

Escape from Stromness



Taking his turn to row was Peter Hansen, a boy of 10 years. His nails ached with the cold and he shook uncontrollably. A thin shirt and worn breeches clung, sea-drenched and freezing, to his skin. Their twisting hampered his movements. The sea salt stung his face. He was weak from hunger. Peter had suffered so many adventures in just a few, short months, and dared not imagine what may befall his young self next. But worst of all, his closest companion through all their woes, Oly, had been left behind. Oly was forever at the captain's beck and call and would have been missed, instantly. He had pled with Peter to take any chance he could to go, and forget him. Peter had gone but he would never forget Oly.

Crossing the Pentland Firth which separates the stormy islands of Orkney from the flow country on the north tip of Scotland in an open boat was daunting, but to haul it through the tide and waves during the month of February was just short of lunacy.

The ten, both men and boys, were desperate. The crew on board their ship, *George*, at anchor in the bay at Stromness, were putting together some devilish schemes; sure to end in real trouble. Peter believed that their ship's master was a reasonable, and honest enough "pirate" but he appeared to be losing his authority among the crew. There were on board that ship, the more bloodthirsty and ambitious, Rollson, Petersen and Robb. Peter and his companions, now struggling to reach the north coast of Scotland, had been able to make few escape plans. They had simply, while no one on board was too concerned with their actions, rowed off from the side of the *George* at dusk. They had been assigned to clean the hull and had almost completed the starboard side. Poor William Harvey was to have been away with them also but had been sent ashore on an errand. There was no sign of him as darkness fell. The men could wait no longer and so William, too, was left behind.

Last night, their first night away from the ship, had been spent on Fara, a small island just a few miles from Stromness. They crept up onto the uninhabited and gloomy part of the tiny island and, taking turns at keeping watch, slept fitfully among the wet heather. They had to be up and off again before daylight which, at this time of year in the north, was not too early. But the men were tired, cold and hungry and did not look forward to rowing out onto the grey, choppy sea. Scapa Flow had been an easy enough passage, but as they rowed round the east end of Hoy into the Pentland Firth they found themselves rowing nowhere against a fierce tide. The tides in the Pentland Firth are fickle and precarious. This was useless. The men had to admit defeat and turn back to Hoy. Hauled up on a deserted stony shore to wait for the tide to turn in their favour, all of the exhausted men fell asleep in the cold winter sunshine. John Milne wakened the men at slack tide and suggested they head for the east side of the island of Stroma. It looked a long way off to Peter who ate one of the hard boiled eggs out of his pocket; the third and final one. "It'll be an easy, short hop to Caithness on the Scottish mainland from that point," John assured them.

The rowing went well until about half way to the island when the men discovered they were in another dreaded tidal current. They hauled gallantly but, once again, had to admit defeat. They let the tide take them, and take them it did. The longboat swirled and bobbed in the tide, heading west! Before the tide turned again the men, now in darkness, reckoned they must be well west into the Pentland Firth. John's suggestion for the men to row east again at slack tide met with groans of disapproval. He pointed out to the men that they would not want to find themselves down Scotland's west coast. They would row east round Dunnet Head. "You'll see it soon," he encouraged them. John Milne, as a youngster, had fished this side of the Firth. "The tide will be doing the work for you soon," he assured Peter. Sure enough, as Dunnet Head appeared, thankfully quite far behind them, glowing through the morning mist, the tide took them. They hurtled towards the North Sea.

As the sun rose fully from its watery horizon, John ordered the watch change. "We'll keep her going for a while now we're moving." The older members took the oars while Peter shivered under damp sail cloth and half slept until he was nudged awake and told to help haul the boat up a shingle beach. They had come into Gills Bay to seek help. Being the least threatening looking member of the ragged crew, Peter was sent to a farmhouse to explain their situation. He had no idea what the crofter's wife was saying to him. It was, he thought, just barely English, but she called her husband from the byre and he came down to the shore to meet the men, carrying a pitch fork before him.

The party were offered no real hospitality, but were invited to spend the following night in a barn. At least they could dry off while a neighbour, one of several from the township who had come to hear their tale that evening,

went off to inform Justice Sinclair of their arrival. The men wished to turn themselves in since not one of them considered themselves unlawful. Had they remained on the *George* there was no saying the number of charges which could be thrown at them. The *George's* future as a pirate ship would be a short one, they were sure. It was heading for disaster.

Justice Sinclair duly arrived as darkness fell once again, wobbling astride a fat pony. He was a scruffy and bad tempered elderly man with a shiny red face and purple lips who seemed disinterested and, not wanting this bother, he told them to be on their way.

The crew, who had taken from the *George* several pieces of eight, kegs of wine, and the beeswax which had been used to pay off countless captains and sailors during the past few weeks, purchased some more old sail cloth from the farmer. They dragged it off the idle plough, which was stored in the barn, down to their longboat. They bought cheese, bannock and hard boiled eggs and, at dawn next day, pushed the boat back into the Pentland Firth rowing, without too much hardship this time, into North Sea to head south down the rugged east coast of Caithness and Sutherland.

The next four days and nights were a hard struggle but the weather, for the time of year, was kind. The Merry Dancers, as John called the shimmering light display in the northern sky, brightened long, hard hours rowing. Two nights were spent resting on shore: time to wrap blistered hands, try to heat some food and keep themselves as warm as possible warm under the salty, damp sail cloth. On the fifth day the longboat reached a huddle of houses which John Milne called Chenerys, they tied up alongside a line of small fishing boats at a rough, boulder jetty. Jumping from one to the other they set the boats bobbing in the moonlight, until they had all stepped ashore. John Milne led the straggling crew of nine to his brother's cottage where, once the family of five bairns had stopped crying, the weary men settled on the floor to have a bite to eat and a sleep. Peter's left arm, stiff like a block of wood, woke him to find his companions were already up and away out. Two little girls sat watching Peter as their mother made some porridge. It had been a long time since he had enjoyed the warmth and comfort of a house. This one was bursting at the seams. In this little, stone fisherman's cottage there really was no room for ten visitors. Peter helped clean the fire and take in a basket of peat then sat on the floor among the children while the mother, who told him her name was Jean, fed the baby.

She wanted to know why Peter was fleeing. Where was he from? Peter was wondering himself, just how he had managed into all the adventures. He began.

"My brother, Jens, was always stronger than me, and bossy. Although he's nearly a year younger than I am, he is bigger and bolder, but we had some good times. At ten years, I would be expected to go off to sea or find work on a farm very soon. But that was not on my mind quite yet. We built rafts and spent long summer days on our island of treasure in the lake a few minutes walk from the small farmhouse where I lived with my mother, brother and sister. We called the island Hubbins. My mother's grandfather had called it that name. My mother's parents owned the farm. She works hard with her father to keep the farm running because my father is away at sea for years at a time. We all had our chores, but once they were done we could run and play. Unlike the flat, sodden land which stretched as far as the eye could see round our home in the south of Sweden, there were shrubs and bushes on our island. Cover to hide from pirates and robbers. Sometimes we were the pirates and we hid from the King's men in our dugouts. Perhaps we had outgrown our small island, or played every game we could make up, but Jens and I became restless. One afternoon, as I struggled to build a crow's nest in a high bush, Jens had set off for home taking my rough paddle with him. We'd had a little argument.

Jens suffered a severe luggit from Mother, and was made to promise never to leave me without my paddle ever again. Next day, however, feeling bitter, Jens swam from the island towing my raft! He left behind the paddle. What tale would he spin to Mother before I could get home? If only Granddad Hansen, my father's father, was with us still. He would quietly listen to all sides of family squabbles and his was always the final say. Take the day we raced home in the rain. I just made it through the door first, slamming it behind me and leaning heavily on it to keep Jens out. Curiously, my brother cried pathetically and put up very little fight. Oh no! I had slammed the door on his fingers. Poor Jens; and poor me! Lucky for me, Granddad came to sort the commotion. Quiet and thoughtful was his judgement.

Granddad Hansen, formerly Lieutenant Hans Claes Hansen, had sailed under a great pirate hunter, Captain William of Dundee. They had met in the lucrative Danish port of Saint Thomas, a semi haven for pirates in the West Indies. The Captain's world had closed in on him. The greed of wealthy men and the politics of our changing world had conspired against him. He was doomed. Things had turned sour, Granddad had explained, when William was charged with piracy and chased by the King of England's navy. Granddad said it was all wrong; Captain William was an honest and proud man and should never have been reduced to the harassed,

half-starved and misunderstood man he had become. 'Greed is a dangerous monster. Don't get tangled up with the like of those who sealed William's fate. And always be honest, Boy.' Granddad's tales of Captain William always ended with this warning.

Will my honesty prove enough to get me out of this, I wonder?"

Jean looked puzzled. "You are in trouble?"

"Maybe not now." Peter replied and had a drink of milk offered by the little girl on the floor next to him. He continues with his story.

"That day I had had to swim from our little island. The morning had started bright but, just as you would expect after a soaking, the damp wind rose off the sea and the sun was soon gone behind the mist. My wet clothes chilled me, right through to the bone. Numbing, muddy water oozed up through the moss and between my bare toes. My feet and legs ached. Then, worse, charging towards me lumbered my pregnant elder sister, Clara, her bright red hair swirling like flames round her head in the wind. Clara's anger is foul at the best of times, but with the worry over her fisherman husband, who had been gone without word for almost seven months, her temper had taken her over. 'Just look at the state of you,' she ranted, 'and threatening young Jens as you did....' Clout! 'Mother's ready for you. Get home.'

I ran. I ran away from her and away from home. I ran into the mist towards the sea. Maybe I'll find my father I thought. Tears had streaked down my face as I remembered him. He'd come home from sea with all kinds of nuts and shells from the Caribbean, carvings of birds and animals, and sketches of people, European cities and towns. In the ten years since I was born Dad had been home only twice. The first time I do not remember as I was only two, but he was home again when I turned four. After a time at home Dad had dreamed of the sea and one morning he was away again. I'm off too, I said to myself and ran until I could run no further. That first night I slept with hens in a hut and cried all night.

Next morning was warm and sunny. Perhaps, if the morning had been dull and wet, I may have gone back home. My father's family are Danish and I knew some of his relatives were fisher folk living at the place he called the Elbow on the south coast, not too far. It took me two days of walking and living rough to reach there, but I felt happier and I felt free. The town of Malmohus seemed quite derelict and run down. Children watched me with suspicion when I didn't stop to play their street games. Along the waterfront large wooden stores stood empty and wharfs rotted. I came across three old men tarring a small boat and asked if any knew the name Hans Hansen. They laughed and said most of the men living round here were named Hans. They asked my business, and said a young lad like me, with energy to spare, should spend the afternoon giving them a hand. I wanted to get on but relented. We discussed all the Hans and Hansens they could think of, but none was my father. It was almost dark and we were all tired so I went along with Peter because he said that us Peters should stick together. Thankfully, his wife made much more sense. She gave me supper and promised that after a good, warm night's sleep by their fire she would help me find the family I was looking for.

She had known from the start where to go. Granddad had been quite a figure living here as a young man returning on occasion from the important position he held overseas. But his family, like the whole town, had suffered from the decline of the herring industry and the constant troubles between Denmark and Sweden. They now had just two small fishing boats. Just enough to 'keep the wolf from the door,' as she put it.

I was introduced to my uncle along with two of his friends as they headed towards the shore. The resemblance to my father was astonishing. My uncle was just a little older looking. He said we were lucky to have caught him, although the sun had just risen. There would be time to chat as we sailed across Oresund to Koge where he had business.

That day was most wonderful; warm wind on my face and the fresh, clean, salty smell of the sea. No wonder my father loved it so much.

'Believe me, it's not always this fine,' my uncle warned. I know now, he was so right!

My uncle had no idea where Dad would be, it having been years since he last passed through Malmohus. He said if I really wanted to find him I should make my way to 'Amsterdam, the financial centre of the world. That's where your father would have headed to find work on a merchant ship. That's the life now. He knew what he was doing when he gave up fishing.'

My uncle told me about their lives as little boys growing up together. They lived in a large wooden house and were fairly well off. In those days, Malmohus was a busy town. Granddad was away abroad most of their childhood, but they had wanted for nothing.

We spent one cold night on the fishing boat and the next in Koge with more of my cousins whom I had never known.

Kristopher, the youngest boy, was sent on an errand and returned with Clara's husband. I thought, here's trouble, I'll be sent off home with him so swiftly my feet will hardly touch the ground. But no, he was fine and really wanted to know how things were back home. I told him about the baby and he seemed quite surprised. He asked how Clara's temper was. 'None better,' I had to admit. He realised that I was set on following in my father's footsteps and would, hopefully, even find him some day, so he offered to help me. He would arrange a working trip for me on a fishing boat which would eventually take me to Copenhagen. Then he would go home to Clara, at least for a while, and let Mother know of my plans. This was all good and I could at least go off on my adventures with a bit of a clear conscience.

I really earned that passage to Copenhagen. It was so bad. I was sick, cold, wet and exhausted. I think the skipper was glad to see me off the boat with the fish once they were landed. He arranged my next job which involved packing herring into barrels. I slept in a hut with the gutters; the girls who cleaned the herring. Each morning I helped them to wrap their hands in rags to prevent them being cut by the sharp knives they used. Our wooden hut had a fire in the middle of the floor and was always full of smoke. But the smoke helped mask the dreadful fishy smell.

Copenhagen was a thriving merchant town. The docks were lined with full warehouses. I would dash over to that part of town whenever I had the chance to try and secure a place on a ship bound for Amsterdam, perhaps as a cabin boy.

I'm told I was lucky because it only took four weeks. Certainly I was glad to get away from the herring, but I missed the girls, they had been very good to me.

The ship, *Olga*, was to make a straight passage to Amsterdam with the remainder of its load of Swedish timber. I was assigned to the ship's cook whom the crew called Papa. The gutters hut had been rough, but this was Hell. My hammock, which was used while I went on watch, was squeezed among ropes, sail cloth, chain, barrels, seventeen other hammocks and ammunition! The air was foul.

Papa had me running relentlessly. I was to do as he bid day or night, keep his secrets and promises and never waste any food. That was clear enough. I kept giant pots of water boiling to help soften great hunks of salt beef. The men drank around a gallon of beer a day to get rid of that saltiness. Papa was a fair man. As long as I kept the deal, he did not beat me. We reached Amsterdam after a good passage and, as I had no apprenticeship, I was free again to find my own way.

To earn shelter for a week, sleeping with five cats on a mattress of straw, I swept out grain stores ready to take in oats and barley to be sold and shipped back out. Word was passed around that I was looking for my father, Hans Hansen. Again I was lucky. Well, in a way. Word came from my new friend, Orsi, a Swedish tavern maid. Orsi would give me scraps of food whenever it was safe. My father was said to be working in the Mediterranean. The information was vague and the Hans Hansen may not even be the right man, but it was something. At the same time, she told me to meet two men looking for crew for a ship soon to leave for the Barbary Coast. John Winter, like me, was from Skane, Sweden. He was tall, fair and handsome with the coldest, grey eyes I have ever seen. His greasy, red companion, Peter Rollson from Copenhagen, was ship's cook.

I met them as they left the tavern that same night. They said I was scrawny but Papa had spoken well of me so I 'might do'. I followed them to their ship, the *George*. As we left, Orsi ran after us. She kissed me on the cheek and handed me one of the young cats. He had been my favourite and I had called him Hubbins. 'Take him as a companion,' she whispered in my ear. 'You will need one among these men.'

'Come on Runt. Stop wasting time.' The two men shook their heads.

Their Captain was a Frenchman named Ferneau who claimed to be English like most of the crew who were from either England or Scotland. He would have preferred me to have been likewise but took me on as cabin boy anyway as the ship was almost ready to sail. I signed my "x" and became part of the crew. Hubbins disappeared below deck.

Winter and Rollson laughed and teased me. 'You'll be a sick boy once we hit the North Sea,' and 'your hair will freeze into spikes as you cling to the mast on watch. You'll be picking icicles out of your hair, even in summer. That scrawny cat'll be in better shape than you Runt.'

We worked all night carrying load upon load of barrels aboard. Ropes were coiled and stored. Every inch of space below decks was taken up with water casks, beer and food of all kinds which could be kept in such a place. Great quantities of gunpowder were stashed to feed the twelve guns which lined the decks. This was frightening since Winter had explained that, during an attack, the cabin boys would act as powder monkeys running from the magazine, the powder store, between men and obstacles across a slippery, wet deck with ladles of powder for the guns. Six more guns were stored below deck. Sails were being repaired right up until the minute before we were to sail. We were so busy below deck, and I was so tired, that I hardly noticed the ship had left the quay and we were away.

The sleeping quarters made me gag. They were so cramped I never was able to stretch out in all the time I spent aboard that ship. The crew was split in two with half on watch for four hours while the others rested. I was assigned to starboard watch so hung my bedding on a hook to the right. The blankets were heavy, greasy and damp. I do not think they had ever been washed in fresh water and laid out on the grass in the sun. My grandmother would take all our bedding out whenever the weather was good. I felt sad and longed for that wonderful summer smell of home. The *George* smelled worse than the *Olga* and the gutters' hut put together! There were on board 24 men who seldom washed or changed their clothes, but I did get used to it. That night, thankfully, my watch was given the first four hours rest. I could have slept standing up.

The ship was of 160-200 tons burden, 70 feet in keel and 13 foot in the hold, flush fore and aft. We were to sail to Santa Cruz, pick up a load of beeswax bound for Genoa. That's where I wanted to go. We were in the service of the Merchants of Amsterdam.

After what seemed like just a few minutes of sleep, I was called to go on watch.

I first met John Gow on deck that misty, August morning. The sun was just rising and everything was peaceful. He explained the duties which would be expected of me. I found his language hard to understand and he laughed. During our month at sea John Gow rose from the position of ordinary sailor to that of second mate and gunner. Having sailed since he was a young lad he had all kinds of experience and skills. Whenever we had time he would teach me various tasks; much more interesting than my usual mundane duties. We measured the speed in knots. Gow flipped the twenty-eight-second hourglass and as a long rope raced out I was told to count the knots on it. However many knots, that's the speed the ship's travelling. He showed me the compass which would determine the direction. Using known landmark positions Captain Ferneau could correct the ship's course and then sail by what Gow called dead reckoning. The backstaff was used to measure the angle between the horizon and the sun at its peak. That would give us our position north and south so long as it was not cloudy.

I enjoyed being on deck when I had a bit of time to myself. I would go and find Hubbins and curl up out of the way. We loved watching the sails work, full of wind. The waves were endless. Where did they begin?

Ferneau appeared everywhere. These moments were short and few before Ferneau would shout, 'Back to your duties Hansen! And get rid of that cat!'

Our peaceful sail was shattered as we sailed west off Spain. The wind rose and the Atlantic swell did its best to destroy us. I thought I had felt bad on the trip to Amsterdam. Here I thought I was a goner. Gow helped me back to my bunk after a cold night hanging over the side of the ship. I was ill for days and cannot really recall much of that time. Needless to say, Ferneau was displeased and I fear I would have been left to rot had it not been for John Gow. He insisted that I should sip water frequently and I am certain he saved me. Hubbins never seemed to leave my side, but he kept out of sight from Ferneau and some of the men he disliked.

As days passed and as I regained my health the butter now tasted rancid, the beer which I had to drink – it was that or nothing – was sour and the weavly biscuits were so hard I could hardly bite them.

One afternoon, on the horizon, astern, we spotted a large ship which was easily gaining on us. It flew an English flag so Ferneau slowed for it to catch up. I feared this would be some pirate ship for Gow was always frightening me with tales of pirates.

The brig had suffered damage to sail. Ferneau was reluctant to help them but eventually relented and we were sent below for the minimum which would see the English ship through its difficulty. It was good to exchange some news with the boys from that ship for a moment and Ferneau, for his 'kindness', was rewarded with a couple of barrels of flour and sugar, which did little to sweeten his mood."

"Did all the crew get on fine?" Jean wondered.

"I believe while I had been unwell a certain tension, which had been noticeable since leaving Amsterdam, had grown between some of the crew and Ferneau.

There were members of the crew whom the Captain preferred and others to whom he gave a very hard time. His distribution of rations and the workload was, even to my inexperienced mind, totally unfair.

The two who had taken me on board, Winter and Rollson, along with some of the Scotsmen and, particularly a man from Wales, James Williams, were often huddled together. I overheard some of their complaints. Although Ferneau was a well respected captain he was incredibly mean and unreasonable. He would never take advice, even when some of our discomfort through the storm could have been prevented. The captain was a man, they believed, to be in great fear. He had fear of Holland's political enemies, fear of pirates, the fear of an unfulfilled contract, fear of time overtaking him, hunger, the weather and now he seemed to even fear the crew; all of which made Ferneau really bossy and bad tempered.

On reaching Santa Cruz on September 2nd we immediately began loading the barrels of beeswax. It was hard work in the searing heat of summer. Ferneau allowed us little time to rest and no time to go ashore at all. Only on one Sabbath was I allowed to go ashore and only to attend church. There was never a real chance to ask anyone if they had met or heard of Hans Hansen. During our short rest times he gave us lines and hooks to fish. I did enjoy perching on the lower yardarm with the chance that I might catch some even more strange fish than the day before, some very different to the Baltic fish I am used to. I've always loved fishing. The cook, who, like me, had no idea what we were catching most of the time, concocted some tasty meals and the whole crew felt the better and stronger of it, as did Hubbins. I wonder who is looking after him now." Peter stopped.

"Cats are good at fending for themselves." Jean quickly changed the subject. "You could try a bit of fishing here if you like," she suggested, and the two older children sprang up, all set to go to the jetty for some fishing. But before Peter could go on with his story, or go fishing, or anything else, the men could be heard crunching up the path to the door. They burst in ordering Peter to hurry and follow them to the jetty. In a way, Peter was relieved not to have to go on any further with his story. The next part would be better explained by John, himself, to his family.

The men had bought a pile of food and some warm woollens. They had also hired a fishing boat to take them to Aberdeen. John Milne would be staying with his brother for a while, and then head home to Banff.

Peter sat on deck listening to the men's plans on their way to Aberdeen across the Moray Firth. Five of the remaining nine men decided to stay in Aberdeen and try to find work fishing, as John had suggested. The other three decided to head for the north east of England to look for work. They were William Billis from Hartlepool, and John Reid and John Harris, both young lads from Hull. All three had boarded the *George* off Lisbon from the ship, *Bachelor*. They persuaded Peter to go with them since he'd have more chance in English ports of tracing his father, or even securing a trip back to the Baltic. So in Aberdeen Peter said goodbye to his friends, Newport, Phinnes, Dobson, and Wheatly. They had been part of Ferneau's crew from Amsterdam. Thomas Curland, off the *Triumvirate*, left with them. Peter had witnessed wild action and shared some severely scary moments with these men. He was sorry to see them go.

William, the two Johns and Peter had with them a share of the money which had been taken from the ship before they escaped. (Nothing more than was due to them they were sure.) They set off walking, sleeping rough, and begging rides on carts and food along the way. Their spirits were high. They felt far from the looming trouble in Orkney, away back and across that rough strip of sea. Peter felt it was a new start for him. March roared in like a lion. The wind rose late one afternoon and by midnight the group were sure no building could be left standing. They thought of ships at sea as they huddled behind a stone sheep pen. Some time in the night a small, wooden hen hut past by, creaking and grinding its rickety, wooden walls, as it was blown right over the sheep pen. In the daylight they could see the damage. A crofter and his wife emerged, dazed, from their wee stone house. Normally they would have been surprised by the four strangers, but this morning they had more on their mind and would be glad of any help.

Up on the common hill ground they could see wreckage which, just the day before, had been six little hen huts. Worse was what they thought to be snow but was, in fact, white hen feathers stuck to the coarse heather. Some of the poorly birds were rescued and taken to the now roofless barn to be fed and rested. They wouldn't lay any eggs for a while.

After a warm breakfast the men set off to gather up drifts of hay which, like the feathers, had been caught among the heather when the stacks blew to pieces. It was strewn over a couple of miles up the north face of the hill. What a mess of wet hay, but it would be all the cow and her summer calf would have until spring. The animals' byre had fared quite well. Although they were alarmed, the two occupants had been warm and safe under their flagstone roof.

William called for help from up the hill. He had found the gander and was trying to rescue him, but the old bird was having none of it. They rounded up the geese, which had found a lea in the hill and were sheltering there. Eventually, the old gander followed them, noisily, home.

There was a mutual gladness in the small household that evening. The surrounding crofts and farms had suffered damage but no loss of life. Around seven o' clock there was a light rap at the door and in came a small gathering of folk from round about. They had fiddles and whistles, bannock and hot broth, and more than a little ale. Peter and his companions spent a good night there, just south of the River Tay and set off next afternoon when they eventually struggled out into the daylight. Apart from three sore heads, all seemed well. But the unthinkable happened some days later. As they waited outside the inn at Queensferry to be taken across the Firth of Forth they were spotted and recognised by six raucous, drunken sailors; these were the men who had been set free with Captain Somerville in the *Lewis Joseph*. All had met before and all had good reason to dislike each other. Somerville and these men had watched, helpless, as their ship, *Sarah*, was holed and left to sink to the bottom of the Atlantic. When they sailed off in the *Lewis Joseph*, a gift from John Gow, they had taken with them the usual beeswax as payment for their ship, arms, ammunition, sails, and thirty or so casks of salmon and herring, some of which had been my friends' cargo off their ship, the *Bachelor*. These men had good reason to hate each other. And, although the trouble was all down to his captain, Peter had been a part, if not a willing part, of the pirate ship's crew. Somerville and his men had spent weeks at sea in an unfamiliar ship with a mixed cargo belonging to who knows who. Then, on arriving in Stranraer, Somerville and the crew had spent some tricky days clearing their names. The two groups of men had now run into each other as the *Sarah's* crew made their way from the west coast to try to find work around the River Forth. Somerville's men were wild and had no intensions of letting things rest. The first man to recognise Peter rushed straight passed John Reid, knocking him to the ground as he went. He grabbed Peter and held him high off the ground. "I've caught the little runt here, boys" he cried. "What should we do to him?"

Peter was sent sprawling as William Billis and John Harris jumped on the man and knocked him to the ground. In seconds the rest of Somerville's men were hauling and punching. Peter and John Reid got stuck in to try to pull the men apart and destroy as many of Somerville's men as possible in the process. The result was one great disturbance before the whole group were rounded up by the ferry men, who had just tied up their boat, along with eager and boisterous assistance from some of their passengers. There's nothing like a good fight for entertainment. All were apprehended at the inn and next day carted to Leith to be locked up.

Custom House officers were most interested in both sides of the story, particularly since tales were unfolding round the entire coast of Scotland. Somerville was apprehended in Stranraer, having just convinced the authorities there that he was a respectable captain. He had assumed that he would be off to resume his career as master at sea very soon. This was not to be. Having been arrested in Stranraer, Somerville was taken to Leith Prison where he rejoined his own men. He was surprised to find Peter and his friends locked up there also.

Both parties had been held for causing a disturbance, but became very puzzled when Captain Somerville joined them. Try as they might, no one would offer any information as to why they were all there. They were eventually informed that two ships, *Greyhound* and *Weasel*, had been sent by the Admiralty to Orkney following ugly reports and rumours. The *Weasel*, the men were told, would call into Leith on its return from the islands to transport them all to London! Whatever was going on in Orkney to cause such a stir? It must be bad, Peter thought.