

# Trials in London.

The sun shone on Peter as he made his way from Newgate Prison with Oly and Captain Wise. The date was May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1725. Peter realised he had just turned eleven, but he felt very old. Old, itchy and smelly but with his whole life stretched out before him. He was free. He would not hang, this time at least. But behind the new freedom there were dreadful feelings of guilt and sadness. The trial of John Gow and his pirate crew was to begin the next day. He had to persuade Captain Wise to take him to be there at the Old Bailey. To be there for John Gow and William Harvey, Punton, all his new friends from Orkney and two the men who helped him to escape on the ship's longboat away back last February. Hopefully they would be released, like himself, with some lessons learned. Peter hoped the trial would deal punishment on those among the crew who planned the murders and dragged the others into the whole mess.

"Where did you come from this morning Captain Wise?" The thought suddenly occurred to Peter.

"We wondered when you would notice he was here." Oly laughed.

"I did notice, but there was so much happening." Peter's feet were hurting. He had not walked any distance for a long time. "What happened to you after you were set free in the *Bachelor*?"

"Well Peter, we sailed the *Bachelor* to Bristol. My father's family have a shipping business there. I had to get things sorted out since I had lost the *Delight*. There were the cargo owners to inform, and I had to sort out who owned the *Bachelor* and all that beeswax which we had been 'given' to us. The loss of our ship has been a big loss to the business and so I have been on the look out for a position with other companies in London. That search has gone very well. It has taken some months, but it has turned out better than I could have dreamed. However, while I was in London during April I visited Marshalsea Prison to enquire after young William Oliver here. I knew he never, ever wished to become a pirate. I thought I'd go and try to get a share of that pocket full of gold which Gow promised him."

"You didn't," Oly laughed.

"No, I hoped to be of some help to William Oliver and ask him to come as cabin boy, once again, on my next voyage. As I arrived that day, Oly had just been taken to the preliminary hearing at Doctors' Commons. Once he was released we left together. Oly had to visit his folks up north but we agreed that if ever he wanted his old job as cabin boy back he was to meet me at the inn, The Rose and Crown. I knew I'd be back there at the end of May."

"So here I am," Oly said. "I had to get back to see you Peter. I felt so bad at going off and leaving you after the hearing. But that place, Marshalsea, scared me. And, Peter, it was Captain Wise who paid to have you moved to a room on your own, with a window and fresh air, while you were ill in Marshalsea."

Peter was amazed. "I thank you for that Sir, for I truly believe that I would have died in the squalor for I missed Oly so much."

"Here we are, The Rose and Crown. Let's get you cleaned up and fed Peter."

In the darkness of the inn a large lady, with a familiar fragrance, wrapped herself round Peter and smothered him in kisses. It was Liz.

"You're home Pet. This is where I've been workin' and stayin' until my William can come back home with me." And she hugged him again.

"This is my boss, Rueben. He's been kind enough to give me a good job here at The Rose. Even lets me off my chores every day to visit my William. He knows all about you Peter."

Peter shook hands with Rueben, a huge man with two rosy red cheeks; just like the apples Liz used to bring for him in prison Peter thought.

"Rueben used to buy them apples for you Peter."

"Thank you indeed Sir." Peter stifled a laugh and shook the man's hand.

"Liz and I found we had much in common during one of my visits here. She told me how she and her husband were caring for a young boy in Newgate. It took me several days to realise it was you Peter."

"And Mr Wise here made sure that you would not to go hungry in that place while he was away on business. But here you are." And Peter received another huge, enveloping cuddle. The patrons at the inn were amused. Peter was not.

Oly and the captain shared a small room at the top of the building. Peter would now join them here. Through the cobwebs, from the tiny window Peter looked out at church spires and sooty chimneys. That rose perfume wafted round the tiny room. There was clean water in a basin and freshly laundered and repaired clothes

waiting for Peter. He felt guilty as he dressed in what must have been William Punton's coming home clothes. They had been carefully altered to fit his, now tiny, frame.

Peter was, indeed, a new person when the three walked out into the sunshine once more with Captain Wise and Oly to go eat some lunch. Peter felt dizzy. Was it the excitement, the freedom, the fresh air, the noise and colours of London's streets? He had no time to wonder. Peter fancied oysters from a vendor, but Captain Wise advised that it would be very risky in his wobbly state. Instead, they had muffins and some hot soup and returned to the inn for a drink of ale. Liz was buzzing around. Peter wondered where she mustered all her energy. Gliding silently around was a strange, tiny dark-haired girl. She had big brown eyes and really white skin. She never smiled and Peter noticed that no-one really took any notice of her at all. Did she ever step out into the sun or did she just work at the inn all day and all night he wondered? Peter did not ponder too long but crept upstairs where he slept in the safety and warmth of the little room while Oly watched over him. Captain Wise left on business.

Fifteen hours later the dawn chorus woke Peter. There was just enough light for Peter to see Oly stretched out, sleeping on the floor, and Captain Wise, wrapped in a blanket, curled up in an old armchair. Then he remembered, with dread, what day it was. May 26<sup>th</sup>; the day of the trial.

Captain Wise stirred and the boys sat up.

"Today I will be attending the trial at the Old Bailey. I am willing to take you both along. However, I will be escorting Mrs Punton as the day will be a terrible ordeal for the lady. I must attend to her, first and foremost, since she has been so kind to us. Should either of you wish to leave the Old Bailey before Mrs Punton and myself, then you must both leave together and return here. It will not be a pleasant experience for you, but I suggest you should try to come along."

Peter had always been sure he wanted to go. Oly was not so keen, but agreed. Peter's hope now was that Oly would stay until the bitter end.

When they met her downstairs, Mrs Punton tried to be cheerful for the boys' sake, but she looked tired and tears were never far away. The small, dark girl appeared from a shadow and gave Mrs Punton a kiss and wished her well.

Outside Liz admitted, "oooo, Jane gives me the creeps, but she's very kind in her own, strange way. I think she's trying to relieve her conscience. She's the one who informed on that Jack Sheppard, the one who kept escaping from gaol. Before she grassed him up she was a girl full of fun. She did it for a laugh; to see if he could escape one more time. She said she was sure he would, but he didn't. He was hanged. She's never laughed since. I met her standing at the entrance to Newgate that first day I came to see my William. She's the one who took me to meet Rueben and got me the work at the inn. I think I'd have starved without them. It's all thanks to that Jane."

In the warm, spring, early morning drizzle, they walked along to a baker's for pies for breakfast. Then, in silence, they made their way to the Old Bailey.

There, crowds gathered already, young and old. It was like a grand day out for those who had no family to be tried. Peter recognised the gentleman who had visited the Orkney men in Newgate but, apart from that man, Oly, the captain and Liz, everyone else was strangers.

Approaching the Session House at the Old Bailey Peter's heart beat faster with every step but, in dread, he had to go on. Peter felt sure that he would have died of fear this morning if he had had to give evidence at the trial. But perhaps he could have said something to save John Gow. He tried to reason with himself, after all, he was free. His horrors should now be over. But there was the muddling feeling that the men to be tried had been his friends and, although some of those people had turned out to be pure evil, others had always been kind and were completely innocent.

The trial was to be held at the Sessions of Oyer and Terminer and Gaol Delivery, Holden for the Jurisdiction of the Admiralty of England at the Justice Hall in the Old Bailey. The name of the place, alone, terrified Oly and Peter.

A pungent stench filled the partly covered outdoor court as the prisoners were brought up from the holding cell. Some of the men had obviously bought Dutch courage from the Newgate "tavern". The outdoor court had been introduced to reduce the spread of prisoners' "gaol-fever" to the learned gentlemen. The accused could be brought forward to a bar, but no closer!

Among the filthy, straggly bearded men with matted hair whom Peter hardly recognised that morning at all, walked the neatly attired John Gow. The prisoners filed into what looked to Peter to be a wooden cattle pen. Close by were the prosecutors, the court recorder and advocates. In contrast to the bedraggled bunch of prisoners, these men wore gowns of scarlet and hoods lined with taffeta and ermine.

The galleries, which rose up on either side of the courtroom were now filled to capacity with whispering, curious onlookers, casting a cold shadow over the court.

Following some formalities the order, "everyone stand" was given and a parade of judges swished in into court wearing floor-length, scarlet robes. Each was framed by a full wig of curls which cascaded down their shoulders. They all were very old. The procedure was laborious and, most of it, completely incomprehensible to Peter.

Suddenly, it seemed, Dobson was instructed to raise a hand while one of the prosecutors read aloud. Peter had difficulty in understanding all that was read out, and could not hear Dobson at all, but knew enough to realise this was a summery of the events on board the *George*. He caught the names of those murdered and those who were responsible for those deaths. As he ended the man looked up. Dobson nodded.

This went on and on similarly for Murphy, Phinnes, Read, and Booth. Peter caught site of Captain Wise who looked enquiringly at him. Peter gave a feint smile as William Clouston was asked to raise his hand. The robed gentleman continued with, what Peter understood to be an account of the events which took place in Orkney Again incomprehensible words were read out and William Clouston smiled before hiding his tears with his hands. He had been acquitted. Mrs Punton held on tight to Peter's had on her right and Captain Wise on her left. And, as husband William was acquitted, she gave a cheer and hugged poor Peter, yet again.

Thus it went on as the Orkney men were each acquitted in turn. Now was William Harvey's moment. They boy was deathly white as he hung onto the wooden rail with his one free hand to try to steady his shaking. It was over in a second. Acquitted.

So too were William Booth, the French men and the two pressed into service off the ship, *True Love*, which had made the mistake of dropping its anchor close to the *George* in Stromness.

Peter was beginning to relax slightly when James Williams was called. After all his crimes were read Williams was heard to plead not guilty as, in turn, did Melvin, Peterson, Winter, Rollson, Macaulay, and Moor. But when it came to John Gow, he remained silent. A voice rang out, "He must plead to the indictment!" There was a stirring and murmuring in the galleries, but Gow remained silent. Peter's heart pounded. One of the red robes called, "Has this man been informed that should he not plead then he shall have judgement against him?" Gow shook his head slowly but remained silent. Turning to face Gow, the judge continued, "I must tell you then, that if you will not plead, you must have a judgement against you, standing as mute."

Peter gasped and hid his face in his hands. He remembered how unjust this had been for Kidd. This judgement had been Kidd's sentence of death. He willed Gow to plead, but the man made no sound.

The courtroom was hushed. Peter strained to hear over the thumping of his heart. Gow was brought to the bar. The judge cleared his throat and continued with the sentence ordering that "his thumbs should be squeezed by two men with a whip-cord till it does break, and then should be doubled till it does again break, and then laid threefold, and that the executioners should pull with their whole strength." The brutality was undertaken. Gow's thumbs were tied and severely pulled by the executioner assisted by another. Obviously in excruciating pain, Gow persisted in his obstinacy. The judge roared his orders. "He shall be pressed tomorrow. He shall be put in a mean house stopped from any light, and he be laid upon his back, with his body bare; his arms be stretched forth with cord, the one to one side, the other to the other side of the prison, and in like manner his legs be used, and that upon his body be laid as much iron and stone as he can bare and more. The first day he shall have three morsels of barley bread, and the next he shall drink thrice of the water in the next channel to the prison door but of no spring and fountain water; and this shall be punishment till he dies."

The gaoler was ordered to carry the prisoner back to Newgate and see that sentence was carried out the next day.

Peter knew all about the pressing chamber. The blood rushed from his head. "No, no," he whispered as Liz put her arm around the boy.

Sentence was declared on the six men who had stood with Gow: Williams, Rollson, Peterson, Macaulay, Winter, Moor and Melvin were found guilty of piracy and murder. "No, no" the lad sobbed gently.

The voice again; "All are to be detained at Newgate until they are to be taken to be formally hanged by their necks until they be dead."

"No, no!" Peter's cry was lost in the cheers and uproar of the court.

Rain swept down the gutters as Peter found himself in a narrow street with Oly tugging at his sleeve. Peter was determined that they he would go to Newgate to plead for John Gow but Captain Wise, wisely, had given Oliver instructions to take the boy straight back to The Rose and Crown to await his return.

Peter finally exhausted himself and Oly helped his sobbing friend back to their little room. He closed the tiny window to keep sounds of merriment out from the street below and gave the lad a large brandy. Peter slept. Aware of bumping and bustle at some point Peter smelt Liz's perfume and felt her kiss his forehead, but he slept on for another seven hours before he awoke in the darkness calling for Oly.

His friend was immediately there at his side, as was Captain Wise.

Peter continued with his campaign to return to John Gow at Newgate. All the while Wise tried to reason with him.

“Ask Liz to come with me then,” cried Peter.

“It cannot be done. Liz is away home with her husband.”

“I’ll find William Harvey then.”

Wise explained gently, “William has left with the Orkney men who have all been taken north to get back home. William asked me to look after you well and he hopes you meet again with him some day. Your friends from the longboat, likewise, sent you all their very best wishes. They have dispersed either off home or to look for employment.”

Peter felt abandoned, with no one to understand how he felt. In the end, Captain Wise compromised and went along, on his own, before dawn to Newgate. He took with him a verbal message from Peter, begging Gow to plead.

Wise found Gow, now shackled to a filthy, cold stone floor next to an open sewage drain which was the condemned prisoners’ water supply. Here was a hopeless place full of hopeless people. Wise implored the man to plead but Gow was adamant. He asked Wise to explain to Peter his reasons for making no plea. He had been the one who finally relieved the crew of their tyrannical master, Captain Ferneau. He had shot this man and would receive justice for that, quite deservedly. “Not guilty” was therefore inappropriate. And he was not, as Peter knew, guilty of all the crimes for which he was to be sentenced. He therefore refused to plead “guilty”. He would have liked to have had a fair trial and been able to state this publicly, but knew that this would never happen in the circumstances. This way, even though he would die eventually, and to the public it would seem to make no sense at all, by not pleading he felt he was doing the correct thing. It had to be this way. Besides, the public would simply assume that by making no plea his property would not be forfeited to the Crown as was the norm. He owned nothing but a wooden chest containing a few bottles anyway.

“Here man,” Gow said. “Here, take your suit of clothes. I will have no further use for them.”

They were interrupted. Four gaolers came to unshackle Gow and haul him out to be pressed. At the same moment, Peter could be heard in the building, shouting and screaming for John Gow. Gow gave a shout and the boy arrived, panting; his red face tear streaked. William Oliver arrived close on his heels. “I’m sorry Sir,” Oly began to explain to his master.

Peter placed his tiny body between the startled gaolers and John Gow as if he could hold them back.

“You must not let this happen! Please just plead!”

Peter screamed and cried. It was impossible to hear anything in the clamour. The gaolers had had enough and Gow was dragged to the press yard. Peter clung to his captain’s legs, begging the gaolers to stop. Suddenly the courtyard fell silent. Peter lay unconscious as blood trickled from an ear. Having been sent sprawling by the gaolers his head had cracked onto the wet stone. He lay motionless. Gow tried to stop the procession to the pressing room. He craned his neck round to see Peter. “Enough!” His voice rang out. “I shall plead. No more harm and agony to my friends. Let me plead.”

Captain Wise and William Oliver acted swiftly. They carried Peter back out through the doors of Newgate vowing that they would see to it that the child never entered that place again as long as they lived.

The prison chaplain, the grave, Reverend J. Gaynam, who had witnessed the scene, followed Gow to the pressing room. Gow now had decided to plead, although it was probably too late. With a rattle of coins, Gaynam was able to have the gaolers delay their duty for an hour; just long enough for the chaplain to send a petition to the court praying that the young pirate be allowed to plead.

Gow did, indeed, appear later that day at the Old Bailey along with Robb and Belbin. Each pleaded “not guilty” and received the same sentence as the unfortunates the previous day. Death by hanging. Belbin and Robb had been found guilty of piracy and Gow guilty of piracy and murder.

Meanwhile, Peter had come round while being carried through the streets to the inn on Drury Lane. There he had been cleaned up and checked for serious injury. There appeared to be none but a split ear and concussion. Jane poured him a glass of brandy and made him rest in a chair where she could watch him. Captain Wise returned to Newgate to discover that Gow had been allowed to plead. He was now in the condemned hold to await the day of his hanging which had been set for 11<sup>th</sup> June.

Captain Wise broke the news to Peter in the evening. Although it was not good news, it was the best that Peter could have hoped for. No long, drawn out torture.

“June 11th is just two weeks away. Not long, but I have been made master of a ship, the *Hannah* which lies at Gravesend. The ship belongs to the Hudson’s Bay Company and will sail across the North Atlantic for Hudson Bay at the end of June. She’s been lying up all winter for repairs. The company sends ships across the Atlantic every summer full of goods to trade with the natives there. The company trades for furs and skins to take back

to England. Hudson Bay freezes up from the middle of October until around the middle of July so all sailing to their post, York Factory, has to be carried out while the bay is free from ice. There's still much work to be done on the *Hannah* before she will be fit to sail. And then she is to be loaded with trade goods and provisions for the company men over there. I'll need to be there so oversee all the work. Now Oly here is spooked by that Jane and wants to be moving out of the inn, so I've found lodgings for the three of us elsewhere."

"I must be near the gaol. I'll be visiting John Gow," Peter stated.

Captain Wise and Oly looked at each other as if they had been waiting for this, and to Peter's surprise they did not argue with him.

"The lodgings are at Wapping which is a fair bit from the gaol, but is on the river and will make travelling easier for myself and Oly." Wise went on. "I will be in Gravesend for most of the time but will return to be with you on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June. Oly will be working for me but may come back several times to be with you on some nights if he can find a waterman or other boat to beg a lift from."

"I'll be alright." Peter really wanted to be on his own with no-one stopping him from visiting the prison.

"So that's OK?" Wise asked. Both boys nodded.

"One more thing Peter, and it may be important or it may be nothing at all, so don't get your hopes up too much." Peter waited. What now?

Wise went on, "I was looking through all the *Hannah's* papers and spotted the name Hans Hansen."

"That's my father's name! Where is he now?"

"Slow down. I don't know. Remember, there are many, many Hans Hansens in the world. This Hans Hansen works for the company. He was to have sailed to London when the *Hannah* left Hudson Bay last year, but he was not on the ship. He did not come back to Britain last year. I did some checking with the company and discovered that this man is, indeed, from Sweden and he is the same age as you say your father would be. It seems that he was working on a trading sloop in the bay. They sailed north, up the west coast of Hudson Bay, each year to trade with the native people for furs and skins. Hans Hansen had arranged to return to Britain last year as he had been with the company for five years; he had served his contract. The sloop was to have rendezvoused with the *Hannah* at the end of September, but although the *Hannah* waited for as long as it could, they eventually had to leave for fear of being trapped in the ice."

"He could be dead now! Trapped in some frozen land." Peter wailed.

"Now hang on. It maybe is not even your father, and I'm sure the crew on the sloop were quite safe. The two ships probably just missed each other. I'll do everything I can to try to find out, but that will have to wait until I get to Hudson Bay."

"And when will you get back!" Peter wondered.

"If all goes well, we should be back in London in November."

"I'm coming!" the boy announced.

"Wait, it may not even be your father. The man may be away up north and we may never see him. And, young man, there may be no position for you with the company."

"Tell them I'll do anything. Anything they want me to do."

"Peter, be patient. Captain Wise is too busy to be worried by all your problems." Oly reminded his friend.

"Thank you Sir for all you have done for me."

"It is a pleasure, Peter, and be assured I will continue to do what I can. Let's find some food and move down to our new lodgings."

They bundled together the few belongings they had and went downstairs.

"If that young lad needs a job there's as much as he can handle round here," Rueben told them as they shook his hand and took their leave.

Captain Wise hired a small boat to take them down the river to Wapping. Peter was amazed by the number of ships tied up alongside each other. They loaded and unloaded cargo from around the world. Among it all were eel boats and fishing boats, little trade boats selling supplies to the ships' crews. The river was murky, not the sort of place you would go for a swim. Peter remembered the clear water round Orkney and the little rock pools he would investigate with Peter Craigie and his little brother. He wondered what Hubbins was up to there in Stromness. It would be so much easier to be a cat, Peter pondered.



The lodgings were more comfortable than the room at the inn. A bed each! Captain Wise left money with the elderly landlady, Mrs Hawkins, who promised that Peter would not go short of anything. Oly and the captain continued their journey down-river to Gravesend.

Through the night, in the safety and peace and quiet Peter hatched a plan. Refusing any breakfast, Peter was in a hurry to be off. His landlady wrapped some bread in a cloth for him as he took his leave. He told her not to worry and that he may not be back for a couple of days and left the old lady standing in the street. Sarah Hawkins shook her head. She had no energy to argue with or question the boy. Young people are always in such a hurry she thought, as she went back indoors to sit by the fire in her kitchen.

Peter went to the river but was too impatient to wait for any transport up river. He made his way on foot, along the embankment where possible and darting up lanes and along streets until he reached familiar territory. He was heading for The Rose and Crown. Peter arrived, panting and wishing to speak to Jane. Rueben had a good idea what was in the boy's mind. He spared the girl a few minutes. The two sat huddled in the kitchen. There, Peter begged Jane to tell him about Jack Sheppard, but the girl shook her head.

"Just tell me what he did."

"Why do you want to know about him? I want to forget it all," she pled.

"Just tell me anything you know about him."

"He had such spirit and brightened our dull lives for a while; everyone's hero. Poor Jack was brought up in Bishopsgate workhouse before being apprenticed to a carpenter. He was a clever fellow who could make anything and work out how everything worked, but, he had a bad streak in him and he put all that knowledge and skills to robbin' folk. He was caught for it and put in gaol. But Jack picked his way out of every cell, shackle, stone wall and iron bar he was locked behind. Six times he escaped in all. He was a symbol of freedom from all of this drudgery and work for folks like me. We all thought nothing could hold him. That last time he was free he robbed the pawn-broker next door and with the money he bought a fine suit and silver sword. He bought me roses. He hired a carriage and the two of us rode right through the arch at Newgate. We went to the taverns and had too much to drink. It was me who turned him in. I was stupid enough to believe he would ever be allowed to escape again, but that night I thought we'd have such a celebration when he broke out one more time. He never did. I will never feel happy again, but I'll do what I can for the unfortunate wives and families of those men locked in Newgate."

"So," Peter announced, "you can tell me all you know about escaping from Newgate. Jack was in the holding cell, just like John Gow. If Jack could escape then surely my friend can too."

"No, no." The landlord made the boy jump as he came up behind the pair and set his hand on Peter's shoulder.

"You get back to your work my girl." Jane scurried off, sniffing and wiping her nose in her apron.

"Your captain will never escape from gaol. Jack Sheppard was a rare lad. He studied his tools. He could fashion tools he needed out of nothing. He could fiddle any lock that came in his way and he could bend and twist his body as if it had no bones. It was as if he was made from liquid. He must have had magic in him, that one. No Peter, never even think that Jane here could tell you how to spring John Gow from there. The best you can do for him now is to take a bit of money to him to buy little things that'll make his last days more bearable. That's all you can do. Just you be there for him Boy."

Peter hung his head. He knew the man was right.

"Get right down there today, Peter, and take along a bit for the man to eat. You can come back here and clean up for me a couple of days a week and we will see about paying you."

Peter stood up ready to be off. He felt a bit foolish but very grateful to Rueben. He would be doing something positive and felt better.

At Newgate he was able to peer into the dark holding cell. He handed over a bundle of food from to the gaoler and promised he would be back.

He made his way to the river and talked a waterman into transporting him back to Wapping.

His landlady was surprised to see him back that night but sat him down in the kitchen to eat. "That captain friend of yours wants me to keep you fed. How can I do that if you keep running off?"

"I do have business that will take me away most days, but I'll always be back at night." Peter explained.

"Business, indeed; what business has a young un like you got in this city?" The landlady pried but Peter did not mind. "My friend, who was at one time my master, and master of his own ship, is in Newgate about to be hanged for crimes he only partly committed. It is wrong, but there is nothing I can do."

The woman gasped and looked at the boy without talking. Peter was puzzled at the worried face staring at him. Eventually she began.

"This will be a difficult time for you, especially since you are so young. I once cared for a man in the same situation as your friend. Be a good friend to this man. I can see you are. The condemned man will need someone strong to see him through. How long does he have?"

“Just until the 11<sup>th</sup> of June.” Peter replied.

“The best thing you can do is visit as often as you can and try to bring the man a bit of money. Have you got any? Just a bit for him to buy a candle or two and a drink. Bring him good food. Does he have family to visit him? Does he have warm clothes, and some way of keeping himself clean? He must have fine clothes on the day of the hanging.”

Mrs Hawkins prattled on and on. Suddenly, among it all Peter heard her mention William Kidd.

“Captain William Kidd?” Peter stopped her.

“Yes, my cousin Sarah’s husband, the man who hanged all these years ago. The man me and my dear husband used to visit in Newgate.”

Peter could not believe this latest coincidence concerning Captain Kidd.

Sarah Hawkins went on, “Captain Kidd should never have been hanged as a pirate. He was innocent, but there were men in high positions in this country who had employed Captain Kidd. It suited their positions to have him hanged. He was never given a fair trial. His documents were taken from him and he was allowed no visitors apart from myself and my late husband. It was a sorry tale.”

Peter and Sarah Hawkins talked through the night. Both were fascinated to learn more about the Scottish captain from each other. At dawn Peter awoke, slumped over the kitchen table. Mrs Hawkins slept on soundly in her armchair by the cold fire. Peter watched his new-found friend. In this vast city, here was someone who really could understand how he felt. Peter took a blanket from his room and laid it over the sleeping woman. He blew gently on the ashes and set some wood on top. He tended the fire and sat gazing at the flames.

Peter felt peace had entered his life. He realised that he was not alone in the world. There were no more battles to be fought. He had good friends, older friends, people with years of experience and knowledge willing to help him and give him strength. He must listen to them. He had been so fortunate to have met Liz, Rueben and Jane. But, to Peter, most amazing had been the whole connection with his own life and that of Captain Kidd. Somehow, the story of Kidd’s life and death, the parts his own grandfather and Oly’s father had played in it, had sustained Peter through his own time in gaol. Finally, this old lady had offered him the peace and comfort needed to see him through the difficult days ahead.

Each morning Peter hitched a lift on an eel boat as far as London Bridge. He worked at the Rose and Crown for Rueben until mid afternoon when he made his way to Newgate to see John Gow. Each day he brought the captain his small wage and a parcel of food from Sarah Hawkins. The old lady looked out her late husbands socks and vests. Every day there was something for the young captain. It was dark by the time Peter reached the lodgings in the evening. Every day was the same; long, long hours for the boy.

On Sunday, 9<sup>th</sup> June Captain Wise and Oly arrived at dawn. Captain Wise’s plan was for the three of them to attend the chapel at Newgate. “We’ll have to get there early to be there for Gow,” he stated. Peter clambered into the waiting boat and they made their way up river in silence.

A large number of people had gathered at the prison chapel but the three squeezed into a pew together. The condemned men were brought in to sit in the condemned pew in the centre. Peter looked at those attending the service in this cold, spartan chapel. Smartly dressed, there were the smug whose eyes never left the convicted men. Were they listening at all? The Reverend J. Gaynam took the first five of the Ten Commandments as his topic for the morning, saving the remainder for the afternoon service. Captain Wise was quietly thankful that the man kept the usual Hell and damnation reminders to a minimum. Everyone poured out into the yard and dispersed. Peter and Oly bid Captain Wise goodbye, having arranged to meet next at their lodgings on Tuesday morning, and made their way to the condemned cell with John’s lunch.

The three found there was very little to talk about. Oly did not want to say too much about the *Hannah* since he did not want to appear too enthusiastic about his forthcoming adventure to Hudson Bay. But Gow was interested in the boy’s new career. Peter noticed that John looked well and seemed relaxed. He told the boys to be off out into the sunshine and enjoy their time together while they had it. He had another enforced visit to the chapel to endure but he then intended to try to get some sleep in this place.

Peter comforted Oly who was upset as they left the gaol. This would be the last time Oly could visit Gow. Peter knew that next afternoon would be his own last visit. The two decided to make their way, on foot, back to Wapping. While they admired the ships Peter wondered what he would do once the execution was over.

“I was not to tell you Peter, but I have been given a new position. I am no longer cabin boy to Captain Wise. I am a seaman with the Hudson’s Bay Company. Captain Wise will be asking you if you can take my place.

“Yes, yes!” Peter shouted as loud as he could. People turned to look. Peter danced round his friend.

“You must be as brave and strong as you can on Tuesday and the captain will ask you that evening before we leave for Gravesend. But you must look surprised, for I was not to tell you.”

As the boys chatted and wandered towards Wapping in the late afternoon they were hailed from a longboat on the river. This was the *Hanna*'s longboat, and its crew called for Oly to join them. Peter was given a speedy row back to his lodgings. Oly called, "I'll see you on Tuesday in the morning at Mrs Hawkins' place," and continued down river in the longboat.

Mrs Hawkins was pleased to see Peter looking quite relaxed. His face had seen the sunshine for the first time in months. She handed the boy a big plate of mutton stew and doe balls. "I have a few things for you to take along to your master tomorrow. Nice clean things for him to wear, you know, on Tuesday."

"Thank you Mrs Hawkins."

Had she said the right thing? Maybe she should not upset the boy.

"It will be for the best if he can be dressed as a captain should be dressed," Peter answered. "It will let people see that he is a real gentleman. Do you think there will be many people there to see.... you know....?"

Mrs Hawkins put her arm round the boy's slumped shoulder. "Aye, there'll be hundreds of those kinds who enjoy that kind of thing. You must not think about them at all. You must be there for your captain. He will need you there. You must think of all the things he taught you and concentrate on the good in the man. Shut your ears to the voices around you."

"Will you be there Mrs Hawkins?"

"No, Peter. Once at the hanging of an innocent man is enough for me. Your friend and Captain Wise will be there with you."

Next morning at The Rose and Crown Peter struggled with his chores. Rueben seemed to be piling them on him. It was four in the afternoon before his boss came with a few coins for the work done. Peter looked at his palm. There was twice as much as he was due.

"I shouldn't think you'll want to be back here to work. Another adventure waits for you I hear." Rueben winked. "And you go off with all that you have learned boy. You'll be a captain some day. Pop in to see us before you sail."

"Thank you for all you have done for me and my captain." Peter dashed off before he became upset. "I will be back to see you before I leave London."

Peter entered Newgate for the last time clutching a parcel from Mrs Hawkins and the usual cloth of food from her and Rueben.

John Gow sat solemnly in the stinking hole among the eight others who were to be hanged the next day. Peter was at a loss for words. Gow seemed totally resigned to his fate and, to Peter, he seemed not to care. "Captain Wise will be asking me to join him as cabin boy on his next trip." Peter whispered. Gow turned and smiled at the boy then returned his stare to the filthy floor. Peter wondered how he managed to muster that brief smile.

"He's going to the Nor Wast is he not? You'll be calling in past Orkney. The ship will lie in Stromness." Gow sat and thought. "Could you pay a visit to my mother Peter? You will know what to tell her." Peter wondered what he would tell the lady. Would she be distraught? Would she order him off her pier like she did to Captain Watt who went telling tales of piracy to the woman? Peter hoped she would not weep as he was sure he would follow.

"Of course I shall Captain."

Gow looked up at the boy again. "Could you look for my wife, Helen Gordon, too and tell her I will love her always." He looked down at the filthy floor.

"I will do that." Peter sniffed.

Oly seems to think that you will find you father in the Nor Wast. He thinks he will be there when you arrive. I hope it all works out for you Peter. Captain Wise is taking on a very loyal and sensible cabin boy."

"Thank you John. I will try to remember all that you taught me. I will think of you often and know that things could have been so different. Put on the clothes from Mrs Hawkins. I think it's Captain Wise's again but all cleaned up and looking good." Peter tried to sound reasonably normal but he could hardly get his voice to work at all.

"Can't at the moment." Gow rattled his shackles and gave a half laugh. "I'll get the chance later." Then the moment Peter dreaded more than anything. "You run along now Peter and get back and thank your Mrs Hawkins from me. I will see you tomorrow will I?"

Peter tried to be as brave as he could be but it was hopeless. As he handed John the coins from his pocket a tear dripped into the captain's palm.

"I will have a drink or two with this Peter to settle myself tomorrow and a candle tonight to keep away the darkness. I thank you and wish you all the best. Go and make yourself into a fine man."

"Goodbye Captain." Peter managed this, loud and clear. And then turned and left Newgate forever.