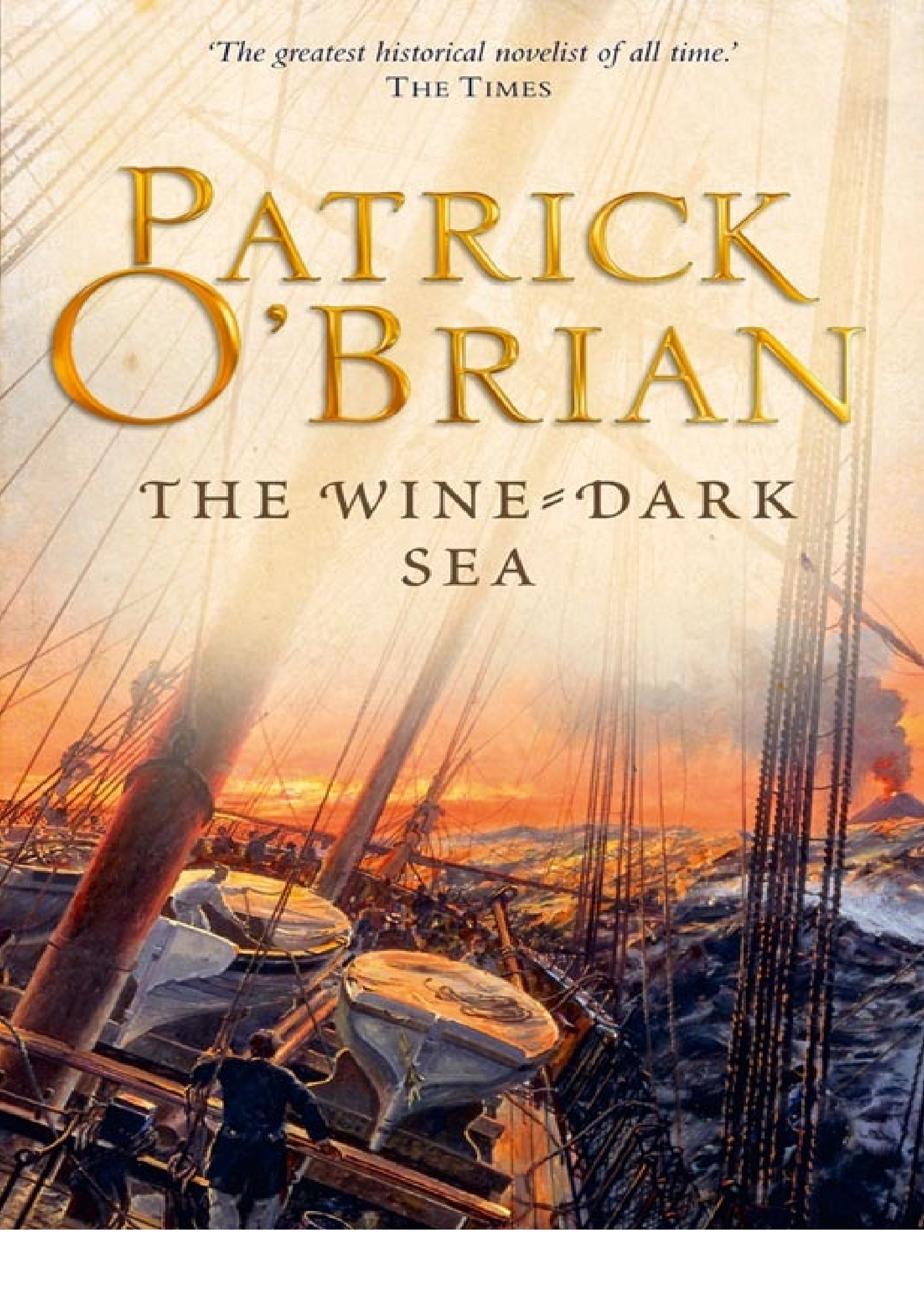


'The greatest historical novelist of all time.'

THE TIMES

PATRICK O'BRIAN

THE WINE-DARK
SEA



PATRICK O'BRIAN

The Wine-Dark Sea

HARPER

FOR RICHARD SIMON
AND VIVIEN GREEN

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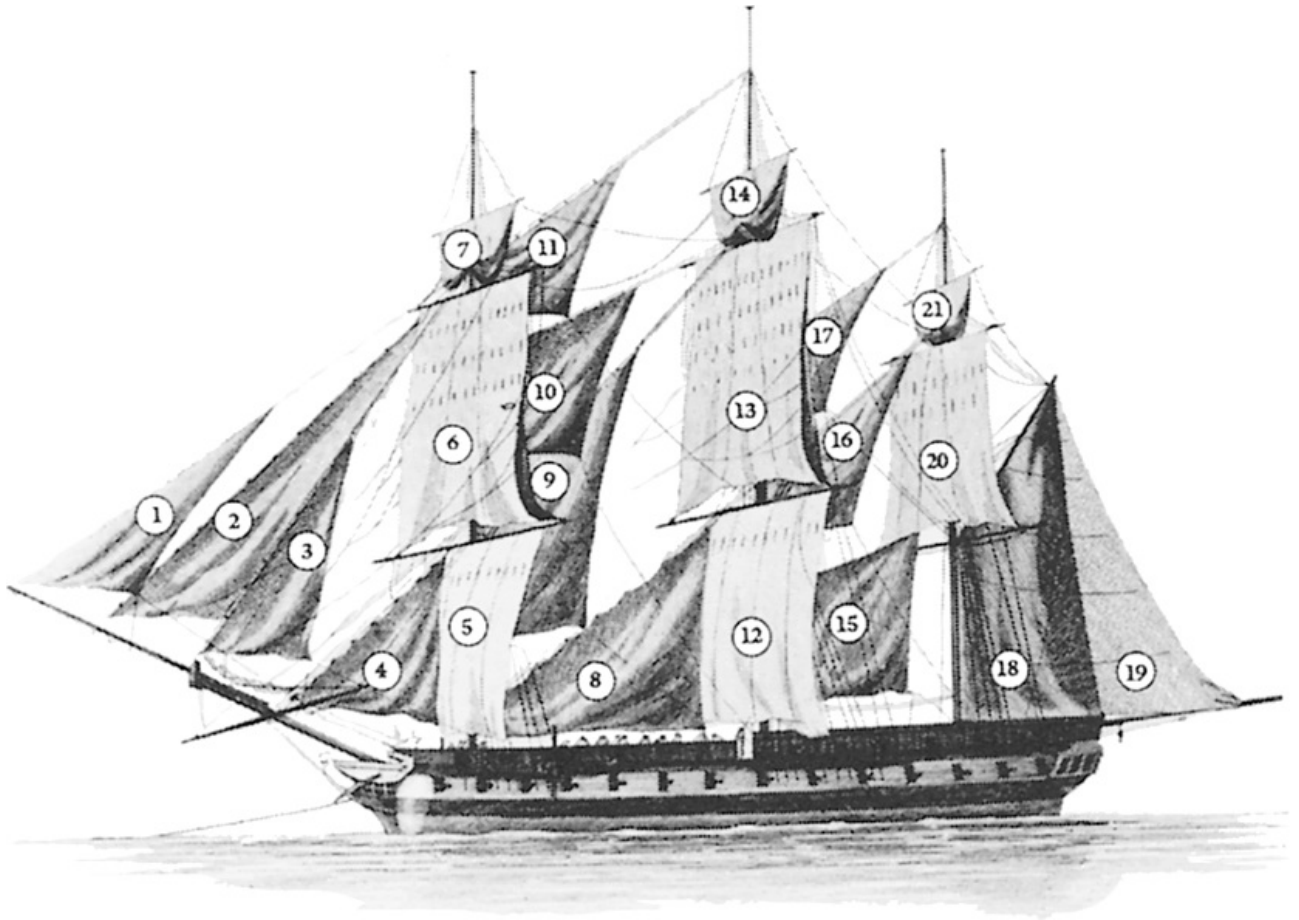
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The sails of a square-rigged ship, hung out to dry in a calm.



- 1 Flying jib
- 2 Jib
- 3 Fore topmast staysail
- 4 Fore staysail
- 5 Foresail, or course
- 6 Fore topsail
- 7 Fore topgallant
- 8 Mainstaysail
- 9 Main topmast staysail
- 10 Middle staysail
- 11 Main topgallant staysail
- 12 Mainsail, or course
- 13 Maintopsail
- 14 Main topgallant
- 15 Mizzen staysail
- 16 Mizzen topmast staysail
- 17 Mizzen topgallant staysail
- 18 Mizzen sail
- 19 Spanker
- 20 Mizzen topsail

Illustration source: Serres, Liber Nauticus.

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Chapter One

A purple ocean, vast under the sky and devoid of all visible life apart from two minute ships racing across its immensity. They were as close-hauled to the somewhat irregular northeasterly trades as ever they could be, with every sail they could safely carry and even more, the bowsprits bowlines twanging taut: they had been running like this day after day, sometimes so far apart that each saw only the other's topsails above the horizon, sometimes within gunshot; and when this was the case they fired at one another with their chasers.

The foremost ship was the *Franklin*, an American privateer of twenty-two guns, nine hundred pounds, and her pursuer was the *Surprise*, a twenty-eight-gun frigate formerly belonging to the Royal Navy but now acting as a privateer too, manned by privateersmen and volunteers. She was nominally commanded by a half-pay officer named Thomas Pullings but in fact by her former captain, Jack Aubrey, a man much higher on the post-captain's list than would ordinarily have been found in so small and antiquated a ship – an anomalous craft entirely unsuited for although she purported to be a privateer her official though unpublished status was that of His Majesty's Hired Vessel *Surprise*. She had set out on her voyage with the purpose of carrying her surgeon, Stephen Maturin, to South America, there to enter into contact with those leading inhabitants who wished to make Chile and Peru independent of Spain: for Maturin, as well as being a doctor of medicine, was an intelligence-agent exceptionally well qualified for this task, being a Catalan on his mother's side and bitterly opposed to Spanish rule, that is to say Castilian – oppression of his country.

He was indeed opposed to oppression in all its forms, and in his youth he had supported the United Irishmen (his father was a Catholic Irish officer in the Spanish service) against everything but the violence of 1798: but above all, far above all, he abhorred that of Buonaparte, and he was perfectly willing to offer his services to the British government to help put an end to it, to offer them *gratis pro Deo*, thus doing away with any hint of the odious name of spy, a vile wretch hired by the Ministry to inform upon his friends, a name associated in his Irish childhood with that of Judas, Spy-Wednesday coming just before the Passion.

His present undertaking, resumed after a long interruption caused by the traitorous passing of information from London to Madrid, gave him the greatest satisfaction, for if success would not only weaken the two oppressors but it would also cause extreme anger and frustration in a particular department of French intelligence that was trying to bring about the same result, though with the difference that the independent South American governments should feel loving and strategically valuable gratitude towards Paris rather than London.

He had had many causes for satisfaction since they left the Polynesian island of Moahu in the pursuit of the *Franklin*. One was that the American had chosen to rely on her remarkable powers of sailing very close to the wind on a course that was leading them directly towards his destination; another was that although her sailing-master, an old Pacific hand from

Nantucket, handled her with uncommon skill, doing everything in his power to run clear and shake off his pursuer by night, neither his guile nor his seamanship could outmatch Aubrey? If the *Franklin* slipped a raft over the side in the darkness, lighting lanterns upon it, dowsing her own and changing course, she found the *Surprise* in her wake when the day broke clear for Jack Aubrey had the same instinct, the same sense of timing and a far greater experience of war.

Still another cause for satisfaction was that every successive noonday observation showed them slanting rapidly down towards the equator and some two hundred miles or more closer to Peru, a country that Dr Maturin associated not only with potential independence but also with the coca plant, a shrub whose dried leaves he, like the Peruvians, was accustomed to chew as a relief from mental or spiritual distress and physical or intellectual weariness as well as a source of benignity and general well-being. Rats, however, had eaten his store of leaves somewhere south of Capricorn. Coca-leaves could not be replaced in New South Wales where the *Surprise* had spent some dismal weeks, and he looked forward eagerly to a fresh supply: ever since he last heard from his wife – letters had caught up with the ship on Norfolk Island – he had felt a deep indwelling anxiety about her; and the coca-leaves might at least dispel the irrational part of it. They sharpened the mind wonderfully; and he welcomed the prospect of that familiar taste, the deadening of the inside of his mouth and pharynx, and the calming of his spirit in what he termed ‘a virtuous ataraxy’, a freedom that owed nothing to alcohol, that contemptible refuge, nor even to his old love opium, which might be objected to on physical and even perhaps on moral grounds.

This was scarcely a subject that so discreet, private and indeed secretive a person as Stephen Maturin was likely to discuss, and although it flashed into his mind as a piece of green seaweed rose momentarily on the bow-wave, all he said to his companion was, ‘It is a great satisfaction to see the ocean a colour so near to that of new wine – of certain kinds of new wine – as it comes gushing from the press.’

He and Nathaniel Martin, his assistant-surgeon, were standing in the frigate’s beakhead, a roughly triangular place in front of and below the forecastle, the very foremost part of the ship where the bowsprit reached out, where the seamen’s privy was to be found, and where the medicoes were least in the way, not only of the hands trimming the sails to capture the greatest possible thrust from the wind but, and above all, of the gunners serving the two bow-chasers on the forecastle, guns that pointed almost directly forward. The gun-crews in question were commanded by Captain Aubrey himself, who pointed and fired the windward chaser, a long brass nine-pounder called *Beelzebub*, and by Captain Pullings, who did the same for the leeward gun: they both had much the same style of firing, which was not surprising since Captain Pullings had been one of Jack’s midshipmen in his first command, a great while ago in the Mediterranean, and had learnt all his practical gunnery from him. They were now very carefully aiming their pieces at the *Franklin*’s topsail yards with the intent of cutting the halyards, backstays and the whole nexus of cordage at the level of the mainyard and even with luck of wounding the mainyard itself: in any case of delaying her progress without damage to her hull. There was no point in battering the hull of a prize, and a prize the *Franklin* seemed fated to be in the long run – perhaps even today, since the *Surprise* was perceptibly gaining. The range was now a thousand yards or even a little less, and both Jack and Pullings waited for just before the height of the roll to send their shot racing over the

broad stretch of water.

‘The Captain does not like it, however,’ observed Maturin, referring to the wine-dark sea. ‘He says it is not natural. He admits the colour, which we have all seen in the Mediterranean on occasion; he admits the swell, which though unusually broad is not rare but the colour and the swell together ...’

The crash and rumble of the Captain’s gun, followed with scarcely a pause by Pullings, cut him short: smoke and smouldering scraps of wad whistled about their heads, yet even before they swept away to leeward Stephen had his spyglass to his eye. He could not catch the flight of the ball, but in three heartbeats he saw a hole appear low in the Frenchman’s topsail, joining a score of others. To his astonishment he also saw a jet of water shoot from her lee scuppers, and above him he heard Tom Pullings’ cry. ‘They are starting their water, sir!’

‘What does this signify?’ asked Martin quietly. He had not applied to a very valuable source, Dr Maturin being strictly a land-animal, but in this case Stephen could truthfully reply ‘that they were pumping their fresh water over the side to lighten the ship and make it go faster.’ ‘Perhaps,’ he added, ‘they may also throw their guns and boats overboard. I have seen it done.’

A savage cheer from all the Surprises in the fore part of the ship showed him that he was seeing it again; and having watched the first few splashes he passed Martin the glass.

The boats went overboard, and the guns: but not quite all the guns. As the *Franklin*’s speed increased, her two stern-chasers fired together, the white smoke streaming away across her wake.

‘How disagreeable it is to be fired at,’ said Martin, shrinking into as small a space as possible; and as he spoke one ball hit the best bower anchor close behind them with an enormous clang: the sharp fragments, together with the second ball, cut away almost all the foretopgallantmast’s support. The mast and its attendant canvas fell quite slowly, spars breaking right and left, and the *Surprise*’s bow-chasers just had time to reply, both shots striking the *Franklin*’s stern. But before either Jack’s or Pullings’ crew could reload their guns they were enveloped in sailcloth, whilst at the same time all hands aft raised the cry *Man overboard* and the ship flew up into the wind, all her sails taken aback and clattering like a madhouse. The *Franklin* fired a single gun: an extraordinary cloud of smoke, and an extraordinary report. But it was drowned by Captain Aubrey’s roar of ‘Clew up, clew up there,’ and emerging from the canvas ‘Where away?’

‘Larboard quarter, sir,’ cried several hands. ‘It’s Mr Reade.’

‘Carry on, Captain Pullings,’ said Jack, whipping off his shirt and diving straight into the sea. He was a powerful swimmer, the only one in the ship, and from time to time he heaved himself high out of the water like a seal to make sure of his direction. Mr Reade, a midshipman of fourteen, had never been able to do much more than keep afloat, and since losing an arm in a recent battle he had not bathed at all. Fortunately the remaining arm was firmly hooked into the bars of a hen-coop that had been thrown to him from the quarterdeck, and though sodden and bruised he was perfectly in possession of his wits. ‘Oh sir,’ he cried from twenty yards. ‘Oh sir, I am so sorry – oh how I hope we han’t missed the chase.’

‘Are you hurt?’ asked Jack.

‘Not at all, sir: but I am so sorry you should have ...’

'Then clap on to my hair' – the Captain wore it long and clubbed, 'and so get set on my shoulders. D'ye hear me there?'

From time to time on the way back to the ship Reade apologized into Jack's ear, or hoped they had not lost the chase; but he was often choked with salt water, for Jack was now swimming against the wind and the set of the sea, and he plunged deep at every stroke.

Reade was less coldly received aboard than might have been expected: in the first place he was much esteemed by all hands, and in the second it was clear to any seaman that his being rescued had not in fact delayed the pursuit of the prize: whether Reade had gone overboard or not, the shattered cross-trees had to be replaced and new spars, sails and cordage had to be sent aloft before the frigate could resume her course. Those few hands who were not extremely busy with the tangle forward passed him the bight of a rope, hauled him aboard, asked him with real kindness how he did, and handed him over to Sarah and Emily Sweeting, two little black, black girls from a remote Melanesian island, belonging to De Maturin and attached to the sick-berth, to be led below and given dry clothes and a cup of tea. And as he went even Awkward Davies, who had been rescued twice and who often resented sharing the distinction, called out, 'It was me as tossed you the hen-coop, sir. I heaved it overboard, ha, ha, ha!'

As for the Captain, he was already in conference with Mr Bulkeley the bosun, and the only congratulations he received were from Pullings, who said, 'Well, and so you've done again, sir,' before going on to the foretopmost cheekblocks. Jack looked for no more, indeed not for as much: he had pulled so many people out of the water in the course of his time at sea that he thought little of it, while those who, like Bonden his coxswain, Killick his steward and several others, had served with him ever since his first command, had seen him do it so often that it seemed natural – some God-damned lubber fell in: the skipper fished him out while the privateersmen and smugglers who made up most of the rest of the crew had acquired much of their shipmates' phlegm.

In any case they were all much too preoccupied with getting the barky into chasing tripart again to indulge in abstract considerations; and to objective spectators like Maturin and his assistant it was a pleasure to see the intense, accurately-directed and almost silent energy with which they worked, a highly skilled crew of seamen who knew exactly what to do and who were doing it with wholehearted zeal. The medicoes, having crawled from under the foretopmast staysail, had gone below to find Reade perfectly well, being fed with sick-berth biscuit by the little girls; and now they were watching the strenuous activity from the quarterdeck, where the ordinary life of the ship was going on in a sparse sort of way: West the officer of the watch, was at his station, telescope under his arm; helmsmen and quartermaster by the wheel.

'Turn the glass and strike the bell,' cried the quartermaster in a loud official voice.

There was no one there of course to obey the order so he turned the glass himself and paced forward towards the belfry to strike the bell. But both gangways were obstructed with spars, cordage and a crowd of straining bodies, and he had to go down into the waist and pick his way among the carpenter and his crew as they worked sweating under the sun, now half way to its height and terrible in the copper-coloured sky. They were shaping not only the new crosstrees but also the heel of the new topgallantmast, an intent body of men, working to very fine limits in a rolling ship, plying sharp-edged tools and impatient of the slightest

interruption. But the quartermaster was a dogged soul; he had served with Nelson in the *Agamemnon* and the *Vanguard*; he was not going to be stopped by a parcel of carpenters; and presently four bells rang out their double chime. The quartermaster returned, followed by the boatswain and bringing with him the two helmsmen who were to take their trick at the wheel.

‘Mr West,’ said Stephen, ‘do you suppose we shall eat our dinner today?’

Mr West’s expression was difficult to read; the loss of his nose, frost-bitten south of the Horn, gave what had been a mild, good-humoured, rather stupid face an appearance of malignity; and this was strengthened by a number of sombre reflexions, more recently acquired.

‘Oh yes,’ he said absently. ‘Unless we are in close action we always shoot the sun and pipe to dinner at noon.’

‘No, no. I mean our ceremony in the gun-room.’

‘Oh, of course,’ said West. ‘What with Reade going overboard and the chase stopping dead and tearing away like smoke and oakum just as we were overhauling her, it slipped my mind. Masthead, there,’ he hailed. ‘What do you see?’

‘Precious little, sir,’ the voice came floating down. ‘It is cruel hazy – orange sorts of haze – in the south-east; but sometimes I catch what might be a twinkle of topgallants.’

West shook his head, but went on, ‘No, no, Doctor; never you fret about our dinner. Cook and steward laid it on handsome, and though we may be a little late I am sure we shall eat – there, do you see, the crosstrees go aloft. They will be swaying up the mast directly.’

‘Will they indeed? Order out of chaos so soon?’

‘Certainly they will. Never you fret about your dinner.’

‘I will not,’ said Stephen, who accepted what seamen told him about ships with the same simplicity as that with which they accepted what he told them about their bodies. ‘Take the bolus,’ he would say. ‘It will rectify the humours amazingly,’ and they, holding their noses (for he often used asafoetida) would force the rounded mass down, gasp, and feel better once. With his mind at ease, therefore, Stephen said to Martin, ‘Let us make our forenoon rounds,’ and went below.

West, left to his solitude, returned to his own fretting – an inadequate word for his concern for the future and his anxiety about the present. Captain Aubrey had begun this much-interrupted voyage with his old shipmate Tom Pullings acting as his first lieutenant and two broken officers, West and Davidge, as second and third. He did not know them as anything but competent seamen, but he was aware that the sentences of their courts-martial had been thought extremely harsh in the service – West was dismissed for duelling, Davidge for signing a dishonest purser’s accounts without checking them – and that reinstatement was their chief aim in life. Up until recently they had been in a fair way to it; but when the *Surprise* was nearly a thousand miles out of Sydney Cove, sailing eastwards across the Pacific Ocean, it was found that a senior midshipman named Oakes had stowed a young gentlewoman away in the cable-tier; and this had led almost all the gun-room officers except Dr Maturin to behave extremely badly. Her instant marriage to Oakes had set her free in that she was no longer a transported convict liable to be taken up again, but it did not liberate her from the adulterous wishes, motions, and jealousies of her shipmates. West and Davidge were the worst and Captain Aubrey, coming late to an understanding of the position, had told them that if they did not put aside the barbarous open enmity that was spreading discord and

inefficiency in the ship he would turn them ashore: farewell for ever to any hope of reinstatement.

Davidge had been killed in the recent action that made the Polynesian island of Moahu at least a nominal part of the British Empire and Oakes had gone off for Batavia with her. Clarissa in a recaptured prize; but so far Captain Aubrey had said nothing. West did not know whether his zeal in the approaches to Moahu and in getting the carronades up through rough country and his modest part in the battle itself had earned him forgiveness or whether he should be dismissed when the ship reached Peru: an agonizing thought. What he did know here and in the immediate present, was that a valuable prize, in which he would share even if he were later dismissed, had almost certainly escaped. They would never catch her before nightfall and in this hazy, moonless darkness, she could run a hundred miles, never to be seen again.

That was one torment to his spirit: another was that this morning Captain Aubrey had promoted Grainger, a fore-castle-man in the starboard watch, to fill the vacancy left by Davidge's death, just as he had raised a young fellow called Sam Norton to replace Oakes. West had to admit that Grainger was a capital seaman, a master-mariner who had sailed his own brig on the Guinea run until he was taken by two Salee rovers off Cape Spartel; but he did not like the man at all. He had already known what it was to be shut up in the gun-room with a shipmate he detested, seeing him at every meal, hearing his voice; and now it seemed that he should have to go through the odious experience again for at least the breadth of the Pacific. Yet more than that, far more, he felt that the gun-room and the quarterdeck, the privileged places in a man-of-war, were not only sacred in themselves but that they conferred a kind of sanctity on their rightful inhabitants, a particular being and an identity. He felt this strongly, though he found the notion difficult to express; and now that Davidge was dead there was nobody with whom he could discuss it. Pullings was a small tenant-farmer's son, Adams, though he acted as purser, was only the Captain's clerk; and Martin did not seem to think either family or caste of much importance. Dr Maturin, who lived almost entirely with the Captain, being his particular friend, was of illegitimate birth and the subject could not be raised with him; while even if West had been in high favour with his commander it would have been quite useless to suggest that if it was necessary to promote foremast jacks, as was in this case, then they might be made master's mates, herding with the midshipmen, so that the gun-room should be preserved: useless, because Jack Aubrey belonged to an old Navy in which a collier's mate like James Cook could die a much-honoured post-captain, and a foremast-hand like William Mitchell might begin his career by being flogged round the fleet and end it as a vice-admiral, rather than to the modern service, in which an officer had not only to pass for lieutenant but also for gentleman if he were to advance.

Dr Maturin and his assistant had the usual seamen's diseases to treat and a few wounds to dress, not from the recent battle, which had been a mere point-blank butchery of an enemy caught in a narrow rocky defile, but from the wear and tear of dragging guns up and down the jungly mountainside. They also had one interesting case of a sailor who, less sure-footed on land than by sea, had fallen on to the pointed end of a cut bamboo, which let air into the cavity of his thorax, into his pleura, with the strangest effect on one lung. This they discussed at length, in Latin, to the great satisfaction of the sick-berth, where heads turned grave.

from one speaker to the other, nodding from time to time, while the patient himself looked modestly down and Padeen Colman, Dr Maturin's almost monoglot Irish servant and loblolly boy, wore his Mass-going reverential face.

They never heard the orders that attended the swaying-up of the new topgallantmast, a anxious business at such a height and with such a swell; nor did they hear the cry of 'Launce ho!' as the bosun's mate at the topmast head banged the fid home through the heel of the topgallantmast, thus supporting it on the topmast trestle-tree. The complex business of securing the long unhandy pole escaped them too – an exceedingly complex business, for although before the swaying-up the shrouds had been placed over the head of the mast followed by the backstays, the preventer-stays and the very stay itself, they all had to be made fast, bowsed upon and set up simultaneously with all possible dispatch so that they exerted an equally-balanced force fore and aft and on either side. The rigging of the topgallant yard with all its appurtenances also passed unnoticed; so did two typical naval illogicalities, for whereas by tradition and good sense only the lightest of the topmen laid on the lofty yard to loose the sail, this time, once it was loosed, sheeted home and hoisted the Captain, with his acknowledged sixteen stone, ran aloft with his glass to sweep what a vague horizon could still be distinguished through the growing haze.

But the medical men and their patients did make out the cheer as the ship returned to her former course, and they did feel her heel as she gathered way, running with a far more lively motion, while all the mingled sounds of the wind in the rigging and the water streaming along her side took on the urgent note of a ship chasing once more.

Almost immediately after the *Surprise* had settled into her accustomed pace, shouldering the strange-coloured sea high and wide, the hands were piped to dinner, and in the usual Bedlam of cries and banging mess-kids that accompanied the ceremony, Stephen returned to the quarterdeck, where the Captain was standing at the windward rail, gazing steadily out to the eastward: he felt Stephen's presence and called him over. 'I have never seen anything like it,' he said, nodding at the sea and the sky.

'It is much thicker now than it was when I went below,' said Stephen. 'And now an umbrella light pervades the whole, like a Claude Lorraine run mad.'

'We had no noon observation, of course,' said Jack. 'There was no horizon and there was no sun to bring down to it either. But what really puzzles me is that every now and then quite independent of the swell, the sea *twitches*: a quick pucker like a horse's skin when there are flies about. There. Did you see? A little quick triple wave on the rising swell.'

'I did, too. It is extremely curious,' said Stephen. 'Can you assign any cause?'

'No,' said Jack. 'I have never heard of such a thing.' He reflected for some minutes, and as each lift of the frigate's bows the spray came sweeping aft. 'But quite apart from all this,' he went on, 'I finished the draft of my official letter this morning, before we came within gunshot, and I should be uncommonly obliged if you would look through it, strike out errors and anything low, and put in some stylish expressions, before Mr Adams makes his fair copies.'

'Sure I will put in what style there is at my command. But why do you say copies and why are you in haste? Whitehall is half the world away or even more for all love.'

'Because in these waters we may meet with a homeward-bound whaler any day.'

'Really? Really? Oh, indeed. Very well: I shall come as soon as our dinner is properly

disposed of. And I shall write to Diana too.'

'Your dinner? Oh yes, of course: I do hope it goes well. You will be changing very soon, no doubt.' He had no doubt at all, because his steward Killick, who also looked after Maturin on formal occasions, had made his appearance, standing at what he considered a respectful distance and fixing them with his shrewish, disapproving eye. He had been with them for many years, in all climates, and although he was neither very clever nor at all agreeable he had, by mere conviction of righteousness, acquired an ascendancy of which both were ashamed. Killick coughed. 'And if you should see Mr West,' added Jack, 'pray tell him I should like to see him for a couple of minutes. I do hope your dinner goes well,' he called after Stephen's back.

The dinner in question was intended to welcome Grainger, now Mr Grainger, to the gun-room; Stephen too hoped that it would go well, and although he ordinarily ate his meals with Jack Aubrey in the cabin he meant to take his place in the gun-room for this occasion: since in principle the surgeon was a gun-room officer his absence might be taken as a slight. Grainger, a reserved, withdrawn man, was much respected aboard, for although he had not belonged to the *Surprise* during her heroic days as a privateer, when she recaptured a Spanish deep-laden with quicksilver, took an American commerce-raider and cut out the *Diane* from the harbour of St Martin's, he was well known to at least half the crew. He had joined at the beginning of this voyage, very highly recommended by his fellow-townsmen of Shelmerston, a port that had provided the *Surprise* with scores of prime seamen, a curious little West Country place, much given to smuggling, privateering, and chapel-going. There were almost as many chapels as there were public houses, and Grainger was an elder of the congregation of Traskites, who met on Saturdays in a severe, sad-coloured building behind the rope-walk. Although the Traskites' views were controversial, he and the younger men who came aboard with him were perfectly at home in the *Surprise*, which was an ark of dissent, containing Brownists, Sethians, Arminians, Muggletonians and several other sects generally united in a seamanlike tolerance when afloat and always in a determined hatred of tithes when ashore. Stephen was well acquainted with him as a shipmate and above all as a patient (two calentures, a broken clavicle) and he valued his many qualities; but he knew very well how such a man, dignified and assured in his own circle, could suffer when he was removed from it. Pullings would be kindness itself; so would Adams; but kindness alone was not necessarily enough with so vulnerable a man as Grainger. Martin would certainly mean well, but he had always been more sensitive to the feelings of birds than to those of men, and prosperity seemed to have made him rather selfish. Although he was sailing as Stephen's assistant he was in fact a clergyman and Jack had recently given him a couple of livings in his gift with the promise of a valuable third when it should fall in; Martin had all the particulars of these parishes and he discussed them over and over again, considering the possibility of different modes of gathering tithes or their equivalent and improvement of the glebes. But worse than the dullness of this conversation was a self-complacency that Stephen had never known in the penniless Martin of some years ago, who was incapable of being a bore. Whether he was not sure of. Here again there had been change: the moody, snappish, nail-biting West of their present longitude was quite unlike the cheerful young man who had so kindly and patiently rowed him about Botany Bay, looking for seaweed.

'Oh, Mr West,' he said, opening the gun-room door, 'before I forget it – the Captain would

like to see you for a minute or two. I believe he is in the cabin.'

'Jesus,' cried West, looking shocked; then recollecting himself, 'Thank you, Doctor.' He ran into his cabin, put on his best coat, and hurried up the ladder.

'Come in,' called Jack.

'I understand you wish to see me, sir.'

'Oh yes, Mr West; but I shall not keep you a minute. Push those files aside and sit on the locker. I had meant to speak to you before, but I have been so taken up with paper-work that I have left it day after day: it is just to tell you that I was thoroughly satisfied with your conduct through our time at Moahu, particularly your exertion in getting the carronades up that infernal mountain: most officerlike. I have mentioned it in my official letter; and I believe that if only you had contrived to be wounded you might have been fairly confident of reinstatement. Perhaps you will do better next time.'

'Oh, I shall do my very best, sir,' cried West. 'Arms, legs, anything ... and may I say how infinitely I am obliged to you for mentioning me, sir?'

'Mr Grainger, welcome to the gun-room,' said Tom Pullings, splendid in his uniform. 'Here is your place, next to Mr West. But first, messmates, let us drink to Mr Grainger's health.'

'Good health,' 'Hear him,' 'Huzzay,' and 'Welcome,' cried the other four, emptying their glasses.

'My dear love to you all, gentlemen,' said Grainger, sitting down in a good blue coat borrowed from his cousin the carpenter, looking pale under his tan, grim and dangerous.

But grimness could not withstand Pullings' and Stephen's good will, far less West's surprising flow of spirits: his happiness broke out in an extraordinary volubility – a thoroughly amiable volubility – and he rose high above his ordinary powers of anecdote and comic rhyme; and when he was not proposing riddles he laughed. There was no doubt that Grainger was pleased with his reception; he ate well, he smiled, he even laughed once or twice; but all the time Maturin saw his quick nervous eyes flitting from plate to plate, seeing just how the gun-room ate its dinner, managed its bread and drank its wine. Yet by pudding-time and toasts the anxiety was gone; Grainger joined in the song *Farewell and adieu to you fine Spanish ladies* and even proposed one of his own: *As I walked out one midsummer morning, for to view the fields and the flowers so gay.*

'From what I could make out here on deck,' said Jack, when Stephen joined him for coffee, 'your dinner seemed quite a cheerful affair.'

'It went off as well as ever I had hoped,' said Stephen. 'Mr West was in a fine flow of spirits – jokes, riddles, conundrums, imitations of famous commanders, songs – I did not know he possessed such social gifts.'

'I am heartily glad of it,' said Jack. 'But Stephen, you look a little worn.'

'I am a little worn. All the more so for having first stepped on deck for a breath of air: the appearance of the ocean appalled me. I asked Bonden what he thought – was it often like this? He only shook his head and wished we might all be here come Sunday. Jack, what do you think? Have you considered it?'

'I considered it most of the time your Nebuchadnezzar's feast was going on, and I cannot

remember ever having seen or read of anything like it; nor can I tell what it means. When you have glanced over my draft, perhaps we might go on deck again and see whether we can make it out.'

Jack always sat uneasy while his official letters were read: he always broke the current of the reader's thoughts by saying, 'The piece about the carronade-slides ain't very elegantly put. I am afraid ... this is just a draft, you understand, not polished at all ... Anything that ain't good grammar or that you don't quite like, pray dash it out ... I never was much of a hand with a pen,' but after all these years Stephen took no more notice of it than the thin drifting Irish rain.

With Jack's voice in the background, the roll and pitch of the ship and the crash of the sea on her weather-bow never affecting his concentration, he read a succinct narrative, cast in the old wooden service style: the *Surprise*, proceeding eastwards in accordance with their Lordship's instructions, had been overtaken in latitude 28°31'S, longitude 168°1'E by a cutter from Sydney with official information that the inhabitants of the island of Moahu were at war with one another and that the British seamen were being ill-used and their ships detained: Captain Aubrey was to deal with the situation, backing whichever side seemed more likely to acknowledge British sovereignty. He had therefore changed course for Moahu without loss of time, pausing only at Anamooka for water and provisions: here he found the whaler *Daisy* recently from Moahu, whose master, Mr Wainwright, informed him that the war between the chief of the northern part of Moahu and the queen of the south was complicated by the presence of a number of French mercenaries on the chief's side and of a privateer under American colours, the *Franklin*, commanded by another Frenchman allied to the chief, Monsieur Dutourd. Acting upon this information, Captain Aubrey therefore proceeded with the utmost dispatch to Pabay, the northern port of Moahu, in the hope of finding the *Franklin* at anchor. She was not there, so having released the detained British ship, the *Truelove* together with her surviving crew, and having destroyed the French garrison with the loss of one officer killed and two seamen wounded, he hastened to the southern harbour, which was about to be attacked from the mountains by the northern chief and probably from the sea by the privateer. The *Surprise* arrived in time: her people had the happiness of defeating the northern land forces without loss before the arrival of the privateer, and Captain Aubrey received the assurance of the Queen's willingness to be a faithful ally to His Majesty. He followed a more detailed account of the two actions and the letter returned to the appearance of the *Franklin* next morning – her inferior force – her flight – and Captain Aubrey's hope that in spite of her excellent sailing qualities she might soon be captured.

'It seems to me a perfectly straightforward seamanlike account,' said Stephen, closing the folder. 'Admirably calculated for Whitehall, apart from a few quibbles I have pencilled in the margin. And I see why West was so happy.'

'Yes: I thought it due to him; and perhaps I laid it on a little heavy, because I was so sorry about Davidge. Thank you, Stephen. Shall we go on deck?'

It was indeed a lurid and portentous sight, the sky quite hidden and the diffused glow now more orange than umber, showed an irregularly turbulent sea flecked as far as the eye could see (which was not much above three miles) with broken water that should have been white and that in fact had taken on an unpleasant acid greenish tinge, most evident in the frigate's leeward bow-wave – an irregular bow-wave too, for now, although the swell was

still very much present, rolling strongly from the north-east, the series of crests was interrupted by innumerable cross-seas.

They stood in silence; and all along the gangway and on the forecastle there were little groups of seamen, gazing in the same attentive way, with a few low murmured words.

‘It is not unlike the typhoon that so nearly did for us when we were running for the Marquesas, south of the line,’ observed Jack. ‘But there are essential differences. The glass perfectly steady, for one thing. Yet even so I believe I shall strike topgallantmasts.’ Raising his voice he called for the bosun and gave the order; it was at once followed by the wailing pipes and entirely superfluous cries of ‘All hands to strike topgallantmasts. All hands. All hands, d’ye hear me there?’

Without a word of complaint or a wry look, for they were much of the Captain’s mind, the patient Surprises laid aloft to undo all they had done with such pains in the forenoon watch. They cast off all that had to be cast off; they clapped on to the mast-rope and by main force raised the foretopgallant so that the fid could be drawn out again and the whole lowered down; and this they did to the others in succession, as well as running in the jib-boom, making all fast and double-gripping the boats.

‘A pretty halfwit I may look, if the poor souls have to sway them up again tomorrow,’ said Jack in a low voice. ‘But when I was very young I had such a lesson about not getting your upper masts down on deck in plenty of time – such a lesson! Now we are on deck and could tell you about it, pointing out the various ropes and spars.’

‘That would give me the utmost pleasure,’ said Stephen.

‘It was when I was coming back from the Cape in the *Minerva*, a very wet ship, Captain Soules: once we were north of the line we had truly miserable weather, a whole series of gales from the westward. But the day after Christmas the wind grew quite moderate and we not only let a reef out of the maintopsail but also sent up the topgallant mast and yard: yet during the night it freshened once more and we close-reefed the topsails again, got the topgallant yard down on deck and shaped the mast.’

‘Before this it was amorphous, I collect? Shapeless?’

‘What a fellow you are, Stephen. Shaping a mast means getting it ready to be struck. But however, while this was in train, with the people tailing on to the mast-rope, the one that raises it a little, do you see, so that it can have a clear run down, the ship took a most prodigious lee-lurch, flinging all hands, still fast to their rope, into the scuppers. And since they hung on like good ’uns this meant that they raised the heel of the mast right up above the cross-trees, so that although the fid was out it could not be lowered down. Do you follow me, Stephen, with my fid and heel and cross-trees?’

‘Perfectly, my dear. A most uncomfortable position, sure.’

‘So it was, upon my word. And before we could do anything about it the topmast springstays parted, then the topmast stay itself; and the mast went, a few feet above the cap and falling upon the lee topsail yardarm carried that away too. And all this mare’s nest came down on the mainyard, parting the lee-lift – that is the lee-lift, you see? Then the weather-quarter of the mainyard, hitting the top, shattered the weather side of the cross-trees; so that as far as the sails were concerned, the main-mast was useless. At that very moment the ship broached to, huge green seas coming aft. We survived; but ever since then I have been perhaps over-cautious. Though this afternoon I had meant to reduce sail in any event.’

‘You do not fear losing the prize?’

‘Certainly I fear losing the prize: I should never say anything so unlucky as *No, she is out*. I may lose her, of course; but you saw her start her water over the side, did you not?’

‘Sure I saw the water and the guns; and I saw how she drew away, free of all that weight. I spent a few moments liberating poor Mr Martin from behind the seat of ease where the wreckage had imprisoned him and he so squeamish about excrement, the creature, and when I looked up again she was much smaller, flying with a supernatural velocity.’

‘Yes, she holds a good wind. But she cannot cross the Pacific with what very little water she may have left – they pumped desperate hard and I saw ton after ton shoot into the sea so she must double back to Moahu. The Sandwich Islands are much too far. I think he will pass before the wind at about ten o’clock, meaning to slip past us with all lights dowsed during the graveyard watch – no moon, you know – and be well to the west of us by dawn, while we are still cracking on like mad lunatics to the eastward. My plan is to lie to in a little while, keeping a very sharp lookout; and if I do not mistake she will be in sight, a little to the south at break of day, with the wind on her quarter and all possible sail abroad. I should add,’ he went on after a pause in which Stephen appeared to be considering, ‘that taking into account her leeway, which I have been measuring ever since the chase began, I mean first to take the ship quite a long way south.’

‘The very same thought was in my mind,’ said Stephen, ‘though I did not presume to utter it. But tell me, before you lie in, do you not think it might calm our spirits if we were to contemplate let us say Corelli rather than this apocalyptic sea? We have scarcely played a note since before Moahu. I never thought to dislike the setting sun, but this one adds an even more sinister tinge to everything in sight, unpleasant though it was before. Besides, those tawny clouds flying in every direction and these irregular waves, these boils of water fill me with melancholy thoughts.’

‘I should like it of all things,’ said Jack. ‘I do not intend to beat to quarters this evening; the people have had quite enough for one day – so we can make an early start.’

A fairly early start: for the irregular waves that had disturbed Stephen Maturin’s sense of order in nature now pitched him headlong down the companion-ladder, where Mr Grainger, standing at its foot, received him as phlegmatically as he would have received a half-sack of dried peas, set him on his feet and told him ‘that he should always keep one hand for himself and the other for the ship.’ But the Doctor had flown down sideways, an ineffectual snatch at the rail having turned him about his vertical axis, so that Grainger caught him with one iron hand on his spine and the other on his upper belly, winding him to such an extent that he could scarcely gasp out a word of thanks. Then, when he had at last recovered his breath and the power of speech, it was found that his chair had to be made fast to two ring-bolts to allow him to hold his ’cello with anything like ease or even safety.

He had a Geronimo Amati at home, just as Aubrey had a treasured Guarnieri, but they travelled with rough old things that could put up with extremes of temperature and humidity. The rough old things always started the evening horribly flat, but in time the players tuned them to their own satisfaction, and exchanging a nod they dashed away into a duet which they knew very well indeed, having played it together these ten years and more, but in which they always found something fresh, some half-forgotten turn of phrase or of particular felicity. They also added new pieces of their own, small improvisations or repetitions, each

player in turn. They might have pleased Corelli's ghost, as showing what power his music still possessed for a later generation: they certainly did not please Preserved Killick, the Captain's steward. 'Yowl, yowl, yowl,' he said to his mate on hearing the familiar sounds. 'They are here again. I have a mind to put ratsbane in their toasted cheese.'

'It cannot go on much longer,' said Grimble. 'The cross-sea is getting up something cruel.'

It was true. The ship was cutting such extraordinary capers that even Jack, a merman ever there was one, had to sit down, wedging himself firmly on a broad locker; and at the setting of the watch, after their traditional toasted cheese had been eaten, he went on deck to take in the courses and lie to under a close-reefed main topsail. He had, at least by dead reckoning, reached something like the point he had been steering for; the inevitable leeward should do the rest by dawn; and he hoped that now the ship's motion would be eased.

'Is it very disagreeable upstairs?' asked Stephen when he returned. 'I hear thunderous rattling on the skylight.'

'It is not so much very disagreeable as very strange,' said Jack. 'As black as can be, of course – never the smell of a star – and wet; and there are strong cross-seas, apparently flowing in three directions at once, which is contrary to reason. Lightning above the clouds, too, showing deep red. Yet there is something else I can hardly put a name to.' He held the lamp close to the barometer, shook his head, and going back to his seat on the locker he said that the motion was certainly easier: perhaps they might go back to the andante?

'With all my heart,' said Stephen, 'if I might have a rope round my middle to hold me to the chair.'

'Of course you may,' said Jack. 'Killick! Killick, there. Lash the Doctor into his seat, and let us have another decanter of port.'

The andante wound its slow length along with a curious gasping unpredictable rhythm, and when they had brought it to its hesitant end, each looking at the other with reproach and disapproval at each false note, Jack said, 'Let us drink to Zephyrus, the son of Millpond.' He was in the act of pouring a glass when the ship pitched with such extraordinary violence that he pitched as though she had fallen into a hole – that he very nearly fell, and the glass left the wine in the air, a coherent body for a single moment.

'This will never do,' he said: and then, 'What in Hell was that crash?' He stood listening for a moment, and then in reply to a knock on the door he called, 'Come in.'

'Mr West's duty, sir,' said Norton, the newly-appointed midshipman, dripping on the chequered deck-cloth, 'and there is firing on the larboard bow.'

'Thank you, Mr Norton,' said Jack. 'I shall come at once.' He quickly stowed his fiddle on the locker and ran on deck. While he was still on the ladder there was another heavy crash, then as he reached the quarterdeck and the pouring rain, several more far forward.

'There, sir,' said West, pointing to a jetting glow, blurred crimson through the milk-war rain. 'It comes and goes. I believe we are under mortar-fire.'

'Beat to quarters,' called Jack, and the bosun's mate wound his call. 'Mr West – Mr West, there. D'ye hear me?' He raised his voice immensely, calling for a lantern: it showed West's face flat on his face, pouring blood.

'Fore topsail,' cried Jack, putting the ship before the wind, and as she gathered way he told two of the afterguard to carry West below. 'Forestaysail and jib.'

The ship came to life, to battle-stations, with a speed and regularity that would have

given him deep satisfaction if he had had a second to feel it.

Stephen was already in the sick-berth with a sleepy Martin and a half-dressed Padeen when West was brought down, followed by half a dozen foremast hands, two of them carrying walking cases. 'A severe depressed fracture on either side of the coronal suture,' said Stephen, having examined West under a powerful lantern, 'and of course this apparently meaningless laceration. Deep coma. Padeen, Davies, lift him as gently as ever you can to the mattress on the floor back there; lay him face down with a little small pad under his forehead the way he can breathe. Next.'

The next man, with a compound fracture of his left arm and a series of gashes down his side, required close, prolonged attention: sewing, snipping, binding-up. He was a man of exceptional fortitude even for a foremast jack and between involuntary gasps he told them that he had been the larboard midship look-out when he saw this sudden spurt of red smoke windward and a glow under the cloud, and he was hailing the quarterdeck when he heard something like stones or even grapeshot hitting the topsail and then there was a great crash and he was down. He lay on the gangway staring through the scuppers with the rain soaking him through and through before he understood what had happened, and he saw that red spurt show twice: not like a gun, but more lasting and crimson: perhaps a battery, a ragged salvo. Then a cross-sea and a lee-lurch tossed him into the waist until old Plaice and Bonden fished him out.

The groaning from a man against the side grew almost to a scream. 'Oh, oh, oh. Forgive me, mates; I can't bear it. Oh, oh, oh, oh ...'

'Mr Martin, pray see what you can do,' said Stephen. 'Sarah, my dear, give me the silk thread needle.'

As she passed it Sarah said in his ear, 'Emily is frightened.'

Stephen nodded, holding the needle between his lips. He was not exactly frightened himself, but he did dread misplacing an instrument or probe. Even down here the ship was moving with a force he had never known: the lantern swung madly, with no sort of rhythm now; and he could scarcely keep his footing.

'This cannot go on,' he murmured. But it did go on; and as he and Martin worked far into the night that part of his mind which was not taken up with probing, sawing, splinting, sewing and bandaging heard and partly recorded what was going on around him – the talk between the hands treated or waiting for treatment, the news brought by fresh cases, the seamen's interpretation of the various sounds and cries on deck.

'There's the foretopmast gone.'

A long discussion of bomb-vessels and the huge mortars they carried: agreement and contradiction.

'Oh for my coca-leaves,' thought Stephen, who so very urgently needed a clear sharp mind untouched by sleep, and a steady hand.

The maintop was broken, injured or destroyed; but the half-heard voices said they should have had to get the topmast down on deck anyhow, with such a sea running and the poor bark almost arsy-versy every minute ... poor sods on deck ... it was worse than the tide-race off Sumburgh Head ... 'This was the day Judas Iscariot was born,' said an Orkneyman.

'Mr Martin, the saw, if you please: hold back the flap and be ready with the tourniquet. Padeen, let him not move at all.' And bending over the patient, 'This will hurt for the

moment, but it will not last. Hold steady.'

The amputation gave place to another example of these puzzling lacerated wounds; and Reade came below followed by Killick with a covered mug of coffee.

'Captain's compliments, sir,' said Reade, 'and he thinks the worst may be over: stars to the south-south-west and the swell not quite so pronounced.'

'Many thanks, Mr Reade,' said Stephen. 'And God bless you, Killick.' He swallowed half the mug, passing Martin the rest. 'Tell me, have we been severely pierced? I hear the pumps have been set a-going, and there is a power of water under foot.'

'Oh no, sir. The masts and the maintop have suffered, but the water is only the ship working, hauling under the chains so her seams open a little. May I ask how Mr West comes along, and Wilcox and Veale, of my division?'

'Mr West is still unconscious. I believe I must open his skull tomorrow. We took Wilcox's fingers off just now: he never said a word and I think he will do well. Veale I have set back till dawn. An eye is a delicate matter and we must have daylight.'

'Well, sir, that will not be long now. Canopus is dipping, and it should be dawn quite soon.'

Chapter Two

A reluctant dawn, a dim blood-red sun; and although the sea was diminishing fast it was still wilder than most sailors had ever seen, with bursting waves and a still-prodigious swell. The desolate ocean, grey now under a deathly white, rolling with enormous force, but still with no life upon it apart from these two ships, now dismasted and tossing like paper boats on a millstream. They were at some distance from one another, both apparently wrecks, floating but out of control: beyond them, to windward, a newly-arisen island of black rock and cinders. It no longer shot out fire, but every now and then, with an enormous shriek, a vast jet of steam leapt from the crater, mingled with ash and volcanic gases. When Jack first saw the island it was a hundred and eighty feet high, but the rollers had already swept away great quantities of the clinker and by the time the sun was clear of the murk not fifty feet remained.

The more northern of the ships, the *Surprise*, was in fact quite well in hand, lying to under a storm trysail on her only undamaged lower mast, while her people did all that very wearied men could do – it had been all hands all night – to repair her damaged maintop and to cross at least the lower yard. They had the strongest motives for doing so, since their quarry was totally dismasted and wallowing gunwales under on the swell, lay directly under their lee, but there was no certainty that helpless though she seemed she might not send up some kind of a jury-rig and slip away into the thick weather with its promise of blinding squalls.

‘Larbolines bowse,’ cried Captain Aubrey, watching the spare topmast with anxious care. ‘Bowse away. Belay!’ And to his first lieutenant, ‘Oh Tom, how I hope the Doctor comes on deck before the land vanishes.’

Tom Pullings shook his head. ‘When last I saw him, perhaps an hour ago, he could hardly stand for sleep: blood up to the elbows and blood where he had wiped his eyes.’

‘It would be the world’s pity, was he to miss all this,’ said Jack. He was no naturalist, but from first light he had been very deeply impressed not only by this mineral landscape but also by the universal death all round as far as eye could see. Countless fish of every kind, most wholly unknown to him, lay dead upon their sides; a sperm whale, not quite grey, floated among them; abyssal forms, huge squids, trailing half the length of the ship. And never a bird, never a single gull. A sulphurous whiff from the island half choked him. ‘He will never forgive me if I do not tell him,’ he said. ‘Do you suppose he has turned in?’

‘Good morning, gentlemen,’ said Stephen from the companion-ladder. ‘What is this I hear about an island?’ He was looking indescribably frowzy, unwashed, unshaved, no wig, only a bloody shirt, bloody apron still round his waist; and it was clear that even he felt it improper to advance to the holy place itself.

‘Let me steady you,’ said Jack, stepping across the heaving deck. Stephen had dipped his hands but not his arms, and they looked like pale gloves against the red-brown. Jack seized one, hauled him up and led him to the rail. ‘There is the island,’ he said. ‘But tell me, how far West? And are any of the others dangerously hurt?’

‘West: there is no change, and I can do nothing until I have more light and a steady basis. As for the others, there is always the possibility of sepsis and mortification, but with the blessing I think they will come through. So that is your island. And God help us, look at the sea! A rolling, heaving graveyard. Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Whales: seven, no eight species of shark: scombridae: cephalopods ... and all parboiled. This is exactly what Dr Falconer of the *Daisy* told us about – submarine eruption, immense turbulence, the appearance of an island of rock or cinders, a cone shooting out flames, mephitic vapour, volcanic bombs and scoriae – and I never grasped what was happening. Yet there I had the typical lacerated wounds, sometimes accompanied by scorching, and the evidence of heavy globular objects striking sails, deck, masts, and of course poor West. You knew what was afoot, I am sure?’

‘Not until we began knotting and splicing at first light,’ said Jack, ‘and when they brought me some of your bombs – there is one there by the capstan must weigh fifty pound – and showed me the cinders the rain had not washed away. Then I saw the whole thing plain. I think I should have smoked it earlier if the island had blazed away good and steady, like Stromboli; but it kept shooting out jets, quite like a battery of mortars. But at least I was not so foolishly mistaken about the *Franklin*. There she lies, right under our lee. You will have to stand on the carronade-slide to see her: take my glass.’

The *Franklin* was of infinitely less interest to Dr Maturin than the encyclopaedia of marine life heaving on the swell below, but he climbed up, gazed, and said, ‘She is in the sad way altogether, with no masts at all. How she rolls! Do you suppose we shall be able to catch her? Our sails seem somewhat out of order.’

‘Perhaps we shall,’ said Jack. ‘We should have steerageway in about five minutes. But there is no hurry. She has few hands on deck, and those few cannot be called very brisk. I had much rather bear down fully prepared, so that there can be no argument, no foolish waste of life, let alone spars and cordage.’

Six bells, and Stephen said, ‘I must go below.’

Jack gave him a hand as far as the ladder, and having urged him ‘to clap on for dear life’ asked whether they should meet for breakfast, adding that ‘this unnatural hell-fire sea would go down as suddenly as it had got up.’

‘A late breakfast? I hope so indeed,’ said Stephen, making his way down by single steps and moving, as Jack noticed for the first time, like an old man.

It was after this late breakfast that Stephen, somewhat restored and by now reconciled to the fact that the dead marine animals were too far altered by heat, battering and sometimes by great change of depth to be valued as specimens, sat under an awning watching the *Franklin* grow larger. For the rest, he and Martin contented themselves with counting at least the main genera and rehearsing all that Dr Falconer had said about submarine volcanic activity, so usual in these parts; they had little energy for more. The wind had dropped, and the squall having cleared the air of volcanic dust, the sun beat down on the heaving sea with more than ordinary strength: the *Surprise*, under forecourse and main topsail, bore slowly down on the privateer, rarely exceeding three knots. Her guns were loaded and run out; her boarders had their weapons at hand; but their earlier apprehensions had died away entirely. The chase had suffered much more than they had; she was much less well equipped with

stores and seamen; and she made no attempt to escape. It had to be admitted that with scarcely three foot of her main and mizzenmasts showing above deck and the foremast gone at the partners her condition was almost desperate; but she could surely have done something with the wreckage over the side, still hanging by the shrouds and stays, something with the spars still to be seen in her waist, something with her undamaged bowsprit? The *Surprise* looked at her with a certain tolerant contempt. With the monstrous seas fast declining the galley fires had been lit quite early, and this being Thursday they had all eaten a pound of reasonably fresh pork, half a pint of dried peas, some of the remaining Moahu yams, and as a particular indulgence a large quantity of plum duff; they had also drunk a quarter of a pint of Sydney rum, publicly diluted with three-quarters of a pint of water and lemon-juice, and now with full bellies and benevolent minds they felt that the natural order of things was returning to the barky, though cruelly mauled, was in a fair way to being shipshape; and they were bearing down upon their prey.

Closer and closer, until the capricious breeze headed them and Jack steered south and west to run alongside the *Franklin* on the following tack. But as the *Surprise* was seen to change course a confused bawling arose from the *Franklin* and a kind of raft was launched over her side, paddled by a single man with a bloody bandage round his head. Jack let fly the sheets, checking the frigate's way, and the man, heaved closer by the swell, called, 'Pray can you give me some water for our wounded men? They are dying of thirst.'

'Do you surrender?'

The man half raised himself to reply – he was clearly no seaman – and cried, 'How can you speak so at such a time, sir? Shame on you.' His voice was harsh, high-pitched and furiously indignant. Jack's expression did not change, but after a pause in which the raft drifted nearer he hailed the bosun on the forecastle: 'Mr Bulkeley, there. Let the Doctor's skiff be lowered down with a couple of breakers in it.'

'If you have a surgeon aboard, it would be a Christian act in him to relieve their pain,' said the man on the raft, now closer still.

'By God ...' began Jack, and there were exclamations all along the gangway; but as Stephen and Martin had already gone below for their instruments Jack said no more than 'Bonden, Plaice, pull them over. And you had better pass that raft a line. Mr Reade, take possession.'

Ever since this chase began Stephen had been considering his best line of conduct in the event of its success. His would have been a delicate mission in any event, since presupposed activities contrary to Spanish interests in South America at a time when Spain was at least nominally an ally of the United Kingdom; but now that the British government had been compelled to deny the existence of any such undertaking it was more delicate by far, and he was extremely unwilling to be recognized by Dutourd, whom he had met in Paris, not that Dutourd was a Bonapartist or in any way connected with French intelligence, but he had an immense acquaintance and he was incurably talkative – far too talkative for an intelligence service to consider making use of him. Dutourd was the man on the raft, the owner of the *Franklin*, and the sequence of events that had brought about their curious proximity, separated by no more than twenty feet of towline, was this: Dutourd, a man of passionate enthusiasms, had like many others at the time fallen in love with the idea of

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