

The Indian Drum

By William MacHarg and Edwin Balmer

Illustrations by IRWIN MYERS

SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I.—Wealthy and highly placed in the Chicago business world, Benjamin Corvet is something of a reclusive and a mystery to his associates. After a courtship with his partner, Henry Spearman, Corvet seeks Constance Sherrill, daughter of his other partner, Lawrence Sherrill, and wishes to marry her. She promises not to marry Spearman. He then disappears. Sherrill writes Corvet and tells him that she has married a man in Blue Rapids, Kansas, and exhibited strange agitation over the matter.

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

CHAPTER III.—From a statement of Sherrill it seems probable that Corvet's legitimate son Corvet has died and 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 died his son's property to him. 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 one of his friends, a young man, in a private interview that he is Spearman's son. Spearman laughs at and denies him.

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

CHAPTER IX.—Alan learns from Wassaquam that it was Corvet's habit to keep the sum of \$1,000 in his home, apparently to meet the demands of a woman, "Lala," who appeared frequently. In the absence of Wassaquam, "Lala" comes to the house demanding to see Corvet. He is evidently in a drug-codine state, to alcohol and opium. Constance goes without avail to get him to explain his connection with Corvet. Wassaquam gives Constance a paper on which is a list of names.

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

CHAPTER XI.—Constance receives a package wrapped in a material 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 keeps them as a proof of his death. Spearman urges Constance to marry him. She consents, but refuses his demand for a immediate ceremony.

CHAPTER XII.—Impressed upon that the watch in the package had been the property of a Captain Standford, commander of the Miwaka, who had gone down with his ship.

CHAPTER XIII.—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 XIV.—Alan secures a position on the freighter of which "Burr" is wheelman. 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 attempt to reach port. The loaded freight cars which the vessel is carrying break loose.

CHAPTER XV.—Corvet recovers his reason and leads in the work of throwing the cars overboard. He and Alan are pinned under the debris. Alan discloses his identity. Corvet tells him Spearman had killed his father. Alan is rescued, but it is impossible to save Corvet. A priest, passenger on the boat, is summoned, and Alan leaves them in conversation.

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 regarded 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. Out 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, astern, receding. 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



"Answer Me; It Was the Martha Corvet?"

across the deck, caught him and carried him with it; it brought him before the coupled line of trucks which hurtled back and forth where 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. Sight of Spearman came before him as he had first seen Spearman, covering in Corvet's library in terror at an apparition. "And 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 Benoit!" Corvet called in response, not directly in reply to Alan's question, rather in response to what those questions stirred. "Father Benoit!"

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 Benoit! Send him to me. I shall never leave here; send Father Benoit!"

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 Benoit!"

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

"It was to Father Benoit 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 finish 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.

CHAPTER XVII

Mr. Spearman Goes North.

The message, in blurred lettering and upon the flimsy tissue paper of a carbon copy—that message which had brought tension to the offices of Corvet, Sherrill and Spearman and had called Constance Sherrill and her mother downtown where further information could be more quickly obtained—was handed to Constance by a clerk as soon as she entered her father's office. She reread it; it already had been repeated to her over the telephone.

"4:05 a. m. Frankfurt Wireless station has received following message from Number 25: 'We have Benjamin Corvet, of Chicago, aboard.'"

"You've received nothing later than this?" she asked.

"Nothing regarding Mr. Corvet, Miss Sherrill," the clerk replied.

"The crew?"

"Yes; we have just got the names of the crew." He took another copied sheet from among the pages and handed it to her, and she looked swiftly down the list of names until she found that of Alan Conrad.

Her eyes filled, blinding her, as she put the paper down, and began to take off her things. She had been clinging determinedly in her thought to the belief that Alan might not have been aboard the ferry. Alan's message, which had sent her father north to meet the ship, had implied plainly

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That some one whom Alan believed to be Uncle Benny was on Number 25; she had been fighting, these last few hours, against conviction that therefore Alan must be on the ferry, too.

She stood by the desk, as the clerk went out, looking through the papers which he had left with her. What she was reading was the carbon of the report prepared that morning and sent, at his rooms, to Henry, who was not yet down.

The last message read: "3:40, Poteskey is calling Manitowoc, Signals from Number 25, after becoming indistinct, failed entirely about 5:45, probably by failure of ship's power to supply current. Operator appears to have remained at key. From 5:25 to 5:43 we received disconnected messages, as follows: 'Have cleared another car . . . they are sticking to it down there . . . engine-room crew is also sticking . . . hell on car deck . . . everything smashed . . . they won't give up . . . sinking now . . . we're going . . . good-by . . . stuck to end . . . all they could . . . know that . . . hand it to them . . . have cleared another car . . . sink . . . S. O. . . Signals then entirely ceased.'"

Constance had not realized, until the reports of the wireless messages told her that he was gone, that companionship with Alan had come to mean to her. She had accepted it as always to be existent, somehow—a companionship which might be interrupted often but always to be formed again. It amazed her to find how firm a place he had found in her world of those close to her with whom she must always be intimately concerned.

The telephone switchboard beside Constance suddenly buzzed, and the operator, plugging in a connection, said: "Yes, sir; at once," and through the partitions of the private office on the other side, a man's heavy tones came to Constance. That was Henry's office, and in timbre, the voice was his, but it was so strange in other characteristics of expression that she waited an instant before saying to the clerk, "Mr. Spearman has come in?"

The clerk hesitated, but the continuance of the tone from the other side of the partition made reply superfluous. "Yes, Miss Sherrill."

Constance went to Henry's door and rapped. He made no answer and no move to open the door; so, after waiting a moment, she turned the knob and went in.

Henry was seated at his desk, facing her, his big hands before him; one of them held the telephone receiver. He lifted it slowly and put it upon the hook beside the transmitter as he



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

watched her with steady, silent, aggressive scrutiny. He did not rise; only after a moment he recollected that he had not done so and came to his feet. "Good morning, Connie," he said. "Come in. What's the news?"

The impulse which had brought her into his office went from her. She had not seen nor heard from Henry directly since before Alan's telegram had



She Made No Reply but Gazed at Him, Studying Him.

come late yesterday afternoon; she had heard from her father only that he had informed Henry; that was all. "I've no news, Henry," she said. "Have you?" She closed the door behind her, moving closer to him.

"How did you happen to be here, Connie?" he asked.

She made no reply but gazed at him, studying him. The agitation which he was trying to conceal was not entirely consequent to her coming in upon him; it had been ruling him before. It had underlain the loudness and abuse of his words which she had overheard. That was no capricious outburst of temper or irritation; it had come from something which had seized and held him in suspense, in dread—in dread; there was no other way, to define her impression to herself. When she had opened the door and come in, he had looked up in dread, as though preparing himself for whatever she might announce. Now that the door shut them in alone, he approached her with arms offered. She stepped back, instinctively avoiding his embrace; and he stopped at once, but he had come quite close to her now.

As she stared at him, the clerk's voice came to her suddenly over the partition which separated the office from the larger room where the clerk was receiving some message over the telephone. Henry straightened, listened; as the voice stopped, his great, finely-shaped head sank between his shoulders; he fumbled in his pocket for a cigar, and his big hands shook as he lighted it, without word of excuse to her. A strange feeling came to



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for that he felt what he dreaded approaching and was no longer conscious of her presence.

She heard footsteps in the larger room coming toward the office door. Henry was in suspense. A rap came at the door. He whitened, and wet his lips.

"Come in," he summoned. One of the office girls entered, bringing a white page of paper with three or four lines of purple typewriting upon it which Constance recognized must be a transcript of a message just received.

She started forward at sight of it, forgetting everything else; but he took the paper as though he did not know she was there. He merely held it until the girl had gone out; even then he stood folding and unfolding it, and his eyes did not drop to the sheet.

The girl had said nothing at all but, having seen her, Constance was thrilled; the girl had not been a bearer of bad news, that was sure; she brought some sort of good news! Constance, certain of it, moved nearer to Henry to read what he held. He looked down and read.

"What is it, Henry?" His muscular reaction, as he read, had drawn the sheet away from her; he recovered himself almost instantly and gave the paper to her.

"8:35 a. m., Manitowoc, Wis.," she read. "The schooner Anna S. Solwerk has been sighted making for this port. She is not close enough for communication, but two lifeboats, additional to her own, can be plainly made out. It is believed that she must have picked up survivors of No. 25. She carries no wireless, so is unable to report. Tugs are going to her."

"Two lifeboats!" Constance cried. "That could mean that they all are saved or nearly all; doesn't it, Henry; doesn't it?"

He had read some other significance in it, she thought, or, from his greater understanding of conditions in the storm, he had been able to hold no hope from what had been reported. That was the only way she could explain to herself as he replied to her; that the word meant to him that men were saved and that therefore it was dismaying to him, could not come to her at once. When it came now, it went over her first only in the flash of incredulous question.

The telephone buzzer under his desk sounded; she drew close as he took up his receiver. "Manitowoc?" he said. "I want to know what you've heard from the Solwerk. . . . You hear me? . . . The men the Solwerk picked up. You have the names yet?"

"The Benton?"

"Oh, I understand! All from the Benton. I see! . . . No; never mind their names. How about Number 25? Nothing more heard from them?" Constance had caught his shoulder while he was speaking and now clung to it. Release—release of strain was going through him; she could feel it, and she heard it in his tones and saw it in his eyes.

(Continued Next Week)

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