

The Diamond Derelict---Being the Record of a



Young Man Who Finally Won Out---By Edward Marshall

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CHAPTER XXII.

No matter how nice the dock is, you can't stay moored there always. What a ship's for is to sail.—The Log Book of the Lyddy.

FIVE weeks later a fine autumn day drew near to its close and the waning sunshine filled the hollows of the Cape Cod sand dunes with dark, purple shadows. Westward the blue expanse of Cape Cod bay rippled in the late afternoon light. Eastward the deeper, more metallic blue of the Atlantic glowed between the scrub pines. The captain sat in a huge chair upon the piazza of his home and chewed gloomily upon the stem of an unlighted pipe. The tan of many years had faded from his rugged face, and it was somewhat thinner than it had been when he was stricken, but there were few other signs of the illness which had left him as vigorous as ever in mind, but uncertain as to legs.

Near him sat Mrs. Burgee, busy with her knitting, and occasionally (and as if anxious not to have the action observed) wiping her eyes with the completed end of the blue sock which was under construction by her needles.

A pleasant breeze stirred the loose locks of Norah's hair as she, seated on the top step of the piazza, leaned back against her husband's knees. She was gazing into the glimmering eastern glow, but it was plain to see that her thoughts were not on the calm grandeur of the sea. Parton himself, in a barrel chair above her, somewhat nervously puffed the smoke from a cigar into the gentle eddies of a light breeze, and watched it as it drifted. One hand rested upon Norah's shoulder, where it caressed a loosened lock of hair. The other bent and unbent the paper of a letter which was held open in it.

The captain was the first to speak.

"What makes me so John mad," he said, "is the idee of gettin' up at such an hour. I don't care a Quincey about your goin' back there to South Africky, but it ain't civilized to expect no man—not no sick man, anyway—to git up at no such hour as 5 o'clock. Adams! I might jest as well be back to sea ag'in. If they can't run their trains at more respectable hours than that, I'm goin' to move off the Cape. Yes, sir, by John Quincey Adams—I'm a-goin' to move to some place where you don't have to stay up all night in order to git started in th' mornin'. What's th' use, anyway? Hey? What's th' use? What's th' use o' livin' on th' Cape? There's Lyddy there. She'll be a-bawlin' around here soon's you're gone; an' I s'pose that woman there—that Nory that you all talk s'much about 's if she was all they was on earth—she'll be screechin' all over th' place within a minute after you git good an' gone. No, sir, by John! I'm a-goin' to move off the Cape.

"Don't know where I'm goin' to move to; don't know an' don't give a—don't give a damn! There, now, Lyddy Skolfeld, you jest make th' most o' that, will you? I don't give a damn! That's th' first time I've took th' name o' the Lord my God in vain for a John Quincey Adams long time. But I don't give a damn. An'-an' what's th' use?"

No one answered, so after waiting a while he went on:

"You English folks make me mad—that's what you do. You make me mad. Us United Statesers come out of you, and I guess we didn't come none too soon. If we'd stayed with you a few years longer 'fore we wrote our declaration I guess we'd been jest th' same helpless, useless sort o' trash that you be. But I don't give a damn! Now if you want to git mad at me, Lyddy, 'cause I've been swearin' you git mad! That's all. Git mad!"

"I ain't a-gittin' mad, Obed," said Mrs. Burgee, somewhat weakly, and wiping her eyes. "Guess I feel 'bout th' same's you do, only I don't put it quite that way."

She paused for a moment as if considering the matter of whether she, too, might not get some satisfaction out of profane swearing.

"I d' knows it's a very bad way, though. 'F I thought I'd git any comfort out of it, I'd say it, too. But it don't seem to me that it'd make me feeling any willin'er to let him go jest to say 'damn.' If you git comfort out of it, though, Obed, why, you cuss. I won't say nothin' now nor never if you cuss about his goin.' Only—well, course, they two knows best. They know what's right for them to do. But

it does jest seem—well, it jest seems hard. I s'pose it's harder yit for them. Obed, than it is for us two, though. They're goin' to be seprated by it. But I jest as soon you'd cuss agin, Obed, if it don't make Henry or Nory feel bad to hear you."

She turned to the young people. "Does it, children?" she asked.

"Go on," said Parton. "I like it."

Norah sat silent for a moment, and then she gently disengaged herself from Parton, and, going first to the captain and then to his wife, kissed them both. Then she sat down again in her chair and leaning her head over until it rested upon Parton's shoulder, began to weep quietly.

"Stow it," said the captain slowly. "Stow that, Nory! If you don't stow it I'll be a-bellerin' myself. That'd be nice now, wouldn't it? You folks make me all forget what I started in to say. What I was a-goin' to say was that you Britsers make me mad! You ain't got no eddication. That's what's th' matter with you—no eddication. Nothin' worth mentionin', anyhow. I'd jest be 'shamed!'"

"Why, Obed!" said his wife reproachfully. "Why, Obed?"

"Well," went on the captain, "I mean it. If Parton there'd been proper brought up, he'd know how to do somethin' or other for himself. He c'd be a carpenter, or a plumber, or a farmer—or somethin'. He wouldn't be jest a John helpless lunatic, wantin' to go back to South Africky to dig for little stuns. I ain't a-blam'in' him any, an' I'd know as Nory's goin' to be much bother to Lyddy whilt' you're gone. But now I tell you what—it makes me all choke up to think of your bein' such a little fool when you was young as not to git no useful eddication at some practical trade or other, so's't you could make a livin' here on the Cape without goin' off to some outlandish place or other, an' leavin' all your folks behind to worry!"

No one attempted to make any reply to this extraordinary speech, but the captain went on rapidly as if to avoid any possible interruption.

"Now don't be a-tellin' me we ain't your folks. What is a man after another man has saved his life? Ain't he that man's folks? And what's a woman after a man has saved her husband's life? Ain't she his folks, too? Well—I jest want to know if she ain't?"

Mrs. Burgee got up slowly and went into the house. When she reappeared she had her sunbonnet on. It was the first time she had shown any signs of really breaking down under the prospect of parting from these young folks whom she had learned to love so well, and whom the old captain, now that he was partially restored to health, had done nothing less than appropriate as a sort of glorified daughter and adored son.

"Well, I'm a-goin' down to th' postoffice," she said simply. "F I stay here any longer a-listenin' to you I'll be bellerin' like a fog horn."

Mrs. Burgee's pilgrimages to the post-office had become as regular as the coming of the days. They puzzled the captain, for he assured her that there was no one who could possibly write to her, but Mrs. Burgee only smiled—and went. Sometimes she took a letter from the groceryman who attended to the business of the mails—a letter with the imprint of the government hydrographic office in its corner and bearing no postage stamp. Most of those who received letters at the little Cape Cod office were impatient and opened them before they left the store, but not so Mrs. Burgee. She always waited until on her way home she had reached a point between two dunes that hid her both from the village and her home. There she glanced eagerly at the contents of the official envelope. The enclosures had so far been most unsatisfactory. They had ever read as follows:

"The United States hydrographic office regrets that it has received no word that any vessel has sighted a derelict barkentine answering to the description of the Lydia Skolfeld."

She noticed that they were always signed with a rubber stamp and wondered if the hands that pressed it to the paper had any notion of the misery its message took to her. She had torn each of the notices to small bits and carefully buried them deep in the Cape Cod sands. In her heart only was there any hope that the Lydia still floated, and she spoke it to none of those seated at home.

As she started out this night she resolved that if she found no news she would abandon hoping, too. She planned a little

ceremony which should take place as she returned along the road and interred the scraps of the official notice. She felt depressed and gloomy, but as she passed down the graveled path between the solemn rows of box plants she turned and bravely smiled.

CHAPTER XXIII.

You can hear the chug of her paddlewheels further than you can a steamboat's whistle. A lovin' woman's heart-throats will reach heaven quicker than the loudest preacher prayin' 'cause he's paid to.—The Log Book of the Lyddy.

Mrs. Burgee's walk toward the postoffice was as little pleasant as any she had ever made across the Cape Cod sand. She loved this sand, but that afternoon it seemed very hard to tramp through. She loved the little pines that struggled on its dunes, but that afternoon they seemed like sturd symbols of dead hopes. At the summit of the little hill whence she waved her farewell back to the group on the porch she could see salt water stretching both to east and west. She loved the sea, but that afternoon it had a heartless glitter.

"Drat you!" she said, and both words left her lips italicized.

"Drat you!" she said again. "You're greedy like a 6 month's child, you are. 'Tain't as if the things could be any use to you. If they was pretty things that you could toss around and wear to make your waves look nice, I wouldn't care so much. But they ain't pretty yet—he told me so. Said they wouldn't be till after they was polished up and cut."

"You got lots o' little stuns a heap sight prettier than they be now, and care so little for 'em that you throw 'em out upon the beach. You'll never git 'em cut and polished. They ain't no use to you at all. You'll leave 'em down amongst the shades in your innards an' never give 'em any chance to even try to shine. And by a-keepin' 'em you're robbin' me—you're robbin' me of what I've longed for all my life."

Mrs. Burgee stopped and stamped her foot there in the sand. She looked around her cautiously. Then she went—with many glances around to see that she was unobserved—a little distance into the dwarf forest of scrub pine.

And there, in the sad silence of the little solitude—a silence emphasized by the constant moaning of the sea and the dead rattling of the sorry limbs above her—she threw herself upon the sand and wept.

She had taken the young people to her heart with that fierce mother love which is not rare in bleak New England. During all the years since she had married her longing for a child had been intense. That she was to die without one she had years before accepted with fatalistic but occasionally rebellious resignation. But when these two young lives came into hers it was almost as delightful as that other warmth of joy which she had felt when as a girl she had first felt certain of Obed's love for her, but it was wholly different.

About the future she had not cared—or dared—to think too much. Obed had been restored to her from the Valley of the Shadow. These two children had been given to her from some mystery of radiance hidden somewhere in God's un-understandable munificence.

So when at last the blow fell on her in his announcement that he must go back to the Cape to fight again for fortune, it dazed her. Hers was not a demonstrative nature, and she had said little of her woe, but as she knelt there on the sand her heart wept, cried out very softly, and she prayed.

Then, hurrying in the twilight, she almost ran down to the postoffice. It was the night when news should come from the Hydrographic office, and her heart jumped a little as the postmaster passed out the envelope with the imprint of the office.

This, she presumed, would hold an answer to the last careful, stiff-fingered note she had sent asking them to acquaint her the moment news should reach them of the sighting of the Lydia Skolfeld, derelict.

All her hopes were centered now in the finding of that hulk. The Lydia had ceased to interest her as a ship—she had become the casket which held the magic key to happiness—the diamonds that would make it possible for Parton to stay away from Africa, and news of her must come through this office in Washington.

She hurried off desperately to her little retreat among the pines and tore the letter open. She scarcely dared to look at it. Her hands trembled as she held it.

At last she slowly turned her gaze and deciphered in the fading light the heading

of the office, the date, the words "Dear Madame."

She gave one helpless look up at the fading brilliance of the sky, which in its drooping seemed to plead humbly with the sea it surveyed for an instant. Then, with hands shaking jerkily and with eyes strained in the dim light she slowly deciphered the brief message.

Without a word she fell forward on the sand and gripped hands full of it between her tense and straining fingers. She rubbed her face down in its cool and pleasant softness. She did not cry, she did not laugh. She lay quite still and tried to think.

It was fully five minutes later that she sat up, and the shadows there among the deadened pines had deepened so that she was unable to read the welcome words again, no matter how she strained her eyes. She rose and started slowly toward the house. She had gone 100 yards, perhaps, when she stopped suddenly. She retraced her steps and again sunk to her knees.

"Oh, Lord, you've been real good to me," she said. "I must forget to thank you; and you've been real good to me."

Then she turned and, stumbling as she ran, went quickly toward the village.

CHAPTER XXIV.

No matter how miserable the voyage may have been, we all chirk up on landin' day.—The Log Book of the Lyddy.

After Mrs. Burgee had left the house the remaining three sat almost silent on the little porch and looked out at the sea. The young people would have been unhappy had not their youth been hopeful of great things to come.

To Parton the prospect of another period of strain and struggle was unwelcome, but he knew that he would start with better courage and a stronger determination because of the tremendous stake he had to work for—happy years at home with Norah.

To her the prospect was more dreadful, but she glorified in his courage and would do naught to break it down. Love is wonderful, and she was learning it. Norah's dreaming eyes were suddenly arrested by the sight of the strange craft and its low-lying tow. She sprang up cheerfully.

"Sail ho!" she cried. She got the captain's battered old marine glass for him, and held it to his eye with one hand, while she adjusted the focus with the other according to his orders. The captain peered squintingly.

"One turn ahead," he said, instructing her, "now back it just a mite. There. That'll do. It's almost too dark to see."

For a moment he gazed, interested as he always was in anything that showed movement on the sea.

"It's John Sears, and that there menhaden-er of his'n—the Susy," said the captain. "She's towin' suthin', but I can't see what it is. Looks like a raft he's picked up some's."

He let his head drop back and Norah lowered the glass, offering it to Parton. He declined and she put it to her own eye for a moment.

"Yes, it's a raft," said she. "Sure the little tug's having hard work pulling it along."

"'Tain't a tug," the captain said. "It's a fishin' boat. Don't seem jest respectable to me to fish from steam craft, but I s'pose they have to do it now to keep their wages paid. Wonder what old plunder John's picked up now. He's allus bringin' suthin' into port. Found Ned Bristow's body, one dark night, a-floatin' out to sea, an' brought it in next day. Took it to Ned's widder. Day or two later, after th' fun'ral, he went to her an' suggested that she pay suthin' or other to him for salvage."

"No, sir," says she. "I've been thinkin' for five years of gittin' some divorce lawyer an' payin' him for gittin' shot of Ned. S'pose I'm goin' to give you money for bringin' of him back to me an' puttin' me to all th' expense of buryin' of him? You c'n guess again," says she.

"'Nother time Cap'n Silas Ketchum lost his smack an' jest got away, he said, with his life, up near th' Banks. He rowed around in small boats till they picked 'em up. It was real nice weather, an' they had time to git lots o' food and water in th' small boats, so it waan't what you'd call a desprate shipwreck. He had it insured for three thousand, and he swore that it was worth all of five and that he had 20 quintal in it besides."

"Well, what does that old menhaden,