

The Last Voyage of The Donna Isabel

By Randall Parrish

Author of Bob Hampton of Placer.

Illustrations by Deaborn Melvill

what we've got here looks just a bit odd. This here is a schooner-rigged steam-yacht all right, an' I guess the tonnage isn't very far out of the Esmeralda class, but we haven't found a blame Chilean on board—two Swedes, a Dutchman, two Kanakas, an' a bloomin' English engineer."

"Well, what of that?" I broke in impatiently. "You know as well as I do that the entire Chilean navy is filled with foreigners."

"Sure," he coincided, with a swift, questioning glance toward me; "that's all true enough, sir, but I never saw a whole crew of those beggars an' no Chilean bossin' 'em. But then that's only a part of it. Every one of them small boats down there, an' the life-preservers hangin' in front of the cabin, have got the name Sea Queen painted on them. Dam' if it ain't, here, too, on this tarpaulin."

I bent over the rail looking down at the lettering he pointed out, yet with no feeling of uneasiness.

"Beyond doubt, that was the yacht's name before the Chilean government purchased her and renamed her Esmeralda for their service. She was bought from English parties, I've heard. Probably the new owners have found no opportunity to repaint the name."

Tuttle drew forth a red bandanna and blew his nose, his voice more sullenly insolent as he resumed speech.

"Glad ye take it so cool, an' maybe yer right. However, it looks dam' odd to me."

I glanced aside at the wheelman apprehensively. The fellow was gazing straight ahead of him into the rapidly thinning fog. It was the manner of the mate more than his words that impressed me.

"See here, Mr. Tuttle," and I dropped my hand rather heavily on his sleeve, "kindly explain exactly what you are driving at. Do you intend to insinuate that we have made a mistake in the dark, and run off with the wrong vessel? Why, man, that is impossible. We are sailors, not landlubbers. Both of us have had chances to see the Esmeralda, and you certainly know where she was moored yesterday."

"Well, when I come to think it over, I don't feel quite so everlastingly sure about that. The mind o' man is mighty deceitful," he admitted, slowly. "You see, I never saw her any closer than maybe a mile, an' even then she was half hid behind other shippin'. Of course I took notice of her outline an' rig, but I didn't pay much attention to details. To-night we was all of us excited, an' colors don't show up much in the dark! Now, her funnel is painted red, an' unless I'm a liar the Esmeralda's was black with a yellow stripe round the top. You see, Mr. Stephens, we kept in pretty close under cover all yesterday, an' maybe they hauled the Esmeralda up to the government docks, and run another boat into her anchorage."

I laughed aloud, not in the least impressed with his argument.

"A very likely story that there were two vessels in that harbor so near alike as to deceive all of us."

He remained stubbornly silent, evidently unconvinced, plucking at his chin-beard.

"There is a certain way of settling the matter," I went on, decisively. "that is, by an examination of the papers in the cabin. Take charge of the bridge, and I'll run down and clear up this affair beyond any further controversy. We may even have one of the ship's officers stowed away there, sleeping off his late celebration. If there is, he's due for a rude awakening. Keep the yacht's head as she is, and I'll be back directly."

I was aware that he watched me closely as I descended the steps, but felt little interest in such surveillance. That we could have been guilty of so serious an error as he suggested was beyond possibility. Nevertheless the mere suspicion was irritating, leaving me filled with a vague unrest. It was quite true that I might have been deceived. I realized that, because I had enjoyed no opportunity to observe the Esmeralda in daylight, and no occasion to study her lines with care at any time. To me she had appeared merely as an extremely graceful vessel, interesting to the eye of a seaman. But Tuttle and his crew must have known the truth. If we were, indeed, on board the wrong vessel, it was from no innocent mistake of the darkness, but rather the result of deliberate plan, the full purpose of which was beyond my comprehension. I swore savagely under my breath, even as I laughed sarcastically at the vague suspicion, aroused largely, as I well realized, by my increasing dislike of the ex-whaleman. The wrong ship? Why, the very conception of such an accident was grotesque, ridiculous, beyond belief! It was the hallucination of a fool. One of the men assisted me to unbar the slide across the companionway, and, bidding him stand by ready for a fall, I started below, my fingers on the brass rail, my feet firm on the rubber-lined stairs.

These led into as handsome a sea-



"See Here, Mr. Tuttle, Kindly Explain What You Are Driving At."

parlor as ever I remember gazing upon. Everything was effective and in elaborate taste, evidencing an expenditure that made me stare about in amazement. So deeply did it impress me that I remained there grasping the rail, gazing about in surprise, hesitating to press my investigations further. Yet this feeling was but momentary, the very desolation and silence quickly convincing me that the cabin contained no occupants. The movement of the vessel, the trampling of men on the deck, and the ceaseless noise of the screw were more noticeable here than forward, and no seaman, however overloaded with liquor he might have been the night before, could have slept undisturbed through the hubbub and changes of the past few hours.

Inspired to activity by this knowledge, and eager to settle the identity of our prize, I began closer examination of that impressive interior, although not entirely relieved from the spell of its royal magnificence. Six doors, three upon each side, opened off from the main cabin. The full-length mirrors occupied the spaces between, and the doors themselves were marvels of decoration and carving. Another, beneath the stairs, led directly into the steward's pantry, and revealed, besides, a passageway leading forward, probably to the lazarette amidships. The others, as I tried their brass knobs, exhibited merely comfortable staterooms, fitted up for officers' use; three contained two bunks each, the others only one. Four of the beds had been carefully made, but the remainder were in disorder, as though quite lately occupied. Everything impressed me as unusually clean and neat, evincing strict discipline. The only desk I noticed was a roll-top affair, securely locked, and with no litter of papers lying anywhere about. This, I figured, was probably the berth of the first officer; the captain's room would naturally be the one farthest astern.

The upright piano, with the high-backed cushioned chairs surrounding it, blocked my view aft, but on rounding these I observed a closed door, which apparently led into a room extending the entire width of the cabin. Never suspecting that it might be occupied, I grasped the brass knob, and stepped within. Instantly I came to a full stop, dazed by astonishment, my teeth clenched in quick effort at self-control. The entire scene burst in upon my consciousness with that first surprised survey—the draped portholes opening out upon the gray fog-bank, the brass bed screwed to the deck, the chairs upholstered in green plush, the polished table with a vase of flowers topping it, the glistening front of a book-case in the corner, the tiger rug into which my feet sank. All these things I perceived, scarcely realizing that I did so, for my one true impression concentrated itself upon the living occupants.

There were two present. At a low dressing table, her back toward me, fronting a mirror, yet with eyes fastened upon an open book lying in her lap, sat a woman. The lowered head yielded me only an indistinct outline of her features, yet the full throat and rounded cheek gave pledge of both youth and beauty. Standing almost directly behind her chair, with short, curly locks, crowned by a smart white cap, her hands busied amid her mistress's tresses, was a maid, petite, roguish, fluttering about like a humming bird. The latter saw me at once, pausing in her work with eyes wide open in surprise, but the preoccupied mistress did not even glance up. She must have heard the sound of the door, however, for she spoke carelessly:

"I thought you were never coming. What caused you to sail so suddenly?" These unexpected words, uttered so naturally, served partially to arouse me from the dull torpor of surprise. I

clenched my hands, wondering if I was really awake, and stared back into the frightened eyes of the maid, who appeared equally incapable of articulation. Suddenly she found voice.

"It is not so one, madame," she cried, shrinking back. "Non, non; it is un homme étranger."

"What is that you say, Celeste?" and the other arose swiftly to her feet, the open book dropping to the floor as she turned to face me. Instantly I recognized her, in spite of the long hair trailing unconfined far below her waist—recognized her with a sudden leap upward of my heart into my throat. There was no semblance of fear, only undisguised amazement, in the dark gray eyes that met mine.

"What—what is the meaning of this strange intrusion? Are you a member of the crew?"

Instantly my cap came off, the thought occurring to me of what a rough figure I must be making in my soaked jacket, with the glistening peak of my cap shadowing my face.

"No, madame," and I bowed before her "I am not one of your crew. My—my entrance here was entirely a mistake."

She leaned forward, one white hand grasping the back of her chair, the expression in her eyes changing as she read my face, perplexity merging into faint recollection.

"I do not quite comprehend," she confessed at last, changing her speech to a slightly broken Spanish. "You—you are Señor Estevan?"

CHAPTER VIII.

In Which I Begin Discovery.

Stunned by this abrupt disclosure of the extremely dangerous predicament we were in, I found no immediate voice for reply, merely standing there as if petrified, staring at them both, cap in hand, grasping the edge of the door. Their faces swam before me in the gray light streaming through the stern ports; the maid already attempting a smile, as though her fears had subsided, the mistress viewing me in wondering perplexity. She it was who first succeeded in breaking the embarrassing silence.

"But, señor, what does this all mean? Why are you here on board the yacht?"

With strong effort at control I brought my senses together, desperately fronting the disagreeable situation, feeling myself scarcely less a victim than she. If all that I now dimly suspected proved true, about us both were being drawn the cords of treachery.

"I cannot explain, madame," I began lamely enough. "At least not until I comprehend the situation better myself than I do now. It is all dark. I have reason to believe a most serious mistake has been made—one it will be very difficult to rectify. Perhaps I could see more clearly if you would consent to answer a few questions. May I ask them of you?"

She bent her head slightly, still gazing directly at me with widely open eyes in which I read increasing bewilderment. I believe she thought me a crazed man, whom she must continue to humor.

"What vessel is this?" "The steam yacht Sea Queen of Liverpool, owned by Lord Darlington," she announced, soberly, her face and lips white.

"How came you anchored off the government docks?"

"By special permission of the president. We were towed into that berth early last evening, after the Esmeralda had been hauled up against the quay to ship armament and stores."

I drew a deep breath, clenching and unclenching my hands.

"Could you tell me if it was known to others that you contemplated anchoring there?"

She hesitated, her lips slightly apart, one hand pressed against her temple.

"It is most important that I learn the exact truth," I urged, earnestly. "I ask for no idle curiosity."

"I am not generally consulted in such matters, señor," she admitted, "but I believe we had been waiting several days for the opportunity to take that position. This is as I have been told."

She seemed to be awaiting my explanation, striving to be courteous, yet with her impatience slightly evidenced by the continual tapping of her foot on the rug. But I was not yet through with my questioning.

"Were no officers left on board last night?"

Her gray eyes widened.

"Certainly yes; the first officer and the engineer were in charge when I retired. The others, with the majority of the crew, had gone ashore at sundown to enjoy the fun. But why do you ask, señor? Are these not on board now?"

"I regret being compelled to answer no. Only the engineer, three of the harbor watch, and some Kanaka firemen have been found. I have discovered no trace of the first officer."

"Then—then he must have rowed ashore with two of the men!" she exclaimed.

"How chanced you to be left here alone?"

She hesitated, her hands clasped on the chairback, her bosom rising and falling tremulously. Yet finally she forced her lips to reply, as though thus seeking the quickest way of clarifying the situation.

"We were all invited to the palace of the president, to listen to the speeches and view the fireworks. Lord Darlington was greatly interested, and most desirous of attending. The unfortunate scene which occurred at the hotel early in the evening left me, however, with so severe a headache that I begged to be allowed to remain here alone with Celeste. At first both Lord Darlington and mamma refused to depart without me, but when

(To Be Continued)

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MATTERS IN DISTRICT COURT

Hixon Goes Free on Account of the Absence of the Prosecuting Witness.

In district court yesterday the case of the State vs. Charles Hixon was heard and Hixon was freed. The prosecuting witness, one W. M. Thomas, failed to appear and as this was the second term at which case had been set for hearing, proceedings were had and a jury impaneled which Judge Travis instructed to return a verdict of not guilty there being no testimony in the case of material importance save that of Thomas himself.

This case was the one which happened last fall when Thomas was badly beaten up by Hixon at the home of the former south of this city near the Burlington bridge. According to the tale which Thomas told, he had been sent by the children of Hixon to come up to his house from Chas. Miller's where he was staying and after going up there Thomas claimed Hixon beat him so badly that he was almost unable to get back to Miller's. Hixon claimed that Thomas had been making himself obnoxious to his (Hixon's) wife and that he had been warned to stay away from the house

years, the next five years being spent under penalty of being hurt. This is claimed he did not do but attempted to visit the house while he thought Hixon was away. After Thomas had recovered from the effects of the beating he received, he stayed about the city for some time and talked loudly of the bitter prosecution he intended to carry on against Hixon but finally left the country and got into Iowa. This was shortly prior to the date set for the first trial. He made it convenient to remain in Iowa ever since but recently stated he would come here and prosecute providing the state would pay him five dollars a day and his expenses. This the county attorney could not see his way clear to do with the consequence that the case ended as above stated.

From Thomas' actions in the case it is evident he was no good and not disposed to treat anyone right and it serves to substantiate Hixon's story of the trouble and to justify his beating the fellow up.

Assault Case on Trial.

Judge Travis and a jury in district

court yesterday afternoon and this morning were engaged in hearing the case of the State vs. John Fleisner charged with assault with intent to do great bodily injury upon Charles Burke. This is the case which came up a few weeks ago when Burke was badly beaten up down in the Burlington yards.

Fleisner and a man named John Mercer were the men whom Burke charged with the crime which arose over a division of meals among the men. All of them were tramps and were unknown in the city. The evidence for the state was confined to Burke's testimony which was substantially as printed in the Journal, to the medical testimony touching the wounds Burke received and to admissions made by the defendant Fleisner. The county attorney found there was no case against Mercer and he was released. The defendant offered no testimony except that of the defendant who admitted the assault but claimed self defense as he claimed Burke was about to strike him with a pair of pliers when he, the defendant, seized a bridge bolt and struck Burke over the head three or four times. The pliers and what purported to be the bolt were placed in evidence, the former being taken from the defendant at the time of his arrest and the latter being afterwards found near the scene of the crime by Chief Rainey. The defendant made a good witness for himself telling a straight forward story and admitting he lost his temper when he saw Burke with the pliers. The case went to the jury about noon.

The case of the state vs. John Clarence charged with the murder of John P. Thacker near Union in January last, is set for trial tomorrow and will be the most important case to be heard at this term of court. It will doubtless attract a large crowd from Union and Murray where the parties are so well known and probably will take several days to try. Matthew Gering will assist County Attorney Ramsey to prosecute the case while Byron Clark will defend.

In This City.

Charles H. Bailey a well known Cass county boy who has been spending his late years in the Argentine Republic in the interests of the International Harvester Company, arrived in the city yesterday morning for a visit with his aged father. He expects to remain several weeks in this city and vicinity. Mr. Bailey left Argentine in January last and for the past two months he has been in Chicago, Ill., at the headquarters of the company. Mr. Bailey holds an important position with the company being in charge of setting up and placing in operation machines in Argentine. It takes several weeks to go from Chicago to Buenos Ayres, he having to go first to London and

thence to the Republic. Mr. Bailey reports that the wheat crop in Argentina is not near up to the standard yield the past season and conditions are not so favorable there as in years past when he visited that country. He brings home with him a curiosity well worth seeing in the shape of a rawhide bridle. This looks odd to our northern eyes but it is an artistic piece of work and the material is such that it will wear until the end of time almost. It cost him four dollars and a half in American money and it is well worth much more than that and he could easily dispose of it for more than it cost him. Mr. Bailey is full of delightful descriptions of the southern republic and its people and a very entertaining talker.

James A. Walker, the veteran Murrayite, is spending today in the city attend to business matters.

Came Home Quick.

The writer spent a few hours in the thriving little village of Cedar Creek last Saturday morning. We stepped from the east-bound morning passenger train, knowing that it would be impossible for us to get home until in the evening, unless by chance we came across someone coming to the county seat by private source. By the time we had finished our business, our friend, John Gauer rolled into town with his auto to bring J. F. Wolf and wife and C. E. Metzger down to the ball game. Mr. Gauer kindly gave us a seat beside him in his "goer," and we came home—and in very short order, too. Talk about your automobiles, but Mr. Gauer has the one to suit our fancy, and John knows how to handle it to perfection. It is one of the Mitchell make, and we believe just the kind of a roadster that will suit many who desire to invest in an auto. Mr. Gauer is agent for this machine, and those who may desire to purchase a good, up-to-date auto should see John and examine the one he has before they make a purchase. Talk about going some, we came down quicker than the Schuyler could have brought us, and we desire to thank Mr. Gauer for the courtesy. We also desire to return thanks to our friend, C. E. Metzger, for favors shown us during our brief stay in Cedar Creek.

Foot Seriously Injured.

A young man employed trimming walnut logs for shipment was very seriously cut yesterday afternoon by his ax slipping and the keen blade entering his foot virtually severing two of his toes. With a fortitude which was astonishing he made no outcry although the injury was a very painful and severe one. Mr. Hatfield, the purchasing agent, was present when the accident happened and he at once hurried the unfortunate man into a buggy and drove to a surgeon's office where the injury was dressed. It was found on examination that it was more severe than had been thought and it is more than possible he may lose at least two of the toes. Even should he be able to save them, it will be a very long time before he will be able to use the foot to any advantage. He is an expert in his line and the accident was one of the unavoidable kind which follow the profession.

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