

A CAPTAIN UNAFRAID

PART V.

Narrated by CAPTAIN JOHN O'BRIEN to HORACE SMITH

THE day after the Laurada left New York with a cargo of arms, of which she was to be relieved by the Dauntless at Navassa Island, General Nuñez and I, with two detectives at our heels, started by rail for Charleston, South Carolina, where the Commodore, which was owned by the Cubans and had done some filibustering work, was lying with a revenue cutter standing guard over her. She had no arms aboard, so there was no excuse for seizing her; but the Government was determined that she should not get away again.

Soon after our arrival I sent word to the Captain of the Commodore to get steam up, to convey the idea to the authorities, who were so excited over the presence of real filibusters that they were ready to believe anything, that we would try to use her. I wanted to make sure that the cutter would stick close alongside of her.

In the meantime Horatio Rubens had left Brunswick, where he had concluded the deal for the purchase of the Dauntless so quickly and quietly that no unfriendly eyes had seen him, and gone to Jacksonville, where he paraded himself so prominently that the spies were on his track in no time. He consulted openly with Mr. Hagan and other active revolutionists, and quickly came to the impressionable slenths to conclude that an expedition was to be sent out on the Three Friends, which was lying in the river in front of the city. Hence it followed that the only other revenue cutter that was near enough to the scene of action to give us any trouble was hurriedly summoned to watch the Three Friends. This was before our continued success had caused the force of cutters in those waters to be enlarged, and augmented with warships. The detectives must have thought we were moving very awkwardly; but they soon knew better.

I will not for the Pinkertons, and the famed Secret Service operatives and special Treasury agents, that one could call them do the same thing twice in the same way, right under their noses, without almost certain detection. That is all I can say of their shrewdness, and as, with one exception, I never tried to trick them twice by precisely the same method, their only effectiveness was in compelling us to think up new ideas, which was not difficult.

At Charleston we found General Rafael Cabrera, in command of a force of seventy-five Cubans, who were to accompany us. It had been planned to send them away on the Commodore, but the scheme had missed fire, so they had been held there under waiting orders. Like some of our army of detectives of all sorts, who had been watching Cabrera and his men. There must have been twenty eyes of them, and they proceeded in "rifle" hand" on the whole, though in all good schools for slenths. Nothing escaped their vigilance.

When I sent the note to the Captain of the Commodore telling him to get up steam and be prepared to sail on short notice, a Secret Service agent paid my trusted messenger a large sum of Government money to let him read the message. As evidence that my confidence in the messenger was not misplaced, he got more money than I told him to ask for.

On the day following our arrival we were joined by a small party from New York, headed by Frank Pagluchi, one of our engineers. Pagluchi, who was American born of Italian parents, was a sharp on marine machinery and a good fighter. With him were half a dozen young Americans who were seeking excitement, and perhaps glory, in Cuba.

They had been passed by someone connected with the Delegation in New York; but nothing else was known about them. One of them was Frederick Funston, whose campaigning in Cuba helped to make him a Brigadier General in the United States army.

LATE in the afternoon of the day they arrived we rounded up our party and hustled to the Atlantic Coast Line depot (then the Plant Line) just in time to catch a train for Jacksonville, leaving the Commodore with smoke pouring from her funnel. We occupied a coach at the rear of the train, which had been reserved for us. The detectives divided their force when they saw us start for the station. A dozen of them wished to join us as traveling companions; but they were told that ours was a private car, so they were obliged to content themselves with the coach ahead.

About ten o'clock that night we reached Callahan, twenty miles north of Jacksonville, where the Seaboard Air Line (then the Florida Central & Peninsular) crosses the Coast Line. As we came to a stop our coach was quietly uncoupled, and when the train pulled out we were left behind. By the time the detectives discovered we were no longer with them they could not jump off without breaking their necks, and the train had orders from the general manager to run through to Jacksonville without stopping for anyone.

Before the train was out of sight an engine backed down and coupled up to our car, switched us over to the Seaboard track, and headed for the coast. At a blind siding in the woods some miles east of Callahan we stopped to pick up the two carloads of arms and ammunition that had been shipped from Bridgeport to Jacksonville. These cars had been dropped off at Callahan, through a private order from headquarters, and the detectives were still waiting and watching for them in Jacksonville.

ALL this jiggery in transportation was due to the astute Fritot, who joined us at Charleston. At Callahan we picked up two Cuban pilots who were supposed to have intimate acquaintance with the coast at the places we were to land. We were then in Fritot's territory, and he was responsible for the safe departure of the expedition.

The first thing he did was to look the party over carefully, to satisfy himself that there were no spies aboard. When he reached Funston he showed some suspicion.

"Who are you?" he sharply inquired.

"Fred Funston."

"Where are you going?"

"To Cuba."

"What for?"

"To fight Spaniards, the same as all of these other men."

"How do you know they are going to fight Spaniards?"

"They told me so in New York, and they told me I might come along."

"Who told you that?"

"Mr. Zayas, secretary of the Junta."

Funston's answers had the ring of honesty, and the interview might have ended there if a young daredevil named Webford, who was sitting beside him, had not sought to help matters along when he saw that Fritot still hesitated.

"We're not only going to fight Spaniards," he said, with offensive braggadocio; "but we're going to kill them. Then we're going to cut off their ears and string them on a line. Before I've been in Cuba a month I expect to have a string that long," and he spread out his arms to their full length.

Fritot studied both men for a long half minute. "That sounds like spy talk," he told Webford. "We are not depriving any Spaniards of their ears; but I think we shall deprive ourselves of the company of you two gentlemen right here!"

He reached the bellcord to stop the train, but paused before giving the signal, to discuss the situation with some of the Cuban leaders. After an earnest exchange of opinions it was decided to allow the two Americans to accompany the expedition; but they were to be closely watched after the landing, and, if it developed that they really were spies, they were to be shot without further ceremony. Formal and strict instructions to this effect were given to General Cabrera, who was admonished to keep the two men under his own observation and see that they did not give him the slip, if such was their intention.

"We will see that you get to Cuba, all right," Fritot assured Funston and Webford, after their case had been disposed of; "and if you are looking for a fight you'll get all you want of it. If you are spies, you will do less harm down there than up here."

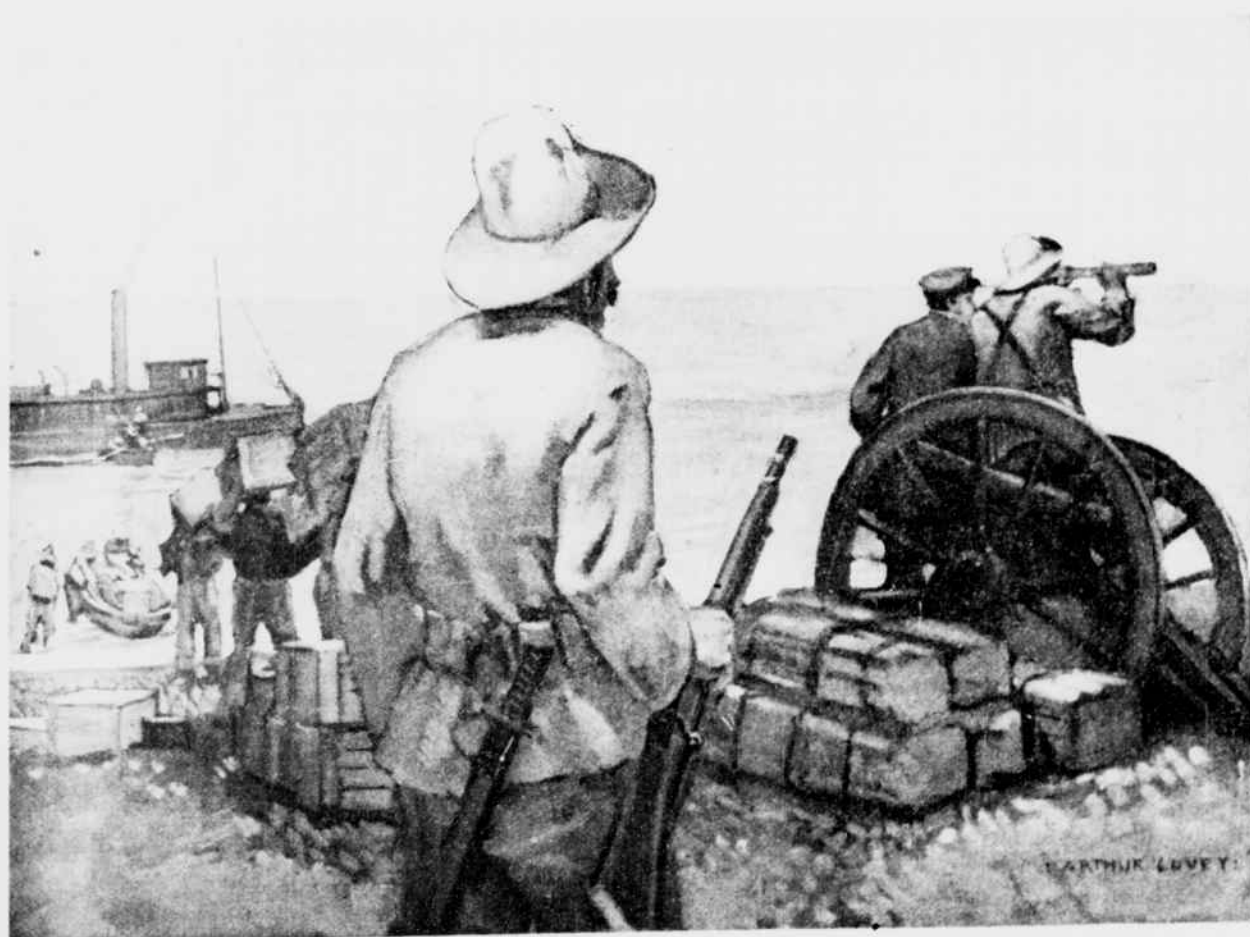
Before we reached our destination, Fritot found time for several short talks with Funston and his boastful companion, in which he sought to draw them out. Funston spoke of several conversations with Zayas, and told of how he had, for several weeks, in a room over a Third-ave. saloon in New York, studied the handling of a Hotchkiss gun, along with a number of Cubans. His evident sincerity had convinced Fritot that he and his friend were all right.

The next time I saw Funston, which was during the second American intervention in Cuba, he was a Brigadier General in the United States army. I have sometimes wondered what his future would have been if he had been put off the train that night in the woods.

WHEN it was still dark we reached Woodbine, a lonely station at the crossing of the Satilla River. The Dauntless, under a full head of steam, was lying at a landing a few steps below the railroad bridge, which crossed the stream close to its mouth, and the arms and ammunition were quickly placed on board of her. Part of the cargo was loaded right on to her deck from the cars as they stood on the bridge. At daylight another tug, the Lucia, came alongside with an extra supply of coal, which was channeled into our bunkers and piled on deck, and before the sun was far up we were off for Cuba, with never a sign of interference.

When our departure became known the Spanish Government entered a scolding protest at Washington. The special Treasury agent in charge of the hoards of supposedly shrewd men who had been assigned to prevent us from getting away stated in his official report of the affair that the expedition had been "so artistically handled that detection was impossible." He had, he said, every reason to believe we should attempt to start from Charleston or Jacksonville, and both of these ports were guarded by revenue cutters.

We left Satilla River on August 14, and three days later I landed General Cabrera and his men and



It Was an Extremely Dangerous Place for Us