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RETRIBUTION; AN INCIDENT AT SEA.

"Is it in law? am I condemned to die?"

It is now some five and twenty years ago that I was junior Lieutenant of as sweet a frigate as ever spread canvass to the breeze, and as it was my first appointment, I was not a little proud of my white lapelles, for I could with truth declare that, as I had the pleasure of wearing them, so also I had honestly won them. We were stationed in that part of the world so terrific to the imagination of Europeans—the West Indies; but I must acknowledge that, though it was precious hot, yet I found it rather pleasant than otherwise.

We were cruising in the Gulf of Florida—the merry old craft playing all sorts of antics in the numerous currents—poking her nose to whatever point of the compass pleased her for the time, in spite of helm or braces—and not unfrequently threatening to resemble the black fellow's schooner, that 'run in the bush for 'n yam apple.' One night to the northward of Anguilla just clear of the Salt Keys Bank, we had a smart gale from the N. E., and we reached away upon the starboard tack under close reefed topsails, fore-topmast staysail and trysail, top gallant yards lulled, so that we were enabled to shake out a couple of reefs; and the bubble of a sea that had been kicked up by the wind was soon smoothed down by the run of the stream. At day light we saw a large ship right ahead of us, with her topmasts gone, the wreck still hanging over the side; whilst to the leeward, running away, large, under a heavy press of canvass, was a low black schooner, which, as she was nearly end on, looked something like a negro's head with a large ostrich plume floating on the waters. What she was became instantly known, and no small degree of excitement prevailed amongst the watch as soon as the name was uttered—'the Black Bloodhound'—which was alike applied to the pirate vessel and the marauding chief, and of whose peculiarities the most wonderful accounts had obtained currency and gained credence. There was nothing the schooner could not be made to do, except speak, and the Captain had the same peculiarity, for all (and I am thinking they were but very few) who escaped from his clutches declared that he carried on the several duties of commander, judge, jury, and chief executioner by dumb show. The fellow was described as hideous in appearance, ferocious by nature, and cruel from an instinctive love of human flesh. The Black Bloodhound, small as she appeared on the ocean, was nearly 200 tons admeasurement, and carried twelve 18 pounder carronades, one long two-and-thirty in amid-ships, upon traversing slides, with an heterogeneous crew of seventy men from all nations.

'Keep her clean rap full, Quarter master,' said I, as descending the companion ladder, I hastened to perform my duty, as officer of the watch, by giving information to the Captain. 'Two sail in sight, Sir,' exclaimed I, on opening the cabin door; a ship about half a league distant ahead, with top-masts gone'—

'Well, Sir, you had no occasion to disturb me for that,' replied he, 'Stand on and hail her, and let me know who she is. I have not had five minutes' sleep throughout the night, and had just got into a snooze, and here you come to rouse me out, merely to tell me'—

'The Black Bloodhound is on our leebeam, Sir, about five miles off,' rejoined I, interrupting him unceremoniously.

'You don't say so, Mr.—' uttered he, making but one spring out of his cot, and drawing on a pair of loose flannel trousers; and throwing his cloak around him, he neither waited for shoes nor hat, but was instantly on deck with his glass, reconnoitering the strangers. One look at the schooner was sufficient to betray her character, whilst the ship in distress was evidently a capture that she had been plundering. 'Turn the hands up; make sail, Mr.—' said the skipper, as cool as a melon. 'The watch square the mainyard—lower the quarter boat down, put twelve men into her armed—and ready Mr.—, to shove off, and take charge of the ship. Do the best you can to repair the damage, and keep the frigate in sight as long as possible. Up helm, Sir, directly on board, and stand after me.—Should you part company, run for Jamaica. Bear a hand, Sir; you have not a moment to spare for chest or bedding.

The orders were promptly obeyed; the word flew swiftly along the decks that the Black Bloodhound was under our lee, and produced greater alacrity among the people than the shrill call of the boatswain's mate. The boat was lowered, and as the frigate launched gallantly ahead, in less than ten minutes from my quitting the Captain's cabin, I was alongside the strange ship; whilst the frigate under a crowd of sail pursued the flying pirate.

During the bustle, I had picked out twelve of the best seamen from the many who volunteered; for so strong is the love of novelty or change in the mind of a tar, that he will undergo any hazard or privation to indulge it. Had the first Lieutenant not been so fully engaged, I much question whether he would have allowed me to carry away such excellent hands; as it was, he had no time to muster or inspect them, and thus I got clear off with my crew, fourteen in all, including myself and a master's mate.

On ascending to the deck, a scene of devastation and blood presented itself such as could only be witnessed under similar circumstances. Bales and cases broken lay about in every direction. Elegantly bound books, silks, muslins, lace, music,—in short, something of every thing, mutilated, torn and defaced—were scattered in every part, fore and aft, and much of it saturated with human gore. The topmast and topgallant gear hanging down increased the confusion, whilst here and there a dead body, horribly mangled, completed the dreadful spectacle. My faculties were for a few minutes utterly benumbed. I had seen many a bloody corpse upon the deck of battle without shinking; but these—these fell by the remorseless hand of the murderer, and not in fair fight with a gallant foe. The men had followed me very closely and were waiting for orders, when one of them caught me up in his arms (I am a little fellow) and ran aft to the taffrail. At first I was much incensed and almost suspected a mutiny, particularly as I saw the rest very busy about the main mast, from which some of them hurried down the main hatchway, whilst others descended by the companion hatch. It was the work of a moment.

'What the devil do you mean by this, Jackson?' said I, addressing the man, who still held me, apparently ready to jump overboard.

'She's on fire forward, Sir,' answered he respectfully; 'and there was a train with a lighted match close to it, leading to a barrel o' powder that stood alongside o' you, Sir; and, as I've heard you say you can't swim, Sir, why I hopes no offence in regard to the trying to save you, Sir.'

Instinct alone could have prompted this simultaneous movement, and I felt humbled and abashed that I should have so far suffered the shock my nature received to unman me as to give my men the advantage of the discovery. I could not, however, but be much gratified at this token of esteem manifested towards me. 'This will never do, Jackson,' said I gratefully, 'we must stand our chance, my boy, sink or swim. Come, let us see if we can't lend them a hand.'

He immediately complied; but the danger had in a great measure ceased through the activity of the men, who had destroyed the communication which had been laid to the powder, ready to blow the ship up. A slight explosion took place down forward, but a plentiful supply of water soon extinguished the fire, and we commenced clearing the wreck: so that in a short time we were running after the frigate, under the foresail, mizen staysail, and driver, but in a couple of hours we lost sight of her altogether, and the chase we had not seen for some time.

'There's a— of a sight in the cabin Sir,' said Jackson as soon as the hurry of duty had somewhat subsided: 'I've been down overhauling the lockers for a palm and needles and some twine, in regard that the first Lieutenant did not give us a sufficient allowance of lime to get my ditty bag along with me, Sir. There's four on 'em with their throats cut from clew to earing, and there's a sort of soughing or groaning abast by the rudder-case; so that thinks I to myself I'll just tell the officer, and mayhap'—

'You're right, Jackson; it may be some poor wretch still in existence,' said I, and for the first time from coming on board, I went below.—The cabin deck was strewn with a variety of articles, and nearly in parallel lines to each other, with their arms tightly pinioned, lay four bodies, each with the head nearly severed from the neck. The cabin was large and handsome, and the dress of the sufferers indicated that they had been passengers. In a state room on the starboard fore part of the cabin lay a male and female in a most disgusting position, as if the fiends delighted in every species of evil that could possibly outrage human nature. They were both dead; and beneath the bed place they occupied was a smaller one in which was a female child about 3 years old cruelly murdered by cutting the throat.

'It's aft here, Sir, as the noise is,' said Jackson, (who followed me below,) going to the rudder case. I went to the spot and listened, and certainly there were sounds of a peculiar kind, but I thought these were merely caused by the weight of the rudder on the gudgeons, till on opening a small door of what appeared to be

a cupboard, the upper part of a human being became visible and we soon had the melancholy gratification of rescuing a fellow creature from a premature death. I say melancholy gratification, for he had been so inhumanly maltreated that it was really shocking to look upon him. He continued for a time in a state of insensibility; but by the application of a cordial which we found, and restoring him to the air, he recovered animation, though his mental faculties seemed at first to be much impaired. He raved of bloodshed and murder, called upon the names of Emma and Eliza, shrieked for his children; and bodily pain, which must have been most excruciating, was absorbed in the most agonized anguish of the heart. He was apparently about five and twenty years of age, but his face had been so scored with knives that it was impossible to make out a feature of his countenance.

Through dint of strenuous perseverance by four o'clock in the afternoon we had jury fore and main topmasts up, and the topgallant sail set for topsail, and as we had lost sight of the frigate I hauled up with a fine breeze, intending to go round Cape St. Antonio, the western extremity of the island of Cuba; and as we had made all tolerably snug, we sought for some refreshment, having brought with us only a bag of bread and a few pieces of salt junk. Our search however was unavailing, for though we found a case of claret and a quarter cask of Madeira, yet we discovered nothing—not even a biscuit—in the way of food. Compelled to make ourselves content upon the fare we had, preparations were made for cooking, and whilst some were attaching weights to the murdered dead for the purpose of sinking them, others were employed washing away the crimson pools that stained the polluted deck. I used my best endeavours to soothe and tranquilize the mind of the sufferer, who still existed, and gradually became more and more conscious, till at length his rationality returned, and he proved to be the mate of the ship and brother to the Captain who had been murdered by the pirates. Every thing that could be done to alleviate the poor fellow's torture was tried, but he was so dreadfully burnt, the wretches having scored him like pork, rubbed powder into the interstices and then fired it off, with other grievous injuries.—And perhaps I may as well relate here the narrative, which I obtained at intervals, and by disjointed parts.

'We sailed,' said the mate, 'from New York, and as my brother the Captain had purchased a property in Jamaica, we were bound to Montego Bay, where, with his family, consisting of a wife and two daughters, one sixteen and the other thirteen, he purposed landing.'

'But there was one younger than you mention,' said I, without making other reference to what I had witnessed.

'Oh yes, Sir,' replied he, 'there were two—two dear innocents—they were mine, Sir—they were mine—the children of one who died a short time before we left New York, and they were going to remain with their uncle whilst I was at sea. I need not ask you how you came to know the fact of their being aboard, for the dreadful massacre is yet before my eyes—Oh God! that I could wipe away the remembrance of it for ever. Yet no! Almighty Father, grant that the hour of retribution may come, and I am content to suffer till that time! We made a very fair passage, Sir, till yesterday afternoon, when the piratical schooner hove in sight, and not liking her appearance, we carried on through thick and thin, under the vain hope of falling in with some of the British cruisers. Oh, Sir, had it pleased Providence to have sent you to our succour yesterday—but I will not arraign the decrees of unerring wisdom. Yet when I think of my murdered little ones, and all my dear relations—all gone—oh, Sir, it is more than my spirit can endure.

'The schooner overhauled us very fast, yet still we cherished the prospect of escape or succour, till in a sudden squall, in which we did not shorten sail, our three topmasts came down and then we sank into despair. The females had been secreted in the hold under a heap of lumber; and whilst I was looking at the wreck, my brother came to me; 'Amos,' said he, 'let me commune with you apart,' and I walked aft with him in silence. 'Amos,' continued he, and there was a fierce fiery restlessness in his eyes as he looked in mine—'Amos,' repeated he, 'our children! could you bear to see them'—and he paused and grasped my arm in a convulsive clutch. 'Amos, answer me—would it not be better that they should die than fall into the power of yon hellish gang!' I caught his meaning; but I could not speak. 'Did not the chosen people of the Most High,' he continued, 'save their wives and daughters from pollution by—' he ceased, and a sickly tremor came over him as he felt terrified at his own thoughts.