

A CAPTAIN UNAFRAID

PART VII.

Narrated by CAPTAIN JOHN O'BRIEN to HORACE SMITH

CAPTAIN GENERAL WEYLER, Spanish Viceroy in Cuba, was made exceedingly angry by my next expedition, the landing from the *Laurada* of a great cargo of war supplies, to say nothing of General Roloff and his party, at Banes, in full view of a highly indignant but impotent Spanish garrison and with a large naval force innocently indolent a few miles away on the other side of us. In the heat of his passion he drew down further discomfiture on his troubled head by sending word to me, through an American newspaper man stationed at Havana, that he intended to have me hanged at the first opportunity. This choleric assurance was not at all disquieting; for there never was any doubt in my mind as to what my fate would be if I were captured, and the manner of its execution made little difference. But I was a little annoyed by his suggestion that I would be so thoughtless as to allow his men to get their hands on me.

"Captain O'Brien has evaded us thus far," said the diminutive commander of all the Spanish forces in Cuba, half in reply to some question concerning the landing at Banes; "but his very daring will eventually deliver him into our hands. Sooner or later we shall get him, and when we do, instead of having him shot along with his Cuban companions, I am going to have him ignominiously hanged from the flagpole at Cabañas, in full view of the city. You can communicate that information to him if you wish. He might be interested in knowing what is in store for him; for we surely shall capture him some day."

Cabañas is the old fortress, once impregnable but now only a magnificent ruin, in which Cubans who were known or suspected to be in sympathy with the revolt were lined up against a wall and shot almost every day during the war. The rampart along which these executions and murders took place, the granite blocks spattered with blood and nicked by tens of thousands of Mauser bullets, was subsequently decorated with a bronze tablet in memory of the patriots who died there.

Weyler's boast was promptly conveyed to me, with an amusing description of the dramatic effect with which it was delivered. Through the same channel I sent back this reply:

"To show my contempt for you and all who take orders from you, I will make a landing within plain sight of Havana on my next trip to Cuba. I may even land an expedition inside the harbor and take you away a prisoner. If we should capture you, which is much more likely than that you will ever capture me, I shall have you chopped up into small pieces and fed to the fires of the *Dauntless*."

The concluding section of this message was intended only as an ironical reply to Weyler's empty threat; but he took it seriously. When it was repeated to him he flew into a rage and denounced me as a "bloodthirsty daredevil."

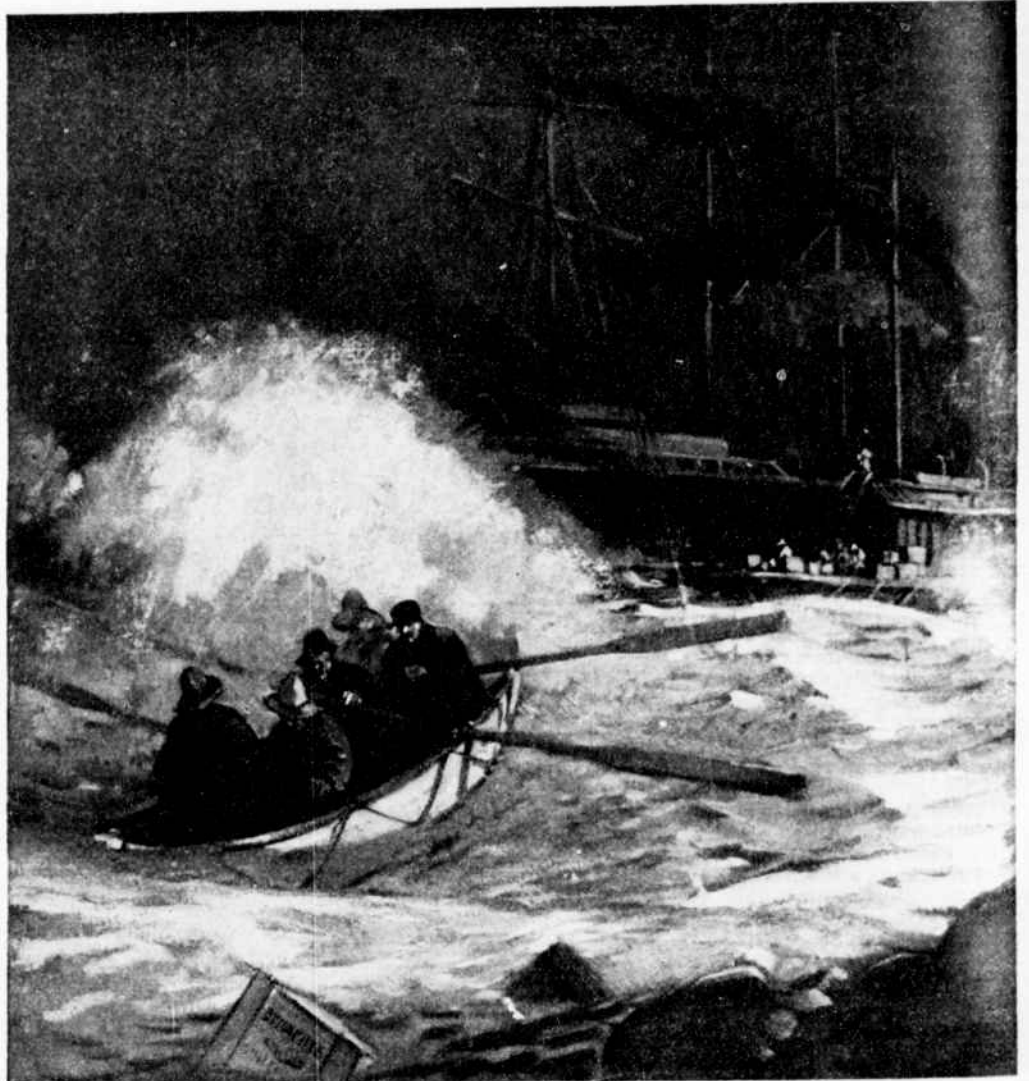
On our next expedition, which followed closely on the heels of this exchange of compliments, I made good my promise, and it was only by a mere chance that Weyler escaped being blown to pieces by some of the dynamite which was landed within easy reach of the big guns that guarded his palace.

THE newspaper man through whom this diverting correspondence was conducted was one of the most useful of our secret supporters. While, being an American, he was supposed to sympathize with the rebels, the full extent of his friendliness was not suspected; so he managed to maintain the pleasant relations with the Spanish authorities that his work required. He used to take long sailing trips, ostensibly only for pleasure; but more than once he met us off Lobos Key lighthouse, which was one of our outposts. Lobos Key is a tiny coral rock at the southerly edge of the Bahama Bank and less than twelve miles from the Cuban coast, a little east of midway of the island.

On account of its location it was a favorite loafing place for the Spanish gunboats, whose commanders were much given to graft. Instead of taking on the three hundred or four hundred tons of coal they were supposed to consume on a cruise, they would purchase only half as much, and put the money for the other half into their pockets. Then they would anchor off Lobos Key, with banked fires, until they had theoretically consumed the coal they hadn't bought, when they would proceed to the east or west. It was nothing unusual for four or five of these thieving warships to be riding at anchor in this soft spot at one time.

The Lobos light was kept by an old Englishman and his nephew, and one of the first things I did, when our organization got down to business, was to establish an amicable arrangement with them; which was easy, for they despised the cowardice and crookedness of the Spaniards. We carried down fresh vegetables and delicacies for them on every trip, and in return they kept us posted as to the movements of the gunboats. We also used the lighthouse as a postoffice, and messages were left there for us by our newspaper correspondent ally and by the Cubans, who, when the coast was clear, sailed across the narrow channel in their little sloops. Eventually the Spaniards discovered this scheme, and shortly before the Maine was blown up they made representations to the British Government which resulted in the removal of the friendly lighthouse keepers.

The keepers of the light at North Elbow Key, or Double Headed Shot Key, as it is known among sailors



Fearful of the Pounding, They Had Dumped the Dynamite Overboard.

on account of the formation of the island, also gave us much information concerning the warships seen around Salt Key Bank, another of their idling places, though not so popular as Lobos Key; for it was not so conveniently situated. We stopped at one or both of these lighthouses in advance of nearly every landing, to get the latest bulletins as to what the warships were doing. With this information it was ordinarily a comparatively simple matter to dodge them. They had to be taken into our calculations, of course; but they never caused me much anxiety. It was only when we were making a landing at some point from which we could not easily run away that I regarded them as an element of danger.

PREPARATIONS for another expedition were begun as soon as the *Laurada* returned from her triumphant trip to Banes. The revolution was going along splendidly, and the only cry heard from the field was an insistent call for more arms. By this time the number of Secret Service men, Pinkerton detectives, special Treasury agents, Spanish spies, and heterogeneous hounds of all grades and colors who were making frantic efforts to get some clue as to what we were doing, had been increased from scores to hundreds. They were so thick around New York and Jacksonville that, though they found out nothing, we could not turn round without falling over one or two of them; so we temporarily transferred our base of operations to Wilmington, North Carolina.

The old schooner John D. Long, which was laid up there after having done service as a pilot boat in her declining years, was chartered with the intention of loading her with arms and having her towed to within easy distance of Cuba; but she could carry only seventy tons, while the cargo that had been ordered for this trip weighed nearly one hundred tons and was valued at eighty thousand dollars. It was therefore decided to carry our coal supply on the schooner and put the arms on the ocean going tug Alexander Jones, which had been engaged to do the towing. With her bunkers practically empty and taking her coal from the schooner every day or two, the Jones could carry the cargo without any trouble.

The two carloads of arms and ammunition were shipped from New York to Jacksonville; but were dropped out of the train at a little junction point, in accordance with a telegraphic order from Fritot handed to the conductor at the transfer station, and slipped over to Wilmington. They were run out on the pier of the Wilmington & Newbern Railway, in the southern part of the city, where, on the night of May 13, their contents were put aboard the Jones.

When the tug was being loaded one of our scouts brought word that some customs officers were approaching the wharf and that the revenue cutter Morrill was getting up steam; so we put out at once, leaving a small part of the cargo behind in one of the cars, which was quickly locked and sealed. The Jones steamed slowly down the river, and, though she passed within sight of the Morrill and it could be seen that she had a lot of stuff aboard, she was not interfered with. If she had appeared to be in a hurry she would probably have been held up.

We anchored off the bar to wait for the schooner, which was loading with coal at the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad wharf while we were taking on the arms. As she was hauled down the stream she passed within hailing distance of the Colfax, the other revenue cutter that had been assigned to prevent any anti-Spanish activity; but aroused no suspicions. We passed a line to the Long, when the tug Jacob Brandon cast her off, and started unconcernedly south; for there was nothing about a crippled schooner being towed down the coast to arouse the curiosity of any cutter or cruiser we might encounter.

General Nuñez and sixty Cubans who were to land with the arms met us off Palm Beach in a fishing schooner and came aboard. We then headed for the Dog Rocks at the northeast corner of Salt Key Bank, where we were to meet the *Dauntless*. The wreckers and pirates who lived there were an inquisitive lot, and they bothered us so much, with their idle efforts to find out who we were and what we were doing, that we moved down to Damas Key, farther south on the edge of the bank, to get away from them. We anchored there on May 18.

Two days later we were joined by the *Dauntless*, which had slipped out of Jacksonville light, and I went aboard of her, with General Nuñez and Cartaya and twenty of the landing party. We coaled from the schooner and took on half of the cargo of arms, which we landed on May 21, ten miles east of Nuevitas.

TO keep my word with General Weyler, the rest of the cargo from the Jones, with most of the Cubans who were going to the front, was landed a mile and a half east of Morro Castle, which guards the entrance to Havana Harbor, and scarcely more than three miles in an air line from the Captain General's palace. It happened that just at that time the rebels under General Alejandro Rodríguez, who was Commanding General of the army in the First Cuban Republic, had Havana closely surrounded. They were in need of arms, and there was no trouble in getting our cargo away from the