

**L. RON
HUBBARD**

The Devil's Rescue

GALAXY
P R E S S

Published by
Galaxy Press, LLC
7051 Hollywood Boulevard, Suite 200
Hollywood, CA 90028

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Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN-10 1-59212-368-6
ISBN-13 978-1-59212-368-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2007928019

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 2007

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HE had been cold so long that he had even ceased to dream of the great logs crackling in the old manor fireplace of his home. He just shivered now and then and ached, becoming conscious of the fact that it was bitter for a moment and then relapsing into a blue ache which ate him from the mop of his salt-encrusted hair to his cracked feet.

He had stopped courting the madness of envisioning great dinners he had eaten, recalling rather the peculiarly delicious flavor of the last biscuit in the breadbox, which moldy and inedible had vanished to its last crumb some two days before.

At the end of sixty hours he had been exhausted with holding himself against the sick lurches, the violent pitches and whipping rolls of the nineteen-foot lifeboat but now he braced himself not at all but lay prone in five inches of water and limply shifted with it from side to side.

It was hell to open his eyes once the salt had formed over them while shut, but some deep instinct in him bade him, now and then, to look up at the tattered ensign which hung upside down on the mast. The savage energy of the wind tearing into the red and white and blue wool wearied him and again he shut his eyes.

It was almost sunset. Sunset of his twenty-second day in

an open boat somewhere south and west of that ironically named place, the Cape of Good Hope.

First he had unloaded the cabin boy over the rail and into the grey restlessness of the sea. He had done it with great sorrow at the time, although it seemed to him now that the important thing about it was how strong he had been. What determination had shone out of him that he would not suffer a like fate! How bravely had he braced himself against that oar, bidding the crew bend their backs until the wind shifted and he could set the sail.

Then he had unloaded the cook. It had seemed strange that the fellow had not been able to live longer on his fat. And the wind hadn't shifted and when dawn rose, the reason why he'd had to carry so much starboard helm the last hour became apparent and so they had dumped the bow oar into the sea.

That was all after the wind had started to blow straight off the Cape. There was nothing astern but auks, he told them. Auks and ice, and they had nothing to lose but their lives which weren't worth much anyway. And so they'd dumped the bow oar's dead heaviness into the sea, whipped into a creamy froth now by the rising wind.

About then he had ceased keeping track of the rest of his crew. The captain, had he not been dead on the schooner's house and in a hundred fathom by now, would have kept a very punctual log about it, doubtless. But not his mate.

And then a couple or five days ago he had finally gotten tired of watching an arm swing back and forth from the

thwart, and to still an urge which demanded to discover if man was fair food, hitched himself upright and, after an hour's work, had managed to slide the body into the thick of a craggy wave which gulped and gave up its prey no more.

He had stared in stupefaction, then, at the biscuit which floated upon the sea water in the bilge. He wondered that the bosun had not eaten it long before. But the bosun's loss was his gain and so he had eaten.

The foolishness of eating came to him afterwards. For eating would prolong his life yet a little while and he was heartily sick of the way the boat kept lurching, rolling, pitching. If the sail hadn't blown away long ago he would have tried to steady the thing with it.

The sound of the wind had gotten into his head along with the slap of the single remaining halyard and he was certain that he would never be able to get it out again. The sea, too, made far too much tumult, for each time a wave towered up its forty feet the wind hacked it down again and sent the top hissing straight out until the air was a horizontal sheet of water, discoloring the already leaden sky.

Wondering a little at his energy now, he put in a time at bailing, scooping up some water, lifting the can to the gunwale, spilling it out, bringing it back, scooping it up, lifting it to the gunwale, spilling it out, bringing it back, scooping it up, spilling it out, lifting it to the gunwale. . . .

He stared for a little at his empty hand, thinking dully that the sea must be still hungry after swallowing eight corpses one after the other. A small part of him was alarmed for now

the boat would fill, little by little, at last to sink. The greater part of him said with some relief that, well, he wouldn't have to bail anymore anyway.

Why he didn't get pneumonia or die of cold like the others was a problem which he would not now have to solve. That would save his head a lot of useless work. For a man had no right to live at all somewhere off Good Hope in the awfulness of its winter with the ferocity of its gales and the chill of its water; not even a bucko mate in the full strength of his twenty-five years.

The streak of irony in his nature had risen up many times to aid him and perhaps in it there was some small explanation of why he had outlasted those sturdy but stolid souls to whom death was simply death and not a rather good joke on the unwary.

After all, he pondered in one of his few wholly lucid moments, what more could he ask? For a good five hours he had had a command, for when the mast had been shivered, striking down the captain, it had been his lot to valiantly strive to keep the schooner afloat with pumps which took out only half of what came in through the sprung seams.

And now again he had a command, his solitary own, nineteen feet in length, seven feet in beam. And what mattered it if he was riding to the slashed sails and boom which made up the sea anchor? What mattered it if there were now eight good inches of water to slosh in the bottom, over the bottom boards continually and over himself at least half of the time?

The clearness of thought began to seep from him and he stared half unseeing at wind-split Old Glory.

The whole thing was impossible and he achieved the belief that he, Edward Lanson, was not here at all, that neither Cape of Good Hope nor South Atlantic existed. Somebody had made a very great mistake and had hung up the wrong scenery around him. He wasn't he and the sea existed not at all. The dark which dropped so slowly, coming down like the easy fingers of death, would take everything away and he would awake in a dry bed to a breakfast fit for a sailor, finding that this had been nothing but nightmare.

He had dreamed the clammy flesh of the dead as he jettisoned them. He had dreamed the weeping of the cabin boy who wept only because of the sorrow his mother would feel. He had dreamed even the *Gloucester Maid*.

He came to himself at the wrench of a powerful sea. It was quite dark now but over him the wind screamed and about him crashed the sea, unbelievable in its power to destroy, conscienceless in its voracity.

He roused himself, for now the bilge covered his face at each roll and though he could not discover any reason for not strangling and thereby putting a swift period to his pain, it took less energy to lift himself with his back to the 'midship thwart than it did to force himself to lie and die.

There was ice in the spray which rattled against his back and he fished listlessly around until he retrieved somebody's sou'wester. The feel of it was clammy but after a while he got used to it.

His chin sunk hopelessly upon his breast; he rode out the thundering hours, coming to himself now and then and remaining for whole minutes with his wits more clear than

they had ever before been in all his life. He thought of the time he had wasted, the countless easy hours spent wholly without purpose, and somehow it amused him to know that all men squander their time, purblind to the hour, often close at hand, when precious few minutes and seconds would be theirs to spend.

The water was now up to his waist as he sat, a full fourteen inches above the bottom boards, eighteen from the keel. Its shifting weight made the craft stagger and take on even more until sometimes half the gunwale was alight with a phosphorescent gleam of foaming spray. The movement pulled him back and forth so that he had to brace himself a little with his arms along the thwart; he had not the strength to adjust himself completely.

If he had ever been close to the shipping lanes, he was far from them now, beyond any possibility of rescue. As he was driven southward he approached Antarctica and the days, each after the last, would increase their cold and the wind its content of ice. A thousand or four thousand miles away was Hobart. A thousand or five hundred directly into the whip of the gale which drove him off was Capetown. Somehow it was strange to know that actual solid land was still in existence upon the planet, that ships still plowed the deep, that he still lived when all these others were long dead.

It must have been close to eleven in that wailing night when he saw a light. Raised high on the crest and then dropped into the trough as he was continually, it was a sketchy glimpse. Stubbornly he would not allow himself to know it for he full

realized that the disappointment would be too agonizing for his remaining sanity to bear.

And yet, each time he was hurtled dizzily in the dark to the foam-toothed peaks, he glimpsed the light anew. Before long, though still refusing to wholeheartedly support the sight, he began to ponder its source, for certainly it resembled no beacon, nor did it seem to be either a running or a range light, for its color was not red or green or white but rather a pale yellow admixed with green. And it was not of one source but rather of many.

At last he believed fully in it and reserved his judgment only about rescue, for it was not to be borne that a ship should pass so near without sighting him.

Now, in these minutes when, believe it whether he would, he might possibly be hauled dripping from the maw of death, his mind refused to function, embattled in itself between desire and refusal to hope.

Ship or land, whichever, it bore steadily toward him, growing better defined with each soaring heave of the sea around. It grew larger but no brighter.

He had known of men going mad in an open boat and seeing all manner of things and then turning berserk when they refused to be real; and it seemed to him that some satanic plan was afloat to draw him into a few croaking cheers after which the vision would vanish. But perhaps if he still refused and did not cheer at all, then he himself would be the victor, outwitting the hostile jokester who saw fit to so work this thing upon him.

He had averted cannibalism. Now, praise God, could he stave off madness, too? He would be cunning. He would rest his chin upon his breast and give no sign and when at last it was too near to withdraw he would seize upon it and so win his life.

Thus, covertly, did he come to believe in the thing and his mind, freed from the struggle, kindled with knowledge that dry in the locker in the stern sheets were four flares. Without betraying any anxiety, he made his way over the thwarts and lifted the cover. His hands were still and raw and it took him some time to finally pull the cap from one with sufficient force to ignite the cap.

Hotly it smoldered, blinding him when it broke into light. He was startled by the sight of the tumbling seas and the frailty of the half-sunken lifeboat. The enormity of his plight rose up into his throat.

He shielded his eyes from the glare and again sought the thing. He could not see it so plainly now but he knew that it was closer. Strange the outline it had taken on, for the whole affair was aglow and it appeared to be nothing more than a triangle of pale fire.

Certainly no ship, however staunch, could plow directly into the gale, squares'ls set even to t'gal'nts!

And certainly those bluff bows and reaching sprit belonged to no staid grain ship, relic of far-gone days when sail was mistress!

The warmth of the flare was good to his hand. He noted its feeling carefully for still he had no faith in this thing. Reason

stated that it could not exist and, if it did, that it could not sail in such a fashion and, if it did, would never be booming up from Antarctica.

But there it was, growing larger, and he fancied that, above the yell of wind, he could make out a repeated hail and the creak of straining gear. Then, in an abrupt lull, he heard the thunder of slacked canvas, amid which a voice clearly cried, "Ahoy the whaleboat! Stand by to take a line!"

It was a trick of the sea, that order. It was a failure in his head that the old merchantman was standing to on his windward to drift down upon him with the wind and sea. But all too plainly he heard the canvas booming now as it was momentarily spilled of wind.

The flare did not seem to affect the strange glow which outlined the entire craft, but as the vessel neared he saw that the sails were scarlet, not yellow green, and that the masts were black, gleaming with spray.

A line whistled by his ear and a monkey fist plunked into a wave beyond him. He was almost afraid, in a sudden fit of premonition which stood up the hair along his neck, to touch that heaving line. The moment's lull was chased away by the returning scream of wind and once the hemp was in his hand he was frightened at the thought of letting it go.

Swiftly he hauled it to him, unmindful of the pain of it through his raw palms. The hawser thumped on the gunwale and he brought it up to carry it forward and drop it over a bitt.

"Haul away!" he cried, his own voice sounding thick but small. The jerk on the lifeboat slammed him to the thwart

and he hung on, staring up at the nearing vessel, split apart as he was by the desire to continue his life and the knowledge that this was somehow an awful thing.

At the rail were many faces, unearthly white against the glowing scarlet of the canvas. Not a sound came from them now. He could feel the intensity of eyes upon him and the atmosphere of the vessel reached out and clothed him in clammy garments.

A line dropped down beside him and he placed the bowline on the bight about both his seat and his shoulders and presently, as the sea dropped away with his boat, he felt himself hauled swiftly up.

Hands pulled him down from the rail to the deck and, ordinarily, at this moment of salvation, he would have given way to an intense desire to lean upon their support. But of their faces he could make out nothing save blots of glowing white.

Not a word was spoken until one sailor, drawing his knife, made as if to cut away the lifeboat.

“Don’t!” cried Lanson in sudden horror.

All faces turned to him.

“Haul it astern,” he begged. “It’s not much to tow and . . . and it’s my only command.”

The knife poised over the hawser for seconds and then the sailor withdrew it and thrust it again into his belt.

Lanson looked up and down the deck, anxious to confront an officer and be told that what he thought was untrue and that this greeting was only a trick of his exhausted nerves.

By the mast he saw a larger fellow, seated and seemingly

disinterested, passing a marlinespike from fist to fist. A visored cap sat upon his head and Lanson stumbled toward him, hoping that here was the mate, a man with a face.

But the mate had no face whatever.

"I am Edward Lanson, mate of the schooner *Gloucester Maid*, foundered three weeks or more ago off Cape of Good Hope."

The fellow turned up his featureless face and continued to pass the marlinespike back and forth. Finally he made a motion with his head toward the quarterdeck and Lanson found himself supported in that direction by the members of the crew.

Any exultation he had felt in his rescue was spent now for it was all too apparent that this ship, hemp-rigged, low of waist and high of stern and fo'c's'le, should have ceased to sail centuries before.

The crew stopped at the bottom of the ladder to the poop and Lanson looked up to find a tall, nervous fellow up there, dressed in an ancient Spanish mode with the silver hilts of pistols protruding from his sash and rapier sweeping back in a thin, bright line. But here, thank God, was a face!

"The *Gloucester Maid*, Edward Lanson, mate, sir."

"Dead?"

"My crew, sir, my crew and my captain every one."

The man on the upper deck took a restless pace back and forth before he faced Lanson again. The dark eyes flamed strangely.

"This is ill done, Mister Mate. Dead, you say, every one but you?"

“Aye.”

“Foundered off the Cape?”

“Aye.”

“And adrift three weeks in an open boat.”

“Aye.”

“You . . . you have no curiosity about the deck on which you stand?”

“I would rather not, sir. I am weary.”

“Of course! But you are a prudent man, Mister Mate. And you would lie if you said you did not know that before you stands Captain Vanderbeck.”

Lanson’s knees were buckling with exhaustion and only the hands held him erect.

“Take him below,” said Vanderbeck. “Give him stout wine. Madeira with a little pilot bread broken in it. When he wakes give him food.” He did not have to raise his voice to get above the wind.

He turned about and paced into the dark of the quarterdeck while the sailors eased Lanson down a companionway and so into a bunk. Presently one came and gave him the medicine prescribed and then, when the door was shut and he was alone, Lanson let his head sink into the pillow and out of him seeped all concern, fleeing before the delicious desire to sleep forever.

When he awoke he found that he still could feel the uneven lurching of the lifeboat, so long had he endured it. The motion was at variance with that of this ancient merchantman and he made very unsteady progress out of the bunk. It was

with surprise that he found it dark outside his port and he wondered if he could have slept through twenty-four hours. In any case he was very refreshed compared to what he had been and he drank some more wine and ate a little pilot bread and began to wonder if any more solid fare would be offered.

His clothes had been rinsed, he found, in fresh water and now hung upon a rack, almost dry. He washed his sore body in a bucket placed there for that purpose and used a half of the bottle of salve which had been left beside the bucket; it cooled his salt-stung skin and allowed him to move without wincing. All the while the cabin kept going up and down and back and forth, duplicating the ceaseless motion of the lifeboat, though when he steadied himself against these expected lunges, he only upset his own balance which was overcome by the steadier movement of the vessel itself.

In a little while, when he was at last dressed and ready, as though somebody had been watching him all the while, the faceless mate put his head in at the door. He said no word but extended a scrap of parchment on which was written:

You will do me the favor of dining in my cabin.

Vanderbeck

“What day is this?” said Lanson.

But the mate withdrew without a word and his sea boots left no sound in the passageway. Lanson turned to a mirror and nervously fixed the knot in his sailor's scarf.

All his life he had had an uncanny awareness of time so that no matter the circumstances he was always able to count off the bells without the aid of a watch. As he came more

clearly himself he realized that there was something very wrong in its being night and though he had no true check of it he felt that his sleep had been of at least thirty-six hours duration. Remembering, he knew that he had awakened three or four times, each time to find a watcher at his side, ready with a warm broth. But it was all indistinct as though it had happened to another.

He combed his long hair with his fingers and then fell to studying his face, not really wanting to for fear of what he might discover. But there was life in his dark eyes, color in his sunken cheeks and lips. No, there was no doubt about his being still alive, no more than there was any doubt about his recovery.

He fingered the note and pondered the captain's name, summing up what he had already seen and heard. And then, suddenly he sank down on the edge of his bed and cupped his face in his worn hands.

What release did he have now?

Why hadn't they let him die out there alone?

For it was quite clear to Edward Lanson now that he faced an endless life of storm in the company of a madman with a crew long dead!

The door swung silently inward and the impassive mate was there again, gesturing mildly that Lanson was to follow without more delay. Lanson avoided looking at the white expanse between cap and collar, at the fingers with their all-too-prominent joints. He followed.

The main cabin was ornate with carved blackwood furniture, glowing silks and oriental carpets. Along the bulkheads to

either side were rows of chests, camphor and ivory and teak, from which drooled the luster of pearls or gaped a little over a load of dull gold coins. The ports were twenty feet athwartship and full seven feet tall, all of cunningly set glass to make compasses and tritons and sea horses; through this, trailing far behind them, glowed their frothing wake, leading off into the gray dark and the shrieking wind.

Before Lanson paid heed to the occupants of the room he searched for and found the lifeboat, planing behind them from its taut painter.

Vanderbeck stood with his back to the companionway, staring gloomily through the stern ports. When Lanson touched the back of a chair, making a slight noise, the captain turned slowly. He had taken off pistols and rapier and had changed sea boots for buckled slippers but he was still garbed in black silk which gave his face an unnatural glow.

“Wine?” said Vanderbeck.

“As you will,” said Lanson.

The captain waved him into a seat at the table but did not himself sit down. Watching the man's restive pacing, Lanson broke some dried fruit in his hands and chased it down with excellent port.

“You are a fellow of remarkable indestructibility,” said Vanderbeck.

“I might,” ventured Lanson, “say the same of you.”

“Yes . . . yes, that's so, I suppose. But blast me, Mister Mate, if I'd enjoy twenty-one days in an open boat, dumping over the crew one by one.”

“I . . . I'd rather not talk about it, sir, if you please.”

“Yes, yes, yes, of course! Blast me, of course! Good fruit, eh?”

“Very tasty.”

“Good, good. Got it from a derelict named the *Martha Howe*. Captain must have been a fool to desert her. There she was, floating high and where was he? Shark bait, most likely. A joke on the fellow, eh?”

Lanson drank a little more wine.

“Marvelous what one finds bobbing around,” said Vanderbeck. “God love us, a man begins to believe that the accursed world is only intent upon one thing—giving all their riches to Old Man Sea.”

“I suppose one would think so,” said Lanson, “looking at all these chests.”

“These? Rubble, Mister Mate. I should show you what there is in the forward hold. But here’s the dinner.” He sat down and the sailor who had entered laid the board with smoothly mechanical motions. His face too was featureless.

“But what worth is it?” demanded Vanderbeck. “It can’t be spent. It can’t buy me what *I* want! Have some beef.”

Lanson ate as slowly as he could, experiencing difficulty with an insane desire to snatch out with both hands and bolt everything in sight. Neither of them said anything more until they had finished and the steward had brought forth some liquors and coffee.

Vanderbeck sank back in his chair and examined his watch, comparing it with an ancient chronometer on another table a short distance away. While he was so engaged a shadow was thrown in the path of the swinging lamp. Lanson’s liquor glass slopped a little.

The captain of the *Gloucester Maid*, recognizable only by his clothes, having no slightest feature from chin to brow, stood deferentially at Vanderbeck's chair. Lanson felt that he was being looked upon but he tried to make no sign.

"Course eas'-nor'-eas' and wind strong, sir," said the captain of the *Gloucester Maid*.

"Eas'-nor'-eas'," repeated Vanderbeck. "When do we pass the Cape?"

"At midnight, sir."

"Perhaps," said Vanderbeck, "we'll not be turned back this time. Steady as you go."

The *Gloucester Maid*'s master touched his cap and withdrew.

"And maybe we will," said Vanderbeck. "That's the only hope. To pass the Cape and be quit of this forever. Hah, Mister Mate, we'll have a drink on it for I very much fear that your own fate also depends upon it."

Lanson drank with him.

"Perhaps," said Vanderbeck, growing more expansive, "*he'll* not even board us this night!"

Lanson smiled. "Has *he* ever failed?"

Vanderbeck clouded, glancing around. "Must you rob me of even the wish? No, *he's* never failed. Not in all these hundreds of years. But by this watch *he's* close to ten minutes overdue. That's unusual."

They lapsed into silence, both of them waiting, Lanson knowing full well who was coming and why and marveling slightly that he in his youth should be wise in lore so old.

He did not disappoint them, though the time had progressed almost an hour. There was a swirl of wind upon the deck,

even louder than the already shrieking gale. The ship was, for a moment, in the grip of some savage force which strained at it and made it reel.

There came a sound of great boots on the deck and a halloo for Vanderbeck. Vanderbeck sat still.

The boots made the companionway groan and the room was full of rushing wind and glaring light and smoke too. Lanson looked steadily at his glass.

“What’s this?” said an ingratiating voice.

“Edward Lanson,” said Vanderbeck.

“And who, may I politely ask, is Edward Lanson?”

“Hah!” said Vanderbeck. “Is he as good as that?” He laughed immoderately, and then, “Mate of the *Gloucester Maid*, or perhaps I should say captain since he had the command for five hours. A cool one, my friend, and worthy of *your* notice. He outlives all the men in his boat. . . .”

“By taking their rations for himself?” hopefully.

Lanson’s face was very stiff when he looked up. The *fellow* in the dark, dripping cloak had slunk into a chair and *his* pointed brows were raised half amusedly, half cynically.

“*You* do not know everything, I see,” said Lanson coldly.

“*You* see?” cried Vanderbeck. “*You* see? Twenty-one days in an open boat and he comes up with enough nerve to bait *you!*” Laughter shook him so that, pouring wine, the bottle chattered against the glass.

He was not cross. A leer of disbelief appeared upon his tapering face. “No man, my young mate, has any such remarkable power of self-sacrifice. *I* should know for, after all, *I* govern the lives of more than you suppose.”

“But not mine,” said Lanson, “and so I’ll not be made to take that lie. Though I can’t say that *your* good opinion is of any great importance to me.”

Vanderbeck poured brandy all around in his enthusiasm. *He* looked put out and not at all pleased with what Vanderbeck had done.

“This was poorly thought of,” *he* growled.

“What can I do? *You* rob me, one by one, of those I get to man her. Even tonight the time of five is through and so they leave with *you*. And when I go to the work of lying to, shall I desist because, wonder of wonders, he is not dead?”

“What else can he expect now?”

“*You’ll* give him the same chance as others,” said Vanderbeck. “He boards me and he is not afraid. Nor is he even afraid of *you!* And therefore *you* wish him ill. He’ll have the same chance, I say.”

He peered at Lanson with shifty eyes but Lanson only sipped his brandy and did not blink. He despised the *fellow* from the nethermost reaches of his soul.

After a little, *he* got up and wandered about the room, opening the chests and regaining *his* good spirits by laughing at the contents. The sight of gold and gems reacted upon *him* like a colossal prank. Finally *he* took heed of the chronometer and sat down at the table again.

From inside the cloak *he* took a great dice cup and wrapping *his* long fingers over the edge, made the cubes within dance.

“Always *your* dice,” said Vanderbeck. “As the years go by I trust *you* less and less.”

“Pah, you think *my* dice are false? Here! Inspect them!”

“What good would that do?” said Vanderbeck. “But, this time, won’t *you* use mine?”

“And be certain, then, that they are false? What a child you think *me*, Captain Vanderbeck. High man for first?”

“As *you* will,” said Vanderbeck.

Promptly *he* rolled out four sixes and a five and sat there grinning while Vanderbeck took the great box and made the cubes rattle. When they fell upon the cloth they showed but small numbers.

“Shoot first, then,” cried Vanderbeck, “and be damned to *you*. This night I’ll pass the Cape, that I swear!”

“Have you not sworn too much already, perhaps?” *he* said. Vanderbeck flushed.

He rolled the dice and got three fives. The remaining two presently bounced forth and one of them was a five. The last was also a mate to the rest.

“Five fives,” *he* grinned. “Shoot five sixes now and pass the Cape. Yes, shoot five sixes or five aces and be free of it. Rattle them well, Captain Vanderbeck, for again you near land after long cruising. Fail and you are *mine* for seven years more.”

Vanderbeck’s eyes were overbright. “*You’ve* never been beaten. *You* have no concern. And it only amuses *you* to see another try. But here, I’ll shoot and to hell with *you*.”

The five dice leaped from the box and when they had quieted they read two sixes, a pair of fours and a deuce. Vanderbeck’s hands shook when he laid the sixes aside and put the trio back into the cup. Thoroughly he shook them, savagely he threw them. Two more sixes came to view.

He was still grinning, self-assured. It amused *him* to see

the moistness of Vanderbeck's hands and the tremble of the captain's lip.

Vanderbeck sent the die spinning round and round inside the cup and then, as though abandoning everything, let it fall to sight.

He began to laugh in a quiet, horrible sort of way. Vanderbeck's eyes were starting from their sockets and he appeared to be on the verge of insanity. Lanson whirled the brandy in the glass with small motions.

"Four sixes and a deuce won't do it *I'm* afraid," *he* said. "And so you're *mine* another seven years. But worry not. Again *I'll* bless your ship. She shall not founder. No, she'll carry you through the storm of winds which blow around the bottom of the world and we'll not meet again until your time has once more come. And so, good voyage to you, Captain Vanderbeck. Collect your crews upon the sea and send them on when their time is done. After all, you gave ship and self to *me* to win against these seas. You won, you see. And so, goodbye and good sailing. . . ."

"There's the matter of myself," said Lanson quietly. He dared not hope. "After all, I had no part in this and offered nothing to the sea but my own small strength. I come here only by chance and *you* have no right to keep me."

"Blast me, that's true," said Vanderbeck. "Much as I like you, Mister Mate, I like you a shade too well to have you so condemned. Come, *you*, he'll have to have his chance."

He regarded them uncertainly for a little and then smiled in an oily fashion, slipping sideways into the chair once more.

"You really want to be given back to the sea, Edward Lanson?"

“Rather that than this.”

“Then you do not like *my* service.”

“I did not ask to enter it.”

His eyes shifted from the direct stare and *he* again produced the dice cup. “But let it be understood what you do. You shoot for your freedom and *I* for your soul. Is that correct?”

Lanson sat up a little straighter and took a hitch on his nerve. “Yes.”

“High man shoots first.”

And *he* rolled four sixes and a trey.

Lanson took the box. He stared for a while into its depths and then stirred it up. He tossed and got a hotchpotch of small ones.

He took the box again, rotating it slowly, all the while grinning triumphantly at Lanson. When the dice spewed forth there were three aces, a four and a deuce. *His* quick hands tossed the four and the deuce back and when they leaped out again they were an ace and a trey. *He* placed the fourth ace with the first three and the die went round and round inside the cup while *he* enjoyed Lanson’s strained face. Then it bounced to the board and teetered for a moment between an ace and a six. Then it fell, the ace on the side.

He shrugged. “Four aces to beat, Edward Lanson. But even if you lose *I* am not such a hard master.”

“I have not lost,” said Lanson stubbornly.

He made the dice clatter in the cup. With a twitch of his wrist he scattered them on the green cloth. Two aces were there to be set aside. *He* tittered. “Go ahead, Edward Lanson. As you say, you have not lost.”

Lanson rattled the three dice savagely. He spilled them and when they had stopped, only one was found to be an ace.

"Keep right on," *he* laughed. "Not even yet have you lost."

Lanson shot *him* a contemptuous glare. The two remaining dice leaped about in the box and then bounced swiftly forth.

Vanderbeck leaped up so suddenly that he upset his brandy, "You see!" he cried. "You see! Two aces and that makes five! He's shot five aces and he's got *you*! Then *you can* be beaten. *You can*! And seven years from tonight when we again come near the Cape, we'll see!"

But a strange thing was happening to Lanson. *His* evil face was beginning to fade. Vanderbeck was beginning to fade. The very tapestries of the room were growing indistinct.

The steward who waited in the door became only a boney thing and then a shadow and finally vanished altogether. The beams overhead grew as transparent as glass and even Vanderbeck's voice was drawing far off.

The *face* was gone. The chests were gone. The table and the beef were gone. And then the deck under his feet was nothing and he began to fall.

The water was a bitter shock. A hungry wave towered up and dropped its tons of froth upon him. He came to the surface gasping and struck out wildly, encumbered by his clothes, smothered by the sea, deafened by the wind.

Close beside him something white was bobbing and he clung desperately to it. The solidity of the canvas-wrapped spar was reassuring for he knew it as a sea anchor. More calmly now he worked himself up the line to the lifeboat's bow, discovering that he was only using one hand.

It took some time for him to get over the lunging gunwale but at last he lay in the half-swamped boat, gasping with relief.

Presently he pulled himself to the 'midship thwart and lay out flat upon it. There was something to which he had clung and now he gazed wonderingly upon it, finding that he still held a dice box.

Overhead the winds that howl around the bottom of the world tore spray straight out from the crests of every wave until a solid sheet of water was continually in the air. Back and forth, up and down, rolling, pitching and staggering, the lifeboat floundered through the gale.

Lanson got in the sea anchor and hung its beribboned canvas upon the mast as best he could, the while glancing about for any further sign of the spectral *Flying Dutchman*.

But the sea was clear, and after a little he lashed the helm upon a northerly course. Gripping the dice box with a stubborn hand and kneeling on the buried bottom boards, Edward Lanson began to bail.



Glossary

STORIES FROM THE GOLDEN AGE *reflect the words and expressions used in the 1930s and 1940s, adding unique flavor and authenticity to the tales. While a character's speech may often reflect regional origins, it also can convey attitudes common in the day. So that readers can better grasp such cultural and historical terms, uncommon words or expressions of the era, the following glossary has been provided.*

astern: in a position behind a specified vessel.

athwartship: across a ship from side to side.

auks: a name given to various species of arctic sea birds having a chunky body, short wings and webbed feet.

bells: the strokes on a ship's bell, every half-hour, to mark the passage of time.

bitt: a vertical post, usually one of a pair, set on the deck of a ship and used for securing cables, lines for towing, etc.

bosun: a ship's officer in charge of supervision and maintenance of the ship and its equipment.

bowline on the bight: a bowline knot (a loop knot that neither slips nor jams) with a double loop tied in the bight (middle or slack part) of a rope.

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bucko mate: the mate of a sailing ship who drove his crew by the power of his fists.

camphor: camphor laurel; a large ornamental evergreen tree, native to Taiwan, Japan and some parts of China. It grows up to seventy feet tall and has leaves with a glossy, waxy appearance.

Capetown: capital of the Republic of South Africa. A port city founded in the seventeenth century as a stopover for ships plying the Europe-to-India route.

chronometer: an instrument for measuring time accurately in spite of motion or varying conditions.

ensign: a naval flag used to indicate nationality.

fathom: a unit of length equal to six feet, used in measuring the depth of water.

Flying Dutchman: the name of the cursed spectral ship on an endless voyage, trying to round South Africa, the Cape of Good Hope, against strong winds and never succeeding. It has been the most famous of maritime ghost stories for more than 300 years.

fo'c's'le: forecastle; the upper deck of a sailing ship, forward of the foremast.

founder: to sink below the surface of the water.

gunwale: the upper edge of the side of a boat. Originally a gunwale was a platform where guns were mounted, and was designed to accommodate the additional stresses imposed by the artillery being used.

halyard: a rope used for raising and lowering a sail.

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hawser: a thick rope or cable for mooring or towing a ship.

Hobart: capital and principal port of Tasmania, southeast Australia.

keel: a lengthwise structure along the base of a ship, and in some vessels extended downwards as a ridge to increase stability.

lying to: stopping with the vessel heading into the wind.

Madeira: a rich, strong white or amber wine, resembling sherry.

marlinespike: a tool made from wood or metal, used in rope work for tasks such as untwisting rope for splicing or untying knots that tighten up under tension. It is basically a polished cone tapered to a rounded point, usually six to twelve inches long, although sometimes it is longer.

monkey fist: a ball-like knot used as an ornament or as a throwing weight at the end of a line.

newfangled: of the newest style or kind.

Old Glory: a common nickname for the flag of the US, bestowed by William Driver (1803-1886), an early nineteenth century American sea captain. Given the flag as a gift, he hung it from his ship's mast and hailed it as "Old Glory" when he left harbor for a trip around the world (1831-1832) as commander of a whaling vessel. Old Glory served as the ship's official flag throughout the voyage.

painter: a rope, usually at the bow, for fastening a boat to a ship, stake, etc.

pilot bread: a hard thin unsalted bread or biscuit formerly eaten aboard ships or as military rations.

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poop: poop deck; a deck that constitutes the roof of a cabin built in the aft part of the ship. The name originates from the Latin *puppis*, for the elevated stern deck.

purblind: completely blind.

quarterdeck: the rear part of the upper deck of a ship, usually reserved for officers.

range light: two white lights carried by a steamer to indicate her course.

rapier: a small sword, especially of the eighteenth century, having a narrow blade and used for thrusting.

running light: one of the lights carried by a ship at night and comprising a green light on the starboard side, a red light on the port side, and on a steamer a white light at the foremast head.

schooner: a fast sailing ship with at least two masts and with sails set lengthwise.

schooner's house: a structure rising above the deck of a schooner that encloses the bridge.

sea anchor: a device, such as a conical canvas bag, that is thrown overboard and dragged behind a ship to control its speed or heading.

sou'wester: a waterproof hat with a wide brim that widens in the back to protect the neck in stormy weather, worn especially by seamen.

spring wagon: a light farm wagon equipped with springs.

sprit: a small pole running diagonally from the foot of a mast up to the top corner of a fore-and-aft sail, to support and stretch it.

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squaresa'ls: square sails; four-cornered sails suspended from the ship's horizontal yards, long rods mounted crosswise on a mast that support and spread the sails. Square sales are on tall ships, which are called "square riggers."

stern: the rear end of a ship or boat.

t'gal'nts: topgallants; the mast or sail above the mainmast, or mainsail in a square-rigged ship.

thwart: a seat across a boat, especially one used by a rower.

windward: facing the wind or on the side facing the wind.