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CHAPTER XVII.

In Which There Is Shipwreck.

I MIGHT have made some confession of my own had I liked, for I did not in the least fancy the look of things.

"We'll crawl on in," said Peterson. "The light can't be a thousand miles from here. If only there was a nigger man and a dinner bell beside the light—that's the trouble. And now—good God! There she goes!"

With a jar that shook the good boat to the core we felt the bottom come up from the depths and smite us. Our headway ceased save for a sickening, crunching crawl. The waves piled clear across our port bow as we swung. And so we hung, the gulf piling in on us in our yellow rimmed world. And at the lift and hollow of the sea we rose and pounded sullenly down in such fashion as would have broken the back of any boat less stanch than ours.

Here in an eye's flash was danger tangible and real. I heard a shriek from the cabin aft and called out for them all to keep below and keep the ports closed. Peterson had the power off in an instant and swung her head as best he could with the dying headway. But it only put her farther on the shoal.

"It's the Timbalier shoals!" he screamed.

Jean Lafitte came bounding up the companionway. "Come," said I quickly, "help me with the anchor." A moment later we sprung the capstan clutch, and I heard the brief growl of the anchor chain as the big hook ran free. Glad enough I was to think of the extra size it had. We eased her down and made fast under Peterson's orders now and so swung into the head of the sea, which mercilessly lifted us and flung us down like a monkey seeking to crack a cocoanut shell. Williams joined us now, and Willie and John, pale as Jean Lafitte, came up from the forecastle, all shouting and jabbering. I ran aft as soon as might be and only pulled up at the cabin door to summon such air of calm as I might. I rapped, but followed in, not waiting. Helena met me, pale, her eyes wide, her hair disheveled, but none the less mistress of herself.

"What is it?" she demanded. "What makes it jolt?"

"We've gone aground," said I. "She does pound a little, doesn't she?"

She looked out into the wild night, across which the voices of the confused wild fowl came like souls in torment.

"This is terrible!" said she simply. "Are we lost?"

"No," said I. "Let us hear no such talk. Go below now and keep quiet. We may pass the night here or we may conclude after a little to go on ahead a little farther. We've just dropped the anchor. The island's just over there a way." I did not care to be too specific.

I found the men trying to make soundings all about us as best they could with boat hooks and a spare spar. But it came to little.

"Peterson," said I, "you're ship's master. What are your orders?"

"Unlash the boat covers," said he. "Get even the dinghy ready. Williams, close your hatch and bear a hand to swing the big boat out to her davits. Set the bottom plugs in well. And, Mr. Harry, you and John, the Chink, had better get some stores and a case or so of bottled water aboard the long boat. Have you got the slickers and rugs ready and plenty of clothes? We'll just be ready if it happens. I don't know where that light or the channel is, but the ducks maybe know where something is. We'll run for them if we can't ride her out."

Peterson stood looking ahead, but was anxious. "She's coming up stronger," said he, "and two points on the port quarter. We're going on harder all the time. Anchor's dragging. Afraid we're going to lose her, Mr. Harry."

"Hush!" said I, nodding to the boy. "And turn on the searchlight. It seems to me I hear breakers in there."

"That's so," said the old man. "Hook on the light's battery, Williams, and let's see what we can see."

The strong beam, wavering from side to side, plowed a furry path into the fog. It disclosed at first only the succession of angry incoming waves, each as it passed thuddling us down on the bar of shell and mud and slime. But at last off to starboard and well astern in our new position, riding at anchor, we raised a faint white line of broken water which seemed a constant feature and now and then caught the low boom of the surf.

"She ain't a half mile over yonder," I heard Willy, the deck hand, say. "An' we could almost walk it if it wasn't for the sea."

"Yes, sir," said Williams, "we'd do fine in there now with them boats. When we hit the white water"—

"Shut up!" ordered Peterson. "Safe as a church here or there, you lubbers. Stand by your tackle and keep your chin. Mr. Harry, tell the ladies just to wrap up a bit because—well, maybe because"—

"Call me when it is time, Peterson," said I, and moved aft, holding Jean Lafitte by the arm.

"Gee!" said he as he dropped, wet and out of breath, into the cabin. And "Gee!" remarked a very pale L'Olonnois in return, gamely as he could. And Mrs. Danlver's moans went rhythmic with the pound of the keel on the shoal.

"What shall we do?" asked Helena at last calmly. "Auntie is very sick. I am beginning to fear for her, it is such a bad attack. This is as rough as I ever saw it on the channel."

"There is no danger," said I, "but Peterson and I just thought that if she kept on pounding in this way it might be better to go ashore."

I spoke lightly, but well enough I knew the risk of trying to launch a boat in such a sea, and what the surf might be none could say.

Silently I motioned to Willy, the deck hand, to bring me the life preservers. "Put them on," I said to Helena.

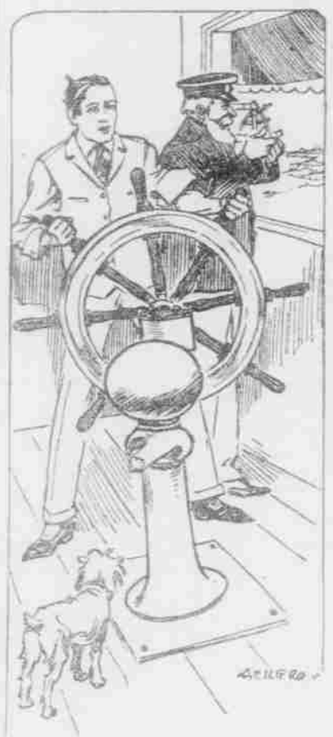
"Oh, I can't! I can't!" moaned the older woman. "I'm dying—let me alone."

"Stop this nonsense, madam," said I sternly, knowing that was the only way. "Put it on at once. You, too, Miss Emory, and you, my boys. Quick! Then throw on loose wraps—all you can. It will be cold."

In spite of all my efforts to seem calm the air of panic ran swiftly. Mrs. Danlver awoke to swift action as she tremblingly fastened the belt about her. Pushing past me, she reached the deck, and so mad was she that in all likelihood she would have sprung overboard. I caught at her, and though my clutch brought away little more than a handful of false hair it seemed to restore her reason, though it destroyed her coiffure. "Enough of this!" I cried to her. "Take your place by the boat and do as you are told." And I saw Helena pass forward, also, as we all reached the deck, herself pale as a wraith, but with no outcry and no spoken word. So at last I ranged them all near the boat that swung ready at the davits.

"We can't all get in that," said Jean Lafitte.

"No," said I, and I did not like to



"And now—good God! There she goes!"

look at the tiny dinghy which lay on the cabin top, squat and tublike, or the small ducking skiff that here on deck was half full of water from the breaking seas.

"Peterson," said I, "take charge of the big boat here. Take Williams to run her motor for you. And the ladies will go with you."

I turned to the two boys, and my heart leaped in pride for them both, for when I motioned to Jimmy to make ready for the large boat, with the ladies, he stepped back, pale as he was. "Not unless John goes, too," said he. And they stood side by side, simply and with no outcry, their young faces grave.

"He must go with us—Jimmy," broke out Helena yearningly, "and so must you."

"Shut up, Auntie," exclaimed Jimmy most irreverently. "Who's a-running this boat I'd like to know?" Which abashed his auntie very much.

"We'll take this one," said Jean Lafitte, and already was tipping the duck boat. "It'll carry us three if it has to." And I allowed him and his mate to stand by, not daring to look at its inadequate shell and again at the breaking seas.

That left the dinghy for Willy and the cook. I glanced at Willy. "Which would you rather chance," I asked him, "the dinghy or the duck boat?"

"The dinghy," said he quickly, and we both knew the corklike quality of this stubby craft.

"Very well," said I. "Call John when the word comes to go."

"Aren't you going with us?" asked Helena now, suddenly, approaching me. I took one long look into her eyes, then "Obey orders" was all I said and pointed to the larger boat. I said goodby to her then. And, in the swift intuitive justice that comes to us in moments of extremity, I passed sentence upon these young boys and myself. Though they had sinned in innocence, though I had sinned in love, it had been our folly that had brought these others into this peril, and our chance must be the least. Peterson and Williams would be a better team in the big boat than any other we could afford. I saw Peterson step toward us and divined what was in his mind. "I'm owner of this boat, my man," said I. "Go to your duty. You're needed in the big boat."

"I'm last to leave her," whispered the old man. "She's my boat and I've run her."

"Peterson," said I, taking him aside, "I'll buy us another boat, but there is no woman on earth, nor ever will be, like that one yonder. Save her. It is your first duty. I wanted that for myself, but she thinks I'm a coward, and I would be if I arranged our crews any other way than just as we are. Take your boat through. We others will do the best we can. And give the word for the boats when you're sure we can't ride it out."

Silently the old man touched his cap, and, giving me one look, he went to the bows of his boat. The Belle Helene, lashed by the storm, rolled and pulled at her cable, rose, fell thuddingly. And at last came a giant swell that almost submerged us. I caught Helena to the cabin top to keep her drier from it, and the two boys also sprang to a point of safety. Mrs. Danlver, less agile, was caught by Peterson and Williams and held to the rail, wetted thoroughly. And by some freak of the wind at that instant came fully the roar of the surf. We of the Belle Helene seemed very small.

I looked now at Peterson. He raised his little magaphone which hung at his belt and shouted loud and clear, as though we could not have heard him at this distance of ten feet. "Get ready to lower away!" Williams and the deck hand sprang to the falls. "Get the women in the boat, you, Williams," called the skipper, "and go in with them to steady her when she floats. Take his place there, Mr. Harry. Lively now!" And how we got the two women into the swinging boat I hardly knew.

The old skipper cast one eye ahead as a big wave rolled astern. "Now!" he shouted. "Lower away, there!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

In Which I Rescue the Cook.

THE boat dropped into the cup of a sea, rose level with the rail the next instant and tossed perilously. I saw the two women huddled in the bottom of her, their eyes covered; saw Williams climbing over them and easing her at the bowline. Then as we seized the next instant of the rhythm and hauled her alongside Peterson made a leap and went aboard her, and Williams scrambled back once more across the two huddled forms. I saw him wrench at the engine crank and heard the spitting chug of the little motor. They fell off in the seaway, Peterson holding her with an oar as he could till the screws caught. Then I saw her answer the helm, and they staggered off, passing out of the beam of our searchlight, so that it seemed to me I had said goodby to Helena forever.

We who remained had no davits to aid us and must launch by hand. For a moment I stood and made my plans. First I called to Willy, our deck hand, who had the dinghy now astern some fashion. "Are you ready?" I demanded. But the next moment I heard his call astern and knew that, monkey-like, he had got her over and was aboard her somehow.

"Now, boys," said I, "come here and shake hands with Black Bart." They came, their serious eyes turned up to me. And never has deeper emotion seized me than as I felt their young hands in mine. We said nothing.

"Now, bear a hand there, you Jean!" I pulled open the gate of the rail and ran out the landing stage, on which the flat bottomed skiff sat. With an oar I pushed it across at right angles as nearly as possible when she cleared. "Quick! Get in, both of you," I called. I was holding the inboard end of the plank under a wedged oar shaft, thrust below the sill of the forward cabin door. They scrambled out and in, Jean grasping the hight of the painter that I handed him and passing it over the rail.

"Now, look out," I called and dropped the landing stage to meet the swell of the next wave. They slid, tilted, righted, rose high—and held. The next moment I sprang, fell into the sea, was caught by the collar as my hand grasped the cockpit coaming, and so I slid in, somehow, over the end deck, and caught the end of the painter from John's hand and cast her free.

The drift carried us off at once, and the next wave almost hid the hull of the Belle Helene. I knew at once we were powerless and that our one hope lay in drifting ashore. There is no worse sea boat than a low, flat ducking boat, decked though she be, and of good counting, for she buts into and does not rise to a sea. But now I thanked my star one thing only was in our favor. We rolled like a log, already half full of water, but we floated because in each end of our skiff was a big empty tin air tank, put there in spite of the laughing protest of the builder, who said no room was left for decoys under the decks. Just now those tin cans were worth more than many duck decoys.

"Keep down!" I ordered. "And hold on!" The boys obeyed me. I could see their gaze bent on me as the source of their hope, their reliance. Jimmy was now free from the first violence of the seasickness, but I saw Jean's hand on his arm.

"Gee!" I heard the latter mutter as the first sea crossed under us. "Dat was a peach." I took heart myself, for we lived that one through. "Bail!" I ordered, and they took their cups to it, while I did all I could with the long punt paddle to make some sort of course. Now and then the blazing trail of the Belle Helene's searchlight swung across as we rolled, to leave us the next instant in blackness. As the seas permitted, we could see her, riding and rocking, sometimes, alight from stem to stern and making a gallant fight for her life, as were we all.

So long as the rollers came in oily and black we did well, but where the top of one broke under us we sank deep into the white foam that had no carrying power, and our cockpit filled so that we all sat in water. Only the tanks held us, logilke, and we bailed and paddled. And after they saw we did not sink, my hardy bullies, perhaps in the ignorance of youth and boy's confidence that a boy and water are friends, began to shout aloud. We wallowed on.

No sound came to us from either of the other boats, and now, very quickly, it seemed, we came at the edge of the surf.

"I'm touching bottom, boys," I called and cast the long punt pole adrift as I took up the short paddle I had held under my leg.

Now we had under us two feet of water, or ten, as the waves might say, and any moment we might roll over. But we wallowed in, rolling, till I knew the supreme moment had come. I waited, holding her head in well as I could so unruly a hulk, and as a big roller came after us paddled as hard as I could. The wave chased us, caught us, pushed us, carried us in. There was a lift of our loggish bows, a blinding crash of white water about us. Our boat was overturned, but in some way, since the beach was all sand and very gentle, the wave flattened so that the back tow did not pull us down. In some way, I do not know how, I found myself standing and dragging Jimmy by the hand. Jean already was ahead, and I heard his shout and saw his hand as he stood, knee deep, but safe. So we all made it ashore, and our boat also, which now we hauled out of the spume. And the long white row of breakers, less dangerous than I had feared, came in, white maned and bellowing.

I could still see the rocking lights of the yacht and the shifting stroke of the searchlight on the sea, but I did not hear and see aught else at the time, and my heart sank.

It was Jimmy whose ear first got the sound which came in—the feverish phut-phut of the motor skiff. Then the ray of the great light swung, and I saw the boat still outside the breakers, nor could I tell then why we had beaten her in. It seemed Peterson was hunting for us others.

"Stay back, boys!" I called to my companions. "You might get thrown down by the waves. Keep back!" But now I was ready to rush in to meet the launch, whose keel I knew would leave her to overturn if she caught bottom.

But Peterson knew about the keel as well as any, and he caught what he thought was water enough before he yelled to Williams to drive her in. She sped in like an arrow, and again the white wave reared high and broke upon its prey. By then I was in water to my waist. I caught Helena out with one reach of my arms, just as I saw Williams and Peterson stagger to with Mrs. Danlver between them. In some miraculous way we got beyond danger and met my pirates dancing and shouting a welcome to our desert isle. Their advent thereon gave the two women folks a fervent wisp to embrace, sob and weep extraordinarily. I had said nothing to Helena and said nothing now.

"Where's the dinghy, Peterson?" I called as he came on grinning.

"Coming in," said he. And, forsooth, that water rat, Willy, made a better landing of it than any of us and calmly helped us now to haul the heavy motor skiff up the beach a few feet at a time as the waves thrust it forward.

"Thank God!" I heard Helena exclaim. "Oh, thank God! We're safe, we're all safe, after all!"

I looked at my little group for a time, all soaked to the skin, all huddled now close together.

"Willy," said I at last, "where's John, the cook?"

"Why, I don't know," said Willy. "Didn't he come with you?"

"What's that?" said Peterson sharply. "You didn't obey orders?"

"Well, I thought he was in the other boat," expoulded Willy, hanging his head.

"You'll get your time," said the old man quietly. "Soon as we get to the railroad, and you'll go home by rail."

"What are you trying to do, Mr. Harry?" he demanded of me a moment later. I was looking at the longboat.

"Well, he's part of the boat's company," said I, "and we've got to save him, Peterson."

"What's that?" asked Helena, now coming up—and then, "Why, John, our

My China Boy Made a Leap.

cook, isn't here, is he?" She, too, looked at the longboat and the sea. "How horrible!" she said. "Horrible!"

"What does he mean to do?" she demanded now of Peterson in turn. The old man only looked at her.

"Surely, you don't mean to go out there again," she said.

I turned to them both, half cold with anger. "Do you think I'd leave him out there to die, perhaps? It was my own fault not to see him in the boat."

"It wasn't," reiterated Peterson. "It was Willy's fault—or mine."

"In either case it's likely to be equally serious for him. We can't leave the poor devil helpless that way."

"Mr. Harry," began Peterson again, "he's only a Chinaman."

"Take shame to yourself for that, Peterson," said I. "He's part of the boat's company—a good cook—yes, but more than a good cook"—

"Well, why didn't he come up with the rest of us?"

"Because he was at his place of duty below until ordered up," said I.

Peterson pondered for a moment. "That's right," said he at length. "I'll go out with you."

I felt Helena's hand on my arm. "It's awful out there," said she. But I only turned to look at her in the half darkness and shook off her hand.

"You can't launch the big boat," said Peterson. "You'd only swamp her if you tried."

"That may be," said I, "but the real thing is to try."

"We might wait till the wind lulls," he argued.

"Yes, and if the wind should change she might drag her anchor and go out to sea. Which boat is best to take, Peterson?" He was silent.

"Which is the best boat, Peterson?" I repeated. "Hardly the duck boat, I think, and you say not the big boat."

"The dinghy is the safest," replied Peterson. "That little tub would ride better, but no man could handle her out there."

"Very well," said I. "She'll get her second wetting anyhow. Lend a hand."

"She'll carry us both," commented the old man, stepping to the side of the stubby little craft.

"But she'll be lighter and ride easier with but one," was my reply. "A chip is dry on top only as long as it's a chip.

"Let go!" I cried to Peterson as the water swirled about our waist. "Go back!" And so I sprang in alone and left him.

For the time I could make small headway, indeed, had not time to get at the oars, but, pushing as I might with the first thing that came to hand, I felt the bottom under me, felt again the lift of the sea carry me out of touch. Then an incoming wave carried me back almost to the point whence I had started. In such way as I could not explain, none the less at length the little boat won through, no more than half filled by the breaking comber. I worked first as best I might, paddling and so keeping her off the best I could. Then when I got the oars the stubby, yawing little rub at first seemed scarce more than to hold her own. I pulled hard—hard as I could. Slowly the line of white breakers passed astern. After that, saving my strength a trifle, I edged out, now angling into the wind, now pulling full into the teeth of the gale.

I kept on until at length I saw the nodding lights of the Belle Helene lighting the gloom more definitely about me. Presently I made under her lee, so that the dinghy was more manageable, and at last I edged up almost to her rail, planning how, perhaps, I might cast a line and so make fast. But first I tried calling.

"Ahoy, there below, John!" I called through the dark. At first there came no answer, and again I shouted. At this I saw the door of the dining saloon pushed open, and John himself thrust out his hand.

"All litee," said he, merely greeting me casually. "You come?"

"Yes," said I, with equal sang froid. "You makee quick jump now, John, s'pose I come in."

"All litee," said he once more. I saw now that he stood there, a book and a bundle in his arm. Perhaps he had been reading to pass the time.

Be that as it may, I cautiously pulled the dinghy under the lee of the Belle Helene. Timing his leap with a sagacity and agility combined which I had not suspected of him, my China boy made a leap, stumbled, righted himself, got his balance and so placed his bundle on the bottom of the boat and his book upon the seat, where he covered it carefully against the spray.

"All litee," said he once more. "I makee pull now. You come this place."

(Continued next Wednesday.)

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CAMBRIDGE.

Mrs. Hannah Linquist and daughter June Linquist, of Chicago, are visitors in Cambridge.

Mrs. Kline and brother William McKibbin of Geneseo, were visitors at Cambridge Thursday.

Mrs. Andrew Long and daughter Irene, of Osco, visited friends in Cambridge Thursday.

A. C. Greer of Seaton, Ill., with a party from Aledo, were Cambridge callers Thursday and attended the Cambridge fair making the trip in their automobile.

S. A. McKinley is attending the Iowa state fair at Des Moines this week.

S. D. Lipton and Henry Shessler of Orion were callers in Cambridge Wednesday and attended the Henry county fair.

Miss Summerson of Moline visited at the home of Mrs. Mollie Gray Thursday.

Mrs. Schriber of Geneseo was a caller at the home of Mrs. Mollie Gray Saturday.

Catherine Thocker of Rock Island is visiting Miss Dorothea Hunt.

Miss Helen Keleher of Orion was a Cambridge caller Friday.

Miss Amelia Grau visited in Osco Friday and Saturday.

Arthur Grau visited several days the past week with his mother, Mrs Mollie Grau, returning to Waterloo Sunday evening.

Mrs. Margaret Blakley left Monday for a visit with her daughter in Pennsylvania. Her daughter, Miss Mary Farrar, acompanied her as far as Rock Island. Mrs. Blakley is 81 years old.

Miss Maud Manguson of Osco visited at the home of Miss Dorothea Hunt the past week.

Miss Edith Neville of Osco is visiting at the home of Miss Theresa Kirkland.

Mrs. Lizzie Ollanius and four children from Iowa are visiting at the home of her mother, Mrs. M. Hardeman.

Dr. and Mrs. Anderson of Orion visited Thursday at the home of Dr. and Mrs. W. H. Couser.

Dr. Paul Welch of Chicago is visiting at the home of his sister and brother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Couser.

Mr. and Mrs. Carl Zubert and persons, Mrs. Zubert, Thelma and Frank Hipple from Litchfield are visiting at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Kipping.

Dr. W. H. Couser went to Knoxville Thursday to attend the funeral of his grandmother, Mrs. Barhoe, who died Tuesday morning.

Mrs. Ahestrund of Moline is in Cambridge.

Mr. and Mrs. E. A. Whitney of Peoria visited the fair the past week then left for a visit at Rock Island.

Mrs. Mallin and son and daughter from St. Louis are visiting at Andover.

Miss Virginia Mallin of St. Louis is visiting in Cambridge.

Miss Blanch Anderson of St. Louis is visiting friends at Andover.

Miss Grace Falls of Kewanee is visiting Miss Florence McMullen in Cambridge.

Mr and Mrs George Britton of Rock Island visited at the home of the latter's parents, Mr. and Mrs. George Yohn.

George Talbot returned to his home in Rock Island after a week's visit.

Misses Esther Foster and Florence Larson returned home Friday from a visit at Burlington, Iowa. Miss Foster was called home by the serious injury of her grandfather, who fell down stairs last Sunday evening and died Friday afternoon. He was buried Sunday.

Mrs. John Weberg of Orion was a Cambridge caller Thursday.

Mr. and Mrs. Joe Smeltzer were callers at Coal Valley, Saturday.

Miss Ruby Ferguson of Annawan is visiting at the home of Miss Alice Smith.

Mr. and Mrs. Henry Allen of Cornwall visited friends in Cambridge Thursday and attended the county fair.

Mr. and Mrs. Leroy Hamilton of Geneseo visited Cambridge Thursday and attended the Henry county fair.

Earl Hinman visited in Chicago the past week.

Miss Imogene Anderson of Chicago visited friends in Cambridge and attended the fair.

Mrs. Mallin of St. Louis is visiting at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Gust Eastland.

Mrs. Henry Talbot and two daughters, Martha and May returned home Saturday from a visit at Bushnell, Ill.

Raymond Asplund and Earl Larson of Orion were callers in Cambridge Friday.

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