WOLVES of the SEA

By RANDALL PARRISH

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Geoffry Carlyle, mariner, sentenced to twenty years of solitude in the American colonies for complicity in the Monmouth rebellion, is put aboard ship. He sees among the passengers Dorothy Fairfax of Maryland and a Spaniard calling himself Captain Sanchez.

CHAPTER II—Life on the prison ship.

CHAPTER III—Carlyle meets Dorothy, who informs him her uncle 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 sloop 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 sail at midnight.

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

CHAPTER VIII—Carlyle fights Sanchez and leaves him for dead.

CHAPTER IX—Carlyle, too late to rescue Dorothy, swims to the Namur.

CHAPTER X—Carlyle boards the Namur and joins the pirate crew.

CHAPTER XI.

The Return of the Boat.

The crew hurried over to the port rail. Beyond doubt most of those aboard realized that this had been an expedition of some importance, the culmination of their long wait on the coast, part of some scheme of their chief, in the spoils of which they expected to share. Moreover this boat approaching through the darkness was bringing back their leader, and however else they might feel toward him, the reckless daring, and audacious resourcefulness of Sanchez meant success.

I was made to comprehend all this by the low, muttered utterances of those crowding near me, spoken in nearly every language of the world. Much I could not translate, yet enough reached my ears to convince me of the temper of the crew—their feverish eagerness to be again at sea, under command of a captain whom they both hated and feared—a cruel, cold-blooded monster, yet a genius in crime, and a natural leader of such men as these, Black Sanchez! I listened to their comments, their expectations, with swiftly beating heart. I alone knew what that boat was bringing. What would be the result when the dead body of their leader came up over the rail?

LeVere shouted an order, and a sudden flare was lighted amidships, the circle of flame illuminating a part of the deck, and spreading out over the wild expanse of water. Scarcely had a minute elapsed before it came sweeping into the radius of light—at first a dim, spectral shadow, scarcely to be recognized; then, almost as suddenly, revealed in all its details—a boat of size, flying toward us under a lug sail, keeling well over, and topping the sea swells like a bird on wing. LeVere called for men to stand by, the fellows rushing past me to their stations, but, in the fascination of the moment, I failed to move. I could do nothing but stare out across the intervening water, with eyes fastened on that swiftly approaching boat. I must see, I must know the message it brought; what story it held of the tragedy. Manuel held the tiller, with Estada seated beside him, leaning forward, and gesticulating with one hand, as he directed the course. I had never seen those two, yet I knew them beyond a doubt. Mendez and Anderson (at least I supposed these to be the two) were poised at the sail halyards, ready to let the straining sheet down at a run, while Cochose crouched low in the bow, his black hand muffled, gripping a coil of rope. Their faces were all turned forward, lighted by the flare from our deck, and I felt a shudder of fear run over me—no expression on any countenance spoke of defeat; even the ugly features of the negro beamed with delight.

But was that all? Was that all? Surely not. Forward of the single mast was stowed the chest, while in the open space between the helmsman and the two sailors were stretched two motionless bodies. LeVere, grippin' a stayrope, and leaning well out, hailed in Spanish.

"Ahoy, the boat! You can make it?"

"Ay!" came back Estada's voice. "Stand by to fend us off. Call all hands, and break anchor as soon as we are aboard."

"Very well, sir. Where is Captain Sanchez?"

Estada pointed downward in swift, expressive gesture.

"Here at my feet—badly hurt, but will recover. Send two more down to help when we make fast. Now, Cochose—let go of your rope; watch out above!"

I stood, settling hard at the rail, and staring down at the scene below, as the men in the boat made fast. I felt paralyzed, and helpless, unable to move. I had no business to remain there; every prospect of security depended on my joining the crew. Yet, only one thought gripped me—Sanchez was not dead! And that other body? That of Dorothy Fairfax, without doubt yet certainly not dead. If their prisoner was the girl—and who else could it be?—she remained alive, helplessly bound to prevent either struggle, or outcry, and destined to a fate far worse than death.

My own life hung in the balance—nay, rather, my doom was already sealed. There seemingly was but one chance for escape left—that was to drop silently overboard. God, no! that would be the craven act of a coward. Better far to stay, and kill, or even be killed, than to be forever cursed by my own conscience.

The fellows sent down from the main chains to the boat brought the injured captain up first. This required the services of three men, his body hanging limp between them, his upturned face showing ghostly in the flaming of the torch thrust out over the rail. To every appearance it was apparently a corpse they handled, except for their tenderness, and a single groan to which the white lips gave utterance, when one of the bearers slipped, wrenching the wounded body with a sharp pang of pain. Once safely on deck, the three bore him across to the after cabin and disappeared down the steps.

Estada had already swung himself up into the chains, while Anderson and Mendez were lifting the girl to her feet, and rather roughly urging her forward. Her eyes reflected all the unutterable horror which for the moment dominated her mind, while her loosened hair, disarranged by struggle, only served to intensify the pallor of her face.

"Hustle her along lively, boys," shouted back Estada coarsely. "If she won't move, give her a shove. Then tie her up again, and take the turn of a rope 'round her. What do you think this is—a queen's reception? Move lively, senorita," in mock sarcasm.

Her gaze settled on him, where he hung far out, grasping a backstay, watching the movements below, and her slender form straightened as by the acquisition of new strength.

"If these creatures will take their hands off me," she said, using their tongue without a tremor in the clear voice. "I can easily go up alone. What is it you are so afraid of—a woman?"

The expression of Estada's face promised an outburst of profanity, but, instead of giving it utterance, he lifted his cap in a sudden pretense at gallantry.

"Your pardon, senorita," he said in a tone of mockery. "If you have come to your senses at last, it is well. Leave her alone, men. Now, my beauty, I am taking you at your own word—a step, and then the protection of my hand. We welcome you, as a guest aboard."

A moment and she had attained the

Chose to Continue Playing the Fool.

deck. Estada chose to continue playing the fool.

"Thanks, senorita—thanks," he began softly, and again bowing before her, cap in hand. "We greet you with the honor aboard the Namur—"

"Enough of that, you coward, you murderer," she broke in coldly. "Do not touch nor speak to me."

She turned her back on him, thus coming face to face with LeVere, who stood enjoying the scene, a wide grin on his dark face, revealing a row of white teeth under a jet-black mustache.

"You, sir—you are an officer?"

"I have charge of the deck."

"Then where am I to go?"

The mulatto, surprised by the sudden question, glanced inquiringly toward Estada, who had already completely lost his sense of humor.

"Go!" the latter growled. "Why send the wench below. I'll see to her later, and teach her who's the master here. Off with her now, but be back quickly." He leaned far over the rail, sending his great voice below. "Send up that chest, you men. Hook on the boat, Manuel, and let her drift; we must get out of here in a hurry. All ready, aloft?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Then set home; hoist it forward!"

"Both anchors apeak, sir."

"Smartly, done—hard down with your helm, there! That's it; now let her play off slowly."

He caught sight of me. All the savage brutality of his nature had been brought to the surface by Dorothy's stinging words, and he sought now some fit opportunity to give it vent. Before I could move, he had gripped me by the collar, and swung me about, so that the light streaming out from the cabin fell directly on my face.

"What the devil are you doing, loafing aft here? I've seen you hanging about for ten minutes, never lifting a hand. Who are you anyhow?"

"Joe Gates, sir."

"Gates—another damned Englishman! How did you ever get aboard here?"

It was the returning LeVere who made explanation before I could reply.

"Manuel brought him on board last night. Picked him up drunk ashore."

"I see. Well now, do you happen to have any idea who I am, Gates?"

"No, sir—only that you are one of the officers."

"I am the first officer, and in command at present. Pedro Estada is my name. Now, you damned English whelp, remember that!"

Before I even suspected what was coming, his unexpected action as swift as the leap of a poised tiger, he struck me fairly between the eyes with the butt of a pistol, and I went down, sprawling onto the deck. For a moment I seemed, in spite of the viciousness of the blow, to retain a spark of consciousness, for I knew he kicked me savagely with his heavy sea boots; I felt the pain, and even heard the words, and curses, accompanying each brutal stroke.

"You drunken dog! You whelp of a sea wolf! You English cur! Take that—damn you! And that! You'll not forget me for awhile. That's it—squirm, I like to see it. When you wake up again, you'll remember Pedro Estada. How did that feel, you grunting pig? Here, LeVere, Manuel, throw this sot into the forecastle. Curse you, here is one more to jog your memory."

The heavy, iron-shod boot landed full in my face, and every sensation left me as I sank limply back, bloody and unconscious.

CHAPTER XII.

A Friend in the Forecastle.

I slowly opened my eyes to find myself lying in an upper bunk of the forecastle. Memory soon returned, stimulated no doubt by the aching of my body where Estada had so brutally kicked me with his heavy boot. The heavy rolling of the bark clearly evidenced that we were already at sea, and bucking against a high wind. It was a dark, dismal, smelly interior, amply large enough, but ill ventilated, and inexpressibly dirty. I must have been lying unconscious for several hours. I rested back, feeling of the numerous bruises on my body, and touching gingerly the dried blood caked on my face. No very serious damage seemed to have been done, although every muscle and tendon appeared to be strained and lacerated. Clinching my teeth to keep back a groan, I succeeded in sitting upright, my head touching the upper deck, as I undertook to survey my surroundings. About half the bunks seemed to be occupied, the figures of the sleeping men barely discernible.

As I sat there, staring about at this scene there was a stir within the upper berth on my own level, and an uplifted face appeared suddenly in the yellow flare of light. It was manifestly an English face at first glance, rosy of cheek, with chestnut beard. A pair of humorous, gray eyes surveyed me silently, and then, apparently satisfied by the scrutiny, the owner sat up in the bunk, revealing powerful shoulders, and a round, bull neck.

"Ahoy, mate," he said pleasantly, endeavoring to speak low, the effort resembling the growl of a bear. "How do you feel—pretty sore?"

"Ache from head to foot," I answered, immediately feeling his friendliness. "But no harm done."

"I saw part of it. The damn black brute kicked savagely enough, but at that you're lucky; it's the Spanish style to use a knife. I've seen that cock slash a man into ribbons for nothing at all—just to show he was bad. Haines tells me your name is Gates, and that you are English."

"That's right; I shipped first out of Bristol."

"So did I, mate—twenty years ago though, and I never went back since. My name is Tom Watkins. Let's shake; there is quite a sprinkling of us Britishers aboard, and we ought to hang together."

He put out a big, hairy fist, and I gripped it heartily, decidedly liking the man as his eyes frankly met mine. He appeared honest and square, a fine type of the English seaman.

"Tom Watkins, you said. May I ask if you were out on the bow-sprit along with Haines last night?"

"Just afore the longboat come in? Yes, we were there."

"Well, I was down below, hanging to the cable, and overheard you two talking together. Somehow Watkins, you do not seem to me to fit in exactly with this gang of pirates; you don't look to be that sort. How long have you been with them?"

He glanced about warily, lowering his voice until it became a hoarse whisper.

"Three years, mate, and most of that time has been hell. I haven't even been ashore, but once, and that was on an island. These fellows don't put any trust in my kind, nor give them any chance to cut and run. Once in awhile a lad does get away, but most of them are caught; and those that are sure get their punishment. They never try it again. I've seen them staked out on the sand and left to die; that ain't no nice thing to remember."

"But how did you come into it?"

"Like most of the rest, I was second mate of the Ranger, a Glasgow brig. These fellows overhauled us at daybreak about a hundred miles off the east end of Cuba. Our skipper was Scotch, and he put up some fight, but it wasn't any use. There was only three of us left alive when the pirates came aboard. One of these died two days later, and another was washed overboard and drowned down in the Gulf. I am all that is left of the Ranger."

"You saved your life by taking on?"

"Sanchez had the two of us, who were able to stand, back in his cabin. He put it to us straight. He said it was up to us whether we signed up or walked the plank; and he didn't appear to care a damn which we chose."

"And you say others of this crew have been obtained in the same manner?" I questioned, deeply interested, and perceiving in this a ray of hope.

"Not exactly—no. I wouldn't precisely say that. It's true, perhaps, that most of the Britishers were forced to join in about the same way I was, and there may be a Scandinavian or two, with a few Dutch, to be counted in that list; but the most are pirates from choice. It's their trade, and they like it. Sanchez only aims to keep hold of a few good men, because he has got to have sailors; but most of his crew are nothing but plain cut-throats. Indians and half-breeds, niggers, creoles, Portuguese, Spanish, and every mongrel you ever heard of. Sanchez himself is half French. The hell-hound who kicked you is a Portuguese, and LeVere is more nigger than anything else. I'll bet there is a hundred rats on board this Namur right now who'd cut your throat for a sovereign, and never so much as think of it again."

"A hundred? Is there that many aboard?"

"A hundred an' thirty all told. Most o' 'em bunk amidships. They're not sailormen, but just cut-throats, an' sea wolves. Yer ought ter see 'em swarm out on deck, like hungry rats, when there's a fight comin'. It's all they're good for."

"Watkins," I said soberly, after a pause during which he sat on the dirty deck to thus better express his feelings, "do you mean to say that in three years you've had no chance to escape? No opportunity to get away?"

"Not a chance, mate; no more will you. I know what yer thinkin' 'bout. I had them notions too when I fust come aboard—gettin' all the decent sort tergether, and takin' the vessel. 'Twon't work; thar ain't 'nough who wud risk it, and if thar wus, yer couldn't get 'em tergether. Sanchez is too damn smart fer thet. Every damn rat is a spy. I ain't hed no such talk as this afore in six months, Gates; the last time cost me twenty lashes at the mast-butt. What'd yer have in yer mind, mate?"

"Only this, Watkins. I've got to do something, and believe I can trust you—it's not my life I'm thinking about, but that of a woman."

"A woman! Not the one brought aboard last night?"

"Exactly; now listen—I'm going to tell you my story, and ask your help. My name is not Gates, and I am not the man Mendez brought aboard drunk, and who was thrown over the rail by LeVere. That fellow was drowned. I am Geoffry Carlyle, an English skipper."

Thereupon I told him my story in detail. Then I said:

"I have no plan; to become a member of the crew was my only thought. But I must act, if at all, before the captain recovers. He would recognize me at sight. You will aid, advise me?"

"That is easier to ask than answer, mate," he admitted finally. "I am an English seaman, and will do my duty, but, so far as I can see, there is no plan we can make. It is God who will save the girl, if she is to be saved. He may use us to that end, but it is wholly beyond our power to accomplish it alone. The only thing I can do is to sound out the men aboard, and learn just what we can expect of them if any opportunity to get comes. There are not more than a dozen at most to be relied upon. Play your part, and keep quiet. If you can let her know of your presence aboard it might be best—for if she saw you suddenly, unprepared, she might say or do something to betray you. There are other reasons why it may be best for her to know she is not entirely deserted."

He leaned over, motioning me toward him, until his lips were at my ear.

"It may not prove as hopeless as it appears now," he whispered confidentially. "I helped carry Sanchez to his stateroom, and washed and dressed his wound. There is no surgeon aboard. He has a bad cut, and is very weak from loss of blood. The question of our success hinges on Pedro Estada. This is a chance he has long been waiting for. The only question is, has he the nerve to act. I doubt if he has alone, but LeVere is with him, and that half-breed would cut the throat of his best friend. You understand?—the death of Sanchez would make Estada chief."

"But," I interposed, "in that case what would the crew do?"

"Accept Estada, no doubt; at least the cut-throats would be with him, for he is of their sort. But Sanchez's death would save you from discovery, and," his voice still lower, so that I barely distinguished the words, "in the confusion aboard, if we were ready, the Namur might be so disabled as to compel them to run her ashore for repairs. That would give you a chance. If once we reach Porto Grande there is no hope."

A marling-spike pounded on the scuttle, and Haines' voice roared down.

"Port watch! Hustle out, bullies!"

(Continued next Sunday.)

Animal's Strong Instinct.

Some animals are remarkable, indeed, for the wonderful development of love and devotion, they possess and show toward men. They are so acute in the sense of their affections that they seem to perceive the feelings of their master in advance of his expressions. Masters of dumb animals have often been heard to declare that their animals were quicker to detect in them a spirit of anger than were their fellow men.

How He Averages Up.

"De man dat kain't do no work fo' his swuse'f," said Uncle Eben, "generally averages up by makin' a whole lot o' trouble foh other people."

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