up by clinging to the anchor hawser, until strong enough to return on board. At least there was no one aboard the Namur able to deny that this had been done.

Satisfied by this reasoning of being able to pass myself off as the dead man, I began slowly and cautiously to drag myself up the rust hawser. I had chosen a fortunate moment for my effort; no one heeded the little noise I made, and, when I finally topped the rail and was able to look inboard it was to discover a deserted fore deck, with the watch all engaged at some task amidships. I crept down the fore-castle ladder and worked my way aft beneath the black shadow of the port rail, until able thus to drift unnoticed into a group tailing onto a mainsail halyard. The fellow next to me, without releasing his grip, turned his head and stared, but without discerning my features.

"Whar did yer cum from?" he growled, and I as instantly recognized Bill Haines. "Been soberin', have yer? Well, now, lay to an' pull."

Before I could attempt an answer a tall figure loomed up before us, the same high-pitched voice I had noticed previously calling out sharply:

"There, that's enough, mon! Now make fast. We can head the old girl out from here in a jiffy, if it really begins to blow. Jose, you stand by at the wheel, in case you're needed; some of the rest ship the capstan bars, and remain near for a call."

"What are ye swingin' the yards fur, anyhow, LeVerre?" asked Haines insolently. "Just fer exercise?"

"Because I am a sailor, Haines," he replied angrily. "Anyhow it is none of your business; I was left in command here. Those clouds don't look good to me; there is going to be a blow before morning."

Haines growled something and Le-

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