

THE ANCHOR AND CHAIN

drunken brawl, I made sure, when even I, a child, knew better than to misuse the black bottle in this unkind way. 'Twas the passage from Spain—and the rocks of this and the rocks of that—and 'twas the virtues of a fore-and-after and the vices of an English square rig for the foremast. He'd stand by the square rig; and there were Newfoundlanders at his table to dispute the opinion. The good Lord only knew what would come of it! And the rain was on the panes, and the night was black, and the wind was playing devil-tricks on the great sea, where square-rigged foremasts and fore-and-afters were fighting for their lives. A dirty night at sea—a dirty night, God help us!

"Skipper Nicholas," says Tom Bull, in an anxious whisper, "I'm tied up t' Judby's wharf, bound out at dawn, if the wind holds. I 'low you is in trouble, lad, along o' them jools. An' if you wants t' cut an' run—"

In the pause my uncle scowled.

—"The little *Good Omen*," says Tom Bull, under his breath, "is your'n t' command!"

'Twas kind of intention, no doubt, but done in folly—in stupid (if not befuddled) misconception of the old man's mettle. My uncle sat quite still, frowning into his glass; the purple color crept into the long, crescent scar of his scalp, his unkempt beard bristled like a boar's back, the flesh of his cheeks, in composure of a ruddy hue, turned a spotty crimson and white, with the web of veins swelling ominously. All the storm signals I had, with the acumen of the child who suffers unerring discipline, mastered to that hour were at the