The Sargasso Sea

The Curse of the Love of Margaret Inch and the Voyage of the Ship Aida By Justus Miles Forman

O MAKE anything like a proper coherent tale of this extraordinary business I must piece together-as if it were for a patchwork quiltodds and ends and ill-related fragments that I have got from many sources. Part of the story I and from Sol Saradine, the Jew, who wears gold earrings and was Drury's mate on both voyages; part I had from the log of the Aida; part from Drury's diary, which he called his private log; other parts from certain neighbors of Margaret Inch at Fairford; and the rest I have had to fill in from imagination-though that is but stray bits here and thereconnecting links, if you like.

Still, I mean to give you as well as I can, all the essentials, holding back nothing that matters-save one fact; the bearings of that spot, away to the south in the Sargasso Sea, where two bare masts slant up above the heaving weed, and a fortune lies below. The latitude and longitude of that infinitesimal speck upon the waste is known to me, and will never, I think be forgotten, but I have promised Sol Saradine

ure to evoke romantic fancies in a maid-a square, middle-aged man, with a square face and a scrubby beard that was beginning to gray. He had no humor at all and, I was going to say, no imagination, but I take that back. Unimaginative men do not go a-seeking Spanish treasure. Also I mind what Sol Saradine said of him, that Drury was a species of volcano (what he really said was "sleeping dog"), and when roused was terrific. I think women scent that sort of thing in men, and like it on the ground that it promises excitement, and generally fulfills its promise. On the tenth day young Piers Drury turned up

in answer to his uncle's summons, and on the fourteenth the Aida set sail for the south. Four days is a brief period of time, but in a far briefer there may be, as Sol Saradine says, "the devil to pay."

ND yet there can never have been a more inno-A cent trouble maker. A big, fair lad young Piers was, with yellow hair and blue eyes-a few freckles across the bridge of his straight nose--the

in a week's time he would be quite himself again. ance (for he had already been there without a diver to make sure), to the spot where the two bare masts of an earlier and unfortunate seeker slanted up above the heaving weed, and they dropped anchor.

HE invalid wasn't strong enough to dive at once, or so his uncle, against young Piers' protests, decided, and they waited three days in the merciless, still heat. Then he went down to explore, found nothing in the dense, under-sea forest, tried again, working inward in concentric circles, and at the end of the second day, made out the galleon lying in three fathoms of water and rent asunder by what appeared to have been a dynamite blast. The earlier seekers, whose schooner canted a few yards apart, had made his labors easier for him. He brought up with him in his pouch a handful of doubloons. No. they were pieces-of-eight-one of them lies before me now as a write-and the work was over for the

Sol Saradine says the three of them, who berthed aft, drank champagne with their dinner, and that young Piers, being still pretty weak, got a trifle tipsy.

That night Abner Drury saw red. What occurred I transcribe in his own words from his private log, which he always kept locked away, and which had written on the cover of it: "To be read only after my death."

How in the world a sane man could commit the incredible, the fantastic folly of putting such a confession into written words, when he meant to keep it a secret for the remainder of his life, I know no more than you. It is beyond me.

The entry in the private log seems to have been made on the day following the event. It begins:

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"June 28, —02.

"Last night, the devil having entered into me, his black angers standing round about, and God being absent. I, in a fit of passion, siew my nephew, my brother Jonadab's son, Piers Drury, by throttling him with my hands, he being weak from fever and tipsy from drink and so not able to defend himself. Nobody saw what I done, for the crew was below in their bunks and the lookout asleep at the other end of the deck.

"And when he was dead I put the body over the side and it sank, the face looking up at me.

"He had a locket round about his neck hung on a cord. I see it for the first time and asked what it was. It was Margaret Inch's likeness.

"I asked him by what right he wore her likeness, and he laughed at me, telling me they loved each other. Then I heard a rushing wind and saw a red haze with bright stars shooting through it, and I done what I done.

"His face looked up at me in the moonlight before he sank out of sight.

"So I have committed murder in black passion, and God will damn my soul for it eternally; and I shall burn in hell. But not yet a while. I am a strong man, forty-one years old, and Margaret Inch is in Fairford. Burn me in hell fire, Lord, and welcome to you, but give me first ten years of life, or five, or two, or even one, and Margaret inch with me, and I hereby promise not to complain. So be it.

per's bunk early the next morning and told him that young Piers could not be found, he had to wake the man from a sleep so sound that it was like a stupor. It was a species of stupor, I fancy, for, in so far as I can learn, he never slept soundly again to the

Y AN odd coincidence it was Captain Salisbury's B wife who, a month later, witnessed the first encounter between Margaret Inch and Drury on the morning of the Aida's return to Fairford. She says she had gone over to Miss Inch's house to diagnose out of her wealth of knowledge, an illness which had befallen the campanulas in the front

garden. (The symptoms indicated too much moisture A fisherman, passing up the leafy street, called in to the two women that Captain Drury's Aida (Ada) had anchored in the harbor half an hour back, and as the two women stood at the front gate Drury him-

Ignoring the elder, he spoke a good morning to Margaret Inch, who greeted him with pink cheeks and a shortened breath, but looked over his shealder down the hill. She asked if he had brought back the in a heavy voice, said no. The girl continued to look over his shoulder, and presently, when he did not speak again, she asked:

self bore in sight, mounting the hill.

Where is your nephew. Piers?"

Still Captain Drury did not speak, and she asked again: "Where is he?" Drury's eyes must have told her, for Margaret Inch gave a dreadful scream and clapped her two hands up over her mouth. Young Piers' murderer bent upon the girl such a look, says Mrs. Salisbury, "as I never see before and hope never

to again," rurned abruptly and walked away. That would seem more or less naturally to be the nd of Abner Drury's wooing, but it wasn't-not by a good deal. He was a determined and, from what we already know, I may well say, desperate man. It was his way to get what he wanted (though, to be sure, he failed to bring back the Spanish treasure): Fairford late in August. On the eve of All Souls'or, in other words, the 31st of October-he was married to Margaret Inch, spinster, and the two took up their residence in his wife's home.

S OL SARADINE, who was present at the wedding, says that the bridegroom's face were new sailcloth, and that he had grown noticeably thinner within the past three months, but that his eyes burned like the eyes of a man in high fever Morgaret Inch looked spiritless and ill. The private log is not expansive. The entry for the day says:

Yet upon this rather cheerless beginning there followed several months (four, to be exact) of something that had all the outward marks of quiet contentment, if not of wild rapture. For that matter, rapture, or at least the expression thereof, would ill have become a middle-aged seafaring man like Drury, and nobody expected ecstatic rhapsodies from his tongue-tied wife. That wouldn't have been like her. They might, however, have expected redder cheeks and more frequent smiles, and, in the man, a higher head and a brighter eye.

C OL SARADINE says that Drury complained to him of sleeplessness, and I know Margaret several times said to her neighbors that her husband slept ill and muttered in his sleep or got up and walked the floor. His general health suffered from it after a time, and he went to the old village doctor, vho, with exquisitely unconscious irony, bade him rid his mind of any worries or troubles he might be brooding over.

I wonder what Drury said to that. It was four months and four days after the wedding when the sword at last smote down between the two. I know the exact date, because the private log chronicles the event very briefly.

"Last night I talked in my sleep and she knows." It seems Drury awoke some two or three hours after midnight in a curious state of inexplicable unand shivering. His wife was gone from his side. He waited a few moments, still shivering without apparent reason, then went to look for her. She was not in the house, but the back door of the kitchen was open and a bitter wind was driving the snow in along the floor. Drury pulled something round his shoul-ders, went out into the night and found his wife at the bottom of the orchard, crouched upon the ground, with the snow drifting against her body. She was in a state of nervous anarchy that was practically madness, but her moaning speech was all about one fact, and her husband knew that she knew.

S HE screamed when he spoke to her and struck at him, even bit and scratched, but somehow he sot her into the house and into her bed, where she

controllable paroxysm of screaming. O IT went on for some days-a week-a fortnight think shame and a sense of deadly guilt and re--this intolerable state of affairs. For a while I morse held the man's hand, but he was a hard man and accustomed to dominate. More than once the neighbors heard Margaret Drury screaming horridly by night, and it wasn't long before all the village knew of it and said that something must be done. In the end a sort of deputation waited upon Abner Drurythe old parson, Doctor Saltonstall and two of the elders of the church, all ancient men, wagging white

denounce him, but she did nothing of the sort, only

moved around her house in that strange and staring apathy, and paid no heed when spoken to. And when

he touched her she broke out into a seemingly un-

RURY looked at the row of old men fiercely, and the red swept up over his face-perhaps before his eyes again. Then his head dropped and the spirit broke in him forever. He said he would give them his answer in two day's time, and meanwhile there would be no more screaming.

and, without much beating about the bush, they ue-

manded an explanation.

The answer proved to be the sailing of the Aida in the teeth of winter for ports unknown. Sol Saradine, who had money laid by, and toiled only when he felt like it, shipped again as mate. He says he esn't even now quite know why.

They laid a southerly course and put in at Miami, afterward Nassau, thence a long leg to Galveston, where they remained idle for a fortnight. Drury had once plied a profitable trade between here and certain Cuban ports. He said something about taking it up again, and perhaps would have done so but for what shortly occurred.

I have asked Sol Saradine how Drury bore himself during these weeks, and the Jew says he was a man crushed but not broken-which speech you may interpret as suits von

He complained, I know, of sleeping ill, if at all, and was often on his feet the night long, pacing the Aida's deck. He never spoke of his wife, and Sol Saradine, who possesses tact, and who, in common with the rest of Fairford, knew there was some unhappy mystery there, took pains never in any fashion to refer to her.

The private log is written up through these days.

but it is a mere transcript of the ship's log without

S o Now we come to the reason why Drury gave up his idea of carrying coffee between Galveston and Cube. There has been decided by the company of the company and Cuba. They had been at the former port nearly a fortnight when Sol Saradine and the skipper returned late one evening to where the Aida lay in

The cuddy ports shone bright and cheery through the darkness as they approached, and Drury growled something angry about that fool of a cabin boy, for he was a careful man and did not like to see good oil wasted. They went on board, and Sol Saradine pointed out to the skipper a trail of wet footprints and little pools of water that led across the deck to the cabin companion. It looked as if the boy had been swimming in the harbor before lighting that lamp

"I'll take it out of him tomorrow!" Drury said. and they stooped to go under the companion hood. Sol Saradine observed that the steps here were wet too, Saradine observed that the steps here were wet too, and cautioned the skipper, who was ahead of him, not to slip. But at the bottom of the companion Cap'n Drury halted suddenly, gave a hoarse cry and flung up one arm over his face, recoiling so that he lurched heavily against Sol Saradine's knees. The Jew bent down to stare over the other man's shoulder into that little brightly lighted inclosure, and he says that the place was unoccupied, the three bunks (like sepulchral niches in a wall) untouched, the olicloth-covered table in the middle of the cabin bare, save that Drury's parchment treasure chart, which usually never left his person and was guarded like his life, lay open there—an astonishing piece of carelessness. There were tiny pools of water beside it on the ollcloth, as if wet arms had rested there. Sol Saradine says he saw them quite distinctly in the bright light of the swinging lamp.

W ITHOUT taking his eyes from the table, Cap'n his companion away, and the hand was shaking violently. He said in a kind of whisper:
"Go! Leave me alone with him." And at those

rush to the neighbors or to the village constable and HE following nine days of that voyage eastward remain even now, I can see, in Sol Saradine's mind, a sort of nightmare. He does not like to talk about them. It was not that Cap'n Drury was difficult to get on with: he was less difficult than ever before-softer-spoken, more considerate of those about him, almost gentle in his bearing. But in the evening, when the swinging lamp was lighted over the stripped, oilcloth-covered table, then Drury would sit down with the treasure chart before him and talk earnestly for hours to the empty air across the table. Further, the place was always wet-and cold.

Little pools of water stood on the floor and on the When sopped up others came in their place. Sol Saradine bore it to the breaking point, then slung a hammock between decks under the main hatch, and berthed there. The skipper made no comment on the change, if indeed he ever noticed it, for was very absent-minded of late. However, when beards. They indicated that women do not scream as in deadly agony for a half-hour at a time and repeat it night after night unless something is wrong, the cabin-boy had hysterics and refused to enter that chill, damp place again, Drury awoke from his apathy, flogged the youth soundly, and thereafter, without further complaint, the meals were served, the

slops were emptied, and the bunk-yes, two bunks were made. So on the eighth of April (bear that date in mind!) they came once more to the dismal, weedy sea, furled their sails, and entered it. Once more they passed the melancholy, dismantled hulks that had been ships and were now roosting-places for pelagic fowl. The wind dropped and the air was heavy with the reek of corruption. Toward the end of the third day they made out the two bare masts, appproached them, and anchored there. The sun went down, I am told, in a torn welter of blood, and round the Alda, as dusk

came on, the seabirds wailed incessantly.
Sol Saradine, it appears, asked the skipper if he wished the diving gear brought up out of the hold and made ready for use. Drury regarded him with the mild bewilderment latterly characteristic, and said yes; so the Jew spent what remained of the daylight over this task and afterward walked the deck in some perturbation of spirit. He took it that the skipper himself meant to go down, since there was no one else on board who had even so much as tried on a helmet, but he was quite sure Drury was in no state for such difficult and exacting work. The man was about half crazy, Sol Saradine considered, and he wondered if it might not be held justifiable to clap him in irons and make straight for the nearest con-

E SAYS he tramped the deck for some hours, considering these matters, screwing up his courage almost to the point of action and then losing hold of it again, cursing himself for having shipped on board the Aida, for not having demanded a discharge at Galveston. He walked and pondered alone there until late in the night, when the crew were long asleep in their bunks, and the lookout for-

ward was asleep too, bent over the anchor windlass.

He says he was just about to take himself to his hammock when he saw Drury emerge from the cabin empanion and walk aft along the deck in the moonlight. He walked, it seems, in a peculiar fashiontwo or three hurried steps, then a halt and a hanging back, as if he went reluctantly. It was, says Sol Saradine, exactly as an unwilling little child is dragged along by the hand-only Drury seemed to be

The Jew, keeping, as well as he might, under ver, followed that fantastically progressing figure down the deck, and once called aloud to it, for he thought the man might be walking in his sleep. Cap'n Drury paid no heed to the hail, but went on in that odd gait, stumbling and leaning back with so extraordinary an appearance of being dragged by a force greater than his own that the mate stared and rubbed his eyes, and at last called out again, in a louder voice this time.

HE stumbling figure, with his mate hovering uncertainly behind, came at last to a break in the rail where the dinghy lay at the bottom of a sea-ladder, and halted there with what looked like a violent effort. He had so far been stient, though breathing hard and fast, but when he came to that break in the rail quite suddenly he threw up his arms and cried his wife's name:

"Margaret! Margaret!" He seemed to be calling upon her for help in utmost need, and his voice screamed out upon the still night with a shocking clamor—hoarse, dreadful shrieks that seemed to tear their way out of his throat. The awakened waterfowl began to screech, too, round about the schooner in the darkness.

darkness.

Sol Saradine dashed forward with a shout, but before he could reach the spot where the skipper stood the man was gone with a swift, annatural violence; not—says the Jew—as if he had fallen or leaped from the deck, but as if he had been jerked away by a rope



"It is impossible to acquit the girl of coquetry in some degree"

that no one else shall know them, and no one else ever shall. That I swear.

Those drowned doubloons have done harm enough After an absence of twenty years, during which time he had sailed all the seas of this world, and traded in most of the ports thereof, Abner Drury came back to Fairford, the sleepy fishing village of his birth.

E CAME standing upon the white deck of the big schooner Alda (but he pronounced it Ada), of which he was master and owner, for he had prospered in these twenty years, and he had in his ocket a chart, handdrawn on parchment, annotated in different scripts. Spanish and English. It looked very much like other buried treasure charts, even to the age-browned, ink and the occasional rusty spots that might have been blood stains; and the bearings set down in one corner of the parchment were the latitude and longitude of a theoretical pin-point in

Drury came to Fairford like Diogenes, looking for an honest man, only, more exigent than the Greek cynic, he wanted two men instead of one. To be plain, there is reason to believe that he expected to find his nephew, young Piers Drury, whom he had never seen, but whom he knew to have adopted the profession of diver; and, further, he wanted to find a mate who should be at once intelligent, trust worthy, and acquainted with gasoline propulsion-for the Aida was equipped with an auxiliary engine.

HIS paragon he discovered almost at once in Sol Saradine, the Jew, who wore gold earrings; but young Piers, who, contrary to his uncle's expectation, did not live in Fairford, but out Gloucester way, was busy about his own work and couldn't turn up for ten days.

On the second day Drury seems to have made an important discovery. A girl child whom he quite possibly may have seen toddling about Fairford twenty vears before had grown to womanhood. Drury saw her leaning over the gate of her front garden, stopped to stare, and presently asked one of her neighbors

HAVE seen a photograph of Margaret Inch taken by an itinerant artist, which, judging from sup-plementary verbal description, I believe to have been a ghastly libel. Still not even the best efforts of this wandering criminal could quite disguise the girl's grave beauty. I don't wonder Abner Drury stopped to stare, not though he was past forty and reckoned a hard man. I know little about his early life, but I have never heard that women had any part in it, and

it is my guess that they never had. In any case, the middle-aged sailor seems to have been, as the phrase goes, "hard hit," and to have

made no effort to disguise it. The girl's part in this suddenly initiated romance is less easy to reconstruct. She was, they tell me, very gentle and sweet, tender with children, an angel of mercy in the sick room, universally beloved-but she was alone in the world, her father having been lost at sea, long back, and her mother dead these two ttle I know of Miss Inch's feelings toward Abne rury at this period, save that she certainly allowed im to spend a great deal of his time in her fragrant arden, where the pinks and sweet williams and nignonettes and larkspurs grew, or on the shady orch of the little house, whence, looking down the reen hill, you saw the masts of the fishing boats in the harbor, and the Alda among them.

He can hardly have been, I should think, the figthick neck and large arms of a gladiator (a little vain of his strength he seems to have been, and given to showing it off in feats)-a sunny smile for everybody. and the heart of a child. The boy would not consciously have hurt an earthworm, but before he had been twelve hours in Fairford he was leaning across Margaret Inch's garden gate. His uncle saw him

there, looked black, and passed by. Now, it is certain that no living soul will ever know exactly what passed between this young woman and these two men during the four days prior to the Aida's departure. That Miss Inch continued to see a good deal of Captain Drury is well established, and it is no secret that young Piers was often in her sweet garden also-but never the two together. It is impossible to acquit the girl of coquetry in some degree, and I shall not try, but that there was any harm in her, or that she realized what she was stirring up with her inexperienced little finger, I, for my part, refuse to believe.

wife blundered in upon and described afterward as Fairford."

"This day I was married to Margaret Inch at eatureless. The two controls of the control of the featureless. The two shook hands, Margaret Inch wished Drury good luck and a safe return, and Drury thanked her. Following that he glowered upon the girl hungrily for a space, made as if to say more, but turned with an abrupt movement and went away. Whatever that unuttered speech was he seems have thought it would keep.

But very late that evening, a next-door neighbor, descending into her back garden for some obscure reason, glanced across the top of the low party wall and saw two rapt young people a-kissing in the moon-

At break of day the Aida set sail for the mysterious Sargasso Sea and the sunken galleon there.

four days out and put into Savannah to let the storm blow over. And once again they made port at Nassau-but this time by intention to take on water and provisions. Drury's private los proving featureless, I have asked Sol Saradine about the two men's behavior during this early part of the voyage, and he says that young Piers was his habitual gav and cheery and light-hearted self, but that the skipper seemed gloomy and held himself apart. He unbent only of an evening when the three sat in the cuddy with their heads bowed over the parchment chart. The Jew says he often left the other two there, poring over that yellow document, when he went on deck to

It was, I believe, almost immediately after the Aida left the Bahaman coast that young Piers fell ill with a fever. Drury was at first for turning back, but the lad protested loudly, and the attack looked a very light one-as indeed it turned out to be-so in the end they held their course, and fed the invalid with quinine, and came presently to the margin of that heaving swamp-the tract of mystery and death-the

ERE the Aida furled her wings, and, under bare poles with the little auxiliary engine coughing and sputtering, the treasure-seekers turned their backs upon blue water and wound their tortuous way

into the Sargasso sea.

Twice in the dreary waste they passed derelicts wooden ships, dismasted, whitened, weed-hung, surcenters of insecure islands, roosting-places for sea fowl; and often they saw wreckage, spare or planks or a water-logged boat. The wind died and it was fiercely hot. Young Piers complained of it, tossing on his cot under the deck awning, but he grew bet-ter even in that tropical glare, and it was plain that



"The Jew bent down to stare over the other man's shoulder

In the morning, Sol Saradine, heartily ashamed of his fears and ascribing them to the last unnecessary drink of the evening before, went aboard the Aida to make his peace. But the skipper did not seem to realize that he had been absent. Cap'n Drury, looking quite himself, indeed, with a more peaceful face than he had shown in many a month, sent him ashore again to order a quantity of gasoline, saying that he meant to sail before noon, in ballast. The Jew asked where. The skipper smiled upon him—Drury smiled, and said:

"To the Sargasso Sea."

about his body. There was a great splash at the bottom of the sea-ladder, a final bubbling cry, and then no more.

The lookout, thoroughly awake now, came running aft along the deck, and he and Sol Saradine sprang into the dinghy and pushed off from the schooner's side. They rowed round and round, watching the still surface of the sea for half an hour or more, then went back on board. The mate looked at his watch, and it was half-past eleven.

brought the Aida back to Fairford and turned her over to the authorities there. He kept in his possession the parchment treasure chart which he had found on the floor of the cuddy, but I doubt if he will ever make use of it, for he has retired from the sea now and cultivates his garden; also the very sound of the name Sargasso makes him shiver.

Margaret Drury is dead, and I have a queer thing to teil about that, which I got from old Mrs. Saltonstall. She passed away on the night of the eighth of April. She had been asleep for some hours, and old Mrs. Saltonstall, her volunteer nurse, was nodding in her chair. She says that while the hall clock was striking eleven Margaret Drury suddenly awoke, laughed aloud, and died.

Eleven o'clock on the night of April & brought the Aida back to Fairford and turned