WOLVES of the SEA

By RANDALL PARRISH

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CHAPTER XV.

The Cabin of the Namur.

Both huge, black hands grasped the spokes, and it was evident that it required all his giant strength to control the bucking wheel. He was an ugly-looking brute, the lower portion of his face apelike and the wool growing so low as to leave him scarcely an inch of forehead. His eyes lifted an instant from the binnacle card to glance at me curiously. They exhibited no flash of recognition.

For half an hour Estada hung about aft, apparently paying no attention to me, and yet watching my movements closely. There was little to be done, but I thought it best to keep the watch reasonably busy, so they might thus learn that I knew my work. They proved prompt and capable enough, although I was eyed with some curiosity when I first went forward, and, no doubt, was very thoroughly discussed behind my back. The idlers amidships were a totally different class—a mongrel scum, profanely chatting in Spanish or swaggering about the deck, their very looks a challenge. However, they kept out of my way, and I found no occasion to interfere with their diversions. After Estada left the deck the majority amused themselves gambling, and as I had received no orders to interfere I permitted the games to proceed. Mendez interfered only once on occasion of a brief fight. My only instructions from the Portuguese on his going below was to call him at once if a sail was sighted. Apparently he was satisfied of my ability to command the deck.

No occasion to call him arose during my watch. It was still daylight, but with a purple gleam across the waters, when LeVere arrived on deck for my relief. We were talking together abaft the wheel when Estada appeared in the companionway.

"Every promise of a clear night," he said, glancing about at the horizon. "Better change the course two points, LeVere; we are lying in too close to the coast for our purpose. The table call will come very shortly, Senor Gates."

I washed up hastily in my stateroom and came out into the cabin perplexed as to what might occur within the next few moments. Yet whatever the result there was no avoiding it. My every move was one of extreme caution.

Estada and Estevan awaited me. The latter was all rigged out, and with smooth black hair oiled and plastered down upon his forehead. I never beheld a more disagreeable face, or one which so thoroughly revealed the nature of a man. As I touched his hand, at Estada's brief introduction, it was as if I fingered a snake.

"This is your chair, Gates, and you will find we live well aboard the Namur—wine, women and song—hey, Manuel! Why not, when all are at command? Steward, you told the lady what my orders were. Then bid her join us."

We stood in silence, as Gunsaules crossed the deck and inserted a key in the after stateroom door. Manuel was grinning in full enjoyment, but the expression on the face of Estada was that of grim cruelty. I felt my hands grip like iron on my chair back and my teeth clinch in restraint. God, but I would have liked to grip the fellow where he stood—all the battled-up hatred in my soul struggling for action. Yet that would only mean the death of all hope, and I turned my eyes away from him and stared with the others at the opening door.

Out into the full light of the cabin the woman came and halted barely a step in advance of the steward, her head uplifted proudly, her eyes on me. Never before had I realized her beauty, her personality, as I did then. Her posture was not that of defiance nor of surrender; she stood as a woman defending her right to respect, sustained by a wonderful courage. I caught her glance, but there was no recognition in it; not by the flicker of an eyelid did she betray surprise, and yet in some mysterious manner a flash of intelligence passed between us. It was all instantaneous—for her gaze seemed to concentrate on Estada as though she knew him as leader.

"You sent for me? For what?" she asked, her Spanish clear and well chosen.

"To join us at meal," he answered unmoved. "It is better than to remain alone."

"Better! You must have a strange opinion of me to believe I would sit with murderers and thieves."

"Harsh words, senorita," and Estada grinned grimly. "Yet I expected them. There are many trades in the world by which men are robbed. We only work at the one we like best; nor will I discuss ethics with you. However, senorita, I can say that we have seen to live in this last night."

"No lives!" in sudden, incredulous surprise. "You mean my uncle lives?"

"If you refer to Fairfax—the one in whose room the chest was hidden, I can only reply truthfully that he lives. One of our men struck him down, but it was not a death blow. If he be the reason of your disdain there is no cause. This chair is held for you."

"But why was I brought away a prisoner? To be a plaything? A sport for your pleasure?"

"That was but the orders of our chief; we await his recovery to learn his purpose."

"Sanchez! Was he your chief? A pirate?"

"A buccaneer; we prey on the enemies of Spain. It was at Captain Sanchez' orders we waited the arrival of your vessel from England. He loved you; he would no doubt have dealt with you honorably; I have reason to believe that to be his purpose now. Nothing will change his purpose. He is that kind, and he has the power. He determined that if you would not come to him by choice you should be made to by force. You are here now by his orders and will remain until you consent to his purpose—all that remains for you to decide is whether you choose to be prisoner or guest aboard."

"And if he should die?"

Estada shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"Who knows?"

Her lips tightened as though to hold back a cry while one hand pressed to the open door steadied her. There was a look in the searching eyes I did not like to see. It was a moment before she could control her voice.

"I have heard them call you Estada. Of what rank in this company are you?"

"I am Pedro Estada, formerly the first officer, now, by occasion of Captain Sanchez' wound, in full command. These are two of my officers—Senor Gates, one of your own countrymen.

"Peace or War?"

and Manuel Estevan. And now that I have answered your questions, what is it to be between us—peace or war?"

Her eyes dropped, and I could distinctly note the trembling of her slender figure. When she slowly raised her glance once more it rested on my face as though seeking approval, guidance.

"If there be only the one choice," she said quietly, "I accept peace. I cannot live locked in that room alone haunted by my thoughts and memories. If I pledge you my word, senor, am I to enjoy the freedom of this cabin and the deck?"

Estada looked at us, a shade of doubt in his eyes. I made no sign, but Manuel nodded.

"Why not?" he asked in his harsh croak of a voice. "The long and we be at sea? What harm can the girl do?"

"Perhaps none; I will take a fair chance, at least. You shall have the freedom of the cabin so long as you keep your word, while at sea in the days, we will consider that later. Do you mean what you say by [illegible] hers?"

My recollection of that meal is not of words but of faces. Estada's eyes sought, constantly the girl's face, and to my conversation evidently of interest in her personality which proved trouble. I know not whether she noticed this awakening admiration, but she certainly played her part with quick aptness. I believe that even the Portuguese realized the possibility that she was not altogether regretful for this adventure and that it was safe for him to relax some degree of vigilance. His manner became more gracious, and long before the meal ended his language had a tendency to compliment and flatter. I confessed myself with well-planned compliment. The young woman sat directly across from me, our heads overhead by all, and as I knew both have possessed some slight knowledge of fighting there not venture beyond [illegible] sentences in that tongue. When [illegible] she look her eye from me, so that nothing passed between us, either by word of mouth or glance of eye to [illegible] suspicion.

Believing my [illegible] confidence would be increased by such action, I was free to leave the table, and it being my watch below, immediately retired to my room, quietly closing the door after me, yet refraining from locking the latch entirely, and reclining a slight opening through which to listen and hear. Manuel did not linger long, making some excuse to go forward, but Estada remained for some time endeavoring to entertain the [illegible] gation made a fool of the man, yet even he finally became discouraged of making her comprehend his meaning, and lapsed into a silence which gave her an excuse to retire. This was accomplished so graciously as to leave no sting, the fellow actually accompanying her to the door of her stateroom, bowing his compliments as she disappeared within. The fool actually believed he had made a conquest and preened himself like a turkey cock.

"Gunsaules, you need not lock the senorita in her room or guard her in any way hereafter. She is permitted to come and go as she pleases aboard."

Estada entered his own stateroom, leaving the door ajar. When he came out he had exchanged his coat for a rough jacket. Thus attired for a turn on deck, he disappeared through the companion.

CHAPTER XVI.

In Dorothy's Stateroom.

I stood crouched, with eye at the crack watchful of every movement in the lighted cabin, my own decision made. I must see and talk with Dorothy. Gunsaules turned down the light and departed along the passage leading amidships. A moment later I heard the sound of dishes grinding together preparatory to being washed. No better opportunity for action was likely to occur, although the situation was not without peril. I crept along close to the side walls, lifted the latch noiselessly, and slipped quickly within. There was no light, except a glimmer of stars through a large after port, but against this faint radiance she stood vaguely revealed. Her first thought must have been Estada, for there was a startled note in her challenge.

"Who are you? Why do you come here?"

"Speak low," I cautioned. "You must know my voice."

"Geoffry Carlyle!"

"Yes, but do not use that name—all hope depends on my remaining unknown. You welcome me?"

She came straight forward through the dim star shine, a spectral figure, with both hands outstretched.

"Welcome!" her tone that of intense sincerity. "Your presence gives me all the strength I have. But for you I should throw myself through that port into the sea. But I know not how you came here—tell me, you are not one of these wretches?"

"No; you must believe that first of all, and trust me."

"I do—but—but tell me all you can."

"Is there a divan here, or anywhere we can sit down together? I can see nothing in this darkness."

"Yes; hold my hand while I guide you; we can sit here."

It was a couch of some kind against the outer wall. She did not release her grasp, seemingly gaining courage from this physical contact, and my fingers closed warmly over her own.

"Now, please," breathlessly, "how is it possible you are aboard this vessel—an officer?"

I told her the strange story, as swiftly and simply as possible, speaking scarcely above a whisper, feeling as I progressed that I related a dream rather than a series of facts. It appeared to me she could scarcely be expected to believe the truth of what I said, and yet she did, almost unquestioningly, the clasp of her fingers perceptibly tightening as I proceeded. She sat so close beside me that I could feel her breath upon my cheek.

"Why, if—if you had not told me this yourself I could hardly believe such a tale," she exclaimed. "Yet it must be true, miraculous as it seems. But what is to be the ending? Have you any plan of escape?"

"Utterly a plan. I have had no opportunity even to learn the true nature of the crew. Watkins is an honest sailor, and he has told me of others on whom I could rely. There are those aboard—but I do not know how many—who would mutiny if they had a leader and a reasonable chance of success. I must reach those and learn who they are. Influenced the voyage [illegible] broadens to the long enough to enable me to plan carefully."

"You have discussed the voyage with this man—Estada?"

"He told me what he had decided upon; not to return to those waters [illegible] after they had captured some prize and could go with good [illegible] in their pockets."

[illegible]

[illegible]ally and physically true; [illegible] color to our honored [illegible]

[illegible]pest, clearest, brightest, [illegible]rest blue.

[illegible]

[illegible] call to struggles fierce, [illegible] with others gallant red. [illegible] front, in many a fray, [illegible]at and left their comrades [illegible]ed.

[illegible]

[illegible]r dreams they see the Ar- [illegible]ne decay, [illegible]ath of Chateau Thierry's [illegible]ugable grim, [illegible]n going o'er the top, [illegible] the throb of victory come [illegible] him.

[illegible]

[illegible]ht of life has taken new [illegible]uff, [illegible]er, purer chaster white; [illegible]hat now the only way to [illegible]

[illegible], brother, charitable and [illegible]ood.

[illegible]

"We cannot permit him to feel that either of us [illegible]. He is the power aboard; our lives, everything else in his hands. If he seems to be out of Sanchez, the man is [illegible] for he will find a way to accomplish his purpose; murder means nothing to these men."

"Of course you are right," she acquiesced, "for [illegible] desperate we must resort to any weapons. You believe it will [illegible] the possibility of escape if I permit this monster to imagine that I have some interest in him?"

"To do so might delay the explosion," I replied gravely, "and just now any delay is welcome. I doubt if even Estada will resort to force on board; indeed force will be the very last card he will care to play in your case. You are English and all the practical persons on board are from northern Europe—English and Scandinavian. These men are not pirates from choice—they are prisoners who have taken on to save their own lives. With his [illegible] and confidences assailed he can compel them to work. But he dare not go too far. Once these fellows [illegible] in mutiny they could take the ship. An account on you would be disastrous."

"It is those men you count on?"

"Yes; but for me to gain their confidence and leadership will require time. The slightest slip would mean failure and merciless punishment. At best the situation is absolutely desperate—but I see no other solution."

"And my service is deceit—the actor of a part to blind the eyes of Estada?"

"I sincerely believe your greater chance of security lies in this course. The fellow is a supreme egotist; opposition will anger him, while flattery will make him subservient. You have the will and discretion to hold him within certain limits. It is a danger-

She Lifted Her Eyes.

ous game, I admit, and a disagreeable one, but the case requires desperate remedies."

She lifted her eyes, searching my face through the dim light.

"Geoffry Carlyle," she said at last, a tremor in the low voice, "there is no compact I would not make to preserve my honor. I hate this man; I dread his touch; I shrink from contact with him as I would from a snake, but I am not going to refuse to do my part. If you say this is right and [illegible] I will consent."

"I believe it is."

"And you will not lose faith in me?" she questioned earnestly. "It will not lower your belief in my womanhood?"

"Nothing could do that, Mistress Dorothy. I want you to realize the depth of my interest and respect. Your friendliness has grown dearer to me, and I would never urge you to lower your ideals. But we must face the situation as it is. We possess but two weapons of defense—deceit or force. A resort to the latter is at present impossible. I cannot conceive that you are [illegible] justified in any way by using the power you possess to escape [illegible]—"

"The power I possess?"

"Yes—beauty and wit. Those are new weapons, and most effective ones. You can play with Estada and defeat him—temporarily, at least. I confess there is danger in such a game—for in a wild heart, and his evil nature may overmaster his discretion. Take this pistol. Keep it hidden about your person, but use it only when all else fails. [illegible] feed and banish that dull and stupid feeling.—Adv.

(Continued Next Sunday)

If I Were a Farmer

If I were a farmer I would keep at hand a few reliable medicines for minor ailments that are not so serious as to require the attention of a physician, such as Chamberlain's Colic and Diarrhoea Remedy for bowel complaints.

Chamberlain's Cough Remedy for coughs, colds and croup.

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Chamberlain's Tablets for stomach troubles, biliousness and constipation.

By having these articles at hand it would often save the trouble of a trip to town in the busiest season or in the night, and would enable me to treat slight ailments as soon as they appear, and thereby avoid the more serious diseases that so often follow. —Adv.

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