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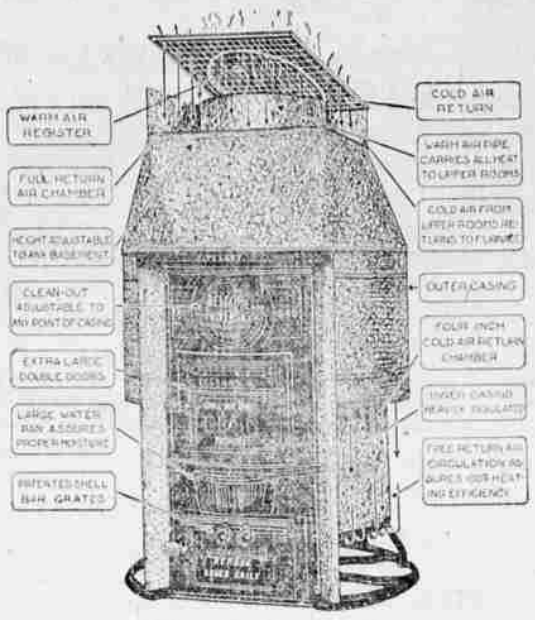

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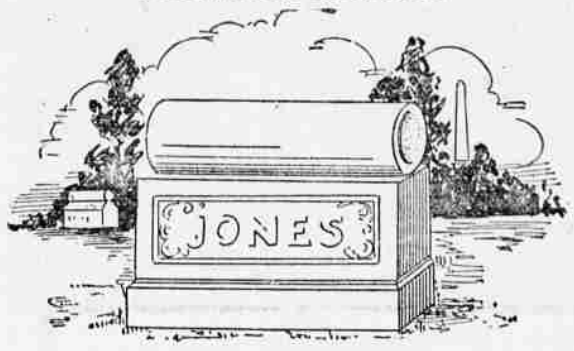

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WOLVES of the SEA

By RANDALL PARRISH

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(Continued from Last Sunday)

CHAPTER XXV.

The Open Boat.

I came back to a consciousness of pain, unable at once to realize where I was, or feel any true sense of personality. Then slowly I comprehended that I rested in a boat, tossed about by a fairly heavy sea; that it was night and there were stars visible in the sky overhead. I stared at these, vacant of thought, when a figure seemed to lean over me, and I caught the outline of a face, gazing eagerly down into my own. Instantly memory came back in a flash—this was not

This Was Not Death—but Life.

death, but life; I was in a boat with her. I could not move my hands, and my voice was but a hoarse whisper.

"Mistress Fairfax—Dorothy!"

"Yes—yes," swiftly. "It is all right, but you must lie still. Watkins, Captain Carlyle is conscious. What shall I do?"

He must have been behind us at the steering oar, for his gruff, kindly voice sounded very close.

"Yer might lift him up, miss," he said soberly. "He'll breathe better. How's that, Captain?"

"Much easier," I managed to breathe. "I guess I am all right now. You fished me out?"

"Sam did. He got a boat hook in your collar. We cast off when yer went overboard, and cruised about in the fog hunting for yer. Who was it yer was fightin' with, sir?"

"LeVere."

"That's what I told the lads. He's a gonner, I reckon?"

"I never saw him after we sank. Are all the men here?"

"All but those in the forward boat, sir. They got away furst, an' we ain't had no sight ov 'em since. Maybe we will when it gets daylight. Harwood's in charge. I give him a compass, an' told him ter steer west. Was thet right?"

"All I could have told him. I haven't had an observation, and it is all guesswork. I know the American coast lies to that direction, but that is about all. I couldn't tell if it be a hundred, or a hundred and fifty miles away. I must have been in bad shape when you pulled me in?"

"We thought you was gone, sir. You was bleedin' some, too, but only from flesh wounds. The young lady she just wouldn't let yer die. She worked over yer for two or three hours, sir, afore I hed any hope."

Her eyes were downcast and her face turned away, but I reached out my hand and clasped her fingers. The mystery of the night and ocean was in her motionless posture. Only as her hand gently pressed mine did I gain courage, with a knowledge that she recognized and welcomed my presence.

"Watkins says I owe my life to you," I said, so low the words were scarcely audible above the dash of water alongside. "It will make that life more valuable than ever before."

She turned her head, and I felt her eyes searching the dim outline of my face questioningly.

"Of course I did everything I knew," she replied. "Why should I not? You are here, Captain Carlyle, for my sake; I owe you service."

"And must I be content merely with that thought?" I urged, far from pleased. "This would mean that your only interest in me arises from gratitude."

"And friendship," her voice as confidential as my own. "There is no reason why you should doubt that surely."

"It would be easier for me to understand, but for the memory of what I am—a bond slave."

"Your meaning is that true friendship has as a basis equality?"

"Does it not? Can real friendship exist otherwise?"

"No," she acknowledged gravely. "And the fact that such friendship does exist between us evidences my faith in you. I have never felt this social distinction, Captain Carlyle, have given it no thought. This may seem strange to you, yet is most natural. You bear an honorable name, and belong to a family of gentlemen. You held a position of command, won by your own efforts. You bore the part of a man in a revolution; if guilty of any crime, it was a political one, in no way sullying your honor. I have every reason to believe you were falsely accused and convicted. Consequently that conviction does not exist between us; you are not my uncle's servant, but my friend—you understand me now?"

"And you would actually have me speak with you as of your own class—a free man, worthy to claim your friendship in life?"

"Yes," frankly, her face uplifted. "Why should it be otherwise? No man could have done more, or proved himself more stanch and true. We are in danger yet, but such peril is nothing compared with what I have escaped. I feel that your skill and courage will bring us safely to land. I am no longer afraid, for I have learned to trust you. You possess my entire confidence."

"But do you understand fully?" I questioned anxiously. "All I have done for you would have been done for any other woman under the same conditions of danger. Such service to another would have been a duty, and no more. But to be with you, aiding and protecting, has been a delight, a joy. I have served Dorothy Fairfax for her own sake—not as I would any other."

"Did you not suppose I knew?"

Her glance flashed into mine through the star-gleam, with a sudden message of revealment.

"You knew—that—that it was you personally I served?"

"Of course I knew. A woman is never unaware of such things. Now, if ever, I must tell you the truth. I know you care for me, and have cared since first we met. An interest no less fateful has led me to seek your acquaintance, and give you my aid. Surely it is not unmaidenly for me to confess this when we face the chance of death together?"

"But," I stammered, "I can scarcely believe you realize your words. I—I love you Dorothy."

"And is it not also possible for me to love?"

"You—you mean, you love me?"

"I love you—are you sorry?"

"Sorry! I am mad with the joy of it; yet stricken dumb. Dorothy Fairfax, I have never even dared dream of such a message from your lips. Dear, dear girl, do you forget who I am? What my future?"

"I forget nothing," she said, proudly. "It is because I know what you are that my heart responds. Nor is your future so clouded. You are today a free man. If we escape these perils, for whether Roger Dalgax be alive, or dead, he will never dare you again to hold to service. If alive, he will join his efforts with mine to obtain a pardon because of these services, and we have influence in Eng-

(Continued on page 8)

land. Yet, should such effort fail, you are a sailor, and the seas of the world are free. It is not necessary that your vessel fly the English flag."

"You give me hope—a wonderful hope."

"And courage," her hands firmly clasping mine. "Courage to fight on in faith. I would have that my gift to you, Geoffry. We are in peril still, great peril, but you will face it beside me, knowing that whether we live or die we are together. I am not afraid any more."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A Floating Coffin.

The laboring boat rested so low in the water it was only as we were thrown upward on the crest of a wave that I could gain any view about through the pallid light of the dawn. It was all a desolate, restless waste in the midst of which we tossed, while above hung masses of dark clouds obscuring the sky. We were but a hurtling speck between the gray above and the gray below.

The first thing needing my attention was the food and water. I crept forward cautiously and soon had Sam busily engaged in passing out the various articles for inspection. Only essentials had been chosen, yet the supply seemed ample for the distance I believed we would have to cover before attaining land. But the nature of that unknown coast was so doubtful I determined to deal out the provisions sparingly, saving every crumb possible. The men grumbled at the smallness of the ration, yet munched away contentedly enough, once convinced that we all shared alike.

"All right, lads," I said cheerfully. "Now we understand each other and can get at work. We'll divide into watches first of all—two men aft here and one at the bow. Watkins and I will take it watch and watch, but there is enough right now for all hands to turn to and make the craft shipshape. Two of you bail out that water till she's dry, and the others get out that extra sail forward and rig up a jib. She'll ride easier and make better progress with more canvas showing."

The men gradually knocked off work and lay down, and finally I yielded to Dorothy's pleadings and fell into a sound sleep. It seemed as though I scarcely lost consciousness, yet I must have slept for an hour or more, my head pillowed on her lap. When I awoke Schmitt was again at the steering paddle, and both he and Dorothy were staring across me out over the port quarter.

"What is it?" I asked eagerly, but before the words were entirely uttered a hoarse voice forward bawled out excitedly:

"There you see it; straight out agin that cloud edge. It's a full-rigged schooner."

"Ay," boomed another, "an' headin' straight cross our course astern."

I reached my feet, clinging to the mast to keep erect and, as the boat was again flung upward, gained clearly the glimpse I sought.

"Ay, you're right, lads!" I exclaimed. "It's a schooner, headed to clear us by a hundred fathoms. Port your helm, Schmitt—hard down, man. Now, Sam, off with that red shirt; tie it on the boat hook and let fly. They can't help seeing us if there is any watch on deck."

We swept about in a wide circle, headed straight across the bows of the

We Swept By in a Large Circle.

on-coming vessel. All eyes stared out watchfully, Sam's shirt flapping above us, and both Watkins and Schmitt straining their muscles to hold the plunging quarter-boat against the force of the wind. A man forward on his knees growled out a curse.

"What's the matter aboard there?" he yelled. "Did yer ever see a boat yaw like that, afore? Damn me, if I believe they got a hand at the wheel."

The same thought had leaped into my mind. The schooner was headed to pass us on the port quarter, yet yawing so crazily at times as to make me fearful of being run down. I could perceive no sign of life aboard, no signal that we had been seen. The sight angered me.

"Stand by, all hands," I cried desperately. "We'll board whether they want us or not. Slip across, Miss Fairfax, out of the way. Now, Watkins, run us in under those fore-chains; easy man, don't let her strike us. Lay hold quick, lads, and hank on for your lives. Give me that end of rope—ready, hog, all of you; I'll make the leap. Now then—hold hard!"

It was five feet, and up my purchase the tossing boat, but I made it, one hand desperately gripping a stanchion, until I gained balance and was

(Continued on page 8)

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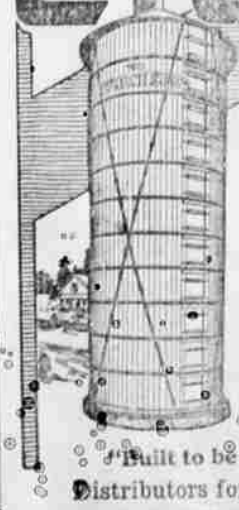

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