

# The Revenge

On April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1725 Peter was given clean, but far from new, breeches and a tunic. He was ordered to make himself presentable since next morning he was to be examined. Peter did not sleep that night. Harry Jamieson and his cellmates were sure he had nothing to fear and they were sure he would soon be set free.

“You’ll see,” said Harry, “you’ll be off out the main gate and forget all about your mates in here.”

Peter thought about that. What if he was set free? Where would he go? He knew not one soul in London. A year ago, when he had left home, London would have been a huge, fun adventure, but not now. He had lost his friend Oly again and had come no closer to ever finding his father.

Peter was taken next morning, between two tall, thin, uniformed men, to be examined before the Worshipful Charles Pinfold, Doctor of Law, in his chamber at Doctors’ Commons. Here the Admiralty heard all cases relating to the navy, sea merchants, mariners and pirates.

Peter was shaking as he stood before Doctor Charles Pinfold. The room was huge and gloomy. The familiar smell of beeswax did little to set Peter at ease. Head down, Peter stared at the polished wooden floor. Two sets of square shoe buckles, one set on the feet either side of him, glistened in the sun from a high window. The thin man on Peter’s right instructed the lad to speak clearly and directly towards the ancient Doctor. He was to tell the absolute truth at all times. The doctor merely glanced up from the papers before him and grunted. A booming voice from behind him made Peter jump. “You are to give us a full account of you movements and involvement during the events which took place on board the ship, *George*, on the night of November 2<sup>nd</sup>, the ship having just left Santa Cruz. Begin.”

This was the moment Peter had dreaded so long. The details he would be forced by law to tell this man would be the death knell for his former friends; the very people who had looked after him, given him work, and that chance to find his father. The law is the law and Granddad had always, always told him to be an honest person. He would have to be just that.

Peter felt his tongue stick to the roof his mouth. He tried to lick his lips. Shakily, Peter began.

“I was a servant of Oliver Ferneau, master of the *George*. Since I was off watch, I settled in my hammock, between decks, just after we weighed anchor at Santa Cruz. I was awakened, I think, around ten o’ clock by a cry and could see Mr Algier, the supercargo, clutching his throat. Poor Algier whispered to me that Daniel Macaulay had stabbed him with a knife. There was blood everywhere; all over his hands and his chest. There were others around in the gloom, although I could not see who they were. I heard whispers and bumping. Algier struggled towards the main hatchway. I ran crying out for my master. I ran to his cabin. Captain Ferneau was not there but James Williams pushed his way in. He told me to stop blubbering and, as he grabbed my master’s watch from the desk there, he said, ‘Mind your own business,’ and left me alone. I could hear a pistol fire from between decks and another fire from on deck. I picked up the cabin key, came out and locked it behind me. I ran onto deck to find my master, Captain Ferneau but stopped at the main hatchway which was open. Below I could hear Steven Algier plead for his life. James Williams was demanding his watch. I hid behind a chest and covered my ears and eyes, but again I heard a shot and Algier cried out, ‘I am killed, I am killed!’

At that time I believed Macaulay and Williams were causing all of the trouble and they would soon leave the ship in the longboat, but I was very wrong. A real nightmare was unfolding. As I went aft to find Captain Ferneau, the horrors of the night became even worse. I came across John Peterson and another, whom I can not remember, hoisting the chief mate overboard. They asked me to lend them a hand. I would not help them and ran forward.”

Peter stopped. He wished this was over. Doctor Charles Pinfold again glanced up at him. He nodded to the two uniformed men either side of him. A gentleman on the doctor’s left taking notes. His pen ceased scratching.

The voice behind him reminded him of the other terrible crimes committed that night. You are to tell us who were responsible among the crew for the murders.

Peter continued.

“During the following weeks I have heard the following men confess to these murders: John Winter, James Williams, John Peterson, Daniel Macaulay, Peter Rollson, William Melvin and Michael Moor.” Peter stopped. The scratching pen stopped, but Peter added in a soft voice, “and John Gow, too.” There was another short burst of scratching.



Peter was handed water in a thin glass. Pinfold cleared his throat and a large hand placed on his shoulder guided Peter from the room. Through the tears he realised he had condemned some of his own crewmates.

Back in his cell, Peter did his best to find a dry corner to curl up in. He wished to speak to no-one but accepted a sip of tepid water offered by a concerned prisoner before settling to reflected on the months he had spent on the *George* – memories tossed up by Pinfold's investigation. He relived the awful events of that November night.

Peter had always regarded John Gow as a special friend on the *George*. Captain Ferneau had recognised he was a man with much experience at sea and had him made up to mate and gunner. Peter was aware that Rollson, Peterson and Williams often talked together of their dislike for the master, but he had never heard any of this from John Gow, even when the master, Ferneau, was in his foulest of moods. These were frequent. Peter never saw his master again. Lying in the darkness in Marshalsea Prison, Peter let his mind relive the enfolding horrors of that night. He had not dared to conjure up these memories properly until now.

On deck that dark night Peter heard a voice in the darkness, "I bet you have the key to the cabin, don't you, you runt? It was William Melvin; a knife in his right hand was dripping with blood. Terrified, Peter handed the key over and was dragged off to the great cabin. Slumped by the doorway, holding his head in his hands, was Timothy Murphy. Both he and Peter were shoved inside and the door was locked behind them.

Murphy, the ship's carpenter, was one of the oldest members of the crew. He loved to play his whistle and tell stories of giants, fairies and strange beasts back home in his native Ireland. Peter thought it must be a strange place to live. Murphy usually went about his work singing all the time, but that night he was grave and confused. "I was awakened by the sound of a pistol shot between decks," the Irishman started to explain. "Then, in the dim light, I saw Jelfs, the chief mate, jump down into the ship's hold. There were others fussing round him but I could not make out who they were. They scuffled off into the darkness. Suddenly, John Gow appeared right beside me in the dark. I asked him what was going on. Gow looked worried and replied in a kindly tone, 'Don't you mind anything but go into the great cabin.' So here we both are. But why are you here?" Before Peter had time to explain or wonder what was happening, the door was unlocked again and young William Booth was slung in like a wet rag.

Booth appeared extremely upset. He, too, told of being awakened by the sound of pistol fire and had seen Jelfs, the chief mate, struggling down the ladder between decks.

"I saw there was something far wrong and went to help Jelfs. The man had been cut right around the neck! The poor man knew he had been struck by a knife but did not know who had done it to him. He had already shaken John Milne and Joseph Wheatly out of their hammocks by the hatchway and was telling them, 'for God's sake get me into the hold out of the way!'

Booth explained that he had left them and had climbed on deck to find help. He had gone to the helm.

"There's always someone there I thought and I found your Irish friend, George Dobson. We were both puzzled over the pistol shots we'd heard and all the trouble going on. Just then someone had called, 'man over board!' and Robert Reid sprang down beside us from the main topsail where he said he had been working on the sheets. We asked him what was going on. I told him about Jelfs but the man shoved me aside and grumbled, 'I can not tell what the matter is Booth, but if I had a pistol you should soon know what the matter is.'

I've long known that Reid would shoot me, given the opportunity. He's a jealous old man. Jelfs shipped me in Amsterdam and was instructing and training me to be mate some day. Jelfs was a good friend to me. However, as I walked in the direction of the main cabin to find help for Jelfs, I was struck on the back of the head and left sprawled on the deck. I believe it was Reid who struck me."

Booth went on to tell the captives what had happened to him next.

"I came round I think not too long after and thankful that, apart from a bash on the head, I felt alright. I went on to find Jelfs, or at least find help for him. As I headed towards the cabin, I heard a pistol fire and, at the main hatchway, I stopped and listened. Below, Robert Reid and John Milne were making ready to hoist the body of my friend, the chief mate, onto the deck in order to throw him over the side." Booth stopped. He covered his face with his hands and took several deep breaths before continuing.

"I ran to the main cabin since I could not bear to witness my good friend's sad end, but footsteps behind me caused me to stop. I turned to face James Williams, armed and wide eyed, aiming a pistol at my head! 'Stop!' I heard, and found that John Gow had appeared from the darkness. He told Williams, 'let him alone, there's enough killed already. We shall want hands to work the ship.' James Williams had lowered the pistol from my head. He spat and forced me along to the main cabin."

That night Peter heard graphic accounts and experiences of the men. The full horror was emerging. Next man thrown into the great cabin was James Belbin, the ship's boatswain.

Belbin told them he had been asleep in his hammock when he had heard a cry. He believed someone had shouted, "Man over board!" Rushing onto the deck the master had called to him, "What was the cry?" Belbin had shouted, "Man over board!" and then headed towards the quarter deck.

"I was still half asleep, but was jolted wide awake when suddenly, as I had approached the master who was peering over the side of the ship, John Peterson with two or three others grabbed Ferneau, and endeavoured to throw him over the side." Peter gasped at this.

Belbin continued, "Ferneau, however, rounded on them. He twisted a knife from Winter's hand, cutting his own badly as he did this. At that point the chief mate made a brief appearance on deck. He too had been injured and had offered no assistance before he rushed straight down the main hatchway for shelter."

Belbin told the men locked in the cabin that he had then witnessed Winter and Peterson make use of their knives.

"Winter retrieved his knife from Ferneau and stabbed the master before drawing his knife across the master's throat. John Gow came on deck and aimed his pistol at Ferneau. The master cried, 'Mon due, mon due.' He was shot but still clung to the mizzen chain. There was a struggle but finally he was thrown, still fighting, over the side of the ship.

I stood, stunned, as if in a dream. I heard James Williams and John Gow argue whether to shoot me or not, but Gow made a plea for my life. James Williams took his frustration out on me and threw me into the cabin with you.

As Peter and the three others in the main cabin spoke of their night's ordeal they wondered how many of the ship's crew of over twenty men had lost their lives. They wondered who could now be trusted at all. Again they heard the cabin door key turn and, this time, John Phinnes, sick with fright, was pushed through before the door was slammed shut and locked once again.

John had been standing upon the forecabin when he had heard the call, "Man over board!" Phinnes had rushed aft but had had come upon the same scene witnessed by James Belbin. However, he had recognised Peter Rollson and William Melvin along with Peterson struggle with the master. Winter had stood brandishing a knife which the master had managed to prise from his grasp, cutting his own hand to the bone. Phinnes had witnessed the gallant, but futile, attempt by Ferneau to save his life, ship and its cargo from these men but all was lost for him once Gow had weakened him with two pistol shots.

Phinnes told them, "I spotted movement in the darkness. Someone staggered from the hatchway to the helm and fell, landing over the tiller. I went over to look and found that it was the ship's surgeon, John Guy, but could do nothing to save this man's life. He had had his throat cut. As I had stooped to lay the poor man on the deck, John Gow pulled me up straight and told me to come quietly to the great cabin."

Peter remained locked in the cabin along with Murphy, Booth, Belbin and Phinnes for the remainder of the night. They wondered what was going on and had, by now, a good idea of those involved and the crimes being committed. They felt sure that their lives would be in little danger provided they did as they were commanded since two of them had already heard Gow plead for their lives. They would be required to crew the ship so they would be spared, meantime. The five of them wondered where their ship would sail next. Peter's heart sank. He had joined the ship to try to find his father whom he believed to be working in the Mediterranean. Would he still have that chance to find his father?

There were the usual sounds which a ship creates as it sails steadily through calm waters and, apart from those noises, all seemed quiet on board. Peter and his confined companions did not sleep at all. They recalled details of the dreadful scenes they had witnessed. There was much surprise among all five to the sudden nature of the crimes. They had all heard, at various times, Rollson, Peterson and, particularly, Williams complain and swear curses about the master, but they never dreamed it would come to this. However, his memory now jogged, Belbin, the ship's boatswain, said that he remembered an incident around two days sailing from Amsterdam when someone, he could not recall just who it was, had told him of a plan to take the ship, but Belbin had put that man in his place and sent him away. That, Belbin thought, could be the reason for the call, "man over board!" which he was sure he had heard, whilst in his hammock, before the trouble began. Belbin reasoned that this feigned emergency had ensured the master was on deck, just when and where the gang wanted him. There appeared to be no man over board at that point. How many had since gone over they wondered?

The door burst open and in came a jubilant James Williams followed by William Melvin, John Peterson, John Winter, Daniel Macaulay, Robert Reid and Michael Moor. Williams announced that they were waiting on the other members of the crew; then there were matters to be sorted.

Most of the weary ship's crew filed, slowly, into the main cabin, followed by John Gow. Immediately, James Williams called out, "Captain Gow, I wish you joy!"

The crew looked at each other, slightly puzzled.

Captain Gow asked, "Whose idea was this?"

Williams demanded silence and continued. "Just in case any of do not know it, Captain Ferneau is no longer. Neither is his chief mate, Bonaventure Jelfs, or the super-cargo, Steven Algier, nor even the ship's surgeon, John Guy. We shall miss them, but they would not have understood our reasoning. They were not half starved and over worked as the rest of us were." Some of the crew laughed.

"There is just one man among us now with the skill to navigate this ship and to be our master. I propose John Gow for this task. Do you all agree?" Peterson, Rollson, Macaulay and their troupe made their support noisily obvious. Gow was a popular member of the crew. Most of the company nodded because they agreed and some agreed because they were too terrified not to.

"In that case, Captain Gow, you are welcome to the ship." He handed John Gow, firstly, Captain Ferneau's watch which Gow fastened by its chain to the breast of his jacket and popped the watch into his top pocket. He smiled and thanked Williams who then handed Ferneau's sword to the elected, Captain Gow.

Again Gow thanked Williams.

"Our ship, which will now be known as the *Revenge*..." there was a loud cheer.

"Our ship, the *Revenge* shall today take to the high seas, cruising..." another raucous cheer.

"We shall take what we can, and you shall all be wealthy men. No more hungrily looking on as some of the crew eat well. We shall, as pirates share and enjoy equal status." More cheering. "But now, we are in want of a gunner and I say Peter Rollson is the man." Again a roar of approval came from around Williams and his men. Who would dare disagree?

In the general commotion it must have been decided that James Williams would take up the position of chief mate. Peter did not catch how this came about, but there it was anyway. All sorted

Williams was a big man, at least he had had a big stomach (how did he manage that on rations?), with a big, loud voice.

Williams now stood upon a bench. "Quiet! The *Revenge* has a new purpose. The ship has now a master, a chief mate and gunner. The rest of you shall perform your duties as before. These of you who will not act in the working of the ship shall have a pill and be sent on shore." The crew were in no doubt about the meaning of this order. They would be shot with a pistol and thrown over the side of the ship if they did not do as they were bid. "We shall operate this ship as a pirate ship and the usual rules and agreements shall be drawn up. You shall duly be called to the captain's cabin to sign more favourable ship's articles of agreement than you signed with Ferneau." He stepped down to leave room for John Gow.

Gow briefed the men. "Obey all orders, or die." That was brief and clear. "Also," he went on, "if any person other than Williams, Winter, Peterson, Belbin, Rollson, Macaulay, Melvin or Moore goes near my cabin or abaft the main mast without my instruction to do so, then they are dead men." The crew got the message.

The watches were organised and the men dispersed either to their duties or to mull things over amongst themselves in their hammocks.

Dobson came to the main cabin just as Peter, Murphy and Booth were leaving to make their way below. He was unwell. "I thought I was never going to be relieved at the helm tonight," he moaned. "I've been sick since the doc. landed at my feet. I'm going for a rest. Tell me what's going on now." They went below deck where Dobson climbed into his hammock.

"Listen up boys," Murphy whispered. "Delay this signing as long as you can. You do not want it to appear you had a hand in all this. What I mean is, when we get caught, because we're bound to with this rabble, it must never look like you were a willing *pirate*."

Hubbins came slinking up to Peter and jumped on top of the boy lying in his hammock. Ears back and wide-eyed, he settled as Peter stroked him. Peter asked what sort of things a pirate would be expected to agree to. Between them, the older two, Murphy and Dobson thought there might be an incentive bonus. For instance, the first man to spot the sail of a ship carrying good plunder may receive an award of several pieces of eight. There were certain to be rules enforced regarding discipline. "Probably, if you were to disobey an order you would lose your share of any treasure or plunder, or receive punishment as deemed by the master." Murphy suggested, and went on, "If a man turns out to be a coward during an engagement with another ship, then they will lose their share. And, of course, you can not be drunk at that time either or, again, you lose your share."

“How do you two know all of this?” Booth asked.

“Never have you minded Lad.” Murphy replied with a twinkle in his eye.

Dobson went on to explained that pirate ships were not under the orders of a few high ranking men, such as they had been with Ferneau, his super-cargo and chief mate, but were commanded with the voted permission of their crews and pirate captain, in their case, Captain Gow. Really the only time the captain would command a pirate ship would be during a chase. Every other decision was voted on; where to sail, which ships to apprehend, etc.

A mind-boggling fact, Peter considered, was that all food and drink was to be equally shared, as was any treasure. Murphy added that sometimes the captain would have a larger share; maybe a double share.

Peter thought about the food. He had longed for Ferneau to leave some of the food he took to him, but Ferneau never did. Ferneau was so mean he was never even sick!

“Shall we all really become rich?” Peter chirped. But the men laughed.

“All pirates I’ve encountered drank their treasure in the first port they came to. They live from day to day and do not seem to plan very far ahead.” Murphy brought him back to the real world.

“And all pirates have a healthy disrespect for authority.” Murphy added.

The men took Peter’s example and took a rest while they could.

Later, in his hammock Peter tried not to listen to the despair which swept over Dobson. He and Booth shed tears together, Dobson sorrowfully declaring that he wished their ship could be taken by a Royal Navy man-of-war and they would not be forced to act, any longer, against their wills with pirates.

“Did you hear Williams?” he sobbed. “He intends to tie every man from the captured ships together in a raft and throw them all into the sea to find their fate.”

What a situation, Peter thought; to be wishing to be taken by a man-of-war and pressed into service rather than be here where at least you are well fed; and all is equal on a pirate ship. It can’t be too bad if you are not caught. He had heard some of the crew tell of the elaborate and daring deeds men undertook to avoid the Royal Navy. They would hide for months in lonely, damp caves to evade being pressed into service. Harry Jamieson once told Peter of how he had dressed as an old lady for a whole harvest season in order to help his mum and dad on their farm. He said the press gang officers came close, but he made a convincing old dear. Harry had seen some of his friends taken off to one of those ships, fighting and screaming. The Royal Navy, according to Jamieson, meant underpaid hard labour, terrifying discipline, arrogant officers and a good chance of dying young. Peter could imagine Harry; hunched, his tangle of bright red hair tied in a shawl, his smiling, weather-worn, freckled face peeping out.

Would pirating be such a bad thing after all, Peter wondered. Honest work, until now, had been bleak. So far he had worked very hard for very little under abusive captains. He had no choice, therefore Peter resolved to just get on with it and make the most of everything. John Gow, after all, had been a good friend on board the *George*. Peter hoped he would not change with his raise in status, as Captain Gow of the pirate ship, *Revenge*. The boy and his cat slept.

Gow was tall with pale skin and blue eyes. With his fair, slightly wavy hair, he was even quite dashing, but was a serious person. At every opportunity the crew would have as much to drink as they could get away with, which under Ferneau, had been next to nothing. John had spoken to Peter of the horrors of drink. “It never does you any favours, Peter,” he would say. “Even when you think it might cheer you when you’re down about things, it will only make things worse.” He was a man who believed passionately that every man should be equal, and that every person has a talent, “something to offer”. Gow had grown up in Orkney, a group of islands off the north coast of Scotland, son to a merchant and his wife. His father would have been a wealthy man but for the taxes set upon the few merchants in their tiny home town of Stromness by the wealthy, neighbouring, small city and royal burgh of Kirkwall. “The world is an unfair place, generally,” he would say. “But we maybe should not put up with it that way,” had pondered. “I’m sure things will change for the ordinary, hard working people, but it will not happen in our life times, Peter.”

Peter had a high regard for his new captain. He felt that Gow was an honest man and would do his best for the whole crew.

As the days at sea passed, while the men worked and ate and rested they spoke of the murders. Some boasted of their part in it all, others, shocked and mortified just wanted to talk it over.

There had been a growing tension on the ship which had escalated in Santa Cruz. Having loaded the *George* and with preparations for leaving the port well underway, Captain Ferneau, on the morning of 2<sup>nd</sup> November, had welcomed on board some of the merchants with whom he had been dealing. As the captain and his guests had relaxed in the shade of an awning erected on the quarter deck, Peterson, Winter, two of the Swedes and Macaulay had come onto the quarter deck. Believing that the master would act politely in front of his honoured guests, they had spoken loudly of their ill usage and the lack of provisions and allowance during the whole voyage. The crewmen had made it clear that it was Ferneau's plan to make as much as possible from this trip, personally, at their cost. Ferneau had kept his cool throughout the verbal onslaught. He had spoken calmly in front of his merchant guests and explained to the men that, if they had complaints, they had to do no more than to let him know of them. If anything was to be found amiss, it would simply be rectified. The men had left the quarter deck seemingly satisfied with this answer. Ferneau had burned under his calm exterior. The seamen had known it.

At around five o' clock the ship had slipped its mooring, expecting the usual evening offshore breeze to carry them out to sea; but instead, it fell completely calm and, fearing the ship may fall foul of its own anchor, the captain had ordered the mizzen-top sail to be unfurled. Peterson, whose duty on watch it was to carry out this order, had moved in a slow and careless manner. "Move to it!" Ferneau had shouted.

"As we eat, so shall we work," had been Peterson's surly reply, loud enough for all to hear. Ferneau had been an uneasy man as they weighed anchor and stood off to sea that evening.

In prison Peter bravely let each memory come back to him. He wondered if there had been other signs that real trouble had been brewing before the murders. He had not noticed anything really, but he recalled a conversation he had had some days afterwards, when life on board the pirate ship had settled somewhat. That day, his suspicions that there had been a plan forming among some of the crew for some time were confirmed. Peter let his memory take him back to that conversation.

Daniel Macaulay and Peter had been given sail cloth to repair, a job which would take forever Peter thought. His hands were sore and blistered although they had hardly begun the task. But Daniel had much to boast about and his tale kept Peter's mind off the state of his hands. According to the young Stornoway man, the idea of taking the *George* and go pirating had been mooted for a long time.

"While in Santa Cruz, I had been sent to row Captain Ferneau ashore along with, Belbin, Phinnes, Williams and Moor. While the master went off about his business, Williams and Moor approached us. Williams asked for our thoughts on a plan to take the ship. I really disliked our master, and so I replied that I would do as they did. I would take part with them in an organised siege of the *George*.

Phinnes would not discuss such a thing, but Belbin was keen."

This was a revelation to Peter; since Belbin had spent the night locked up with them in the main cabin and had explained his part as a mere bystander. He asked Daniel why Belbin had not told them all this.

"Just wait," said Macaulay. "On the night we left Santa Cruz, just after they finally weighed anchor at around 7.00p.m., Williams had gone looking for John Winter. He wanted Winter's comments on his idea to take the *George* by killing off the master, chief mate and the surgeon. Although Winter had agreed they should take the ship, he had wanted no part in the murders. He had suggested that the three men should be set adrift in a small boat. He had then gone to his hammock where Michael Moor had come to him. Moor had asked him to assist in the killings which had been spoken of. Again Winter had said no. Moor had then told Winter to wait and see what they had planned for him if he persisted in this refusal. When Peterson arrived to back up Moor, Winter had relented."

Daniel went on to tell Peter that he was approached on the deck by Williams, Winter, Melvin, Peterson, Moor, and Rollson who asked if he was still game to be part of the scheme. Again he promised "to do as they did."

Macaulay continued. "Shortly after this meeting Peterson and Winter had overheard Captain Ferneau talking with the chief mate. Ferneau complained that yet another member of crew had shown signs of insubordination. The two men had heard their own names mentioned as 'trouble in the making'. Ferneau now told the chief mate that they should have firearms ready, not only to defend themselves and the ship, but also, to correct any further insubordination. Winter and Peterson had realised that once Ferneau was armed, and with backup in place, the crew would be completely at his mercy, whatever mean plans he may have for his men's welfare."

Daniel Macaulay went on to tell Peter of the events that night. "At eight o' clock, you will remember, the crew were assembled, as usual, by Ferneau in the great cabin for prayers, after which the watch was set and those off duty turned in to their hammocks. Winter and Peterson had got down to business. The two approached the

men with whom they had already spoken, to urge them to bring this predicament to a speedy end. They apprehended John Gow, the gunner, as he left to prepare the firearms as instructed by the master. Gow gave his promise not to hinder the men's plans. He, too, had had enough of the regime on board and was well aware that, since leaving Amsterdam, there had never been enough provisions for the men. Gow shook hands with Winter. Peterson and Winter found Williams eager to take the ship that very night, as soon as possible. Belbin, Melvin and me joined the huddle and, although he refused to commit any murders, Rollson readily accepted a knife from Winter.

Peterson's plan was to have the chief mate, ship's surgeon and the super-cargo killed simultaneously, and as silently as possible, as they slept in their hammocks. At the same time the master was to be killed on deck. Melvin had asked how the murders were to be committed. Peterson replied, 'with knives.' Williams, waving a knife in front of Rollson's and Peterson's face, had taunted, 'Who will be first, the Swede or the Dane?'

Peterson's plans were that he along with Winter and me were to kill the mate, surgeon and super-cargo below deck. Gow, Williams and Melvin were, at the same time, to kill the master on deck.

The sign to begin the murders below deck was agreed upon. Peterson was to ask, 'Who fires now?' Winter's reply, 'the Dutch,' were the agreed key words for the killings to take place.

Belbin, at the same time, in order to attract the attention of the master over the port quarter, was to cry, 'Man over board'.

"That is not what Belbin told us at all!" Peter remarked.

"I know," Macaulay replied. "After he had witnessed the brutality of the master's murder, he refused to go below and arm himself with a pistol. Williams was about to dispatch him with the rest of the souls but Gow forbade it. Belbin is a good boatswain and has been ordered to remain in that position. He would not have wanted anyone to imagine he had a part in the murders. Some day, he may have thought, your evidence, that of Belbin the innocent bystander, may be required.

Anyway, the three of us, Winter, Peterson and me, each with a knife in our right hands, crept to the hammocks of the mate, the super-cargo and the surgeon.

At the same time, on deck, the master sat abaft, relaxed, on the chicken coop. The weather was fine. Belbin and Reid worked aloft on the main topsail. Minutes after the three of us had gone below to steerage, Belbin gave the call, 'Man over board!'

The master, on hearing this shout, took two or three steps forward and turned back to look over the side of the ship. Rollson and Melvin ran towards the master calling that they were going to assist Williams, whom they indicated was overboard. But the two grabbed Ferneau and tried to force him over the side.

Below deck, Peterson's attempt at murder had gone far, far wrong when the chief mate had turned his head and, with a cut to the side of his neck, had sprung, confused, out of his hammock and rushed onto deck. He could see there was little hope of any help there and scrambled down through the main hatchway, begging for help. Joseph Wheatly and John Milne had then hidden the mate under sail cloth in the hold.

Gow collected two pistols from the arms chest and instructed Moor to guard it with his life or die. 'If any man molests you I will stand by you.' Then Gow spotted the wounded Alger beneath his hammock and fired his pistol at the floor behind the cowering man to get him out, before he rushed on deck. Alger having been injured by Peterson's attempted murder and then having been shot at by Gow managed to crawl from his hiding place beneath his hammock.

Williams, now holding a pistol to the super-cargo's head, ordered him to hand over his watch. Alger sobbed that he had sold it in Santa Cruz whereupon Williams made a further demand for the ship's money, supposedly four chests, brimming full. As a clerk to the master, the security of the ship's funds was Alger's main task. He handed Williams his key and begged to be spared. Chased by Williams, Alger ran forward imploring Williams to at least give him time to pray. Winters held Williams pistol arm to give Alger the time he needed, but Williams shook off Winter. He shouted, 'damn my blood; say your prayers and be damned,' then shot the super-cargo without remorse. Winter and Peterson, knives at the ready, then rushed on deck.

You will have heard Winter boast about striking the master with his knife," said Macaulay. Peter nodded. "He and Peterson came rushing on deck carrying light and bloody knives. The master twisted Winter's knife from him. Gow came on the scene at this time and, believing that the master would kill one of the men, he shot him." "So Gow had to shoot him?" Peter thought aloud.

“Yes, Gow believed this and fired two shots. One struck Ferneau, the other hit the ship’s gunnels. Ferneau never gave up, he struggled on. Williams, with his foot, forced the master to let go his grip of the mizzen chain and he fell into the waves.

Once the master had been done away with, Williams and Winter swung round to search for Jelfs whom they knew was injured, but in hiding. Moor believed him to be in the hold. The two men tore at the barrels, boxes and spare rigging with vengeance, all the while cursing the chief mate; blaming him for the lack of provisions the crew had endured.

‘This is all about to change. Your master is gone. The scheming ends here,’ Williams yelled as Jelfs was discovered under the sail. He was dragged to the main hatchway where Michael Moor stood over him with a pistol. Jelfs begged them not to kill him for the sake of his wife and children who would be left destitute. Williams ordered Moor to shoot Jelfs. Moor hesitated. Williams bellowed, ‘If you will not make sure the sun and moon shines through this man, I will make sure the sun and moon shine through you, Moor!’ The mate, too, now lay dead.

Meanwhile, below deck, Winter had made a slightly better job at dispatching the surgeon. After the attack the wounded man had dragged himself from his hammock onto the deck where he died. His only mistake had been committed earlier that evening when he had warned the conspirators to ‘cease such criminally abhorrent talk.’ Someone called, ‘Get him over the side.’ John Winter obliged. Witnessing all of this, Dobson had thrown up but remained at the helm.

Reid called to Milne and Jamieson, ‘Time to hang the dogs now they’re dead.’ He went on deck and threw a rope down the hatchway. They hoisted Jelfs onto the deck where he was eagerly heaved over the ship’s side by the same three. Mr Algier was similarly disposed of.

Williams proudly turned to Gow to inform him, ‘The dogs are gone. I wish you good luck and prosperity in your new command.’

In commotion and agitation, as the conspirators armed themselves, petty squabbles broke out. Gow snarled at Winter, ‘I’m in this up to my ears now thanks to all your dithering. The master was about to get the better of you there. He would have killed you.’ And Melvin pushed Rollson against a beam blaming him of cowardice and leaving himself and the others to wrestle with the master. But the deeds were done. They went off to make plans and gather the crew.”

Macaulay finished off his version of the terrible events.

“There have been so many boasts and lies,” Peter said. “At first Reid had told me he went below to find out what all the shooting was about, and came across Gow and the others armed with pistols. He told me he thought the *George* was under attack, so called to them, ‘For God’s sake give me a pistol!’ He said Williams shouted, ‘Get out of the way dog, or you’ll be shot.’ Clearly after all you say, and the things I’ve seen, this was all a bluff too.”

Macaulay nodded in agreement.

Peter had been exhausted and so relieved when the sail was fixed and the tale had been told. At last he had felt he knew the whole story. He could have a rest. His head hurt. What next, he had anxiously dared to wonder. He had called gently for Hubbins and gone to his hammock.

Peter wished he had Hubbins with him now in Marshalsea as he lay shaking in his corner in the cold and dark.