

hour mud. Presently we ran among them all, passing in and out, and through their lines. Then I took the rudder-strings, so that Celia might look while the Captain talked.

He pushed his hat well back, sat upright, and began to look up and down the familiar craft with the eye of an old friend anxious to see them looking their best. It was not much they could show in the way of decoration, but the figure-heads were there still, and the balconies and carvings of the stern were mostly uninjured. As for the hull, it had generally been painted either black, white, or yellow. There were no masts, but they had jurnymasts to serve as derricks on occasion. "That is the *Queen Charlotte*, my dear. She was flagship at Algiers when Lord Exmouth showed the Moors we would stand no more nonsense. We've fought a good many naval actions, but I think that business was about the best day's work we ever did. I was chasing Arab dhows and slavers off Zanzibar, and hadn't the chance of doing my share of the work. In 1816, that was—"

"Look—look—Celia! Look, children. There's the old *Asia*. God bless her! Flagship, Celia, at Navarino. My old ship—my one battle. Ah! Navarino. They say now it was a mistake, and that we only played the Russian's game. No chance of doing that again. But anyhow it was a glorious victory." The recollection of that day was always too much for the Captain, and he might have gone on the whole evening with personal reminiscences of the battle, but for the breeze which freshened up and carried us past the *Asia*.

"No confounded steam," he growled, "no wheels and smoke spoiling the decks; quiet—easy sailing, and no noise allowed aboard until the guns began to speak. Port, Laddy. That is the *Princess Charlotte*, Celia. Forty people were drowned when she was launched; and a good many more went below when she made herself heard at Acre. I was not there either; more's the pity. I was cruising about the narrow seas picking up pirates off Borneo."

"There is the *Egypt*. She fought the French fleet in 1795, and the Spaniards in 1797. Good old craft. Stout old masted-war."

"That is the *Illustration*, moored in line with the *Egypt*. She was with her in '95, and I think she helped to take Java in 1811. We used in those days, you see, Celia, if we wanted a place that belonged to the enemy, just to go and take it. Not that we were so unmanly as not to give them a civil choice. We used to say, 'Gentlemen, Señors, Caballeros, Mynders, Double Dutchman,' as the case might be, 'we've come here to hand down your hunting and run up the Union Jack over your snug quarters. So, as perhaps you would not like to give in without a bit of a fight, you had better ram in your charge, and we'll give you lead.' Then the action began, and after a respectable quantity of powder was burned they struck their colours, we went ashore, the men had a spree, and the officers made themselves agreeable to the young ladies."

"Did not the young ladies object to making friends with the enemy?"

"Not at all, my dear. Why should they? We did them no wrong, and we generally represented the popular side; they wanted to be taken by the British Fleet, which meant safety as well as flirtation. And we enjoyed our bit of fighting first. Did you ever hear of Captain Willoughby in Mahébourg Bay, Island of Mauritius? Well, that's an unlucky story, because it ended badly, and instead of Willoughby taking the island the island took him. Ran his ship ashore. She turned on her side, so that her guns couldn't be brought to bear. They found the Captain with one eye out and a leg shot off. The French Captain had a leg shot off too, and so they put them both in the same bed, where they got better, and drank each other's health. The worst of it was that what we sailors got for England, the politicians gave away again when they signed a peace. We let the Dutch have Java, we let the French have Bourbon and Guadalupe. I wonder we didn't give New Zealand to the Americans, and I dare say we should if they had thought of asking for it."

"That is the *Colossus*, my dear. Good old ship too; she was at Trafalgar. There is the *Alfred*, who helped to take Guadalupe in 1810, and the *Eolus* frigate. She fired a shot or two at Martinique the year before. Look at them, the row of beauties; forty-two pounders, the handiest and most murderous craft that ever went to sea; and look at the sloops and the little three gun brigantines. I had one under my command once. And there is the *Columbine*."

The Captain began to sing—

The *Trinculo* may do her best,
And the *Alert* so fleet, sir,
Alert she is, but then she's out
Alert enough to beat, sir.

The *Acorn* and the *Satellite*,
Their efforts, too, may try, sir,
But if they beat the *Columbine*,
Why, dash it!—they must fly, sir.

"They will build no more such ships; seamanship means poking the fire. Look at those things now."

He pointed with great contempt to the war steamers. Those of 1858 would be thought harmless things enough now. Two or three had screws, but most had the old paddles. The *Duke of Wellington* of 130 guns carried a screw; so did the *Blenheim*, the *Archer*, and the *Encounter*, all of which were lying in the harbour. But the *Odin*, the *Basilisk*, and the *Sidon* were splendid paddle steamers. Among them lay the *Megara*,

a troop ship, afterwards wrecked on St. Paul's Island; the *Queen's steam yacht*, the *Fairy*, as pretty a craft as ever floated, in which Her Majesty used to run to and fro between Osborne and the port; the *Victoria and Albert*, the larger Royal Yacht; and the pretty little *Joe*, the smallest steamer afloat, before they invented the noisy little steam launches to kill the fish, to tear down the banks of the rivers, and to take the bread out of the mouths of the old wherry-men in our harbour.

We were drawing near the last of the big ships.

"There, Celia, look at that craft," cried the Captain. "Do you see anything remarkable about her?"

"No; only she is yellow."

"That is because she is a receiving hulk," he informed her, with the calmness that comes of a whole reservoir of knowledge behind. "It is in her out that I mean. Don't you remark the cut of her stern, the lines of her bows?"

She shook her head, and laughed.

"Oh! the ignorance of womankind," said the Captain. "My dear, she's French. Now you see." Again Celia shook her head.

"Well," he sighed, "I suppose it's no use trying to make a young lady understand such a simple thing. If it had been a bit of lace now, or any other fall-dal and flap-doodle—never mind, my pretty, you're wise enough up in your own lines. That is the *Blonde*, my dear, and she is one of the very last of the old prizes left. When she is broken up, I don't know where I could go to look for another of the old French prizes. My father, who was a master in the navy, navigated her into this very port. She struck her flag off Brest."

"It is a page of history, children," he went on, "this old harbour. They ought to keep all the ships just as they are, and never break up one till she drops to pieces. The brave old ships! It seems a shame, too, to turn them into coal hulks and convict hulks. I would paint them every year, and keep them for the boys and girls to see. 'These are the craft of the old fighting bulldogs,' I would tell them. 'You've got to fight your own battles in a different sort of way. But be bulldogs, however you go into action, and you'll pull through just as your fathers did.'"

"I saw a sight when I was a boy," the Captain went on, "that you'll never see again unless the Lords of the Admiralty take my advice and give over breaking up ships. I saw the last of the oldest ship in the service. She was the *Royal William*, of eighty guns. This ship was built for Charles the Second, sailed for James the Second, and fought off and on for a hundred and forty years. Then they broke her up—in 1812—because, I suppose, they were tired of looking at her. She ought to be afloat now, for sounder timber you never saw."

"Shall we down sails and out sculls?" I asked.

The Captain answered by a gesture, and we kept on our course. The tide was running out rapidly.

"Five minutes more, Laddy," he said. "We've time to go as far as Jack the Painter's Point, and then we'll come down easy and comfortable with the last of the ebb."

We had left the lines of ships and hulks behind us now, and were sailing over the broad surface of the upper harbour, where it is wise, even at high tide, to keep to the creeks, the lines of which are indicated by posts. In these there lay, so old that they had long since been forgotten, some half-a-dozen black hulks, each tenanted by a single ex-warrant officer with his family. Even the Captain, who knew most ships, could not tell the history of these mysterious vessels. What life, I used to think as a boy, could compare with that of being the only man on board one of these old ships? Fancy being left in charge of such a vessel, yourself all alone, or perhaps with Leonard moored alongside also in charge of one. Robinson Crusoe in his most solitary moments could not have felt happier. Then to wander and explore the great empty ship; to open the cabin and look in the old lockers; to roam about in the dim silences of the lower deck, the twilight of the orlop; the mysterious shades of the cockpit, and to gaze down the impenetrable Erebus of the hold. To this day I can never go on board a great ship without a feeling of mysterious treasures and strange secrets lurking in the depths below me. And what a place for ghosts! Think, if you could constrain the ghosts of these old ships to speak, what tales they could tell of privateering, of pirating, of perils on the Spanish Main, of adventure, of pillage, and of glory. There may be a ghost or two in old inns, deserted houses, ruined castles, and country churchyards. But they are nothing, they can be nothing, compared with the ghosts on an old ship lying forgotten up the harbour. 'Cis shudders, and thinks she can get on very well without ghosts, and that when she wants their society she would rather meet them ashore."

"That ships may be haunted," said the Captain, gravely, "is true beyond a doubt. Every sailor will tell you that. Did you never hear how we were haunted aboard the *Earnought* by the ghost of the purser's clerk?"

I have always regretted, for Celia's sake, that we did not hear that story. The Captain stopped because we were close on Jack the Painter's Point, and we had to attend to the boat.

The Point was a low-lying narrow tongue of land, with one solitary tree up on it, running out into the harbour. It had an edging or beach of dingy sand, behind which the turf began, in knots of long coarse grass, between which, at high tide, the ground was soft and marshy; when the water was out it was difficult to tell where

the mud ended and the land began. Now, when the tide was at its highest, the little point, lapped by the waves, and backed by its single tree, made a pretty picture. It was a lonely and deserted spot, far away from any house or inhabited place; there was not even a road near it; behind was a barren field of poor grass where geese picked up a living with anxiety and continued effort; and it was haunted by the gloomiest associations, because here the ghost of Jack the Painter walked.

It was not a fact open to doubt, like some stories of haunted places; Jack had been seen by a crowd of witnesses, respectable mariners, whose testimony was free from any tinge of doubt. It walked after nightfall—it walked backwards and forwards, up and down the narrow tongue of land. It walked with its hands clasped behind its neck, and its head bent forward as if in pain. Anybody might be in pain after hanging for years in chains. Imitate that action, and conjure up, if you can, the horror of such an attitude when assumed by a ghost.

The story of Painter Jack was an episode in the last century. He belonged to the fraternity of ropemakers, a special Guild in this port, the members of which enjoyed the privilege, whenever the Sovereign paid the place a visit, of marching in procession, clad in white jackets, nankeen trousers, and blue sashes, in front of the Royal carriage. The possession of his share in this privilege ought to have made Jack, as it doubtless made the rest of his brethren, virtuous and happy. It did not: Jack became moody, and nursed thoughts of greatness. Unfortunately, his ambition led him in the same direction as that of the illustrious Eratosthenes. He achieved greatness by setting fire to the rope-walk. They found out who had done it, after the fire was over and a vast amount of damage had been perpetrated, and they tried the unlucky Jack for the offence. He confessed, made an edifying end, and was hanged in chains on that very point which now bears his name. It was in 1776, and twenty years ago there were still people who remembered the horrid gibbet and the black body, tarred, shapeless, hanging in chains, and swinging stridently to and fro in the breeze. Other gentlemen who were gibbeted in the course of the same century had friends to come secretly and take them down. Mr. Bryan, for instance, was one. He for a brief space kept company with Painter Jack, hanging beside him, clad handsomely in black velvet, new shoes, and a laced shirt. He was secretly removed by his relations. Williams the Marine was another; he was popular in the force, and his comrades took him down. So that poor Jack was left quite alone in that dreary place, and partly out of habit, partly because it had no more pleasant places of resort, the ghost continued to roam about the spot where the body had hung so long.

"Down sail, out sculls," said the Captain. "Hard a port, Celia. We'll drop down easy and comfortable with the tide. How fast it runs out!" It was too late to think of tacking home with the wind dead against us, and the tide was strong in our favour. I took the sculls and began mechanically to row, looking at Celia. She was more silent now. Perhaps she was thinking of her persistent lover, for the lines of her mouth were set hard. I do not know what the Captain was thinking of; perhaps of Leonard. However that may be, we were a boat's crew without a coxswain for a few minutes.

"Laddy!" cried the Captain, starting up, "where have we got to?"

I held up and looked round. The tide was running out faster than I had ever known it. We were in the middle of one of the great banks of mud, and there was, I felt at once, but a single inch between the keel and the mud. I grasped the sculls again, and pulled as hard as I knew; but it was all of no use. The next moment we touched; then a desperate struggle to pull her through the mud; then we stuck fast, and, like the water flowing out of a cup, the tide ran away from the mud-bank, leaving us high and dry, fast prisoners for six hours.

We looked at each other in dismay.

Then the Captain laughed.

"Not the first boat's crew that has had to pass the night on the mud," he said cheerfully.

"Lucky we've got the wraps. Celia, my dear, do you think you shall mind it very much? We will put you to sleep in the stern while Laddy and I keep watch and watch. No supper, though. Poor little maid! Poor Celia!"

She only laughed. She liked the adventure.

There was no help for it, not the slightest. Like it or not, we had to pass the night where we were unless we could wade, waist deep, for a mile through black mud to Jack the Painter's Point.

The tide which had left us on the bank had retreated from the whole upper part of the harbour. But the surface of the mud was still wet, and the splendour of the setting sun made it look like a vast expanse of molten gold. One might have been on the broad ocean, with nothing to break the boundless view but a single solitary islet with a tree on it, for so seemed the Point of Painter Jack. The sky was cloudless, save in the west, where the light mists of evening were gathered together, like the courtiers at the *coucher du roi*, to take farewell of the sun, clad in their gorgeous dresses of pearl-grey, yellow, crimson, and emerald. Ahead of the face of the setting sun, a purple cleft in light and cloud, stood up the solitary poplar on the Point. Bathed and surrounded by the western glory, it seemed to have lost all restraints of distance, and to form, in the far-off splendour, part and parcel of the sapphire-tinted west.

As we looked, the sun sank with a plunge,

the evening gun from the Duke of York's bastion over the north of the harbour saluted the departure of the day. The courtier clouds did not immediately disperse, but slowly began putting off their bright apparel.

In a quarter of an hour the outside clouds were grey; in half an hour all were grey; and presently we began to see the stars clear and bright in the cloudless sky.

"The day is gone," murmured Celia, "morn is breaking somewhere beyond the Atlantic. We ought not to let the thoughts of our own selfish cares spoil the evening, but when the sun sank, my heart sank too."

"Faith and Hope, my pretty," said the Captain. "Come, it is nearly nine o'clock. Let us have evening prayers and turn in."

This was our godly custom before supper. The Captain read a chapter—he was not particular what—regarding all chapters as so many articles or rules of the ship, containing well-defined duties, on the proper performance of which rested the hope of future promotion. On this occasion we had no chapter, naturally. But we all stood up while the Captain took off his hat and recited one or two prayers. Then Celia and I sang the Evening Hymn. Our voices sounded strange in the immensity of the heavens above us,—strange and small.

And then we sat down, and the Captain began to wrap Celia round in the waterproofs. She refused to have more than one, and we finally persuaded him to take one for himself—they were good-sized serviceable things, fortunately—and to leave us the other. We all three sat down in the stern of the boat, the Captain on the boards with his elbow on the seat, and Celia and I, side by side, the rug wrapped round us, close together.

Ashore the bells of the old church were playing their hymn tune, followed by the curfew.

"The bells sound sweetly across the water," murmured Celia. "Listen, Laddy, what do they say?"

"I know what the big bell says," I replied. "It has written upon it what it says:

We good people all
To prayers do call.
We honour to King,
And brides joy do bring.
Good tidings we tell,
And ring the dead's knell.

"Good tidings we tell," she whispers.

"What good tidings for us, Laddy?"

"I will tell you presently," I said, "when I have made them out."

The bells ceased, and silence falls upon us. It has grown darker, but there is no real darkness during this summer night, only a twilight which makes the shadows black. As we look down the harbour, where the ships lie, it is a scene of enchantment. For the man-of-war's lights, not regular, but scattered here and there over the dark waters, light up the harbour, and produce an effect stranger than any theatrical scene.

Said the Captain, thinking still of the ships,

"A ship's life is like a man's life. She is put in commission after years of work to fit her up—that's our education. She sails away on the business of the country, she has storms and calms—so have the landlubbers ashore; she has good captains and bad captains; she has times of good behaviour and times of bad; sometimes she's wrecked—well, there's many a good fellow thrown away so; sometimes she goes down in action, nothing finer than that—and sometimes she spends the rest of her life up in harbour. Well for her if she isn't made a convict hulk. Celia, my dear, you are comfortable, and not too cold?"

"Not a bit cold, Captain, thank you, only rather hungry."

There was no help for that, and the Captain, announcing his intention to turn in, enjoined me to wake him at twelve, so that we two could keep watch and watch about, covered his head with the rug, and in five minutes was fast asleep.

Then Celia and I had the night all to ourselves.

We were sitting close together, with the waterproof round our shoulders. Presently, getting a little cramped, Celia slipped down from the seat, and curled herself close up to the sleeping Captain, resting her head upon my knees, while I laid my arm round her neck.

Was it treachery when I had striven to beat down and conquer a passion which was not by any means fraternal for me to feel as if there had never been a perfect night since the world for me began till this one? I wished it would last for ever. When before had I had my queen all to myself in the long, sweet silences of a summer night! And none to hear what we said.

There was no word of love, because that was all one side, but there was talk. We did not sleep that night. The air was soft and warm, though sometimes came a cold touch of wind which made us pull the wraps tighter, and nestle close to each other. But we talked in low whispers, partly because the night is a sacred time, and partly because we were careful not to wake the Captain.

(To be continued.)

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