

# *The Coasts of Chance*

*She Loved Iberville*

Henry Bedford-Jones

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*“Those charts, lad, have changed the course of history.”*

## *The Coasts of Chance: “She Loved Iberville”*

Second in a Series

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

*Illustrated by* HAROLD S. DELAY

**T**hey lived life roughly in those days; a storm of battle and sudden death filled all Newfoundland in 1697. In a world of ravening men, white and red, a girl alone had not an earthly chance.

Not a soul guessed that the crop-haired stripling, the tap-boy in the Placentia tavern, was really a girl. Not a soul dreamed that in the hands of young Adams lay the destiny of men, the future of fleets and armies, of Hudson’s Bay, of the fur trade, even of Canada and half the new world itself! Least of all did Bess Adams dream such a thing.

Alone and desperate, she labored in the tavern for bare existence—a slim, agile boy, breasts tightly bound, rough woolen garments concealing

any hint of sex. Her father had been a pilot in Hudson's Bay, for the English. But, while the English held most of Newfoundland, the French held Placentia.

"Quick! Canadians are in there—attend to them!" cried the harassed innkeeper, and shoved young Adams into the main room. Thus began destiny, in the dead of winter, as she obeyed the order.

A crude place, this tavern room; huge, log-walled, with an immense fireplace for heating and cooking. But, seated at the table, were the most romantic figures in all America—Pierre le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville, darkly handsome, saturnine, magnetic, and his brother, the boy Bienville, on first campaign.

Iberville looked up at the hovering tap-boy. His face warmed, his eyes kindled, the spell of his lean eager self leaped forth.

"Ha, pale cheeks and big eyes!" he exclaimed in his vibrant, gusty manner. "Brave eyes, by my faith! Fetch us wine, brave eyes!"

Later, when the innkeeper was passing, Iberville hailed him and spoke about the tap-boy. English, no doubt?

"Not at all, monsieur," was the reply. "A lad who fled here for shelter. One of the Irish slaves."

That explained everything. In Newfoundland were many of the hapless Irish Jacobites, sold as slaves to the English settlements. Wherever possible, they fled to freedom among the French, but too often died in the effort.

So Bess Adams, waiting on the little group of Canadians, heard wondrous things amid their laughter and eager talk. It was the dead of winter. Iberville had brought a few of his Canadian backwoodsmen, and meant to lead them on snowshoes to destroy every English settlement on the island. And what men they were!

Iberville himself, at home in Versailles or the deep forest; his young brother, the lovely, lordly Bienville; Abbé Daudoin, who had been a musketeer before he became a fighting chaplain; Montigny, the dark, savage Canadian leader, and the rest of them. Romantic names and men, every one.

"Now listen, my friends!" cried Iberville, as the tap-boy poised opposite. "With the spring, my brother Serigny brings a fleet from France; we'll sweep the English out of Hudson's Bay. But first, our work lies here! And when the fleet comes, when I leave here for the north, I want to leave this whole island a French possession."

Hudson's Bay! He was leading a fleet to the great bay, to conquer the whole vast fur trade at one swoop! Bess Adams went about her work with a dream in her dark eyes. And, all this long frost-ridden winter, whenever Iberville saw her, he greeted her with a slap on the shoulder and a cheery word. "Ha, brave eyes!" It was his name for her. He remembered her. That in itself was enough to make one's heart leap high.

She saw him often, for he was in Placentia on hurried trips, now and again. English prisoners poured in, St. John's was taken, the settlements scattered along the island shores were raided and wiped out. But here, in the rude log tavern where the Canadians roared their drinking songs, Iberville was no stranger.

A slender man, all fire and flame. To the French, he was a puzzle. To the Canadians, a demigod. To the Indians, a great war-chief. To the English, a devil let loose. But to Bess Adams, he was a hero; and she was closer right than any of them.

There was no logic in her worship; he was a married man, and a great man. She might better have set her heart upon young Bienville, or any of the gay, roistering Canadians, half Indian in talk and dress; but she did not. She was a girl, and Iberville became her hero, just as he was to all his men. They talked of him everywhere, of his exploits at sea, in the woods, in the frozen north. He and his brethren of the le Moyne family were the heroes of all Canada.

His personality captivated her simple, rough heart; he had come into her life like a vision from another world. "Ha, brave eyes!" The kindly words burned into her spirit, and true words they were. Bess Adams, in her guise as a boy, was playing a deadly, risky game and playing it well, for not a soul suspected her real sex.

Tucked away among her few personal effects was a little sheaf of folded papers, her sole heritage from her father, pilot of the English adventurers in Hudson's Bay.

**T**he long frozen weeks passed, while the huge log fires blazed and hunters brought in moose and caribou for meat; and wounded men who brought in batches of prisoners told new tales of the snowshoe war and of Iberville's high deeds. Indians, feathered and painted, stalked about; Canadians, painted and feathered like their Iroquois friends, drank and talked and laughed. And suddenly came destiny.

Sails came up the bay—the fleet was in from France!

All Placentia roared and rocked with news. It was a dramatic moment. Hudson's Straits were open only a few short weeks in the year, ice-closed most of the time. Further, an English fleet was on the way to reinforce the English forts on the bay. Iberville must win that race! But Iberville was somewhere in the woods, finishing his conquest. Messengers went out to seek him in hot haste. They found him. Dropping everything else, he came in to Placentia. Bess Adams saw him arrive with his wild, bronzed Canadians. Out in the bay was his brother Serigny with four ships of war, the crews half dead with scurvy.

That night they crowded the tavern. Gallant officers from France, gentlemen of Canada, Iberville in his woolens, young Bienville in a gay uniform, the older Serigny in epaulets. Three of the famed le Moyne brethren, each of them a prince in looks and thought and deed! But it was to Iberville that the dark eyes of Bess Adams strayed, as she came and went.

She caught his voice, ringing, vibrant, rich.

“Go? Now, at once, the minute we can leave! Ice? Be damned to it! We'll fight through the straits somehow. If those English ships beat us to the bay?—but they shan't! One thing I'd give my right arm to have. Fort Nelson is the chief English post there, and we've no charts of the shore or the river. That coast is all shoals and shallows for miles out into the bay. It's destruction for any ship which has no chart. Ours are all old ones.”

“We could get no better,” said Serigny, frowning. “None of our pilots know the waters of the bay, Pierre. And what if we meet the English fleet?”

The laughing eyes of Iberville swept the circle of intent faces.

“I suppose,” he said, “you gentlemen would lay ship to ship and blaze away?”

“Why not?” spoke up an officer. “Those are the approved naval tactics, monsieur?”



*“Ice? Be damned to it! We’ll fight through the straits somehow!”*

Iberville’s laugh blared out. “Aye, of course! But not my tactics, gentlemen. If we do meet the English, I intend to invent new tactics; fight them Indian fashion! No, never mind explanations. Wait and see what happens when the time comes! There’s always something new over the horizon, if one can find it. Some day, when we’ve thrown the English out of all this northland, I want to seek a new country, found a new colony for France—far down in the south. I’ll take my Canadians to Louisiana and build an empire there!”

They laughed at his dream, his vision of the future. Bess Adams, however, went back and forth at her work, fingers trembling on the dishes, eyes alight, cheeks flushed. This seigneur, this hero, captain of all the fleet, needed one thing—and she alone could supply his lack!

The secret quivered within her, until her very heart hungered and cried out.

Later, when the crowd broke up, the three le Moyne brethren sat talking among themselves, laughing, radiant, with tales of Canada, the court, the snowshoe campaign. And of a sudden their voices died and their bright eyes focussed, as the tap-boy came and stood before them, eager gaze fastened on Iberville. He glanced up and smiled.

“Ha, brave eyes! What is it, lad?”

“Why, monsieur,” said Bess Adams, choking a little with excitement, “are you heading for the straits at once?”

“Why, yes!” he said gravely, but with a twinkle in his eyes. “We must be there when the ice clears from the straits. We must slip through to the bay, ahead of the English.”

“And I heard you say you’d give much,” she hurried on, “for charts. Charts of the bay and the river where Fort Nelson lies. If you had a chart that showed the depths along the coast, would it help you?”

**I**n the sudden silence, the dark lean face of Iberville narrowed abruptly, and his eyes blazed forth.

“What’s this? You know where such charts could be had?”

“Yes. I have them,” said Bess Adams. “My father was a pilot for the English company. I—I’d like to sell the charts to you.”

Her voice faltered and died, as that of Serigny crackled up.

“Careful, Pierre! This may be some English trick. Beware!”

“Honest eyes give the lie to tricks,” said Iberville. “Come, lad! I thought you were one of the Irish slaves? How, then, was your father an English pilot?”

“He died,” she said simply. “My mother was Irish, and she died. The English would have harmed me, and I fled here for safety.”

Now, all this was true enough in its way. A young girl alone in the settlements was as safe as a fat rabbit in the midst of a wolf-pack; in this wild land women were rarer than diamonds or gold. To the three le Moynes who looked at her, Bess Adams was no more than a boy, shock-headed, roughly clad, excited.

“Come, lad, I know you,” said Iberville kindly. “But I don’t understand your words, or your talk of selling these charts.”

The boy flushed scarlet.

“Not for money, monsieur; not that at all! I’d sell you the charts for a place aboard your ship, your own ship. I can serve. I’m strong and willing.”

“I’ll be damned!” said Iberville, staring. “You want to go with the fleet? Why?”

Shy, confused, the boy hesitated.

“Why stay here, monsieur? It’s like you said a little while ago; something new, over the horizon! Here life is deadly. With—with you, it’s worth while.”

Iberville, radiant, put up a hand and gripped the boy’s shoulder.

“Ha, brave eyes! You’re a lad after my own heart! The chaplain aboard the *Pelican*, my own ship, is an Irishman, one Fitzmaurice of Kerry. He’ll find you a place—but first, what about these charts? Where are they?”

“Upstairs, monsieur, with my things in the loft. Then, you’ll take me?”

“Yes, yes! Get your charts, boy; if you speak the truth, you have my word on it. Get them, get them! Name of the devil, what luck this may prove to be—get them!”

So Bess Adams got the little leather-encased packet from the cold sleeping loft, and brought it down. Iberville unfolded the papers, and in a growing blaze of excitement the three men studied them; until, abruptly, Iberville reached out and caught the boy in a wild, joyous embrace.

“A marvel, a marvel!” he cried, in an ecstasy of delight. “Brave eyes, you’ve brought us luck and all else; here’s the one thing we needed! Get what things you have, and go aboard ship with me this night.”

Bess Adams, red and frightened lest that embrace discover her secret, wiggled out of it amid the laughter of the others, and fled.

She was not the only one to go aboard. Into the squadron piled the Canadians and a few redskin allies, mostly on Iberville’s ship. Without losing a moment, despite scurvy-smitten crews, the impetuous le Moynes were off.

**T**o Bess Adams, it was like a wild fantastic dream, as the shores of Newfoundland faded away and the four ships hauled northward along the Labrador coast. One might say that she was utterly mad, struck silly by an insensate infatuation for an older man; perhaps! Yet cold stark sanity has condemned many a person to a lifetime of hell. To pitch sanity overboard and follow a dream takes courage and a great heart.

Although the quarters aboard the *Pelican* were crowded, her secret remained entirely safe. There was no pampered relaxation about this life; all was bitter cold, bitter wet; half the crew down with scurvy. Men went unshaved. They slept in their clothes.

Besides, the poor drab wench with her tightly bound breasts and coarse garments was by no means abloom with beauty. Only those great dark eyes of her might have hinted the truth, had there been anyone to suspect; but there was none. The glowering Indians, who might have sensed her secret, were too seasick to care.

With the red-headed Fitzmaurice of Kerry, she made fast friends; an Irish exile, this fighting chaplain was a gay soul, who divined her intense admiration for Iberville and shared it fully. So did the merry Bacqueville, the Royal Commissioner. He was a Creole from the West Indies, and worshipped Iberville; he had a vast project, in fact, of writing a book about Canada, and hung day and night upon one or other of the Canadians, getting stories of Indian raids and Hudson's Bay.

This Bacqueville had a vast curiosity about everything, scratched away with quill and ink-horn at every opportunity, and was an arrant nuisance; but so debonair and merry was he that everyone gladly contributed to his lore. Bess Adams, who knew how to trim a quill, gave him much help and taught him a little English, and liked him in her shy, distant way.

Not that she had much time to spare; from the start, she worked as never before in her life, and liked it. Of Iberville she saw a good deal, always getting a smiling word and a gay jest to warm her cold spirits; he spared her the smiles he gave to few others. For his one burning thought now was to drive ahead at any and every cost. The first to get through the straits and reach the bay would win the prize of empire.

They passed Labrador and came at last into the straits between the enormous iron cliffs, heading on among the ice-drifts. Here, for Bess Adams and all others aboard, life became a very hell of hopeless effort, with Iberville lashing them to frantic exertion by day and night. They chopped at the ice, they blasted it with powder, they somehow smashed a way through it and ahead—only to be carried back, time and again, by the heavy drift.

Days passed into weeks. They lingered, sometimes within sight of the bay itself, more often carried back for miles with the pack. Fog hung over everything and toil was incessant. The other ships were completely lost to sight. The *Pelican* was alone and helpless before the fantastic currents. Some of her well men and guns had been put aboard the *Profound*, so she was short-handed despite the aid of the Canadians.

In the eternal fog, life became a mad jumble, a weary round of labor, varied by bits of fantasy. Bears were chased and hunted down on the ice. Once, a number of Eskimos showed up for barter—funny little dumpy men

clad in furs from head to foot. Their visit marked a red-letter day for Bess Adams, and a day of near disaster.

The ship was gripped fast in the ice. Bess Adams was staring curiously at the dumpy little Eskimos, bartering on the ice alongside, when without warning Iberville's hand came down at her shoulder, his voice broke forth at her ear.

“Come along, lad! You need a bit of exercise. We'll take a look at the ice ahead; if I'm not mistaken, there's a break in it. Ready?”

With a flush of eager delight, she followed him over the side to the ice. Musket on shoulder, Iberville swung along jauntily; and she, in the thrill of being alone with him, cared not whether the fog closed out the ship or not.

Now, the boy's hero-worship had been observed aboard, and had become something of a joke among the officers. Perhaps Iberville had compassion upon her, perhaps he thrilled a little to her wide-eyed devotion; but today, as they slipped and slid along in their moccasins, he threw off ten years and became a laughing, jesting boy.

**A**n ice-hummock loomed up. He pretended it was a bear and charged it, jerked the tomahawk from his belt and hurled it, gave the Mohawk whoop and scalp-yell—and suddenly lost footing and went all asprawl. Laughing, Bess Adams retrieved the fallen musket, only to slip and go down herself.

She, however, really went down, and disappeared with one gulping cry of terror into an ice-hole. The icy water closed above her. The musket was lost. She herself was nearly lost; Iberville, luckily, got a grip on her upflung arm. He pulled her up and on the ice, and then jerked off his long woolen coat.

“Strip, lad!” he commanded. “Out of those wet things. Get into this coat, and back to the ship.”

“No, no!” She shrank back, such fear in her eyes that he stared at her in startled astonishment. “It won't matter—I can change aboard the ship— —”

“Change now!” he commanded in his imperative way. “Why, you're blue with cold! You'll freeze solid before reaching the ship, lad! Come, strip to the buff and I'll slap the blood back into your body.”

Panic seized her. She turned and ran for it—ran, soaked and streaming and freezing, back the way they had come. Iberville, luckily, was so far from

comprehending her reasons that the whole thing struck him humorously, and he pursued her with a roar of laughter. However, she ran with desperation spurring her on, and reaching the ship ahead of him, dived for 'tween decks and privacy, amid bursts of laughter from the men on deck.

What might have come of it was problematical, had not all thought of it been driven from every mind. For, as Iberville came alongside the ship, he halted suddenly. Every voice ceased, and laughter died, as a sound came dully through the fog.

“Guns!” said somebody.

Guns, indeed. A distant thunder of gunfire rolling along the towering iron cliffs. What it meant, they could only conjecture. Later, they learned that the *Profound* had been carried by the ice-drift slap into the midst of the English squadron; she fought them until the drift carried her away again into the fog.



“Strip, lad!” he commanded. “Out of those wet things.”

The *Pelican* remained alone, under curtains of mist, but drifted at last into the mouth of the straits. There, ahead of them, was the bay, dotted with floe ice; and as near as could be told, Serigny and the other ships must be ahead of them. The fog lifted, showing not another sail in sight. A breeze stirred. Came wind, and the thunderous break-up of the floes. A channel opened ahead, and Iberville cracked on all sail.

**F**ree! Free of the ice and fog, with destiny ahead!

The *Pelican* went scudding across the wide bay for Nelson. There was a wild and uproarious celebration aboard her. Bess Adams carried wine to the officers' mess; gay French nobles, the red-headed Fitzmaurice, lean Canadians, the Indian chief, young Bienville, dark eager Iberville, a wild company of clamorous tongues.

And suddenly Iberville caught at the cabin-boy and shoved a winecup into his hand.

"A toast to the lad!" rang out his voice. "A health to him, who gave us what we most needed! Drink it yourself with us, brave eyes; we're all comrades here, and if success comes, then we owe it to you and your charts! Drink!"

"Then I'll drink to you, M. d'Iberville, and those who love you!" exclaimed Bess Adams, her deep dark eyes all aglow. More laughter, hearty cheers, eyes flashing through the tobacco smoke, and the girl's heart leaping. Comrades! And he had saved her life, that day on the ice. But it did not end there. Grandville, officer of the marines, leaped to his feet and raised his cup anew.

"Another toast to the lad!" he cried. "My men have told me how he's passed among the sick, comforting them, feeding them, helping them. To the lad who's tender as a woman and brave as a lion!"

They drank the toast with acclaim, while Bess Adams shrank and blushed again. She dreaded having the general attention focused upon her, and was thankful when she could get away from it all.

Moreover, the future worried her. She had embarked on this mad cruise to be with Iberville. Once ashore, everything would be changed; discovery must come, soon or late. She had nothing to expect from the future. Her hero-worship asked nothing, true. She did not seek love. Yet, once her secret was known, she would certainly be handed over to some soldier or settler as a wife and a mother of wilderness children. And from this she shrank with horror, a prospect unendurable.

So the *Pelican* headed on, straight as an arrow, to the Nelson river. Now a fever of suspense took hold upon every soul aboard. Were the other ships here? Had the English, perhaps, beaten them all?

Hereabouts the land was very low, and shoals ran out into the bay for miles. The channel by which one might reach the river and the fort would

have to be sounded very carefully, since the ice had swept away all buoys and markers. Yet, if the English had not arrived, the race was won.

With afternoon, the blue land grew in the west, a shoreline still snowy and icebound. The dark trees grew, and the wide river-mouth. A shout of joy burst from Iberville as he lowered his spyglass. Empty!

“We’ve won the race! In with the canvas!”

To a sharp burst of yells and war-whoops succeeded running seamen, sharp orders, the slap-slap of canvas coming in. The anchor was let fall, a good ten miles out from the land, because of the shoal waters.

Boats? There was only a pinnace, towing under the stern, but some canoes had been taken aboard at Placentia. Martigny and a score of his woodsmen were sent ashore, to scout the fort, drive the English within the walls, and get information. Also, the worst cases among the sick men were sent to die ashore, if die they must.

Then, with night coming down, the guns were shifted and lanterns were hung about the decks. Fiddles came out, wine was decanted, and with chanson and roaring song, officer and seaman, voyageur and cabin-boy danced and celebrated gaily. They toasted the great flag of white with the three golden lilies of France with joyous hearts. Toil was done, and ahead lay victory!

“All due to the charts the lad gave us,” said Iberville, standing with his brother in a dark corner of the deck. They were unaware of a shadow hovering near them. “When the English fleet comes, those charts will mean victory.”

“Why!” asked young Bienville.

“Because they’ll enable me to fight and destroy that fleet in my own fashion. According to our information, the English ships are far superior to ours, with heavy crews; but I’ve thought out a new way of handling ships in action. Well, wait and see!”

Bess Adams crept away, with a new glow in her heart, and went down to the sick men below, giving them all the help and comfort a kindly girl’s heart could give. Sixty men down there, unable to move, and others barely able to stagger about the deck. Scurvy had smitten the marines and seamen with fearful hand.

She slept, through the dawn and into the daylight, to be wakened in broad morning by feet stamping along the decks, by eager voices, by wild

shouts of joy. She came tumbling on deck into a bitter cold wind under gray and threatening skies, to cheer with the others. For there, off to the eastward, three tiny sails broke the horizon. Serigny and the other ships had arrived safely!

Out to meet them! Iberville's voice lifted down the decks; laughing, singing, jesting, the men leaped to work. The anchor was hove in, the canvas bellied out, and away went the *Pelican* to greet her consorts and guide them to safe anchorage. Hot boasts rose high; now let the English fleet come, and see what would happen! The battle tactics of the day were simple—lay alongside an enemy ship, hammer away with broadsides, grapple him and lay him aboard. What a fight there would be in the bay, if the English came and the four French ships were ready for them! No quarter in these waters; defeat meant death. Only the fittest could survive.

So, amid the joyous clamor, Bess Adams carried hot food and wine to the poop, where the officers clustered about Iberville. Wild storm threatened. Flurries of snow were in the air, and in the bitter cold the spray froze where it fell. Across the shallow waters of the bay ruffled squall after squall.

Then, as she held her tray to him, Bess Adams caught a mutter from Iberville.

“Strange they don't answer our signals! Eh? What's this?”

“Wine, monsieur, and a bit of hot soup.”

Iberville accepted it, gulped it down hastily as he squinted at the horizon. He lifted the flagon of wine; then his hand poised, and Bess Adams saw his lean dark face lose color. His other hand shot out and gripped young Bienville's arm and drew him close, and a low, quick word came from his lips.

“Bienville—below, and get there fast! Take charge of the upper gun tier. Tell Grandville and La Salle to clear the lower deck for action; get gone! St. Martin! Summon every Canadian to the forecastle with muskets and powder-horns; quick! Ligondez! Stretch hand-lines along the decks to help men get about on the ice. Break out powder and serve round shot for the guns. Battle stations! Battle stations, all hands!”

For one dread instant, Bess Adams thought he had gone insane. So did others. Stupefied amazement settled on those around, wondering glances were exchanged. Then from the lookouts drifted down a sudden frightful

yell of warning and dismay; from the three approaching ships broke flecks of scarlet.

Not Serigny had arrived—but the English!

The realization was ghastly. Three ships coming down the wind; and with English forts holding every harbor on the bay, no possible escape for the *Pelican*. Bess Adams felt a cold chill grip at her very soul. The entire ship fell silent, as awful consternation gripped at officers and men. Then her gaze fell on Iberville, and her heart leaped.

“Up with the Lilies!” His voice blared like a trumpet. A laugh was on his lips, a sparkle, a flame lit his eye. “Here goes France, my friends! Here goes France!”

“Here goes France!” The words were repeated, went rippling from man to man. A cheer lifted; then a wild, shrill burst of shouts pealed up. Orders flew. Guns were being cleared, shot brought up, powder readied, lines rigged along the freezing, slippery decks for handhold. Iberville turned to Bess Adams.

“The charts, lad, your charts! For God’s love, jump!”

She ran to the chart-locker and back again, holding the charts for him; his hand steadying her blue cracked fingers, his blazing face close to hers, his vibrant spirit flooding into her, while her heart pounded and her hungry eyes gripped his strong features. Then he laughed, and clapped her on the shoulder.

“Good lad! Stand by with the charts, now; and be ready to carry orders.”

Voices were crackling around, pilots arguing, information being exchanged; even before leaving France, full information had been received about these English ships. Each one of them was a match, and more than a match, for the sadly crippled *Pelican*, with so many of her men sick or ashore, and a scant forty guns available. For down this bitter wind blew the noble *Hampshire*, 56; the *Hudson Bay*, 32; and the *Dering*, 36, crowded with men and troops for the bay forts.

Grandville, his marines ready, came to Iberville. He was white-lipped.

“Pierre! How can you hope to fight these English! Better to run for it.”

“Run? Very well. Tell me where to run,” and Iberville laughed, curtly, ironically.

“But how to fight?”

“As a ship should fight—with brains to back her guns! I’ve dreamed of such a day as this!” came the strong, deep voice that thrilled Bess Adams to the quick. “Tactics? Aye, as they will be in the future! Why has a ship sails and a rudder, if not for use? Now, my friend, unless they cripple us at the first fire, you’ll see a ship handled as she should be handled!”

A gun spoke, a white wreath blowing from the *Hampshire*, and Grandville ran for his post. It was nine-thirty when that first gun spoke.

With two men at the long helm, Iberville sent his orders along the decks and waited. To any seaman’s eye, the position of his ship was hopeless; she was obviously lost. To north and west and south lay the low shores and the long treacherous shallows; to the east, the open waters of the bay were cut off by the English ships foaming down the wind. Iberville consulted the charts again, as Bess Adams held them ready, and laughed softly.

“Those charts, lad, have changed the course of history!” he said. “Without them, France would be lost this morning.”

The *Pelican* was heading out and away to the southward, cutting across the rougher water of the shoals. The three English ships naturally took for granted that she was trying to make her escape. They changed course and came in line formation to cut her off, leaning to the thrust of the wind; gallant ships, wealth and empire in their grip.

Suddenly Iberville’s voice blared, men leaped to tacks and braces.



*He lifted the flagon of wine; then his hand poised, and Bess Adams saw his lean dark face lose color.*

To the utter amazement of the English, the *Pelican* ceased to run. She altered course sharply; now she was bearing straight for them, circled out, and had the weather-gauge of them! Iberville barked again. Reef-tackles set taut, the fore and main courses were spilled as though they were about to furl.

To the *Hampshire*, it was obvious that the French meant to lay them aboard. Dour Captain Fletcher refused the challenge, luffed and paid off; a quick, wild laugh of exultant delight burst from Iberville. The sound of it was drowned as the guns began to roar, and the stout decks shivered to the recoil. His voice rose again amid the wild turmoil.

That whole broadside was poured into the *Hampshire*. Hard up with the helm, brace in the after yards! Up mounted the mainsail and bellied out; the spanker was brailed in, and like a shifting devil the *Pelican* whirled and drove straight for the *Dering*. Into this stout ship the guns roared a blast of grape, cutting her rigging into shreds, and then roared another blast into the *Hudson Bay*. Another shift, and Iberville was off.

But dour old Fletcher knew his business. The *Hampshire* came foaming along back, with a rolling thunder of guns; and here was the instant Iberville had dreaded, with good reason.

The rigging of the *Pelican* was cut to rope-yarns by that hail of shot; sheets, braces and topping-lifts were severed. Her desperate seamen leaped

to reeve new lines, make repairs, get the canvas up again; but for the moment she was well nigh helpless. And the three enemy ships closed in upon her murderously.

So near were they that musketry flashed and banged, balls showering the decks. Yells of hatred were exchanged. But Bacqueville, ordering the Canadian sharpshooters, poured in a vicious fire, picking off the English helmsmen; a fortunate squall came hurtling down with a flurry of snow, and on its wings the *Pelican* worked out to the clear and was off.

Not undamaged, aloof and aloft. Her decks were freezing crimson now: and Fitzmaurice of Kerry was shriving the dying and helping to carry wounded men below. With woman's thought, Bess Adams had gone to get a mug of hot soup; she brought it to Iberville, and he took it with quick gratitude. But as he took it, he saw the scarlet trickle coming from her sleeve and spreading between her fingers.

“What, lad? Hurt?”

“Oh, no, monsieur! A man was hit beside me—it is his blood.”

She lied, and joyed in the lie. A bullet through the flesh of the arm was no great hurt; and there was small need of bandages here. Wounds froze almost at once in this icy blast of air.

“Good,” said he. “Stand ready with the charts. I'll need them again.”

No doubt of that; those veteran English commanders who knew by heart every fathom of the treacherous shoals, now had the audacious Frenchman where they wanted him. He was far outmatched, with no chance of escape from the lee shore, with shallows reaching out miles and miles; they had only to outsail him, force him back on the shoals, and pound him into surrender or shipwreck.

During three and a half hours they strove stubbornly to do it.

**A**gain and again they drove him almost upon the shallows—almost, but not quite. Wearing and tacking is ever a losing proposition; hence must a square-rigger shiver her canvas to lose some way, before turning on her heel. With plenty of searoom and deep water under his forefoot, Iberville might not have worried, but with shoals beneath his lee, he was constantly on the brink of disaster.

After each tack and wear the *Pelican* lost some way, and once she started turning, she had to be kept going around fast. But Iberville knew his vessel,

and he knew seamanship; more important than all else, he knew exactly where those shoals and shallows lay, and had shore bearings on all passages. Always he tacked and wore abruptly, the bleeding hands of his seamen laboring with the icy brails, lifts and sheets, while the other men worked the guns like mad.

Always he managed to keep the weather-gauge, by maneuvering which was a miracle to behold. He took their blasts of shot and bullets as he slipped past, and his own guns roared hearty answer. Their constant endeavor was to cripple him; time after time, grape screamed through the rigging, but fast as shroud or stay was shot away it was repaired, and fresh men took the places of those who fell from aloft.

So the *Pelican* evaded the long shoals by a hairbreadth, with an uncanny knowledge of depths and passages, leading an eerie dance of death by wind and tide, until the cursing English cried that they had to do, not with men, but with devils.

And all the while, the bitter cold became more intense. Snow thickened in the air, and the wind was freshening toward actual gale; but the English meant to settle things at all costs, and Iberville did not refuse the challenge. Repeatedly, the storms of iron and lead swept the ship, until her hand-lines were frozen red, until blood sloshed and froze about her gun-carriages. Yet the voice of Iberville lifted clear and calm, while Bess Adams relayed his orders, one arm useless and her eyes like burning stars in a white face.

Roundshot and musketry and grape poured into the doomed frigate; but ever she gave back shot for shot. If a helmsman was hit, another man took his place at the reddened tiller. Her gunners died, and staggering sick men came reeling from below to man the cannon with scarecrow hands. Repeatedly Iberville accomplished the impossible, slipping away each time he was cornered, and the one fought on against the three.

Then Fletcher, despairing of winning by such tactics, suddenly lost all patience. He seized his chance, and suddenly bore down with the *Hampshire*, in a savage effort to ram and sink the Frenchman.

Iberville let out a wild yell. Bess Adams stumbled and slipped to the poop rail, shrilly repeating the frantic orders. Powder-blackened men tailed on to the lines; the yards swung, the helm went over, and the foaming *Hampshire* lost her weather-gauge as the reeling *Pelican* evaded the frenzied rush.

“Round shot!” shouted Iberville, sending the word to the gun crews. “Double-shot every gun!”

The two ships were plunging along at the edge of the shallows, so near that their yardarms almost touched; so close now, side by side, that grenades and curses and yells flew back and forth, faces peered from port and bulwark, musketry rippled out unceasingly while the guns belched and thundered. But the English used grape, while the French guns held double loads of round shot only, at this point-blank range.

Staggering and shuddering under recoil of smashing shot and howling squall, the two craft drove on and on as though gripped in a frenzy of utter madness, the same insensate battle-fury that gripped their crews.

Then, it seemed, the end had come. One final terrific broadside, a blast of fire and iron from those English guns, sent the *Pelican* fluttering around into the wind, all her rigging cut to ribbons, half the men in her waist dead amid that hurricane of grape, and her helmsman struck down.

Bess Adams slipped as the frigate reeled; a splinter from the rail smashed her across the head and sent her all asprawl on the bloody ice. Luckily, the jagged wood did her no great damage. She struggled erect, wiping blood from her eyes, and a wild cry escaped her. Iberville was gone! All her heart, all her fright, leaped forth in that shrill, frantic cry; then she checked it.

Gone, yes; but to the helm. He stood there gripping the reddened tiller. His voice lifted with its vibrant, powerful blare, to be drowned in a new and more frightful cry that went surging along the decks.

**S**taring out as the smoke blew away, Bess Adams saw it happen; she saw the lordly *Hampshire* reel and stagger, her very bottom ripped out by those terrific broadsides. All in a minute, every sail set, she plunged and sank down under the white-capped seas, and came to rest upon the shoals with only her topmast still showing, and her two hundred and thirty men spotting the water as they drowned.

“To the lines! All hands!” came the ring of Iberville’s voice.

A lesser man would have been content; not he! Once more the guns began to crash, as the wounded frigate swept around and Iberville held her straight for the *Hudson Bay*. The Englishman headed up into the wind; his flag and foresail came fluttering down—surrender! The guns ceased. While the men yelled in mad exultation on her splintered icy decks, the *Pelican* drove on, hurtling straight for the third enemy.

The *Dering*, however, had no heart for that meeting. She turned about, shook out her reefed canvas and was away like a bird in flight, pouring one last broadside into the victorious *Pelican* as she swung.

Bess Adams, clinging to the rail, heard Iberville groan aloud as he surveyed his bloody decks; then the ringing voice was up again, up and stirring his men. After the *Dering* tore the shot-shattered frigate, straight into the open water eastward, while men worked like devils to get the shot-holes stoppered against the gushing water. Out of the northeast was driving down a wild gale of snow and black clouds.

Bess Adams hung there at the rail, helpless, hurt, a spreading wetness of warm blood on her body. And suddenly she felt the arm of Iberville about her, his voice at her ear.

“Why, lad—you’re hurt! Below with you, below; get the wounds dressed. Ha, brave eyes! I love you for this day’s work! Below, and into dry clothes. Here, somebody! Give the lad a hand along the deck.”

Below, then, and into hell, where men screamed and groaned under rude surgery, where blood ran like water, and hideous death was everywhere. When they would have stripped her to seek the hurts, Bess Adams flinched and fled away from it all.

In a dark corner she bared herself where none could see. She made shift to bandage the torn arm, and the bullet-scape along her ribs; neither was dangerous, and the cut over her scalp was a mere nothing. She felt no pain at all. The touch of Iberville’s hand, the quick warmth of his voice, was in her veins like heady wine.

And with it, another thought. It was the end; and she would meet it beside him, up on deck, facing death with level gaze.

They all knew it was the end, as the hours dragged on. The *Dering* escaped in the black smother of storm and Iberville headed around for Nelson; but there was no shelter or refuge from the approaching doom, and every soul aboard realized it. Snowflakes broke silvery on the wind and dead frozen faces peered from the scupper ice. Water was pouring into the riven ship, and the dark afternoon was deepening into stormy night.

Yes, it was a dear-bought victory. Men cursed or stared in frozen despair, with only the gay le Moyne voices like a ringing clank of steel to pluck up hopeless hearts. They found the surrendered *Hudson Bay* lying at anchor, miles offshore among the shoals; and as the night closed down, the *Pelican* also came to anchor, there to await the end that was all too certain. Find the

river-mouth she could not. There was no other shelter. And by this time tremendous seas were lifting from across the shallow bay, lifting her, battering her, promising to smash her to pieces even if the anchors held. What the English broadsides had begun, the waves would finish; she was practically sinking under them.



*“Why lad—you’re hurt! Below with you, below; and get the wounds dressed.”*

Toward ten of the night Iberville, Bienville and some remaining officers, gathered in the mess cabin. Bess Adams fetched some scraps of cold food and some wine, between the wild and frenzied lurches of the ship.

**A**cross a table lay the shot-torn flag, with a great bloody smear across the three golden Fleurs-de-lis. Iberville, gaunt and harried and haggard, nodded gloomily at the ensign, while he puffed at a pipe.

“The lilies are red this night, and will be redder!” he said grimly. “Hear the poor wounded devils shriek as she plunges! And there’s nothing we can do for them. We’re all bound to hell together.”

“At least, we’ve something new to relate in hell!” spoke up La Salle, the young ensign, with a faint laugh. “His Majesty’s navy has learned something today, thanks to you. It’s nearly thirty years since the first frigate was laid

down. In all that time, no one has ever until now shown what such a ship could do if handled aright. All they teach in the Naval College is to lay alongside and keep on firing. Why, Iberville, do you realize what was discovered this day? Tactics, seamanship applied to actual fighting!"

A hum of approval rose.

"What use the discovery, if none lives to tell of it?" said Iberville with weary irony. "Bacqueville, you might write it down in your notebook, to be washed ashore later."

The young Creole officer grinned, "I'm a Royal Commissioner, not a naval officer, Pierre. All I can say is that you fought the ship for three hours and more."

Iberville lifted his head. "And not dead yet!" he exclaimed with a flash of spirit. "Ha, brave eyes!" His gaze warmed on Bess Adams, as she handed him more wine. "Not badly hurt after all, eh?"

She was about to answer, when the ship seemed to lift and shake herself. Then came a deafening shock, a crash that hurled Bess Adams into a corner, and darkness as the one light was extinguished. The rudder had been ripped out bodily.

Next moment a huge following sea pooped the ship squarely, smashing all the after cabins into ruined wreckage; icy water was sent cascading through the entire vessel. A wild cry went fluttering along the decks. The cables had parted, and the ship was at the mercy of the wind and sea.

It was midnight, after two hours of blind, staggering lunges, when she finally struck upon the shoals.

Those next hours, in pitch icy darkness, were hours of hell and superhuman exertions. Tremendous battering seas broke over the shattered wreck, snow came down in gusts and thick flurries; to care for the sick and wounded men, many of whom were washed away to death, became the first object of everyone. When the gray light of dawn at last came, it was all too evident that the frigate was fast breaking up.

Bess Adams, at the point of total exhaustion, had no strength, no life, remaining. A line about her waist, she was held securely in the lee of the poop, half frozen. Now, as the daylight grew, she lifted agonized eyes toward shore, and once more her heart sank. The snow ceased, to reveal a tree-fringed shore barely within sight—a good six miles distant.

It seemed the end of all hope. None the less, the indomitable Iberville stirred his men to action; he, whose energy never flagged, had strength for all. With some, he fell to work making rafts, in the waist. Others cut spars adrift and set out for the distant line of shore.

Iberville caught sight of the figure crouching under the poop, abandoned his work, and came to the girl with a flash of his gay, radiant smile.

“What, lad? You’ve given up hope? Nonsense! Come, there’s a place for you on the first raft.”

She looked up at him, all her poor wild heart in her eyes.

“No, monsieur. Not until you go.”

“Why, God love you, brave eyes!” Touched, Iberville reached out and caught her hand, and looked into her face. “Very well; we’re comrades, you and I. We’ll go together, on the second raft. The wounded, or what’s left of them, go on the first. Wait here, and I’ll not forget you.”

To his hearty grip, his look, his voice, she warmed. Alone again, she watched and waited while the men toiled on. Some were swimming for shore, others drowned as they were licked off.

Crash upon crash resounded, as the doomed hulk quivered under the ravaging seas, whose spray hid her from sight at times. At length the first raft was launched in the lee, and when the wounded had been lashed aboard, it set off, to be swept toward shore.

**T**he second raft was readied and got into the water. A huge sea burst, sweeping the deck with spray and flood. Bess Adams looked up to see young Bienville before her, his hand outstretched, his voice ringing heartily.

“Come along, comrade! Pierre sent me to get you. Can you walk?”

Free of the lashing, she could stagger, at least; she was numb and frozen. With every moment the wreck was going to pieces under their very feet. Cries of despair went up on all sides as she began to split in two.

Somehow, Bess Adams got aboard the raft, clinging frantically beside Bienville. At the broken bulwarks stood Iberville, passing the other men aboard. The raft sank deeper in the water; it was nearly awash. Shouts of alarm and protest went up. There was no more room, if those already aboard her wanted to live.

“Only one more to come!” shouted Iberville cheerfully.

“Pierre! Come yourself!” cried the boy Bienville. “No room for more!”

Iberville looked down at him and laughed, as the last man crawled over.

“The men go first, brother! The captain last.”

The man poised, jumped, and beneath his weight the unwieldy raft sogged under the water. Iberville stood poised, his lean features set hard.

“Go ahead! Cast off the line!”

“No, no!” With a shrill cry, Bess Adams came to her feet, ankle deep in water. “Here’s room, Iberville—here! Take my place! I can swim and hold to a line.”

“Stop it!” he shouted harshly, but he was too late.

With a sudden swift movement, she was off the raft, plunging into the water. Iberville delayed not. He jumped, gained the vacant place, and the line was cast off.

“Here!” Iberville’s voice blared out frantically. “The lad, the lad! Throw him a line! For God’s sake don’t let him try to swim for it—”

A sea swept Bess Adams up, almost beside him, swept her high and broke over her. For an instant they saw her face. Iberville saw her eyes fastened upon him. Then the salt spray broke, and she was sucked away. The raft went lurching and staggering off toward the wave-swept shallows.

The gray skies broke. The white flag of France came careering toward the river-mouth; Serigny and his three ships were here at last, with men and guns to sweep the bay of the north for France. And Bess Adams, who could not swim a stroke, lay cold but smiling, and careless of all life’s ills.

She had loved Iberville.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *The Coasts of Chance: She Loved Iberville* by Henry Bedford-Jones]