

**L. RON
HUBBARD**



**SEA
FANGS**

GALAXY
PRESENTS

THE STRICKEN YACHT

THE teeth of the hurricane shook the plunging *Bonito* from stem to stern each time the dripping bows uprooted the gray, hurtling seas. From the bridge it was almost impossible to view the white yacht's forward house, and the intensity of the spray not only blinded the ports of the flying bridge, but had already smashed out two heavy panes of glass.

Through these two openings the hurricane threw lashing coils of wind and water which swirled about the slickered body of the tall helmsman. The man's steel-blue eyes were smarted by the whip of the salt water, and he squinted to see the binnacle more clearly. Although the compass was crashing backward and forward as though spun by a mighty hand, and the wheel was a live thing that fought the confining long fingers with the fury and strength of a thing gone mad, the helmsman braced his strong shoulders against the lash of the sea and tried to keep the once-trim *Bonito* close into the blast.

To the captain, huddled in a protected wing of the bridge, the helmsman was a mere waterfront loafer who had signed on at New York. And to the man at the wheel the captain was a paid servant of fabulously rich people. But together they were two human beings who fought the destruction of the

screaming wind oblivious of the panic-stricken passengers below decks, intent only upon holding out until this blow should pass.

The captain stepped up beside the binnacle, clutching at it for support.

“Hold her into it!” he yelled above the roar of the storm.

“She’s swinging off!”

He snatched the wheel away from the sailor and tried to pull it over a spoke. But the wheel lashed back once, and then spun madly in the opposite direction. The sailor risked bruised hands and stopped it, brought his back against it, swung it up, up, up, until the bow was once more taking the coming sea full on the nose.

“Get the hell back into the wing!” cried the sailor. “Are you trying to wreck us?”

The captain’s fists clenched for an instant, and then an unexpectedly heavy sea made him clutch at the binnacle again. He crept back to the protected wing.

Bob Sherman, the sailor, wrested his eyes from the compass long enough to frown in the direction of the wing. Looking back at the spinning disk he frowned again. Old Herbert Marmion, owner of the *Bonito*, might know something of the art of making money, but he was certainly short on judging men. This Captain Stoddard was all right when it came to officiating at pink teas, but he was a dead loss where seamanship was concerned.

Sherman had the papers of a master mariner down in his sea bag, but he was not going to unfold his hand just yet. It was not his business if the *Bonito* sprung every rivet in

her trim hull. Still, he had shown Stoddard that dropping barometer, had even explained what a hurricane meant down here off the treacherous coast of Venezuela. And Captain Stoddard had told him to finish painting the stack and leave seamanship to someone who understood it.

The caking salt on Sherman's cheeks had long ago begun to eat into his bronze skin, and the spray had found its stinging way down inside the slicker, making his clothes cling to his hard body. But there was something in this fight with the hurricane that avenged all the wrongs the sea had done him in the past three years. In reality, of course, the misdeeds lay at the door of Herbert Marmion and a certain outfit of outlaw smugglers and revolutionists who held sway over their small islands a few miles out from the Gulf of Venezuela. But the sea's brute force, brought to him through the broken ports, was ample challenge to his tremendous strength, and Bob Sherman fought on.

The chief officer, a silky man named Hardesty, came out of a passageway and tapped Sherman on the shoulder. "You've had it an hour!" he yelled. He motioned two sailors out of the passage and to the wheel.

The two sailors laid trembling, and immediately wet, hands upon that terrible wheel, and looked up at Sherman. He released the wheel as though the action was distasteful to him.

"The stewards," cried the chief officer, "are all in their bunks. Will you go below and lend a hand?"

Sherman nodded assent and stooped to enter the open door. Bracing himself against the sides of the passageway, he

worked his way aft. At the top of a companionway he pulled his sou'wester from his hair and whipped the streams of water away from his coat. Then he pulled the oilskin hat over his right eye and dropped to the lower deck.

He found himself in the main salon and paused for a moment to stare around at the havoc the storm had caused. Heavy chairs lay broken on their sides. The grand piano had lost all but one of its legs. Drapes were tangled about mahogany tables, and rugs were snarled bits of color on the water-soaked deck.

Sherman held to a rail for support and stood there with a grim smile on his face. It gave him something like pleasure to see the belongings of the Marmions so drastically ruined. He glanced toward the row of doors which designated the owner's quarters and smiled again. All the Marmions and their friends were within those doors, seasick, stricken with fear. But as he looked one of the doors swung back, and Sherman found himself looking at Marmion's daughter.

She was black-haired and dark-eyed. Her face was drawn with worry, but when she saw him she smiled and picked her way across the heaving deck.

"You're one of the sailors, aren't you?" she said.

He looked down at her and nodded, without smiling.

"Please. I need some help terribly. Dad's lying on the floor of his cabin and I can't get him back into his bunk." She started back across the salon, clinging to upset chairs to steady herself against the pitch and roll of the *Bonito*.

Sherman followed her, scorning handholds. He saw her step into the first cabin and he looked in through the door.

Herbert Marmion lay sprawled miserably on the littered rug. Sherman stepped through and encircled the man's body with strong arms. Without seeming effort, he picked the man up and shoved him into the bunk. The man lay there, moaning.

Suddenly the fat-rimmed eyes started wide and the soft, plump hands clawed at Bob's slicker.

"Are we going to sink?"

"How should I know? Ask that two-for-a-nickel captain of yours!" Sherman swung around and went back into the passageway, Herbert Marmion's panicky cries following him.

The girl followed Sherman out and closed the door. She looked up at the sailor, a troubled expression in her eyes. She tugged at his arm. Bringing her mouth close to his ear, she said, "Who are you?"

"You wouldn't be interested." Sherman stared hard at her for a moment. "Who's next?" he said abruptly.

The girl frowned and led down the passageway to a pantry. She stepped in, making her way around broken dishes and dented pans. Picking up a copper coffeepot, she made a helpless gesture in the direction of the door. Sherman entered and looked about. He saw a small oil stove and a water tappet. Pointing to a can of coffee lashed on the shelf, he applied a match to the stove and stood back, watching the blue flame lick around the wick.

The girl handed him the filled pot. Bob lashed two towels around the handle and spout, and tied it on the stove. He glanced back and saw that the girl had seated herself on a built-in table and was quietly considering him. He noted with indifference that she was beautiful. Her hair was swept

back from her forehead and was glisteningly jet-black. Her eyes were almost as dark as her hair. Yes, Sherman thought, she showed more beauty and breeding than he would have expected in a Marmion.

The coffee was boiling, and Sherman wrapped the towels around it and picked it up. The girl took several heavy cups from the debris on the floor and led the way back up the passage. But no one wanted coffee—neither the girl’s father and mother, nor Percy Gilman, her fiancé, nor any of the Marmions’ friends.

The girl and Sherman went back to the pantry. He set the coffee pot in a corner where the contents wouldn’t spill, and, at the girl’s invitation, sat down on the built-in table. Then he saw that a ventilator above was letting spray down upon them and he closed it. He kicked the pantry doors shut and found that he had blotted out the sound of the raging hurricane. The girl poured out two cups of coffee, and they sat down on the table again.

The girl was staring across the narrow pantry at a fragment of china, nursing the warmth of the cup in her two slender hands.

“I don’t blame you for being a swashbuckler, Bob.”

Sherman started and spilled some of his coffee.

“How did you know my name?”

The girl smiled.