

Prisoners

Late on March 3rd the prisoners were boarded onto the navy ship, Weasel, bound for the Thames. Peter slumped into a corner in cramped quarters below deck. Somerville's men were aboard and, apart from just a few hours at Leith jail, they were kept apart from Peter and his friends. Let someone else sort out the muddle, Peter thought. There were others here in the darkness. Peter slept. A chink of morning light streamed between ceiling boards which cheered Peter for there, with the sun on his cheek, was his dearest friend, William Oliver; Oly. Peter scrambled over half sleeping bodies to his friend who, by now, could hear his best pal. They were so excited and spoke at once, together, each wanting to know how the other came to be here.

"You first," said Oly.

Peter related his journey; but now, the burning question. Whatever had happened in Orkney?

Oly did not know. "Remember, when you escaped things on board the *George* were becoming wild; really getting out of hand. As you know, to begin with, the master was pleased to be back in his home town of Stromness and the folk there welcomed this wealthy, young captain. He traded fairly with vessels in the harbour. With a Scottish ship they traded the routine beeswax and copper for some wine and brandy. The master sought his sweetheart, Helen Gordon. You remember her don't you Peter? We met her on the pier before you escaped. You'll remember the day you left; I had had to go ashore with the captain? Well, we managed to get the girl sneaked out from her father's house at Stromness. We took off, running, all three of us, and went some miles to a little inn which stood by a brig in the neighbouring parish. There, after we'd all had some ale and a few songs the two of them, I'm certain, spent a comfortable night. I was posted outside to watch for any movement along the track from Stromness. I fell asleep. The following morning, after big breakfast of warm porridge and bannock, we walked on to the Odin Stone, just about an hour in the frosty sunshine. This stone is magic. It was set up by people thousands of years ago between two circles of great stones, higher than you and me. Orkney folk visit this stone to be healed. It is around twelve feet high and has a hole right through it. People will pass an injured limb through it, or even a baby who is unwell, to be cured. But our captain and Helen Gordon were there for another reason. On that beautiful morning among the glistening heather, between two lakes, the couple linked hands through the Odin Stone and pledged their troth to each other. They are now bound in marriage to each other forever, through life and death. I was with them as a witness, Peter. It was really romantic. They were so happy and she looked so pretty with evergreens gathered round her hair.



The master took his bride off for a few days and I was sent back to the ship. That's when the trouble began. You remember the *Margaret* anchored nearby our ship? Well, the master of that ship, Captain Watt, recognised the *George*. Two of our crew, Macaulay and young Jamieson had deserted from the *Margaret* in Amsterdam and sailed off with Ferneau on the *George*. Watt had got a hold of Jamieson ashore and tried to persuade him to go away, escape, with him on the *Margaret*, but Jamieson was afraid of what our master, or one of his rogue crew, might do to the *Margaret* if he went over to join Watt's crew. He thought the *Margaret* would be set alight. Tearfully, Jamieson had told Watt how much he wished he had never left him to join the *George* in Amsterdam. He confided in his old captain the terrible things which had occurred on the *George*. They parted. Watt sailed the next day, but not before he gave the authorities Jamieson's story in full along with his own account of his doubts regarding our ship. Rumours were now rife around Stromness. Jamieson then realised he had to get off the ship before the master returned. He felt sure he would be sentenced to death by the crew for giving the game away.

That same night the scoundrel, Belbin, along with Peterson, went ashore returning with three stolen sheep and, even worse, a couple of women. That's always trouble on any ship and soon the crew were into the brandy, then the wine, and a fine fight broke out. In the general melee, I was grabbed on deck by a hefty woman and pulled over the side into one of the small, stolen boats which had appeared alongside the *George* over the days. 'Just row for the shore,' was the gruff order. Away from the ship's side this woman threw back the shawl from her head. It was Harry Jamieson, dressed as a woman in one of the girl's clothes! Where she was, I have little idea. In Stromness we went straight to an old army officer Harry had met at the inn and told him the whole, sorry tale so far. For our trouble, he took us down to a cold, stone cellar and locked us in. There was a big wooden door at one end of the cellar. We could hear the sea lapping outside it but it was heavily locked. We

banged and shouted on it, but with no reply. The old man must have drunk himself stupid that night because we were there for at least four tides before he finally went to fetch the proper authorities and we were let out of there. We were starving of cold and hunger. We told our story once more and were taken and locked up in a tiny jail for our troubles. So here we are, all of us, prisoners. All I know is that the trouble on the ship grew and grew after we left; but what it was all about, I do not know.”

The *Weasel* made slow, rolling progress south and, with a constant, battering gale from the east, it was not a comfortable trip. In the darkness the men told tales from their youth and exploits at sea. Peter decided to tell a tale his Granddad Hansen had told him often of his great hero, Captain William.

“Granda first met the captain whilst serving as a Danish Lieutenant, in the lucrative Danish port of Saint Thomas in the West Indies, a semi haven for pirate ships. From the very first meeting, when Granddad was sent by the Danish Governor to deliver a message to the captain, he judged Captain William to be a real gentleman. The message he carried was not his own wishes. He would have welcomed the ship, the *Quedagh*, into port. It was in sore need of repair and provisions therefore Captain William had requested entry to the port. He had also requested Danish support in case an English navy warship should try to take him “without Royal Orders”. William had discovered that, because of political scandal in England, he was now wanted for piracy. Meanwhile, the message from the Governor was that the *Quedagh* could enter port. However, merchants had been forbidden to trade with the captain and crew.

While in port in this sticky position, William had received many offers to join pirate crews and sail off to make his fortune and be a “free” man. No contracts with wealthy men. No deadlines. But Captain William was determined to complete his mission as a legal pirate hunter and return home to his beloved wife and family, a wealthy and honoured man.

Granddad had heard reports of a Scottish settlement set up in the Bay of Darien. The land there being rich, the Scots would do well. Their port in the South Sea would command the China and East Indian Trade. Granddad held the idea that William, a Scotsman, would never have a fair hearing from the English so should set sail for the colony and a new life. William had been well aware of Scotland’s previous forty years of domination by England. The English navigation acts forbade trade between the Scots and the America colonies, and denied them commerce with East Indies and Africa. He must have been tempted.

Granddad had told me that he had had enough of the Governor at Saint Thomas since that man would not even consider helping William and his crew for fear of a rift with mighty England. One evening, under the stars in St Thomas, the 47 year old lieutenant shared rum with his captain friend as they tried to think of a solution. Granddad had explained to his family when he returned to Sweden how his own problems and William’s became as one. Granddad had decided to leave his position on the island and sail with William on the *Quedagh*. Next day the captain left behind his sick companions and others who feared for their future with him. They hoisted the anchor and sailed off from Saint Thomas, not to settle in the Scottish colony, but to somehow find a new ship, get the crew to safety and for Captain William to clear his name and prove his honesty and integrity. Suffering from hunger and exhaustion during the following weeks William finally managed to trade some of his cargo for food. He was forced to part with bales of the finest Indian silks and muslins. With a shifty Captain Bolton, the captain traded the leaky *Quedagh* for the beat-up, 55 ton sloop the *Saint Antonio*. He had, in effect, paid three times the ships value of 900 pieces of eight. William loaded ammunition and arms onto this ship, stowed away silver, jewels, gold and bales of Persian silk, all acquired during his pirate hunting days. Leaving some of his treasures and crew with Bolton on board the *Quedagh*, and promising to return as soon as he had sorted all his problems, William set sail for New York. From day one, Granddad said, Captain William acted like a man who had friends in high places. Granddad was sure he had.

Whatever happened to his friend, Captain William of Dundee, we were never told. They shared many adventures during their passage on the *Saint Antonio*. The trip ended in Boston. From there, several months later, they sailed to England where, seemingly, they had parted company. Granddad came home to his family, his career now over. He did not ever want to discuss that. Being a Danish family living on land which now belonged to Sweden meant that this once fairly wealthy family from Malmohus was now poor. Granddad’s sons and families were now fisher folk. Granddad Hansen came to live with us on the farm where he worked until he had just turned 70. There, Hans Claes Hansen died quietly in his sleep.”

This was enough storytelling for one day. It had tired and somehow frightened Peter, but he was very grateful to have his friend Oly by him again.

After days, the sickening rock of the old *Weasel* altered and, eventually, the ship creaked alongside a wooden wharf. The men could hear voices and chains rattling. Peter and Oly were chained together in a line with some

of their crewmates and brought ashore. Their eyes smarted in the daylight. For the first time Peter saw some of the other prisoners from the *Weasel*. As they were trudging through the streets towards Marshalsea Prison he saw the men, who spoke with Orkney accents, gape at the chaos of London. A vendor of hake walked with a basket on her head while another selling fruit had this tied round her waist. A family sold rabbits and milk; the smallest boy came to Peter and told him he was from Ireland and wanted to go back there. An old lady with a cone-shaped hat sold fire-shovels. The poorest looking people sold fish while those selling old clothes were brightly dressed. And all the while, everyone was shouting of their wares. It was a noisy scene, and it was smelly.

Raggedy children ran along side the prisoners asking if they had murdered anyone or robbed a rich house.

“Did you hide some jewels?” Peter laughed at the idea as the enquirer, a little girl, tried to take his hand.

“You could tell me and I’ll keep them safe for you, unless they hang you.” An older girl dragged her away.

Peter liked the children and wished he could just run off and play with them.

There was a pungent smell which grew more and more distasteful as they walked.

And, as they trudded through the prison’s main gate the smell was rank. This is where it was coming from; their home for however long.

Locked in a dank stone cell, Peter was relieved to find Oly would be there to help him through this latest ordeal. A gaoler announced, “You are here since maritime crimes fall within the jurisdiction of the Admiralty Courts, hence you shall be confined here, in Marshalsea Prison, Southwark. You shall be examined at a preliminary hearing, to be arranged.” The door slammed shut and was bolted behind him. Oly and Peter did not know many of their cell mates; only Harry Jamieson, William Billis, and the two Johns off the *Bachelor*. None of the Orkney men shared their cell. This was disappointing because they could have told of the happenings in Orkney. Some time in the middle of the night Robert Reid was slung through the door. He had been badly beaten. Peter sat over the man in the gloom. Reid, a crewman, had sailed along with Peter on the *George* from Amsterdam. Peter had never quite understood Reid; one minute a great friend, the next, roaring and swearing at you. When he was able to speak Robert explained that he had been beaten up by some of the Orkney men in another cell. They blamed Robert for the “situation” they were in, although Robert had hardly met any of them for any time at all.

“They said they could have sailed off to a life of adventure and wealth if I had not gone shouting to the authorities about pirates. They had replaced yourselves and the others when you took the longboat and cleared off. The ship was sorely in need of more crew before it could sail anywhere. But I left the day after you two, Harry and Oly. I deserted while I was ashore for milk. I ran from the harbour to the country and up to the big farmhouse on the hill. Remember, we used to talk about living on a farm like that. Just cutting oats and barley and lying around on harvest days among the stooks. Anyway, the farmer was so amazed by my story that he gave me a horse to ride the fifteen miles to the city of Kirkwall to carry the news to the magistrates there, which I did. What gratitude. They threw me in the tollbooth and here I am today.”

The prisoners wanted more. “What news from the Orkney men and whatever did go on after we left?” But Reid was none the wiser having been slammed in prison in Kirkwall and told nothing by the Orkney men. They were intent on giving him a beating, and only that.

“But I tell you one thing. The city of Kirkwall was arming itself, ready for any attack from the *George*.”

Indeed, Reid had overheard the pirate crew talking of a wealthy landowner by the name of Mr Henry Grahame. They had said he would be worth one thousand pounds, at least. Reid had passed this information on to the authorities in Kirkwall. A rider had been dispatched to warn Mr Grahame and his family to leave their home at once and flee to safety. News soon spread that the residence of another landed proprietor had been plundered. At this Kirkwall had been roused to action. At a hurriedly arranged council meeting it had been decided that, with Gow’s heavily armed ship in Orkney waters, twenty four of the town’s officers, who had been appointed at the last Lammas Market, should at once be armed and assembled at the Tollbooth. There they should remain, ready for any action. A clerk had been appointed to make a proclamation through the town, accompanied by the drummer, to order townsfolk who held arms to gather at the Tollbooth at two the next day. Those absent were to be “proceeded against with the utmost severity”. The great guns, stored in the church, were brought to the shore to protect the city.

In Marshalsea Prison, before the noise, clamour and usual squabbles and interruptions of the day, Oly woke Peter. He was agitated and keen to tell Peter stories about his father. They had never exchanged stories before, on board the *George*; there had never been time. But Peter knew that Oly was from Newcastle and, just like himself, Oly’s father made rare and longed for visits home from sea. There, he, as Peter’s grandfather had done with him, had shared his adventures with Oly through stories and song.

Oly was excited and warned Peter he was in for a real treat.

“As a young cabin boy, years before I was born, my dad, Davey, had found himself embroiled in a wild mutiny. On board the *Adventure Galley* their captain and the crew scanned the horizon for two sister ships bearing the bounty collected on the high seas after frightening months of sea chases and fighting. Finally, with the three ships reunited in Saint Mary’s in Madagascar the celebrations began. Two days of fiddle music and drink, and much talk of the goods they were about to share. On the third day Captain Kidd gathered the crews together on the deck of his ship the *Adventure Galley*. In the distance, also at anchor in the bay, was the *Mocha Frigate* belonging to a long-time enemy of Captain Kidd. It belonged to the pirate, Robert Culliford. Kidd announced to the gathered crews that it was his intention to capture the *Mocha* and take Culliford prisoner. There were enough men and arms to do this easily he declared. Kidd had dressed in his most flamboyant outfit with his sword and two pistols. ‘Ready your weapons for the attack,’ he roared from the forecastle. But the reply was complete silence. No one made a sound or movement. They just wanted their share of the wealth and to go home. Then someone shouted, ‘we would rather fire two guns into you than one into Culliford.’ Further insults followed quick and fast.

Kidd shouted that this was the time to fight, it would be a victory and more wealth for them all, but the reply from his men was that it was the time to vote on it. The result of the vote was 100 to 15 to go over; to mutiny over, to the pirate, Captain Culliford.

Kidd stormed off declaring they would negotiate over their pay in New York and not a day sooner. He went ashore with his loyal few, my father, Davey, among them.

At first light the mutineers started to unload bales from one of the treasure ships. The beach was strewn with bright silks and calicoes, plain and striped. Kidd managed to round up a small band of heavily armed island men to confront the mutineers. Luckily Culliford and his pirates were not around. Even though, Kidd and his band were outnumbered four to one. The deserters, perhaps stunned by their captain’s brave stand and in awe at his command, agreed to divide the bales properly and in accordance to their original agreement. At the end of the day Kidd had come out of the proceedings pretty well and unscathed.

Culliford returned to his ship that evening after two months of rich living on the island. He set his new crew of pirates to clean his ship, *Mocha*. He was eager to take advantage of the northbound winds and get away pirating in the Indian Ocean.

First, though, it was party time for pirates and mutineers.

Everything which could be moved and sold for drink was carted off the ships. It would be the mother of all parties. As the kegs and bottles were drained Culliford and his followers made plans to have Kidd’s throat cut and steal his gold, which they were sure was valued around £10,000.

On his ship, with just fifteen men and boys as crew, Kidd barricaded himself, Barleycorn, his trusted cabin boy, and Davey in the captain’s cabin. They laid out forty small arms and twenty four pistols, all ready to fire. They piled bales behind the door and as the pirates banged on it Kidd roared his warning. He would fire on the first man through the door and blow up the ship. The mutineers knew Kidd well enough to know he meant every word. Davey was terrified but, along with Barleycorn, was ready at Kidd’s side to feed him the guns. The mutineers departed for a while but returned to hammer on the door with a band of drunken pirates as backup. ‘Come and get it then.’ Kidd bellowed. But the rabble were too scared and stumbled angrily away. As a parting gesture they tried to set fire to the ship but Kidd’s loyal crew managed to put out the flames.

For days the pirates and mutineers, in drunken fashion, prepared to go to sea. One of Kidd’s ships was sunk simply to make it easier to work on the *Mocha*’s hull.

Culliford and his dreadful companions eventually sailed to do their worst at sea on June 15th. Kidd and the boys emerged from his cabin to find that the *Adventure Galley* was slowly sinking. Against all the odds he had saved eleven men, four cabin boys and around £25,000 of treasure; all to bring home, somehow. He required another ship.

Kidd’s third ship was a shambles but was their only hope. Culliford and his men had taken everything of any use off her.

Kidd was determined that this deserted monster of a ship would be made fit and ready to sail south, round Africa, across the Atlantic and home to New York. His tiny crew worked frantically for months. The work was back-breaking. They scavenged everything off the beached *Adventure Galley*. The mast was dismantled. Every scrap of sail cloth, rigging, casks and the treasure was taken on board. Hardest of all was hoisting the thirty cannon onto the high decks. Then the now derelict *Adventure Galley* was burned and the precious remaining metal retrieved.

In late September, the wind changed and Kidd was ready to leave Saint Mary's. The sails, which had been patched with striped calicoes, filled with wind and looked strangely exotic. The crew's number had risen to a more healthy twenty men.

At their first port, six hundred miles down the coast of Madagascar Kidd bought, along with much needed rations, some young slaves, one whom he called Dundee.

Although Kidd held papers to prove his actions were legal his strange ship would cause interest. The ship, with its thirty cannon looked formidable but it was badly undermanned. But the ship, its crew and cargo were most fortunate. Seven months after sailing from Saint Mary's they arrived, tattered but safe, in the West Indies.

On their arrival, Kidd requested permission for his ship to enter the harbour. A red-headed Dane came aboard with the Governor's reply."

Peter's jaw dropped. "My dear friend, Peter; my father, cabin boy on board CAPTAIN WILLIAM Kidd's ship the *QUEDAGH* assisted your own grandfather, Hans Claes Hanson to the captain's cabin."

Peter and Oly cheered and hugged. They jumped around and got into such trouble over the hullabaloo they were causing, but it felt so good. They felt like brothers, the closest of friends. Nothing could ever happen to them. They would always be together to help each other, forever.

"There's so much more for me to tell you Peter. I will tell you all about Captain William. All the pieces your grandfather left out."

Oly was one of the first from the cell to be taken for examination. To everyone's horror, Oly was not taken back to the cell and the gaolers would not give Peter any clue as to his whereabouts. Peter was distraught. He would not eat. Harry Jamieson tried his best to comfort the youngster. Peter's sobs could be heard at night. He was growing thin and pale; the usual hope, Peter's special spark, had gone and the men became dispirited.