

WOLVES of the SEA

By
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PARRISH

CHAPTER XX.
The Deck Is Ours.

I had the next step carefully outlined in my own mind, and yet I hesitated a moment, glancing into the two faces before me, with a sudden realization of what the contemplated action would mean to all of us, if by any chance it should fail of success. I managed to speak cheerfully, putting a ring of confidence into my voice.

"Then the sooner we act the better. Watkins, have LeVere order these men aft. Let him say that Senor Estada wishes them to break out some stores in the lazaret. They need be here only long enough for us to distribute these arms among them, and for me to speak a word of instruction to them."

"But have I no part? Is there no way in which I can help?" asked the girl.

"You have your pistol? Then remain here. I shall have to go on deck with the men, and will not dare leave them a moment until the ship is absolutely secure. Manuel is locked in that stateroom, but must not be communicated with by anyone. It will be your part to see that Gussauls neither enters that passage leading amidships, nor approaches this door. Keep him in sight. You will save us a man. Wait here now until I see how securely this passage forward is closed."

It was as described to me—a heavy oak door, well studded, not only locked, but held firmly in place by a stout iron bar. There was not the faintest possibility of any entrance aft, except through assistance from this side. As I returned to the cabin, Gussauls came out of the captain's room and crossed the deck. At sight of me he stopped instantly.

"Gussauls," I said, "you are to remain in this cabin until I give the word. The lady here has a pistol, and orders to shoot if you attempt to either enter this passage, or approach the door of Manuel's stateroom. How did you find Sanchez?"

"Sitting up in his bunk, senor, and able to eat."

"Does he know what is occurring on board?"

"No, senor. He questioned me, but I only told him everything was all right, so far."

In my heart I believed the fellow deliberately lied, but there was no opportunity to question him further, for at that moment the door of the companion opened and a miscellaneous group of men thronged down the stairs. They were a rough English contingent meeting my gaze, but the faces were largely foreign, with those of two negroes conspicuous.

"Twelve here, sir; I couldn't get Harwood down from the foretop," said Watkins.

"And there are others below who will join us?"

"Yes, sir; six more I count on."

"Which means, lads, that with Harwood, Senor LeVere, and myself, we'll total twenty-one in this ship. Now I'll tell you what is up. Watkins gave you some of it no doubt, but a word from me will make it clearer. I'm no pirate; I'm an English sailor, shanghaied. Estada named me first officer because I understand navigation."

I stopped speaking, staring at one of the faces before me; all at once it appeared familiar. "What is your name, my man?"

"Jim Carter, sir."

"You were on the Sinbad, three years ago?"

"I was that, Mister Carlyle," he answered grinning. "I know'd you the minute I cum down yere."

"Then that is all I need say on that line. Here's one of your mates, lads, who will vouch for me. Now, as I've been told, you are all of you in the same boat—you are prisoners on board. Luck has given us a chance to make a break, and get away. Captain Sanchez is wounded and helpless. Pedro Estada is dead, and I've got Manuel locked in that stateroom. His cut-throats are all below, and now all we've got to do is clap on the hatch and keep them there. Now, what I want to know is are you fellows with me?"

Watkins answered up promptly; then Carter; the others joining in with less heartiness, the different accents revealing their nationalities. I knew Sanchez well enough to feel assured they would follow their leaders once the game started.

"That's good enough; now we've got to hit hard and quick, lads. There are six men on deck who are not with us. Watkins will take care of them with those fellows I don't assign to other work. Jones, you and Carter make straight for the forecabin and don't let anyone come up the scuttle. One of you had better drop down below, and prevent any of those lads from unbarring the door leading amidships. Who is the best for that job?"

"All right—Carter it is then. You Frenchmen, and the two negroes, your part will be to ship the main hatch. Do a quick job, and clamp it down tight."

"I'll come down to you, Carlson, as soon as we have the deck. It ought not to take more than five minutes to handle those lads, and siew around a carromide. Watkins, you and Carter hand out the cutlasses from the rack; you boys will handle those better than I do. Good; now are you all ready?"

There was a low murmur of voices, the faces watching me showing their increasing excitement and eagerness. Our little talk had served to arouse their confidence in my leadership, and with gleaming weapons in their hands they became self-reliant volunteers. Once turned loose my greatest difficulty might be to restrain them, rather than urge them on. Revenge for past wrongs was in each heart, and they welcomed a chance to strike.

I whispered a parting word of admonition into the ear of Dorothy, receiving in return a glance from her eyes, which gave a new throbbing to my heart; then straightened up, and pistol in hand, pushed my way through the throng of sailors to the foot of the stairs.

"Follow me, lads," I said quietly.

We emerged through the companion, and I stepped aside as the others rushed by. There was no shout, no cheer, the fellows seeming to realize the desperate nature of their work, and the importance of surprise. They were outnumbered five to one, and their only hope of success lay in rendering their opponents helpless before they could rally to a defense. All the pent-up hate of years was in their hearts, blazed madly in their eyes; they were tigers leaping at the throat of their prey, yet sane enough to com-

prehend even in their blood-rage that they must act together. It was over so quickly I scarcely saw it all. My eyes swept from group to group—the four totting at the cover of the main hatch; the fellows racing toward the forecabin; and Watkins' squad driving straight into the grouped watch beyond the foremast. It was snarling done; Watkins had taken no cutlass, but went in with both fists, asking no questions, but battering right and left,



Battering Right and Left.

his men surging after, with steel blades flaming in the sunlight. The astounded watch, cursing and fighting grimly, held for a moment, and then went staggering back against the port rail, unable to stem the rush, and roaring for mercy. I had view of Carlson dropping recklessly down the forecabin scuttle, and then springing forward myself to give a hand to the four wrestling with the main hatch. Together we dragged it into position, forcing relentlessly back as we did so, a dozen struggling figures frantically endeavoring to reach the deck. Shots were fired, the bullets whistling through the opening, the flare lighting up the black depths below, revealing vaguely a mass of frantic men staring up, and cursing us fiercely in a dozen languages; but, in spite of them, we clamped the hatch down tight, and locked it securely into place with an iron bar.

Watkins needed no help; he had his party rounded up. To my orders they were driven into the cook's galley and a guard stationed at the door. Then I turned to the more serious work confronting me in the forecabin. We must have men enough to sail the bark, and if I was to command them, I must first of all prove my courage and enforce authority. The whole success of our effort depended on this.

"What's going on below?" I asked.

"Curst!" mostly, answered Carter, peering down through a slight upturning of the scuttle. "They don't just know what's happening yet, but the big nigger seems ter be raisin' hell. Carlson is a holdin' him back with his cutlasses."

"Open up and let me down."

I fell, rather than clambered along the rungs of the ladder, coming to my feet on deck in the midst of a group of angry men. The light was so poor I could scarcely see their faces; a babel of voices greeted me, and more than one hand gripped me fiercely as the excited group yelled a demand to know what in hell we were up to. I roughly cleared a space, aided by Carlson's cutlass, and fronted them. Towering above them all, his black apron-like face, distorted with rage, I dis-

tinguished the giant Cochose, his immense hands grasping a wooden bar ripped from a bunk. Plainly enough he was the leader. If I was to rule, this black brute must be conquered at the very start, conquered by my own hands, and in the presence of his mates.

"Stand back there lads," I said sternly. "I'll explain all that has happened presently, but first I am going to lick that black within an inch of his life. Step out of there, Cochose."

He came grinning widely, balancing the heavy club.

"You mean me, sah? You all think yer kin lick me?"

"Yes, I think so; I'll try it anyway. Here Carlson, take this pistol and sheath knife. If anyone interferes shoot him. All I ask is fair play. Drop that club, Cochose, and throw away your knife. You and I will fight this out with bare hands."

His dull brain worked slowly, and he stared at me, his eyes ugly. His silence and lack of response, awake a growl from the impatient circle of men behind. One fellow kicked the club out of his hand contemptuously, and another plucked the knife from his belt.

"You big skulker," the latter said, with an oath of derision, "go on, and fight!"

"What for Ah fight this white man? Ah don't even know who he is."

"Then I'll tell you. Estada is dead; Manuel is a prisoner. I'm in command of this bark. You are a big, boasting cur! I heard what you said when I came down, and now I'll make you prove it."

I took two steps forward, my advance so swift and unexpected the big negro had not even time to throw up an arm in defense. With open hand I struck him squarely across the face.

CHAPTER XXI. In Full Possession.

A roar of delight went up. I knew sailors and felt they would welcome a fight like this and their immediate sympathy would be with me for starting it. More than that, this black bully, ruling over them by brute force, could be no favorite. They might fear him, but with that fear would be mingled hate, and a delight in his downfall.

In that instant, although I cannot recall removing watchful eyes from the negro's face, I received an impression of my surroundings never to be erased from memory—the gloomy interior, the deck, foul, littered with sea boots, and discarded clothing, and the great beams overhead blackened by smoke. The rays of the swinging slush lanterns barely illuminated the central space, the rows of bunks beyond remaining mere shadows, yet this dim, yellowish light, fell full upon the excited half circle of men who were roaring about the negro. They were a rough, wild lot, ranging in color from the intense black of Central Africa to the blond of Scandinavia, half naked some, their voices mingling in a dozen tongues, their eyes gleaming with savagery.

I know not whether Cochose lunged forward of his own volition, or was pressed on from behind, yet suddenly he was within reach of me, and the battle was on, his object evidently being to crush me in his giant grip, mine to oppose science to strength, and avoid his bearing. We swayed back and forth to the sharp pitching of the ship. Then he spring straight at me determined to smash me to the deck by the very power of his onslaught. But I side-stepped him, getting in two swift blows, which rocked his head, and tore open one cheek, from which blood trickled. Yet he kept his feet, blindly gripping for me.

I evaded his clutch by leaping aside, but the space was far too small to permit these tactics to carry long, and finally he had me. Yet, even as he

seemingly crushed the very breath out of me, his giant strength met with a resistance which increased his fury. Already the fellow had lost his head, but I fought coolly, putting my skill against brute force, every wrestler's trick I knew flashing into my brain. Breathlessly, my flesh scraped and bruised, I wriggled partly free, and tripped him, his great body striking the deck with a thud. I felt with him, dragged down by his desperate grip, but was first upon my feet, saluted by a roar of delight from the lips of those crowding about us. As he staggered up also, I struck him again, a blow which would have ended the game, had not my foot slipped on the reeling deck. As it was it drove him to his knees, groggy, and with one eye half closed, yet with strength enough left to regain his feet as soon as I. This time he charged me like a wild bull, froth whitening his lips, scarcely appearing human in the yellow light. In mad rage he forgot all caution, his one thought to reach me with his hands, and throttle me into lifeless pulp. I fought him back, driving blow on blow through his guard, side-stepping his mad rushes, landing again and again on his body. Twice I got in over his heart, and at last, found the chance I sought, and sent a right jab straight to the chin. All the force of one hundred and eighty pounds was behind the clenched fist, and the negro went down as though felled by a poleax. Once weakly he endeavored to rise, but this time I used my left, and he never stirred again, lying there with no sign of life except the quivering of the huge body. Assured that he was down and out, I stood above him, gazing into the ring of excited faces.

"That's one attended to," I said shortly. "Now is there any more of you who would like to fight this out?"

There was no answer although the ring widened under the threat of my eyes, and I met sullen faces here and there. I was in no mood to take chances.

"Carlson," I said, "you know all these men. Pick out those you can trust, and have them stand over there to the right. Call them out by name; be lively now."

They stepped forth eagerly enough, and ranged themselves before the bunks, the faces mostly those of northern Europe, although a negro or two was among them. As the Swede ceased calling, six or seven yet remained clustered in front of me, a motley lot, one of them an Indian, the others mostly half-breeds. I glanced from face to face inquiringly.

"How about it, you?" I asked. "Are there any more of you fellows who take a chance with us? This is my last offer."

"What's the game?" asked a sullen voice in English, and a bearded fellow, burned black, pushed his way to the front. "I used ter be Scotch; now I don't know what I am. One flag is as good as another ter me—only I want to know what sorter game I'm playin' in. Who are yer? An' whar'd yer cum from?"

"I am an English seaman," I answered shortly, "and how I came aboard makes no difference. Right now I am the only navigator on the Namur. Estada is dead—knifed last night by one of the buccaneers, Manuel Estevan had a hand in the business, and he's safely locked in a stateroom aft. Captain Sanchez is wounded and helpless, and those cut-throats amidships are battered down below hatches. LeVere and I are the officers left, and we control the deck."

"Yer mean those fellers were almighty take the ship?"

"Exactly that; now where are you lads? With Manuel and his bunch of pirates? Or with us?"

"What er yer going ter do with us, an' this ship? That's the fust question."

I had not decided that even in my own mind, but the answer came promptly enough.

"I am going to leave that to the crew. As soon as we have all secure, I'll have every man on deck, and then we'll talk it over. That's fair enough isn't it?"

"It looks fair. Come on, mates; I'm fer the Englishman."

Only one followed him, however, a sheep-faced boy; the others remained sullen and defiant. I had no further time to waste in explanations. I glanced up at Carter's face framed in the scuttle hole.

"Carter, pass these men up and take them forward with the others. Turn them over to Watkins. Then come back here, and report to me."

They went up the ladder one by one, and disappeared onto the deck above. Carlson and I watched the others until Carter stuck his head once again through the opening.

"All safe, sir—they was like lambs."

"Very well; stand by to help. Now you lads, lift this black and shove him up to where they can get hold above."

They hoisted the unconscious form up the ladder and forced it through the hole onto the deck. At my stern command they crawled forth into the sunlight. There they picked up Cochose and carried him aft.

I went to the main hatch, and had the cover slipped to one side, the armed sailors gathering close about the edge, as I peered down. It was a scene of pandemonium, revealed in the yellow flame of slush lanterns, a group of white faces showing clearly, as the prisoners below struggled forward, gesticulating and shouting. Ignoring their mad roaring, and the threat of leveled guns, I stared down at the infuriated faces, until the clamor ceased sufficiently to let my voice be heard.

"What are you men trying to do, frighten me? You might as well stop that. This opening is lined with guns, and if one of you fire a shot we'll pour lead into you. More than that; if you attempt to climb out there is a brass carromide trained on the hatch. So listen! We are in control of the ship (Continued on Page 2)

"BRAVER MEN NEVER WENT TO SEA."

"Don't forget the men of the merchant marine," said Admiral Sims on his way up the bay, "who stood by us at all times and did their duty in every respect. If they had not done so the work of our army and navy would stand but for little."

High praise from a big source generously spoken! None knows better than Admiral Sims the spirit of the men of the merchant marine and what their services counted for in winning the war. It is fitting that, as commander of the American naval forces operating in European waters, he should testify to the admiration in which he holds them and claim for them their full share of honor and glory.

With the fighting ships of the navy the U-boats for their own good wanted no traffic. The quarry they lay in wait for throughout the war zone was the great fleet of ships bearing food and munitions to the allies and the Americans overseas. During their campaign of ruthlessness the German submarines spared none they could overtake. In the face of this constant peril the crews of the merchant ships stuck fearlessly to their task and month after month ferried across the Atlantic their cargoes.

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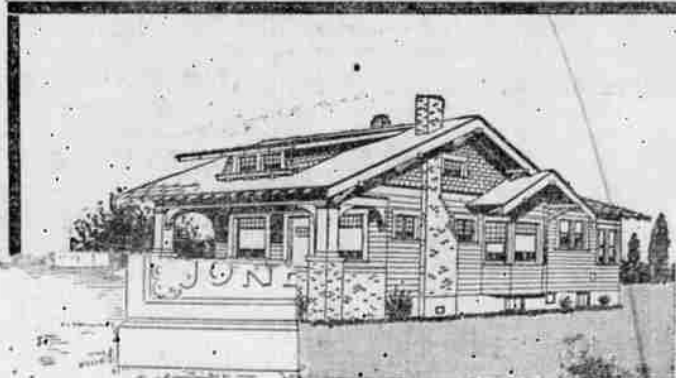
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