

THE INDIAN DRUM

By William MacHarg and Edwin Balmer

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CHAPTER XV.—Continued.

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 wheelman; the vessel seemed to be steady 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 flocks, and Alan gave warning of these by halts to the bridge; the bridge answered and when possible the steamer avoided the flocks; when it could not do that it cut through them. The wind, rowed ice heaving and crushing under the bows took strange, distorted, glistening shapes. Now another such shape 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 halted; 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, spur by spur, 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 lolled 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 the stern astern; he had bawled that to the wheelman, "Hard over!" But, though the screws turned full astern, Number 25 steered straight on. The ferry 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 bent 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. . . . crashed again. That second crash threw all who had nothing to hold by, but 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 wheelman 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 halted 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 about 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 belts bent behind Alan; it was two o'clock. Reiter should have come long before; but no one came. He was numb now; ice from the spray cracked 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 halted 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 rattle 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 ugly 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 strug-



Corvet Already Was Back Among the Cars Again, Shouting Orders.

gling 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.

Alan clambered to his feet. Corvet already was back among the cars again, shouting orders; the mate and the men who had followed him before leaped at his yells. Corvet called to them to throw ropes and chains to bind the loads which were letting go; the heavier loads—steel beams, castings, machinery—snapped their lashings, tipped from their flat cars and thundered down the deck. The cars tipped farther, turned over; others balanced back; it was upon their wheels that they charged forward, half riding one another, crashing and demolishing, as the ferry pitched; it was upon their trucks that they tottered and battered from side to side as the deck swayed. Now the stern again descended; a line of cars swept for the fantail. Corvet's cry came to Alan through the screaming of steel and the clangor of destruction. Corvet's cry sent men with bars

beside the cars as the fantail dipped into the water; Corvet, again leading the crew, cleared the leader of those madly charging cars and ran it over the stern.

The fore trucks fell and, before the rear trucks reached the edge, the stern lifted and caught the car in the middle; it balanced, half over the water, half over the deck. Corvet crouched under the car with a crowbar; Alan and two others went with him; they worked the car on until the weight of the end over the water tipped it down; the balance broke, and the car tumbled and dived. Corvet, having cleared another hundred tons, leaped back, calling to the crew.

They followed him again, unquestioning, obedient. Alan followed close to him. It was not pity which stirred him now for Benjamin Corvet; nor was it bitterness; but it certainly was not contempt. Of all the ways in which he had fancied finding Benjamin Corvet, he had never thought of seeing him like this!

It was, probably, only for a flash; but the great quality of leadership which he had once possessed, which Sherrill had described to Alan and which had been destroyed by the threat over him, had returned to him in this desperate emergency which he had created. How much or how little of his own condition Corvet understood, Alan could not tell; it was plain only that he comprehended that he had been the cause of the catastrophe, and in his fierce will to repair it he not only disregarded all risk to himself; he also had summoned up from within him and was spending the last strength of his spirit. But he was spending it in a losing fight.

He got off two more cars; yet the deck only dipped lower, and water washed farther and farther up over the fantail. Men, leaping from before the charging cars, got caught in the murderous melee of iron and steel and wheels; men's shrill cries came amid the scream of metal. Alan, tugging at a crate which had struck down a man, felt aid beside him and, turning, he saw the priest whom he had passed on the stairs. The priest was bruised and bloody; this was not his first effort to aid. Together they lifted an end of the crate; they bent—Alan stepped back, and the priest knelt alone, his lips repeating the prayer for absolution. Screams of men came from behind; and the priest rose and turned. He saw men caught between two wrecks of cars crushing together; there was no moment to reach them; he stood and raised his arms to them, his head thrown back, his voice calling to them, as they died, the words of absolution.

Three more cars at the cost of two lives the crew cleared, while the sheathing of ice spread over the steel inboard, and dissolution of all the cargo became complete. Cut stone and motor parts, chasses and castings, furniture and beams, swept back and forth, while the cars, burst and splintered, became monstrous missiles hurtling forward, sidewise, aslant, recolling. Yet men, though scattered singly, tried to stay them by ropes and chains while the water washed higher and higher. Dimly, far away, deafened out by the clangor, the steam whistle of Number 25 was blowing the four long blasts of distress; Alan heard the sound now and then with indifferent wonder. All destruction had come for him to be contained within this car deck; here the ship loosed on itself all elements of annihilation; who could aid it from without? Alan caught the end of a chain which Corvet flung him and, though he knew it was useless, he carried it across from one stanchion to the next. Something, sweeping across the deck, caught him and carried him with it; it brought him before the coupled line of trucks which hurtled back and forth between the rails of track three had been. He was hurled before them and rolled over; something cold and heavy pinned him down; and upon him, the car trucks came.

But, before them, something warm and living—a hand and bare arm catching him quickly and pulling at him, tugged him a little farther on. Alan, looking up, saw Corvet beside him; Corvet, unable to move him farther, was crouching down there with him. Alan yelled to him to leap, to twist aside and get out of the way; but Corvet only crouched closer and put his arms over Alan; then the wreckage came upon them, driving them apart. As the movement stopped, Alan still could see Corvet dimly by the glow of the incandescent lamps

overhead; the truck separated them. It bore down upon Alan, holding him motionless and, on the other side, it crushed upon Corvet's legs.

He turned over, as far as he could, and spoke to Alan. "You have been saving me, so now I tried to save you," he said simply. "What reason did you have for doing that? Why have you been keeping by me?"

"I'm Alan Conrad of Blue Rapids, Kansas," Alan cried to him. "And you're Benjamin Corvet! You know me; you sent for me! Why did you do that?"

Corvet made no reply to this. Alan, peering at him underneath the truck, could see that his hands were pressed against his face and that his body shook. Whether this was from some new physical pain from the movement of the wreckage, Alan did not know till he lowered his hands after a moment; and now he did not heed Alan or seem even to be aware of him.

"Dear little Connie!" he said aloud. "Dear little Connie! She mustn't marry him—not him! That must be seen to. What shall I do, what shall I do?"

Alan worked nearer him. "Why mustn't she marry him?" he cried to Corvet. "Why? Ben Corvet, tell me! Tell me why?"

"Who are you?" Corvet seemed only with an effort to become conscious of Alan's presence.

"I'm Alan Conrad, whom you used to take care of. I'm from Blue Rapids. You know about me; are you my father, Ben Corvet? Are you my father or what—what are you to me?"

"Your father?" Corvet repeated. "Did he tell you that? He killed your father."

"Killed him? Killed him, how?"

"Of course. He killed them all—all. But your father—he shot him; he shot him through the head!"

Alan twinged. Eight of Spearman came before him as he had first seen Spearman, covering in Corvet's library in terror at an apparition. "The bullet hole above the eye!" So that was the hole made by the shot Spearman fired which had killed Alan's father—which shot him through the head! Alan peered at Corvet and called to him.

"Father Benitot!" Corvet called in response, not directly in reply to Alan's question, rather in response to what those questions stirred. "Father Benitot!"

Some one, drawn by the cry, was moving wreckage near them. A hand and arm with a torn sleeve showed; Alan could not see the rest of the figure, but by the sleeve he recognized that it was the mate.

"Who's caught here?" he called down.

"Benjamin Corvet of Corvet, Sherrill and Spearman, ship owners of Chicago," Corvet's voice replied deeply, fully; there was authority in it and wonder too—the wonder of a man finding himself in a situation which his recollection cannot explain.

"Ben Corvet!" the mate shouted in surprise; he cried it to the others, those who had followed Corvet and obeyed him during the hour before and had not known why. The mate tried to pull the wreckage aside and make his way to Corvet; but the old man stopped him. "The priest, Father Benitot! Send him to me. I shall never leave here; send Father Benitot!"

The word was passed without the mate moving away. The mate, after a minute, made no further attempt to free Corvet; that indeed was useless, and Corvet demanded his right of sacrament from the priest who came and crouched under the wreckage beside him.

"Father Benitot!"

"I am not Father Benitot. I am Father Perron of L'Anse."

"It was to Father Benitot of St. Ignace I should have gone, Father! . . . The priest got a little closer as Corvet spoke, and Alan heard only voices now and then through the sounds of clanging metal and the drum of ice against the hull. The mate and his helpers were working to get him free. They had abandoned all effort to save the ship; it was settling. And with the settling, the movement of the wreckage imprisoning Alan was increasing. This movement made useless the efforts of the mate; it would free Alan of itself in a moment, if it did not kill him; it would free or fling Corvet too. But he, as Alan saw him, was wholly oblivious of that now. His lips moved quietly, firmly; and his eyes were fixed steadily on the eyes of the priest.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

BIDE DUDLEY AND NICKNAMES

Bide Dudley, author of "Bollivar Brown," says that life to the small boy is just one nickname after another. "The only person who ever calls a boy by his proper name is his mother, and she seldom does it unless she is boiling mad," declares the creator of "Bollivar." "Let her catch Pug Jones stealing cookies from the jar in the pantry and he will be William Henry Harrison Jones for the moment. The full name always lends emphasis to the box on the ear that follows

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