

# THE CAPTAIN OF the KANSAS

By LOUIS TRACY,  
Author of "The Wings of the Morning," "The Pillar of Light," Etc.

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## CHAPTER XII.

**T**HE captain was enthusiastic when he heard of Elsie's idea for the protection of the main deck—"an excellent notion," he termed it, but he scouted the suggestion that she should undertake the work herself.

"You little know what hauling that heavy canvas means," he said when they met at lunch. "It would tear the skin off your hands. No, Miss Maxwell, we can put our Chileans on to that job. I have something better for you to do. Can you map?"

"I have copied heaps of plans for my father," she told him.

"Excellent! At noon today I took an observation, so I intend to devote an hour to revising the chart. Will you help? Joey is in the scheme already. Then the admiralty will graciously acknowledge the survey supplied by Miss Elsie Maxwell, Captain Arthur Courtenay and Joey, otherwise known as 'the pup.'"

His allusion to the dog by name recalled "Jose the Winebag," but Elsie thought she would retain that tiny scrap of detective information for the present. So she simply said:

"You will explain to me my part of the undertaking, of course?"

"Certainly. You must first correct the index error. Then you subtract the dip and the refraction in altitude, take the sun's semidiameter from the nautical almanac and add the parallax. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly. It sounds the easiest thing. But I don't wish to hear the remarks of the admiralty when they see the result."

"I am interested in navigation to the slight extent possible to a mere yachtsman. May I join you?" interposed Christobal.

"Oh, yes!" said the captain offhandedly.

Elsie repressed the smile on her lips. Did the worthy doctor fear developments if this harmless mapmaking progressed in his absence? She imagined, too, that Courtenay's acquiescence in Christobal's desire to be present was not wholly in accordance with his innermost wish. She promptly crushed that dangerous fancy. The captain was only seeking for some excuse to take her away from the rough work of rigging the extra awnings. How odd that the other thought should have cropped up first!

"You still think the Kansas will win clear of her difficulties?" she said rather hurriedly. "After all, the ship's safety is essential to your survey."

"Every hour strengthens my opinion," was the confident reply. "Suarez says that there is a reasonable chance of occasional brief spells of fine weather at this period of the year. At any rate, the gale may not be absolutely continuous, and Walker is assured that he can patch up the engines for half speed. Given a calm day—a day like this, for instance—we can reach the strait in a few hours."

"And the Indians?"

"I leave them out of my reckoning. What else can I do?"

"Kill 'em," said Tollemache.

Courtenay glanced sharply at his fellow countryman. He disliked these references to the Alaculof bogey in Elsie's presence.

"We have dynamite aboard," said Tollemache. "Why not construct a couple of infernal machines which could be fired by pulling a string and let them drift toward the canoes when the Indians are near enough?"

"It is worth trying," was Courtenay's brief comment, though he saw later that Tollemache's suggestion was a very useful one.

Elsie's first task was to prepare a large scale drawing of the southern part of Hanover Island as set forth in admirably chart No. 1337 (sheet 2, Patagonia), which is the only trustworthy record available for shipmasters using the outer passage between the gulf of Penas and the strait of Magellan. It was a simple matter to fill in the few contours given. The neighboring small islands were shown in reasonable detail, but the whole western coast of Hanover Island itself consisted of a dotted line and a solitary peak, Stokes mountain, the height of which could be estimated and the position triangulated from the sea. Even Concepcion strait, on the north, and the San Blas channel, on the south, were marked in those significant dotted lines. The coast was practically unknown to civilized man.

It was borne in on the girl while she worked that the chief marvel in her present condition was the triumph of science over nature in its most hostile mood. The Kansas boasted all the comforts and luxuries of a well equipped hotel. Seated at the same table as herself was a skillful sailor, using logarithms, secants and cosecants, polar distances and hour angles as if he were in some university class room.

She stole a glance at Courtenay. He was so keenly engaged on the business in hand, so bent on achieving accuracy in his figures, that she studied herself for her leisure. Then she wondered if he ever gave a thought to that promised wife of his, who must soon suffer the agony of knowing that the Kansas was overdue.

Elsie was sufficiently well acquainted

ed with shipping to realize the sensation that would be created by the first cablegram from Colonel announcing the nonappearance of the steamer in the strait. The Valparaiso newspapers would be full of surmises as to the vessel's fate. They would publish full details of the valuable cargo and would give a list of the passengers and officers. Ah! Ventana would learn then, if he had not heard it earlier, that she was on board. And he alone would understand the true reason of her flight from Chile. Her cheeks flushed, and she applied herself more closely to the chart she was copying. She had left a good deal unsaid in her brief statement that morning. How strange, how utterly unexpected, it was that Ventana's name should fall from Courtenay's lips—Courtenay of all men living! And what did Isobel mean during that last dreadful scene ere she was carried away to the boat by screaming in her frenzy that Ventana had taken "an ample vengeance?"

Vengeance for what? Had the half breed dared to make the same proposal to the rich and highly placed Isobel Baring that he did not scruple to put before the needy governess? Surely that was impossible. There were limits even to his audacity—

"Well, how is my chief hydrographer progressing?"

Courtenay's cheery voice banished the unwelcome specter of Ventana. Elsie started.

"I do believe you were day dreaming," said the captain, with a surprised smile. "A penny for your thoughts."

"I don't think you can pay me," she retorted, hoping to cover her confusion. "Won't you accept Chilean currency?"

"Not on the high seas."

"But you are on dry land. Please make a dot on your map at 51 degrees 14 minutes 9 seconds south and 74 degrees 59 minutes 3 seconds west. That is the present position of the ship. Let me pin this compass card on the table. Use the parallel ruler, regard each inch as a mile, and I'll do the rest by guesswork."

Courtenay took his binoculars and went on to the bridge. He called out the apparent distance of each landmark he could distinguish, described it and gave its true bearing. In the result Elsie found she had prepared a clear and fairly accurate chart of the bay and its headlands, while the position of the distant range of mountains was marked with tolerable precision. But Courtenay was far from being satisfied.

"If I had a base line or even a fresh set of points taken higher up the inlet I could improve on my part of the survey," he said. "Yours is admirable, Miss Maxwell. Of course I know you are an artist, but mapping is a thing apart. That is first rate."

"Perhaps you may be able to secure fresh data when the Kansas puts to sea again," said Christobal.

"If I am conning the wheel I must leave the chartmaking entirely to my assistant," replied the captain lightly.

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Joey. I was telling Miss Maxwell what a lucky fellow you are. Besides, if you went I'd be in command, and you know what would happen then. If all else failed, the bloomin' tub would turn turtle in the sea."

To emphasize his remarks Boyle blew a big smoke ring, and shot several smaller rings through it.

Elsie felt Christobal's critical eye on her. She was shading the outlines of the map and trusted that her head was bent sufficiently to hide the telltale color which leaped to her face. But Courtenay wished to hear more of this.

"I hope you do not credit everything my chief officer says about me," he said, glancing over her shoulder at the drawing, "nor about himself," he added, as she was too busy to look up. "To my knowledge he has refused the command of two ships since we both joined the Kansas."

"Home orders?" cried Boyle, who was certainly beyond himself. Probably he missed his regular vocal exercise owing to lack of a crew. "My missus says to me: 'You just stick to Captain Courtenay, young feller-mead. He's one of the get-rich-quick sort. I'll learn from him how to dodge board of trade inquiries. You stand on what I told you, Miss Maxwell. You remember—commodore? Huh!'"

Courtenay glanced at the chronometer.

"I must be off," he announced. "Tollemache may need some help with his bombs, and those Chileans require looking after."

Christobal, too, quitted the chart room to visit his patients. He had said very little while he sat there, and Elsie did not know whether to laugh or cry at the tragic comedy of her environment. She was only certain of one thing—she would like to box Boyle's ears. She was completely at a loss to account for his persistent efforts to drag in references to their prior conversation. She dared not catechize him. That would be piling up more difficulties for the future. But what possessed him to blurt out such embarrassing details in the presence of the two men whom she most wished to remain in ignorance of them?

She peeped at Boyle sideways. His eyes were closed, the cigar was between his teeth, and he had a broad grin on his face. She could not guess that the once tactful chief officer of the Kansas was saying to himself:

"My godfather, how Pills glared! There will be trouble on this ship about a woman before long or I'm a Dutchman. An' didn't the skipper rise at the fly too! Huh!"

A little later as Elsie passed along the promenade deck she saw Courtenay, Tollemache and Walker deep in consultation. They were arranging a percussion fuse of fulminating mercury. While she was watching them Walker dropped a broken furnace bar on top of a small package placed on an iron block. Instantly there was a sharp report, and Joey, who was an interested observer, jumped several feet. The men laughed, and she heard Courtenay say:

"That is the right proportion of fulminate. Now, Tollemache, I'll help you to fix them. We do not know the moment those reptiles may choose to attack."

So the captain did not leave the Alaculof menace altogether out of count. Something rose in her throat, some wave of emotion which threatened her splendid serenity. She ran rather than walked to her cabin, flung herself on the bed and sobbed piteously. It had to come, this tempest of tears. When desperate odds demanded unflinching courage she faced them dry eyed, with steadfast heart. But today in the bright sunshine and apparent security of the ship sinister death shadows tortured her into rebellion. She did not stop to ask herself why she wept. Being a woman, she yielded to the gust, and when it had ended, with the suddenness of a summer shower, she smiled through the vanishing tears. Her first concern was that none should be aware of her weakness.

"How stupid of me!" she murmured. "What would the men think if they knew I broke down in this fashion?"

She looked in a mirror. In the clear light without any one could see she had been crying, and there was so much work to be done that she did not wish to remain in her stateroom until all tokens of the storm had passed. She searched for a powder puff and was at a loss to discover its whereabouts until she recollected that the doctor had borrowed it for the use of a man slightly scalded when his own supply of antiseptic powder was exhausted. So she went into Isobel's room, entering it for the first time since the Kansas struck on the shoal. The two cabins communicated, as Mr. Baring had gone to the expense of having a door broken through the partition for the girls' use during the voyage.

If Elsie had not already given way to tears she must have faltered now at the sight of her friend's belongings strewn in confusion over the floor, chairs, dressing table and bed. Isobel possessed a gold mounted dressing case the size of an ordinary portmanteau.

It held an assortment of pretty and mostly useless knickknacks, and they had all been tumbled out in a frantic hurry. At first Elsie flinched from further scrutiny, but common sense told her that this despondent mood must be fought. She dropped to her knees, found a mother-of-pearl powder box and picked up other scattered articles and replaced them in the dressing case. To accomplish this it was necessary to rearrange various trays and drawers. Portraits of girl friends, including her own, and of men unknown to her, letters, memoranda and other documents were thrown about in disorder. All these she put back in their receptacles, wondering the while what motive had led Isobel to make such a

frenzied search for some special object that she cared not a jot what became of the remaining articles.

Yet who could account for the frenzy of that terrible hour when the captain announced the ship's danger? Even Courtenay himself, she remembered, had emptied a locker in a rapid hunt for the dog's coat, but he had laughingly explained his haste later when some chance reference was made to his soaked garments.

Anything was excusable in the light of panic. She gathered up a skirt and some blouses, locked the dressing case, put the key in her purse and quitted the room with a heavy heart, for the handling of her friend's treasures had brought sad memories.

Passing into the deck corridor, she heard the captain's voice, apparently at a considerable distance. Two hundred yards away from the ship Courtenay and Tollemache were anchoring a flat framework built of spare hatches and secured by wooden crosspieces. On it stood the first of the infernal machines. The raft floated level with the water, so its only conspicuous feature



Chief Officer Boyle.

ting was a small spar and a block, to which a line and an iron bar were attached. The men looked strange in her eyes at that distance. In the marvellously clear light she could see their features distinctly, and when Courtenay shouted to a sailor to haul in the slack of the line she caught a trumpet-like ring that recalled the scene in the salon when he held back the mob of stewards. His athletic figure, silhouetted against the shimmering green of the water, was instinct with graceful strength. He looked a born leader of men, and, as though to mark his quickness of observation, no sooner had Elsie glanced over the side of the ship than he waved a hand to her.

She sighed. A bitter thought peeped up in her that he was perhaps a trifle careless in showing her these little attentions. She wished he would speak to her of that other girl who awaited him in England. A pleasant state of confidence would be established then. These secret twitches of sentiment were irritating.

She walked aft to obtain a nearer view of the operations. The sailors had already shut in a large portion of the promenade deck with canvas, and she noticed that loopholes were provided every ten feet or so to permit the effective use of the defenders' firearms. Thus at each step she was reminded of the precarious hold she had on life, and she was positively frightened when some mad impulse surged through her whole being, bidding her imperiously to abandon her ultra conscientious loyalty to a woman she had never seen. Why struggle against circumstance? If death were so near, what did she gain by prudery?

For an instant she stood aghast at the revelation which had come to her. She was in love with Courtenay. She was ready to die by his side, fearless and joyous, if only he would put his arms around her and tell her that she was dear to him. Ah, the fierce delight of that first silent surrender! Her heart beat as it had never pulsed before, even under the stress of the storm or the sudden terror of the night attack. Her eyes shone, and her breath came laboriously between parted lips. Golden dreams coursed through her brain. She was thrilled with an unutterable longing.

Then her swimming eyes rested on a group of men standing on the poop. Among them was Christobal, interested, like the rest, in the floating of the mine. And forthwith Elsie fell from the clouds and was brought back, shuddering, to cold reason again. She was sick at heart. She hated herself for her self-abasement. She must grapple with sackcloth and mourn, and the fight must be fought now without parley or hesitation unless the sweetness were to go forth from life forever and all things turn to ashes in her mouth.

So, marshaling the best qualities of her womanhood, she quelled the turmoil in her breast, forced herself to join the men on the after deck and said when the snuffing Spaniard turned to receive her:

"Where do they mean to put the second contrivance?"

"About there," he said, indicating a point on the surface of the bay eastward of the canoes. His right arm was extended, and he placed his left hand on her shoulder. Courtenay, hailing Walker, saw the two leaning over the rail in that attitude. Perhaps one of the two hoped that Courtenay would

see them. Elsie, as part of her punishment, did not shrink away, though the touch of Christobal's hand made her flesh creep. But Joey, whose mind was singularly free from complexities, leaped up at her. He wanted Elsie to tell him what Courtenay was doing out there, so far away from the ship. She stooped and picked him up. Christobal had no excuse for a second career.

"Bark, Joey," she whispered, "bark and call your master. If anything happens to him, you and I shall never see England again. And I am longing for home today."

## CHAPTER XIII.

**C**HRISTMAS day arrived and maintained its kindly reputation by finding affairs on board the Kansas changed for the better.

Mr. Boyle was so far recovered that he could walk. He even took command of two watches in the twenty-four hours, but was forbidden to exert himself lest the wound in his back should reopen. Several injured sailors and firemen were convalescent. The two most serious cases were out of danger. Frascuelo, hardy as a weed, dared the risk of using his damaged leg and survived, though his progress along the deck was painful. Nevertheless on Christmas morning he presented himself before the captain and asked leave to abandon his present quarters. He felt lonely in the fore-cabin and wished to berth with the other Chileans in the neighborhood of the salon. Although his luck was bad in some respects, the coal trimmer was endowed with the nine lives of a cat, for there could be no manner of doubt that he dragged himself aft just in time to avoid being killed.

Yet never was day less ominous in appearance. The breezy, sunlit morning brought no hint of coming tragedy. The fine weather which had prevailed since the Kansas drifted into the estuary seemed to become more settled as the month wore. Suarez said it was unprecedented.

But the miner from Argentina never wavered in his belief that the Indians would soon muster every adult for an assault on the ship. The elements might waver, but not the hate of the savage. From the rising of the sun to the going down thereof Suarez was ever on the alert.

Every other person on the ship held the opinion that the Alaculofs would attack by night if they were not afraid to attempt the enterprise at all. So Suarez slept soundly while his companions were on the qui vive for a call to repel boarders. Were it not for the strain induced by the silent menace of their savage neighbors the small company suffered no ill from their prolonged stay in this peaceful anchorage. There was work in plenty for all hands. Walker was re-enforced by a trio of firemen whose technical knowledge, slight as it was, proved useful when he began to fit and connect the disabled machinery. For the rest, the promenade deck was walled with strong canvas, while Courtenay and Tollemache gave undivided attention to the fashioning of several other floating bombs which could be exploded from the ship. They also provided flexible steam pipes in places where a rush might be made if the Indians once secured a footing on the deck, fore or aft. Steam was kept up constantly in the donkey boiler not alone for the electric light and the daily working of the pumps, as the Kansas had not blundered over the shoal without straining some of her plates, but for use against the naked bodies of their possible assailants.

When day followed day without any sign of hostility not a man on board save Suarez and Tollemache paid much real heed to the shoreward peri. Walker, with his hammers and cold chisels, screw jacks and wrenches, was the center of interest. And Walker's swarthy visage wore a permanent grin, which presaged well for the fulfillment of his promise.

Elsie devoted herself to the hospital. She was thus brought more in contact with Christobal than with any of the others. Nor did he make this close acquaintance irksome to her. Always suave and charming in manner, he exerted himself to be entertaining. Though she knew full well that if the Kansas reached the open sea again he would ask her to marry him, he was evidently content to deny himself the privileges of courtship until a proper time and season.

She was far too wise to appear to avoid Courtenay. Indeed, she was studiously agreeable to him when they met. She adopted the safe role of good fellowship, flattering herself that her own folly would shrink to nothingness under the hourly castigation thus inflicted.

After the midday meal on Christmas day—a sumptuous repast, for the due preparation of which Elsie had come to the Chilean cook's assistance in the matter of the plum pudding—Suarez suddenly reported that a new column of smoke was rising from Guanaco hill, a crag dominating the eastern side of the bay. He was unable to attribute any special significance to the signal on that particular place. During his five years with the Alaculof tribe he had never seen a fire lighted there before. That in itself was a fact sinister and alarming.

Suarez had sufficient tact not to make this statement publicly. He told Christobal, and the doctor passed on the information to the captain. Both men went to the poop with their glasses and carefully examined the coast line.

Courtenay was the first to break an oppressive silence, and his low pitched voice announced stirring tidings.

"Do you see those canoes yonder?" he said. "There were three under the trees before Suarez discovered the smoke on Guanaco. Now I fancy I can make out nearly a dozen. Though they are not launched, they have been

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No. 139—Leaves Goldsboro, N. C., 2:05 p. m.; Selma, N. C., 3:00 p. m., for Greensboro, N. C., handles through sleeper Raleigh, N. C., to Atlanta, Ga., connecting at Greensboro, for all points North, South, and West.

No. 111—Leaves Goldsboro, N. C., 3:40 p. m.; Selma, N. C., 10:38 p. m.; handles sleeping Raleigh, N. C., to Greensboro, N. C. Connects at Greensboro, for Charlotte, Atlanta, New Orleans, Asheville, Knoxville, also for Danville, Lynchburg, Charlottesville, Washington and all points North.

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