

## CHAPTER XVII

FRED RANSOM'S FIRST DAY'S EXPERIENCE AT WRECKING—HE, BILL RUGGLES, JOHN LINDEN, THOMAS DEAL, AND DENNIS BRADY, THE IRISHMAN, GO ASHORE—THEY TAKE JACK, WHO ALWAYS WANTS TO BE ONE OF A PARTY WHERE THERE IS LIKELY TO BE ANY SPORT.



JUST at the peep of day, on the following morning, the *Flying Cloud* got under way, and sailed eight or ten miles to the northward, until she sighted the wrecker that had passed us the day before, and afterwards repassed us in order to resume her station on the Reef. The wrecker was under way for the purpose of sighting our vessel. No wreck appearing on the Reef, between the two schooners, they reversed their course; the *Flying Cloud* running past her anchorage, and examining the Reef, until she sighted a wrecking sloop that was under way from the next station to the southward. She then reversed her course,

for the second time, and ran towards her anchorage.

"Where will we sail now?" I inquired of Ruggles, with whom I was standing on the forward deck.

"Nowheres, to-day," he answered, "unless it should blow this afternoon, and then the captain might chance to get under way again."

"And is this all that we shall have to do every day?" I asked.

"Well, yes," said Ruggles, "about all, 'cept keeping the schooner in good order, and sometimes getting under way in the afternoon, if it's blown heavy along through the day, 'mounting to a storm. We always take a good squint at the Reef, the first thing every morning; for night's the likeliest time, you see, for vessels to pile on it."

"It seems to me, Bill," rejoined I, "that wreckers must have mighty easy times."

"Well," said he, "for sea-faring men, they do have about the easiest times a-going. 'Cept when they gets a wrack, and then a crew has about enough to do in a week to last them for a year. What with getting a wrack off, or a-saving of her cargo, and a-taking on it to Key West, and every thing about it, why the crew has a-plenty to do, I tell you."

"How do you kill all your spare time?" I asked.

"We gin'rally get plenty of liberty on shore, and the Reef is fairly alive with fish and turtle, and such like. We can't hardly miss catching something, even when we're off, just for a spell, to cut wood for the schooner. Then a man can stand a precious lot of sleep, if he practises at it. But you ain't a-goin' to complain about not having enough work to do, be you? If you be, I guess you'll find some of the crew as'll accommodate you with some of their'n."

"You had better believe I don't intend to complain about that," said I, laughing, "but I thought wreckers were every day pitching around off shore in a heavy sea, or floating about on rafts and saving people's property and lives, and doing all sorts of desperate things, and when I began to suspect how different it was, I felt like asking some questions—that's all."

"You may see more of jest that sort of thing, of pitching around, etcetera, than you care for, before your times's out," said Ruggles. "But it don't happen every day, because it do n't storm every day, and ships is n't lost along the Reef every day it does storm. Wrackers is like an army preparing for battle; easy times in camp,

and then blue blazes, and then easy times, and blue blazes again."

"That reminds me, Bill," said I, "to ask you why the schooner has arms aboard. The Indians about here are peaceable, are they not?"

"Oh, yes," replied Ruggles, "the Indians around here is peaceable enough. They're the Spanish Indians; but you know the Seminole Indians, to the northward of them, are at war now with Uncle Sam, and Indians is a curious set. You don't know where to have 'em; they're peaceable with you one day, and your throat's cut afore morning. I expect the owners think it's about as well to be on the safe side, and keep arms aboard the schooner."

"But, Bill," said I, "what is the use of people's having arms, if they are not always ready to use them. We did n't keep any watch on deck last night, did we? What is it to prevent Indians from capturing the vessel at night?"

"Nothing, as I knows on," Ruggles replied, "cept what I told you just now, that Indians is curious critters. They've a mortal fear of tackling a vessel. There's nothing they be afeard to try ashore, if there's plenty of trees and bushes around, but they don't like the looks of a vessel. Perhaps it's because it seems such a mighty big thing to their canoes, and besides, as I told you, it's against the natur of Indians to

do any fighting, unless there's plenty of woods, or other cover around, and if they attack a vessel, they've got to paddle off to her jest as if it was open ground, only worse, because on open ground they could scatter if they wanted to, but in canoes they'd be huddled together."

"Do the men go armed, whenever they go ashore?" I inquired.

"Mostly," said Ruggles, "when they go to the main-land; leastways, it's been so ever since I've been here; but on the Keys, we're not always so partic'lar."

"Why, when you land on a Key," said I, "how can you tell that there may not be Indians from the main-land there, prowling around in the mangroves. Their canoes could be hid, just by hauling them their length from the edge of the shore."

"Well, we don't know, that's a fact," said Ruggles, "but it's jest a risk we run, sometimes. I reckon it is n't much of a risk though, for as I was a-telling you, these Spanish Indians are peaceable-like. Still what's the use of having arms if you don't carry them, I say, and I don't trust an Indian nohow. It's a'most as easy to take the arms in the boat, as to leave them behind, but the wrackers' crews has got used to knowing there's Indians around that seem to be peaceable inclined, and I reckon

that's the reason they often forget to carry their arms. But I often says, boys, would n't it be safer if we'd bring some muskets along, for, says I, if we meet Indians, says I, and they get to know we're in the habit of going without arms, it might n't be safe for us. My belief, I says, is, that the Indians gin'rally thinks the crews has arms along with 'em in the boat. I've met parties of Indians several times, when I've been with a boat's crew over to the mainland, but they never troubled us. They're always asking for tobacco, but they're very civil."

"Ready, about!" sang out the man at the helm.

Bill Ruggles left me, and ran to tend the jib-sheets.

"Helm's a-lee," again sang out the man who steered. Then came the rattling of blocks, and shaking of sails, as the schooner ran up into the wind, and went about.

"Draw away!" shouted the helmsman.

Bill Ruggles and the man with him tending the jib-sheets, eased them away, and Bill returned to me, saying,

"We'll fetch our anchorage on this tack."

"Is there any thing to prevent our going ashore, when we come to anchor?" I inquired. "The captain has had his dinner, that clears

me. Is there any thing for the crew to do? Wouldn't you like to go? How do you think that the rest would like to go?"

"I'll go quick enough," said Ruggles. "I'll jest see who else 'll like to go, and one can ask for all. It won't be more than ten minutes afore we'll be at anchor, and as soon as the sails is furled, I reckon the captain 'll give us liberty, if too many do n't ask. I reckon there 'll be enough of the crew that won't want to go, for any work that the captain may have to do this afternoon."

Ruggles inquired, and found that John Linden and one of the other Conchs, named Thomas Deal, wished to go, and also the Irishman, whose name was Dennis Brady. They and Ruggles and I would make a party of five,—a very good number,—four to row, and one to steer the boat. I was deputed to go and ask permission of the captain, who readily gave it, on condition that the sails should be furled before we started.

"All right," said I, addressing Ruggles, as I rejoined him. "We can go after all hands furl the sails."

"Come, boys," cried he, putting his head down the hatchway, "tumble up here, and stand by to furl sail the moment we let go our anchor. The captain says we can go."

In the course of a quarter of an hour, the vessel was lying at anchor, with every thing snug, and the men lowered away one of the quarter-boats, and began to put various things into her.

"Let's take every thing," said Linden, "harpoon, grains, and a couple of muskets, and then we'll be ready for any game that comes along."

Jack seeing all these preparations, was seized with so intense a wagging of his tail, that he almost wagged his hind feet off the deck.

"Old Jack wants to go," said I, "I guess we can take him without asking permission, can't we?"

"Oh yes!" said Ruggles; "here, you men, lend a hand and help him into the boat. That's it, take hold, two of you, e-a-s-y now with him."

"My! but it's the nate way he has to get aboard," exclaimed Brady, as Jack scrambled down the side of the schooner. "But he's the wise one, though, and if he was n't so cloomsy, bedad! he'd be the image of the dorg I had in the ould country."

"Gammon, Dennis!" said Ruggles, very unceremoniously, as he shoved off from the vessel, and took his seat at the tiller. "You never had a Newfoundland."

"It's the thruth that I'm tilling ye," said



Brady, giving way lustily with his oar. "The finest dogs in the worruld comes from Ireland. Me ooncle has a pack of Newfoundlands."

"A pack of Newfoundlands!" said Ruggles, shouting with laughter.

"Aye!" rejoined Brady, "it's a pack of Newfoundlands; an' sure, and what is there so quare about that? On an eshtate like me ooncle's, about half the size of Floridy, a great many dorgs is naded."

"Well, suppose there is," said Ruggles, "Newfoundlands ain't hunting dogs, be they? What are you talking about packs for?"

"There's where you're out," replied Brady, "for it's jest for huntin' me, ooncle keeps 'em, for the stags in Ireland is so big, that nothin' short of a Newfoundland is equal to pullin' 'em doon."

"Nonsense!" said Ruggles, "if a Newfoundland can pull them down, he can't ketch 'em."

"And that's jest where you're out agin," retorted Brady, not at all disconcerted, "for that's what I was jest a-going to tell ye when I was afther spaking about the dorg Jack being so cloomsy. He's cloomsier nor me dorg in Ireland. Me dorg was one from me ooncle's raising, and, bedad! he'd beat any greyhound ye ever see run."

"That'll do for one," said Ruggles; "I'll

swow, if that don't beat cock-fighting. Now, jest you tell that to the marines."

"An' sure, and it's the maranes is the sinsible min, compared with the likes of ye," retorted Brady.

Luckily, at this point in the conversation, the landing on the beach commenced, or there is no saying where the dispute would have ended, for Ruggles being an Englishman, and Brady an Irishman, they were always sparring with each other.