



By ALROY WEST

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CHAPTER XXVI

WICKS TRIES TO BARGAIN

Alla had sighted a faint smudge on the horizon and at once lit the fire in the hope of attracting attention. It seemed years before the smudge became more distinct, and it was long after Peter joined her before there was any certainty that the distant ship was coming towards the island.

There was considerable confusion on the beach. Doyle had evidently noticed the smoke of the fire and drew the attention of his companions to it. They held some sort of a conference and then started to make for the trees.

"We'll get down to the cave," Peter decided. "There's going to be some trouble, I'm afraid."

They reached the place without incident, and Peter moved out among the boulders in order to keep a watch for the three men. Alla came across to him after a time with some food.

"Splendid!" he cried. "This sentry duty is irksome. I began to feel both tired and hungry."

"I'll relieve you for a time," she offered.

He shook his head. "Then I'll stay with you."

"You must promise to get back to the cave if there is any trouble," he told her.

She shook her head. "Why should I promise that?" she demanded. "There will be no danger because we can keep them at a safe distance by firing at them. Then, when the ship draws near they may possibly hear the sound of the shots and that will make them realize that there is trouble on the island."

"More likely to make them steer off," Peter said.

Some time after he had finished his meal there came a hail from the bushes about four hundred yards away. It was followed by the fluttering of a white flag.

"If they had a gun they'd have used it already," Peter said quickly. "I'll see what they want."

"I'll keep you covered," Alla told him. Peter stood up and moved forward from the shelter of the rocks. The bushes parted and Captain Wicks appeared. He hurried towards the rocks until Peter checked him.

"That will be near enough, Captain Wicks," Peter warned him.

Wicks shrugged his shoulders.

"As you please," he commented. "Doesn't it see to you that this is a stalemate position? We can't capture you because you are armed. Also, we can't get the gold. On the other hand you can't get away from the island. It should be possible to refloat the ship, especially if we jettison as much as possible. What about coming to terms?"

Peter smiled. He realized that Wicks was not aware of the approaching ship.

"I don't have any guarantee," he pointed out, playing for time.

"Neither do we," Wicks retorted. "You might shoot us down. But in that case I doubt if you would get the trawler off the sandbank; it isn't going to be easy."

"I realize that. I rather doubt if it can be done."

Wicks pulled at his beard which was becoming straggly for want of attention.

"I can do it," he declared.

Peter shook his head. "We don't feel disposed to come to terms with you," he announced. "If you care to surrender to me I will accept you as a prisoner. All I can promise you is a fair trial."

Wicks seemed about to burst into a torrent of abuse, but managed to keep control of his temper.

"Why should I do that?" he demanded.

"To save yourself from being murdered by one of your precious pals," Peter explained.

"Meaning Doyle?" Wicks asked, his voice much quieter.

"Exactly. Doyle was responsible for the death of Howe. I believe he killed Gallop."

"He did," Wicks confirmed, evidently anxious that the gull should not rest on his shoulders. "Doyle managed to get his hands free and to keep the rope round them. He waited until Gallop had freed his feet and then took him by surprise."

"And Doyle also killed Crockett."

"Yes. They both drank too much and started to quarrel. Doyle was in a tearing rage because of losing the gold."

"Do you think he will let you live once it is found?"

Wicks thrust his hands in his pockets.

"I'll deal with him," he said grimly.

Peter hesitated. He felt certain that the two men would take the first opportunity of killing Wicks. There was not the slightest doubt that Wicks was a scoundrel but Peter could not refrain from admiring his good points. Wicks commanded a certain respect because he was a splendid seaman. It had been no mean feat to bring the trawler right across the Atlantic. There had been days of strain, but Wicks had never shown any signs of anxiety he must have felt so far as the navigation was concerned. He had been hampered all the time because of the friction on board his ship, and had really acted in a diplomatic way in order to avoid an open breach at a time when the ship might have been imperilled.

"You're running a big risk," Peter said thoughtfully.

"I have always run risks," Wicks retorted.

Peter decided to be perfectly open about the situation.

"It's too late to make terms on the lines you suggest," he said briskly. "There is a ship on the way to the island. I suggest that you come over to me as a prisoner. I will do my best to see that your precious pals are not able to implicate you in the murders."

Wicks jerked as though he had been struck.

"A ship on the way to the island," he gasped.

"Yes. That was why we lit the signal fire."

For a moment the captain hesitated, then he spun round and raced back to the bushes. Peter waited for a minute and then returned to the shelter of the rocks, where Alla was waiting for him.

OUTWITTED BY FATE

"What happened?" she demanded. Peter explained what had taken place and she began to look worried.

"Don't you think it was advisable for me to let him know about the ship?" he asked her.

"I think that was all right. But I am afraid that the news will make them desperate. Sinclair, I am certain, will not give up without a struggle."

"I doubt if they will have time to attack before the ship arrives. It's a pity, though, that we can't see her from here. I'm anxious to know what she is."

Alla suddenly caught his arm. "They're back on the beach!" she cried.

Sure enough, Wicks and his two companions were climbing into the dinghy in order to row across to the trawler. Peter frowned as they reached it and he saw Wicks race across the deck.

"What on earth are they up to?" he asked.

It was not long before they had some indication of the captain's strategy. He appeared on deck after brief interval.

"He's hoisting a signal!" Peter exclaimed.

As soon as it was at the dip he was able to read it. He gave a cry of dismay and made for the foremast.

"QL!" he exclaimed. "Ship infected! Why—that will keep them away!"

The signal was now close up and the two flags fluttered in the slight breeze. The yellow was on top and immediately below it was the yellow and black quartered flag.

Alla grasped Peter by the arm. "The ship which is coming to the island will exchange signals with him," she said. "That means that he will be able to send her away. He'll probably say that he has an outbreak of fever and would like some medical supplies. We must do something to check him."

"I know that," Peter declared. "I'll slip up to the top of the hill and try to send a semaphore message. It should be possible once she is near enough to the island."

"Very well. I will stay here and fire a shot if anything takes place by the beach. Sinclair may come ashore in the hope of taking us by surprise. He may reason that we should notice the flag and try to make our way to the other side of the hill in the hope of attracting the ship's attention."

"No need to warn me," Peter told her. "I shall be able to see for myself."

Until he came near to the fire he was not able to sight the approaching vessel. When he did see her, however, he dropped his hands to his sides in a gesture of hopelessness. Their signal for help was being answered by the yacht! It was evident that she had managed to slide off the rocks once the tide was in.

He raced back to tell Alla. Her face went pale when he explained what was happening.

"And I lit the fire," she cried in despair.

"You're not to blame. Evidently Nunez had a pretty shrewd idea of the direction in which we should set our course. He most probably communi-

cated by radio with the destroyer and then set out in search of us. The signal fire would naturally attract his attention. The main point is what will happen. I think Wicks is going to have a very nasty surprise. I am wondering whether I ought to give him warning."

"I shouldn't!" Alla exclaimed. "If we join him there will be no hope for use. Acting on our own we may be able to outwit both parties."

Peter shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps," he said slowly. "I can't say that I have very great hopes, all the same. For the moment we must play a waiting game."

It was not long before the yacht came into view. No sooner had Wicks observed it than he raced across the deck and jumped into the dinghy, followed by Sinclair and Doyle. They rowed for the shore as hard as they could go, pulled the boat up on the beach and raced for the shelter of the belt of trees.

The yacht came in slowly, obviously using the lead in order to avoid the sandbanks. At last she dropped her anchor, being in such a position that her gun was trained on the stricken trawler. Two launches left her and circled round the sandbank. The absence of action on board the trawler evidently emboldened the men, who finally brought the launches alongside and boarded the ship. From their place on the hill Alla and Drew were able to watch the tiny figures of the men from the yacht. There was great activity among them.

Evidently some sort of signal was exchanged, for a third launch came from the yacht.

"They were pretty well equipped with launches," Peter observed.

Two hours went past and there were still people moving about the deck of the trawler.

"I expect they're searching for the gold," Alla said.

Peter smiled. "I'd like to see Nunez," he said cheerfully. "I expect he's feeling pretty sick about things. It will not be long before he realizes that it must have been taken ashore."

It was about half an hour later that the two launches moved towards the beach. The third, by far the smallest of the three, returned to the yacht.

"Nunez has probably had enough!" Peter commented. "They will now search for Captain Wicks. This is where things are going to be exceedingly lively."

Two men were left on guard, and the rest moved cautiously in the direction of the trees. Some of them stopped to examine Crockett's body, which was lying in exactly the place where it had fallen after the fight with Doyle.

Peter watched the men string out into a line. Then he turned to the girl.

"I believe we've got our chance!" he exclaimed. "Come along!"

They made their way towards the beach as quickly as possible, taking advantage of every inch of cover which the bushes and rocks could offer. When they came near to the beach itself Peter signalled for the girl to stop in the shelter of the trees.

His revolver ready for instant use, he moved forward.

with Mrs. Sidney, motored to New Liskeard for the week-end.

A dual engine fleet airplane came into airport today causing some excitement. It is capable of carrying 1½ tons of freight or fourteen passengers. Mr. Ahr piloted the Airways plane bringing in a party from Sault Ste. Marie.

Guide News

A grand and glorious evening, all Guides concur, was that of Wednesday last, when a full company met at the hall and after flag-break spent a half-hour "tumbling" in shorts under the leadership of Mrs. Mayes.

It was a lovely evening, so Captain Wilkins asked the girls how they would like to practise for "tracking" badges. As all agreed it would be a good evening to begin, Captain Wilkins with Mrs. Besette, started first toward an unknown destination, leaving in their wake, mysterious chalk markings—arrows, etc., and signs which later, the Company followed, coming up to the leaders at the first group of rocks on the Delora Road.

They made campfire in the open and Mrs. Besette sang and taught them a new song, before it was time to trek back for dismissal.

PARTNER WHIST DRIVE BY LADIES' AUXILIARY, MAY 16

The Ladies' Auxiliary of the Canadian Legion are to hold a partner

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whist drive in the Legion hall on Monday evening next, May 16th. On the following day May 17th, there will be a sale of work, home cooking and candy, with afternoon tea served. The Ladies' Auxiliary is also holding its birthday anniversary banquet this (Monday) evening commencing at 7 p.m. At 9 p.m. after the banquet, the ladies are holding a social evening

for members and their husbands and friends and for members of the Legion and their wives and friends.

Toronto Telegram—There's always a hope, of course, that the whole rumpus is kicked up as a press-agent stunt to start the new quintuplets season off with a bang.

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