



By ALROY WEST

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**CHAPTER XVII
THREE STRANGERS**

The three men who were picked up by the trawler claimed to be Americans. They said that they owned a small schooner and were engaged in pearl fishing off the island of Margarita under a license from the Government of Venezuela, without which permit it was illegal to carry on the business. Owing to bad weather they had been prevented from making the shelter of Pamatar, a port on the southeastern side of the island. After a desperate struggle they were forced to run with the storm. Conditions became worse when they found themselves in the track of the hurricane. The masts were snapped off and the steering went, so that they were at the mercy of wind and tide.

When the worst of the storm was past and they were congratulating themselves on the narrow escape they had had from death, they struck a reef and the schooner sank within a quarter of an hour. Since then they had been drifting about in the small boat. They were far too exhausted by their struggle with the hurricane to be able to row, and they had nothing of which they could make a sail apart from their clothing, which they needed for protection from the blazing sun. Their story sounded genuine, but Peter was not too pleased with the appearance of the three men, even when they had had an opportunity of making themselves more presentable.

Sinclair, owner of the schooner and the leader of the men, was nearly as broad as Gallop, and certainly taller. He had a far from handsome face, which was marred still further by the fact that his nose, at some time, had been broken. Foster, who seemed more friendly with him than Doyle, the remaining man, was shorter and more slender in build. He had dark eyes which were never still, and fingers which indicated a similar degree of restlessness. Doyle seemed the best of the three. His hair was aggressively red and he had an engaging smile.

He was the first one to recover his spirits, and he took an early opportunity of thanking both Wicks and Drew for picking them up.

"Not that we should have been needing it," he added, "but for the fact that some people think they're mighty smart at handling a ship and won't listen to good advice." His glance in the direction of Sinclair rendered any further explanation superfluous.

Wicks had just been relieved at the wheel by Peter, and he stopped to talk to Doyle.

"No more pearl fishing for you, I suppose?" he asked.

"Not if I can help it," Doyle told him, with a broad grin.

Wicks thought for a minute or so.

"I might be able to put something in your way," he said slowly.

Doyle closed one eye.

"I'm your man," he declared.

"Then keep quiet about it," Wicks told him. "There's money in it. No need to let your pals in. That would only mean all the less for you. Do you follow me?"

Doyle nodded his head.

"I'm your man," he repeated. "And

I can always be keeping a firm hold on my tongue—leastwise, I can when there's something to be gained by silence."

"There's a lot to be gained," Wicks said, turning away and going to his cabin.

Card playing started once more under the shelter of the awning. Sinclair had a pack and at first he only played with Foster and Doyle. Then Howe contrived to join in, and a bit later Crockett took Howe's place. Wicks noticed it and gave a scowl. He didn't fancy the idea of Sinclair knowing about the gold.

He didn't take any action, but went on the bridge in order to have a word with Drew.

"I'm forgetting about what happened the other day," Wicks said quickly. "I admit that I was wrong about picking these men up. We couldn't very well have sailed right past them. On the other hand I don't feel comfortable about them."

"Neither do I," Peter admitted.

"It would have been far wiser to have left them to drown," Wicks said thoughtfully. "We shall have to watch our step. I suggest that we forget about our differences. Whether you like it or not, you are on board my ship. If Sinclair gets wind of what has taken place and realizes that I have some gold down below there will be more trouble than we can handle. I'm going to have a talk with Gallop about it. Have you any influence with him?"

"I doubt it, but I am quite prepared to do what I can. I am as anxious as you are that there should not be any trouble on board the ship."

"That's all right," Wicks said in an easier tone. "I can depend on Crockett, and if Gallop will help us out we can also rely on Gordon. Howe is the uncertainty, but that is counterbalanced because I think Doyle might help us if it came to a showdown."

"We shouldn't have anything to fear," Peter said. "If Howe and Doyle keep out of it, it means that we are four to two."

"Five," said Wicks quickly. "That Russian girl can be very useful. She's cunning, though. Look how she fooled me about navigation. I could tell from the way she took the wheel that it wasn't unfamiliar to her."

"That was my fault, really," Peter said, anxious for Wicks not to have too big a grudge against the girl.

"I'm not a fool! I realized that straight away. I'd like that gun back which you took from me."

"You have one still," Peter reminded him.

For a moment Wicks seemed about to argue, then he cocked his head slightly on one side.

"Very well," he agreed. "You hang on to it. Perhaps it is advisable that you should be armed. If Sinclair wanted to make trouble he'd do it while I was sleeping. And I have an idea that he is the kind of man who would make plenty of trouble if he thought it would be to his advantage."

"I'm certain he is," Peter agreed.

WORRIED ABOUT ALLA

He began to be sorry that he had insisted on saving the three men. There was always the possibility that the gold would be the cause of bloodshed, but he had also noticed that Sinclair was watching practically every movement that Alla made. Doyle was interested in the girl as well, but there was nothing in his manner to offend. Peter had the idea that Sinclair would get up to mischief. He mentioned this to

Gallop when he was back in the cabin after his trick at the wheel.

Gallop scratched his neck.

"I don't like the look of him," he admitted. "I'm glad you mentioned about it to me because I haven't exactly had the opportunity of watching him. I'm getting concerned about the engines. They've done some fine work—far more than they were intended to do, and I'd like to overhaul them before we go much further. Worrying over that has made me careless over other things I expect. Let me think things over for a minute or so."

Peter lit his pipe and waited. At last Gallop spoke.

"Wicks was practically burying the hatchet when I last saw him," he announced. "It seems to me that it would be a sound plan. I suggested to him that we altered course slightly and landed these fellows along the Guiana coast, but he wouldn't hear of it. He's afraid of landing into trouble near Georgetown. My other suggestion was that we tried to find an island where we could drop them. I think that is what he intends to do. He said he was sorry that he didn't save their boat. Once we were within sight of land we could have pushed them over the side and told them to row ashore. However, their boat was not saved, and it's no good crying over spilt milk. It seems to me that it is put to us to come to some arrangement. I don't like the idea of that girl being left on deck without anybody to take care of her."

"That's what I've been thinking," Peter told him.

"The problem had puzzled him. Owing to the cramped quarters all three of the rescued men were sleeping on the deck. They had slept there for three nights and Sinclair had shown a disposition to wander about. It was not possible to see what he was doing from the bridge. So long as Crockett was on watch there was not much to fear, but Peter did not feel equally safe about Howe.

Gallop, naturally, was only concerned about what might happen to the girl. Peter did not think she was in any danger, but feared that if Sinclair went to the galley he might wrest the revolver from her. He had been trying to make up his mind whether it would be wise to obtain it from her.

"There's only one thing we can do," Gallop said suddenly.

"What?"

"Give her this cabin, of course. We can make shift on deck. Or if you're too soft to do that you can have the galley."

"I don't mind sleeping on deck," Peter told him.

"Splendid. We'll fix that up. Perhaps you will tell Wicks about it. He might suspect that I was trying to plot against him if I mentioned it. Wicks has an exceedingly suspicious mind. Maybe you'd better take all the credit for the idea."

"I don't mind doing that in the slightest," Peter said.

"Go ahead then."

When Peter reached the bridge he saw that Wicks was worried. Once he had taken a look at the sky he understood.

"We're going to have really dirty weather," Wicks said suddenly.

"It does look like it. Shall I get everything fastened up?"

"Yes. It would be as well."

Sinclair stepped towards Peter as he crossed the deck.

"It looks like another storm," he said. "Can we do anything to help?"

"I'd be glad if you would. We're getting everything trim—just in case. We were taken rather by surprise last time. As a result we lost the awning before we knew exactly what was taking place."

As the three rescued men were lending a hand it was not necessary to tell Howe, who was sleeping, but Peter went below in order to warn Gallop.

The engineer scowled.

"That isn't going to do the engines any good," he declared. "They were nearly shaken to bits last time." He yawned and slipped down from his bunk. "I think I'll have a look round and see if there's anything I can do. But it's up to you people to keep her as steady as you can."

"We'll do our best," Peter assured him.

Gallop, still grumbling, went to the engine-room. Peter slipped along to the galley, and had a word with Alla.

"Another storm?" she asked, nodding her head in the direction of Crockett who was seeing that the dinghy was securely fastened.

"So we fear. You'd better get all the loose things tied together. Otherwise the galley will look as though a bull had been on the rampage inside it."

"There are plenty of things which can't be tied together," Alla told him with a laugh. "Are the storms here worse than in other parts? I've never been in these waters before."

"Neither have I," said Peter, "but I've been told that you generally get driven about two hundred miles out of your course if you get a really bad hurricane. That may be an exaggeration, however. So don't get worried."

"A voyage on this ship would cure anybody of worrying over trifles," the girl said with feeling. "I'm expecting a mutiny practically every minute. Howe always seems to be in a bad temper and Sinclair watches me in a way which makes me feel uncomfortable." She turned away and made no further comment.

"I'll drop him overboard during the storm," Peter promised her as he left the galley. He stopped to examine the dinghy and then went forward in order to have a word with Crockett.

"Everything satisfactory?" he asked the man, who had been supervising the work done by Sinclair and his friends.

"I think so, but there are one or two places where she's showing signs of wear and tear. I've been trying to strengthen the hand-rail in a few places. I think a good wave would carry some of it away."

"It will probably carry away more than that," Peter said gloomily, as he looked up at the sky.

Iroquois Falls Boy Scouts Win Pup Tent

Crow Patrol Have Small Margin in Contest

Iroquois Falls, Ont., April 6, 1938—(Special to The Advance)—With a margin of only four points, the Crow Patrol of the First Iroquois Falls Boy Scout Troop, won the first prize in the Troop contest, which has been going on for the past three months. Assistant L. Pretsell made a fitting speech to the boys as he presented them with a large bundle all neatly wrapped up, containing a 6 x 3 Boy Scout Pup Tent, with all the necessary fixtures intact. The Patrol were rather doubtful of the contents of the package, this being April Fool's Day, and some witty remarks were passed prior to the leader opening it up. However, as it was unwrapped, exclamations of joy and triumph were audible, and the boys, under the leadership of their officer, proceeded to erect it for the benefit of those who last.

All noticeable efforts made by the Scouts of the Patrols were given marks, especially for neatness, attendance, badges, games, etc. On their merits, the Crows had gained 64 points over a period of three months. Running a close second, the Beaver Patrol had 60 points, with the Foxes at 56, Moose 42, and Bob Whites trailing in the last with 34 points to their credit. Points were also deducted for misconduct or bad breaks by the Scouts during this period.

Following the presentation, Scout

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routine was in order, and the achievements of the individual Scouts is noteworthy, as many badges are being worn by boys who have successfully tried and passed their respective tests.

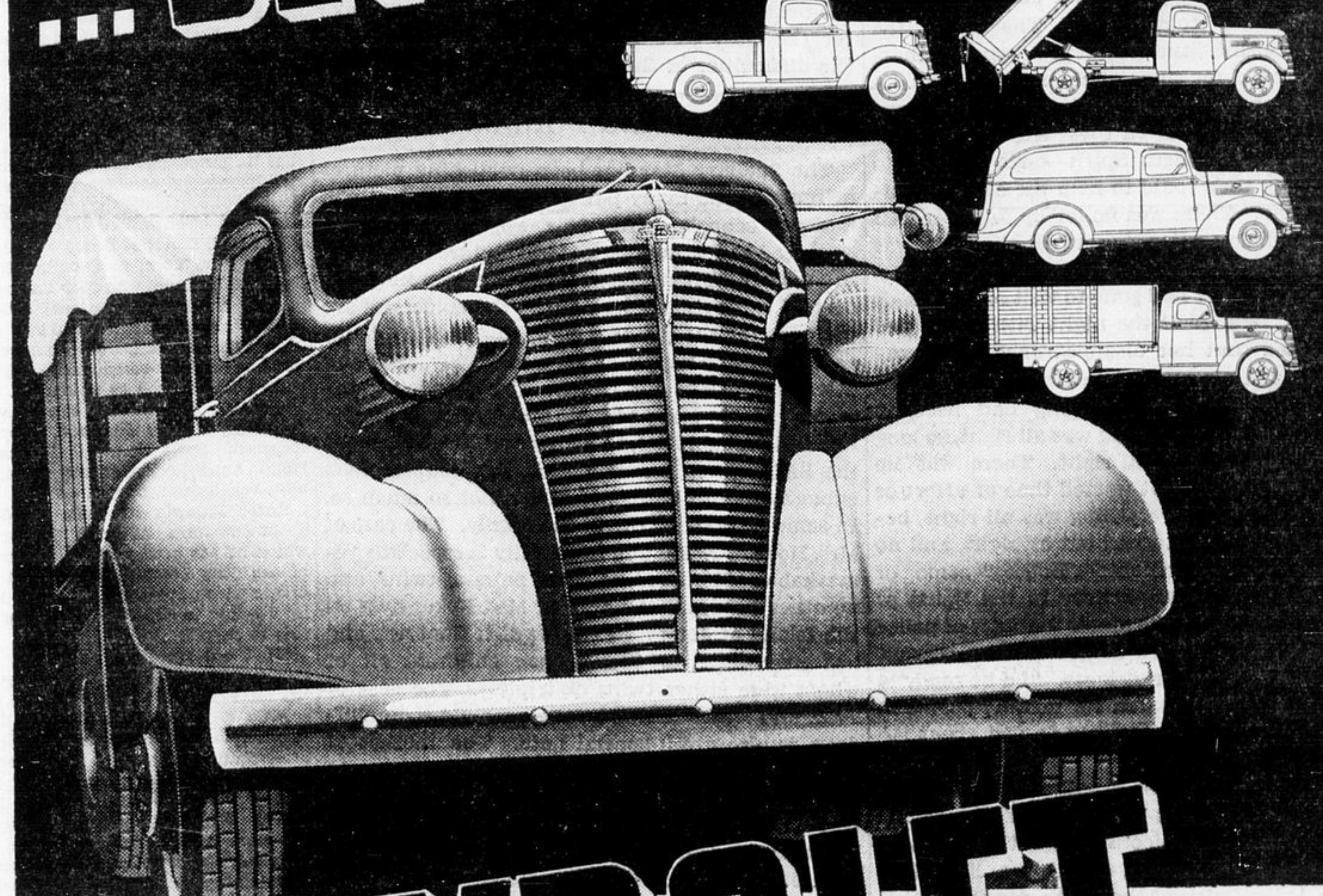
Following this, Mr. C. S. Jessup, who is an active member of the committee, and guest of the evening, was introduced to the boys. The topic of Mr. Jessup's talk was the "Preservation and Conservation of Birds," which has a very definite place in the life of all youth.

Mr. Jessup is donating a prize for the Scout who turns in the best report on their observation of birds during the summer, and helped them to start by describing how to go about it. Starting right away, each boy was urged to keep a record of their findings in regards as to the time of arrival of the birds, their nest making time, and also as to the laying of eggs and hatching. Photos, stories and interesting points will add to the competition.

The Boy Scout Troop purchased a lovely big picture which describes and shows in colour all the birds that live in this country, and will be a great help to those who study this work. Many of the Scouts test tie in with the study of nature, also in the thoughtfulness of each individual.

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