The INDIAN DRUM

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SYNOPSIS

CHAPTTR I.—Wealthy and highly placed in the Chicago business world, Benjamin Corvet is something of a recluse and a mystery to his associates. After a stormy interview with his partner, Henry Spearman, Corvet seeks Constance Sherrill, daughter of his other business partner, Lawrence Sherrill, and secures from her a promise not to marry Spearman. He then disappears. Sherrill learns Corvet has written to a certain Alan Conrad, in Blue Rapids, Kan., and exhibited strange agitation over the matter.

CHAPTER II.—Corvet's letter summons Conrad, a youth of unknown parentage, to Chicago.

CHAPTER III.—From a statement of Sherrill it seems probable Conrad is Corvet's illegitimate son. Corvet has deeded his house and its contents to Alan.

CHAPTER IV.—Alan takes possession of his new home.

CHAPTER V.—That night Alan discovers a man ransacking the desks and bureau drawers in Corvet's apartments. The appearance of Alan tremendously agitates the intruder, who appears to think him a ghost and raves of "the Miwaka." After a struggle the man escapes.

CHAPTER VI.—Next day Alan learns from Sherrill that Corvet has deeded his entire property to him. Introduced to Spearman, Alan is astounded at the discovery that he is the man whom he had found in his house the night before.

CHAPTER VII.—Alan tells no one of his strange encounter, but in a private interview taxes Spearman with the fact. Spearman laughs at and defies him.

CHAPTER VIII.—Corvet's Indian servant, Wassaquam, tells Alan he believes his employer is dead. He also tells him the legend of the Indian drum, which according to old superstition beats once for every life lost on the Great Lakes. Twenty years before, the great freighter Miwaka had gone down with 25 on board, but the Drum had sounded for only 24, leaving the inference that one person had been saved, since it was general belief that the drum never erred. Pursuing a stranger who had made a disturbance at his house, Alan is slugged and rendered unconscious.

CHAPTER IX.—Conrad recovers, and the affair remains a mystery.

CHAPTER XI.—From the document Alan thinks he may have a clew to the mystery surrounding Corvet's life and disappearance. He leaves Chicago to visit Lake Michigan ports in search of the persons whose names were on the list.

CHAPTER X.—Alan learns from Wassaquam that it was Corvet's habit to keep the sum of $100 in the house, apparently to meet the demands of a certain "Luke," who appeared periodically. In the absence of Wassaquam, "Luke" comes to the house demanding to see Corvet. He is evidently in a dying condition, due to alcohol and exposure. Conrad tries without avail to get him to explain his connection with Corvet. The man dies. Wassaquiam gives Conrad a paper on which is a list of names.

CHAPTER XII. — Constance receives a package wrapped in a muffler which she recognizes Corvet was wearing on the day he went away. It contains a few coins, a watch, and woman's wedding ring. She believes them to have been the property of Corvet, and accepts them as a proof of his death. Spearman urges Constance to marry him. She consents, but refuses his demand for an immediate ceremony.

CHAPTER XIII.—Inquiries show that the watch in the package had been the property of a Captain Stafford, commander of the Miwaka, who had gone down with his ship.

CHAPTER XIV.—Working on a lake freighter, Alan becomes acquainted with an elderly man known as "Jim Burr," who seems to be possessed of information which Alan believes would only be known to Corvet.

CHAPTER XV.—Alan secures a position on the freighter of which "Burr" is wheelsman. He is satisfied he has found the man he believes to be his father. "Burr," at the wheel of the freighter, apparently in dementia, refuses to obey orders to change the vessel's course, and the ship collides with a derelict. In almost sinking condition they atempt to reach port. The loaded freight cars which the vessel is carrying break loose.

(Continued from last week.)

Alan faced the wind with mackinaw buttoned about his throat; to make certain his hearing, his ears were unprotected. They numbed frequently, and he drew a hand out of the glove to rub them. The windows to protect the wheelsman had been dropped, as the snow had gathered on the glass; and at intervals, as he glanced back, he could see old Burr's face as he switched on a dim light to look at the compass. The strange placidity which usually characterized the old man's face had not returned to it since Alan had spoken with him on the dock; its look was intent and queerly drawn. Was old Burr beginning to remember that he was Benjamin Corvet? Alan did not believe it could be that; again and again he had spoken Corvet's name to him without effect. Yet there must have been times when, if he was actually Corvet, he had remembered who he was. He must have remembered that when he had written directions to some one to send those things to Constance Sherrill; or, a strange thought had come to Alan, had he written those instructions himself? This certainly would account for the package having been mailed at Manitowoc and for Alan's failure to find out by whom it had been mailed. It would account, too, for the unknown handwriting upon the wrapper, if some one on the ferry had addressed the package for the old man.

What could have brought back that moment of recollection to Corvet, Alan wondered; the finding of the things which he had sent? What might bring another such moment? Would his seeing the Sherrills again—or Spearman—act to restore him?

For half an hour Alan paced steadily at the bow. The storm was increasing noticeably in fierceness; the wind-driven snowflakes had changed to hard pellets which, like little bullets, cut and stung the face; and it was growing colder. From a cabin window came the blue flash of the wireless, which had been silent after notifying the shore stations of their departure. It had commenced again; this was unusual. Something still more unusual followed at once; the direction of the gale seemed slowly to shift, and with it the wash of the water; instead of the wind and the waves coming from dead ahead now, they moved to the port beam, and Number 25, still pitching with the thrust through the seas, also began to roll. This meant, of course, that the steamer had changed its course and was making almost due north. It seemed to Alan to force its engines faster; the deck vibrated more. Alan had not heard the orders for this change and could only speculate as to what it might mean.

His relief came after a few minutes more.

"Where are we heading?" Alan asked.

"Radio," the relief announced. "The H. C. Richardson calling; she's up by the Manitous."

"What sort of trouble?"

"She's not in trouble; it's another ship."

"What ship?"

"No word as to that."

Alan, not delaying to question further, went back to the cabins.

These stretched aft, behind the bridge, along the upper deck, some score on each side of the ship; they had accommodations for almost a hundred passengers; but on this crossing only a few were occupied. Alan had noticed some half-dozen men—business men, no doubt, forced to make the crossing, and one of them, a Catholic priest, returning probably to some mission in the north; he had seen no women among them. A little group of passengers were gathered now in the door of or just outside the wireless cabin, which was one of the row on the starboard side. Stewards stood with them and the cabin maid; within, and bending over the table with the radio instrument, was the operator with the second officer beside him. The violet spark was rasping, and the operator, his receivers strapped over his ears, strained to listen. He got no reply, evidently, and he struck his key again; now, as he listened, he wrote slowly on a pad.

"What is it?" Alan asked the officer.

"The Richardson heard four blasts of a steam whistle about an hour ago when she was opposite the Manitous. She answered with the whistle and turned toward the blasts. She couldn't find any ship." The officer's reply was interrupted by some of the others. "Then . . . that was a few minutes ago . . . they heard the four long again. . . . They'd tried to pick up the other ship with radio before. . . . Yes; we got that here. . . . Tried again and got no answer. . . . But they heard the blasts for half an hour. . . . They said they seemed to be almost beside the ship once. . . . But they didn't see anything. Then the blasts stopped . . . sudden, cut off short in the middle as though something happened. . . . She was blowing distress all right . . . The Richardson's searching again now. . . . Yes, she's searching for boats."

"Anyone else answered?" Alan asked.

"Shore stations on both sides."

"Do they know what ship it is?"

"No."

"What ship might be there now?"

The officer could not answer that. He had known where the Richardson must be; he knew of no other likely to be there at this season. The spray from the waves had frozen upon Alan; ice gleamed and glinted from the rail and from the deck. Alan's shoulders drew up in a spasm. The Richardson, they said, was looking for boats; how long could men live in little boats exposed to that gale and cold?

He turned back to the others about the radio cabin; the glow from within showed him faces as gray as his; it lighted a face on the opposite side of the door—a face haggard with dreadful fright. Old Burr jerked about as Alan spoke to him and moved away alone; Alan followed him and seized his arm.

"What's the matter?" Alan demanded, holding to him.

"The four blasts!" the wheelsman repeated. "They heard the four blasts!" He iterated it once more.

"Yes," Alan urged. "Why not?"

"But where no ship ought to be; so they couldn't find the ship—they couldn't find the ship!" Terror, of awful abjectness, came over the old man. He freed himself from Alan and went forward.

Alan went aft to the car deck. The roar and echoing tumult of the ice against the hull here drowned all other sounds. The thirty-two freight cars, in their four long lines, stood wedged and chained and blocked in place; they tipped and tilted, rolled and swayed like the stanchions and sides of the ship, fixed and secure. Jacks on the steel deck under the edges of the cars, kept them from rocking on their trucks. Men paced watchfully between the tracks, observing the movement of the cars. The cars creaked and groaned, as they worked a little this way and that; the men sprang with sledges and drove the blocks tight again or took an additional turn upon the jacks.

Alan saw old Burr who, on his way to the wheelhouse, had halted to listen. For several minutes the old man stood motionless; he came on again and stopped to listen.

"You hear 'em?" Burr's voice quavered in Alan's ear. "You hear 'em?"

"What?" asked Alan.

"The four blasts! You hear 'em now? The four blasts!"

Burr was straining as he listened, and Alan stood still too; no sound came to him but the noise of the storm. "No," he replied. "I don't hear anything. Do you hear them now?"

Burr stood beside him without making reply; the searchlight, which had been pointed abeam, shot its glare forward, and Alan could see Burr's face in the dancing reflection of the flare. The man had never more plainly re-

The Man Had Never More Plainly Resembled the Picture of Benjamin Corvet.

sembled the picture of Benjamin Corvet; that which had been in the picture, that strange sensation of something haunting him, was upon this man's face, a thousand times intensified; but instead of distorting the features away from all likeness to the picture, it made it grotesquely identical.

And Burr was hearing something—something distinct and terrifying; but he seemed not surprised, but rather satisfied that Alan had not heard. He nodded his head at Alan's denial, and, without reply to Alan's demand, he stood listening. Something bent him forward; he straightened; again the something came; again he straightened. Four times Alan counted the motions. Burr was hearing again the four long blasts of distress! But there was no noise but the gale. "The four blasts!" He recalled old Burr's terror outside the radio cabin. The old man was hearing blasts which were not blown!

He moved on and took the wheel. He was a good wheelsman; the vessel seemed to be steadier on her course and, somehow, to steer easier when the old man steered. His illusions of hearing could do no harm, Alan considered; they were of concern only to Burr and to him.

Alan fought to keep his thought all to his duty; they must be now very nearly at the position where the Richardson last had heard the four long blasts; searching for a ship or for boats, in that snow, was almost hopeless. With sight even along the searchlight's beam shortened to a few hundred yards, only accident could bring Number 25 up for rescue, only chance could carry the ship where the shouts—or the blasts of distress if the wreck still floated and had steam—would be heard.

They were meeting frequent and heavy floes, and Alan gave warning of these by hails to the bridge; the bridge answered and when possible the steamer avoided the floes; when it could not do that it cut through them. The wind-rowed ice beating and crushing under the bows took strange, distorted, glistening shapes. Now another such shape it or not, ran a riotous exultation. As he paced from side to side and hailed and answered hails from the bridge, and while he strained for sight and hearing through the gale-swept snow, the leaping pulse within repeated, appeared before them; where the glare dissipated to a bare glow in the swirling snow, he saw a vague shadow. The man moving the searchlight failed to see it, for he swung the beam on. The shadow was so dim, so ghostly, that Alan sought for it again before he hailed; he could see nothing now, yet he was surer, somehow, that he had seen.

"Something dead ahead, sir!" he shouted back to the bridge.

The bridge answered the hail as the searchlight pointed forward again. A gust carried the snow in a fierce flurry which the light failed to pierce; from the flurry suddenly, silently, spar by spar, a shadow emerged—the shadow of a ship. It was a steamer, Alan saw, a long, low-lying old vessel without lights and without smoke from the funnel slanting up just forward of the after deckhouse; it rolled in the trough of the sea. The sides and all the lower works gleamed in ghostly phosphorescence, it was refraction of the searchlight beam from the ice sheathing all the ship, Alan's brain told him; but the sight of that soundless, shimmering ship materializing from behind the screen of snow struck a tremor through him.

"Ship!" he hailed. "Ahead! Dead ahead, sir! Ship!"

The shout of quick commands echoed to him from the bridge. Underfoot he could feel a new tumult of the deck; the engines, instantly stopped, were being set full speed astern. But Number 25, instead of sheering off to right or left to avoid the collision, steered straight on.

The struggle of the engines against the momentum of the ferry told that others had seen the gleaming ship, or, at least, had heard the hail. The skipper's instant decision had been to put to starboard; he had bawled that to the wheelsman, "Hard over!" But, though the screws turned full astern, Number 25 steered straight on. The flurry was blowing before the bow again; back through the snow the ice-shrouded shimmer ahead retreated. Alan leaped away and up to the wheelhouse.

Men were struggling there—the skipper, a mate, and old Burr, who had held the wheel. He clung to it yet, as one in a trance, fixed, staring ahead; his arms, stiff, had been holding Number 25 to her course. The skipper struck him and beat him away, while the mate tugged at the wheel. Burr was torn from the wheel now, and he made no resistance to the skipper's blows; but the skipper, in his frenzy, struck him again and knocked him to the deck.

Slowly, steadily, Number 25 was responding to her helm. The bow pointed away, and the beam of the ferry came beside the beam of the silent steamer; they were very close now, so close that the searchlight, which had turned to keep on the other vessel, shot above its shimmering deck and lighted only the spars; and, as the water rose and fell between them, the ships sucked closer. Number 25 shook with an effort; it seemed opposing with all the power of its screws some force fatally drawing it on—opposing with the last resistance before giving way. Then, as the water fell again, the ferry seemed to slip and be drawn toward the other vessel; they mounted, side by side . . . crashed . . . recoiled . . . crashed again. That second crash threw all who had nothing to hold by, flat upon the deck; then Number 25 moved by; astern her now the silent steamer vanished in the snow.

Gongs boomed below; through the new confusion and the cries of men, orders began to become audible. Alan, scrambling to his knees, put an arm under old Burr, half raising him; the form encircled by his arm struggled up. The skipper, who had knocked Burr away from the wheel, ignored him now. The old man, dragging himself up and holding to Alan, was staring with terror at the snow screen behind which the vessel had disappeared. His lips moved.

"It was a ship!" he said; he seemed speaking more to himself than to Alan.

"Yes," Alan said. "It was a ship; and you thought—"

"It wasn't there!" the wheelsman cried. "It's—it's been there all the time all night, and I'd—I'd steered through it ten times, twenty times, every few minutes; and then—that time it was a ship!"

Alan's excitement grew greater; he seized the old man again. "You thought it was the Miwaka!" Alan exclaimed. "The Miwaka! And you tried to steer through it again."

"The Miwaka!" old Burr's lips reiterated the word. "Yes; yes—the Miwaka!"

He struggled, writhing with some agony not physical. Alan tried to hold him, but now the old man was beside himself with dismay. He broke away and started aft. The captain's voice recalled Alan to himself, as he was about to follow, and he turned back to the wheelhouse.

The second officer, who had gone below to ascertain the damage done to the ferry, came up to report. Two of the compartments, those which had taken the crush of the collision, had flooded instantly; the bulkheads were holding—only leaking a little, the officer declared. Water was coming into a third compartment, that at the stern; the pumps were fighting this water. The shock had sprung seams elsewhere; but if the after compartment did not fill, the pumps might handle the rest.

Alan was at the bow again on lookout duty, ordered to listen and to look for the little boats. He gave to that duty all his conscious attention; but through his thought, whether he willed it or not, ran a riotous exultation. As he paced from side to side and hailed and answered hails from the bridge, and while he strained for sight and hearing through the gale-swept snow, the leaping pulse within repeated, "I've found him! I've found him!" Alan held no longer possibility of doubt of old Burr's identity with Benjamin Corvet, since the old man had made plain to him that he was haunted by the Miwaka. Since that night in the house on Astor street, when Spearman shouted to Alan that name, everything having to do with the secret of Benjamin Corvet's life had led, so far as Alan could follow it, to the Miwaka; all the change, which Sherrill described but could not account for, Alan had laid to that. Corvet only could have been so haunted by that ghostly ship, and there had been guilt of some awful sort in the old man's cry. Alan had found the man who had sent him away to Kansas when he was a child, who had supported him there and then, at last, sent for him; who had disappeared at his coming and left him all his possessions and his heritage of disgrace, who had paid blackmail to Luke, and who had sent, last, Captain Stafford's watch and the ring which came with it—the wedding ring.

Alan pulled his hand from his glove and felt in his pocket for the little band of gold. What would that mean to him now; what of that was he to learn? And, as he thought of that, Constance Sherrill came more insistently before him. What was he to learn for her, for his friend and Benjamin Corvet's friend, whom he, Uncle Benny, had warned not to care for Henry Spearman, and then had gone away to leave her to marry him? For she was to marry him, Alan had read.

More serious damage than first reported! The pumps certainly must be losing their fight with the water in the port compartment aft; for the bow steadily was lifting, the stern sinking. The starboard rail too was raised, and the list had become so sharp that water washed the deck abaft the forecastle to port. And the ferry was pointed straight into the gale now; long ago she had ceased to circle and steam slowly in search for boats; she struggled with all her power against the wind and the seas, a desperate insistence throbbing in the thrusts of the engines; for Number 25 was fleeing—fleeing for the western shore. She dared not turn to the nearer eastern shore to expose that shattered stern to the seas.

Four bells beat behind Alan; it was two o'clock. Relief should have come long before; but no one came. He was numbed now; ice from the spray crackled upon his clothing when he moved, and it fell in flakes upon the deck. The stark figure on the bridge was that of the second officer; so the thing which was happening below—the thing which was sending strange, violent, wanton tremors through the ship—was serious enough to call the skipper below, to make him abandon the bridge at this time! The tremors, quite distinct from the steady tremble of the engines and the thudding of the pumps, came again. Alan, feeling them, jerked up and stamped and beat his arms to regain sensation. Some one stumbled toward him from the cabins now, a short figure in a great coat. It was a woman, he saw as she hailed him—the cabin maid.

"I'm taking your place!" she shouted to Alan. "You're wanted—every one's wanted on the car deck! The cars—" The gale and her fright stopped her voice as she struggled for speech, "The cars—the cars are loose!"

CHAPTER XVI

"He Killed Your Father."

Alan ran aft along the starboard side, catching at the rail as the deck tilted; the sounds within the hull and the tremors following each sound came to him more distinctly as he advanced. Taking the shortest way to the car deck, he turned into the cabins to reach the passengers' companionway. The noises from the car deck, no longer muffled by the cabins, clanged and resounded in terrible tumult; with the clang and rumble of metal rose shouts and roars of men.

To liberate and throw overboard heavily loaded cars from an endangered ship was so desperate an undertaking and so certain to cost life that men attempted it only in final extremities, when the ship must be lightened at any cost. Alan had never seen the effect of such an attempt, but he had heard of it as the fear which sat always on the hearts of the men who navigate the ferries—the cars loose on a rolling, lurching ship! He was going to that now. The car deck was a pitching, swaying slope; the cars nearest him were still upon their tracks, but they tilted and swayed uglily from side to side; the jacks were gone from under them; the next cars already were hurled from the rails, their wheels screaming on the steel deck, clanging and thudding together in their couplings.

Alan ran aft between them. All the crew who could be called from deck and engine room and firehold were struggling at the fantail, under the direction of the captain, to throw off the cars. The mate was working as one of the men, and with him was Benjamin Corvet. The crew already must have loosened and thrown over the stern three cars from the two tracks on the port side; for there was a space vacant; and as a car charged into that space and the men threw themselves upon it, Alan leaped with them.

It was a flat car laden with steel beams. At Corvet's command, the crew ranged themselves beside it with bars. The bow of the ferry rose to some great wave and, with a cry to the men, Corvet pulled the pin. The others thrust with their bars, and the car slid down the sloping track; and Corvet, caught by some lashing of the beams, came with it. Alan leaped upon it and, catching Corvet, freed him and flung him down to the deck, and dropped with him. A cheer rose as the car cleared the fantail, dove and disappeared.

(Continued Next Week.)

What is difficulty? Only a word indicating the degree of strength requisite for accomplishing particular objects; a mere notice of the necessary for exertion.—Samuel Warren.