

SALVAGE.

BY CUTLIFFE HYNE.

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"The boat's an old P. & O. lifeboat," said Mr. McTodd, "diagonal hull of oak and quite big enough for the purpose. Of course, something with stem in her would be better, because we're both steamer men, but that's out of the question. That would mean too many to share. So the thing is, can you buy this lifeboat and victual her for the trip? I'm no what you might call a capitalist myself, just for the moment."

Captain Kettle eyed the grimy serge of his companion with disfavor. "You don't look it," he said. "That last engine room got gacked from must have been a mighty filthy place."

"Fwas," said McTodd. "But, as it happened, I didn't get the sack. I ran from her here in Gib, because I'd wish to get back to England and have this news useless in my pocket. And, of course, I had to let slide the £8 in wages that was due to me."

"By James, it's beginning to look like business when you see a man running away from a sailor that he's rightfully earned."

"Well, I'm no denying it was a speculation. It's a bit of a speculation, if ye come to reckon up, asking a newly-sacked sea captain to join in such a venture."

"I don't suppose you'd have much choice here in Gibraltar."

"Maybe you'd have heard of either me or Kettle, if I had," said McTodd. "Kettle's face hardened. 'See here,' he said, 'keep a civil tongue in your head, or go out of this lodging. I'm to be treated with respect, or I don't deal with you.'"

"Then let my clothes and be civil yourself. It's a mighty try shop this, captain."

"I've no whisky in the place nor spare money to buy it. If we're to go on with this plan of yours, we shall want every dollar that can be raised."

"That's true, and neither me nor Tonia have 10 shillings to spare. The room and sat himself on the edge of the table and frowned. 'I don't see the use of taking either Antonio, if that's his name, or your other dago. I don't like the breed of them. You and I would be quite enough to handle an open boat, and quite able to take care of our selves. If the weight of the money on her, and we finger it, we'll promise to bring them back their share all right; and if the thing's a fizzle, as it's very likely to be, well, they'll be saved a very unpleasant boat cruise."

"It's no go," said the engineer, "and you may make up your mind to have them shipmates, captain, or sit there on your tail where you are. D'ye think I've any appetite for dagoes myself? No, sir, no more than a stripped thread. And, no, don't trust me. They wouldn't trust you. They would not trust the provost of Edinburgh if he was to make similar proposals to them."

"Then have you no idea where this steamboat was put on the ground?"

"Man, I've told ye 'no' already."

"Seems to me you don't know much, Mr. McTodd."

"I don't. What I know is this: I come ashore here after a vera exhausting trip down the Mediterranean for a drink to fortify the system against the chills on the run home. The brandy is poor here on the rock, though I'll admit it's cheap, and as for the whisky—"

"Never mind that; get on with your yarn."

"Dinna hauchle ma sa, 'Gee, I want to a little drink shibe, and I kenne'd the cutthroat in charge, and gave the name of the ship I wanted sending back in case sleep overcame me, and settled down for an afternoon's enjoyment. Ye'll ken what I mean?"

"I know you're a drunken brawler when you get the chance for an orgie."

"I have my weaknesses, captain, or maybe I'd no have left Ballindrochar, where my father was Free Kirk minister. We both have our weaknesses, Captain Owen Kettle, and it's they that have brought us to what we're in now."

"If you don't leave me alone and get on with your yarn," said Kettle acidly, "you'll find yourself in the street."

after a long spell at tramping when she got into trouble and carried all the money she'd earned in good solid gold in the chart house drawer."

"It sounds like a soft thing, I'll not deny," said Kettle. "But why should Mr. Antonio and his friend come to you?"

"They ran from their ship here in Gib and laid low till she had sailed. It was the natural thing for them to do. But when they began to look 'round them in cold blood they found themselves a bit on the beach. They'd no money; there's such a shady crowd here in Gib that everything's well watched, and they couldn't steal, so there was nothing for it but to take their part."

"Not much. And so they came to you?"

"They knew me," said the engineer. "And I came to you because I knew you, captain. I'm no navigator myself, though I can make shift to handle a sailboat; so a navigator was wanted. I said to myself the man in all creation for this job is Captain Kettle and then what should I do but run right up against you?"

"Thank you, Mac," said Kettle. "And that's the only other thing you'll have to do, and that's buy, borrow or steal the ship to carry the expedition, because the rest of us can't raise a blessed shilling amongst us. It needn't be a big outfit, but the old P. & O. lifeboat, which was purchased by dint of haggling for an absurdly small sum, and victualled and watered for eighteen days. The Portuguese, who still refused to disclose the precise location of the wreck, said that it might be found by passing through many hazardous shoals and suggested that it was advisable to take at least a month's provisions. But the meagerness of their capital flatly forbade this, and they were only able to furnish the boat with what would spin out to eighteen days on an uneventful short sea passage. They trusted that what pickings they might find in the storerooms of the wreck would provide for the return voyage."

With this slender equipment, then, they sailed forth from Gibraltar bay, an obvious party of adventurers. They were bombarded by the questions and the curious stares of all the shipping interest on the Rock; they were flattered by the attention of a naval busbyboy (who had been hidden carry his inquisitiveness to the denouement), and were carried off accordingly, and if ever ill-wishes could sink a craft, that ancient P. & O. lifeboat was full to her marks."

The voyage did not begin with prosperity. There is always a strong surface current running in through the straits, and just then the breezes were light. The lifeboat was a dull sailer, and her people, in consequence, had the mortification of keeping Carrero point and the frowning rock behind in sight for three baking days. The two Portuguese were first profane, then sultry, then frigid; some said a day, it appeared, had been violated by the start, and they began first to hint at and then to insist on a return. To which Kettle retorted that he was going to see the matter through now if he had to hang in the straits for the whole eighteen days and sunset for the rest of the trip upon dew and their belts, and in this McTodd backed him up. Once started and away from the whisky bottle, there was nothing very yielding about Mr. McTodd. Only one compromise did Kettle offer to make. He would stand across and drop his Portuguese on their part, would disclose the whereabouts of the wreck, and in due time, when the dividends were gathered, he faithfully promised them their share. But to this they would not consent. In fact, there was a good deal of mutual distrust between the two parties."

At last, however, a kindly slant of wind took the lifeboat in charge and hustled her wetly out into the broad Atlantic, and when she had run the shores of Europe and Asia out of sight, and there was nothing round them but the blue heaving water, with here and there a sail or a steamer's smoke, then Senior Antonio saw fit to give Captain Kettle a course."

"We was steaming from Tenerife to Madeira, when we saw those rocks with Duncansby Head ashore."

"Hm," said Kettle. "Those'll be the Salvage Islands."

"Steam was piled up on de first. 'Nother island we pass after."

"That's Piton island, if I remember. Let's have a look at the chart." He handed over the tiller to McTodd, took a tattered admiralty chart from one of the lockers, and spread it on the damp floor gratings. The two Portuguese helped with their brown hands to keep from slipping away. "Yes, either Little Piton or Great Piton. Which side did you pass it on?"

Antonio thumped a gunwale of the lifeboat.

"Keep it on the port hand going north, did you? Then that'll be Great Piton, and a sweet shop it is for reefs, according to this chart. I wish I'd a directory. It will be a regular cat's dance getting in. But, I say, young man, isn't there a light there?"

"Light? I no understand."

"Ye sassy lighthouse-faro-show-mark-light in dark?"

"O, yes, lights house, I got there. No, no lights house."

"Well, there's one marked here as 'projected,' and I was afraid it might have come from the Canaries were Spanish, and Madeira was Portuguese, and that there's rocks which lie half way would be a sort of slack cross between the pair of them. Mananna's the motto, isn't it Tonia? Never do today what you hope another day will do for you tomorrow."

"St. st. Mananna," said the Portuguese, "who had not understood one word in ten of all this. 'Mananna we find rich, plenty, too much rich. God says the money was forgotten. Those Canary fishing schooners land on the salvages sometimes,' said McTodd, 'so I heard once in Las Palmas.'"

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"Then there'll be fleas on the islands, whatever else there is," said Kettle. "I guess we got to take our chances, Mac. If the old wreck's been overhauled before we get there, it's our bad luck; if she hasn't been skinned clean we'll take what there is, and I fancy we shall be men enough to stick to it. It isn't as if she was piled up on some civilized beach, with coast guards to take possession, and all the rest of it. The islands are either Spanish or Portuguese; they belong to a pack of thieves anyway, and we've just as much right to help ourselves as any one else has. What we've got to do at present is to shove this old ruin of a lifeboat along as though she were a racing yacht. At the shortest, we've got 700 miles of blue water ahead of us."

Open-boat voyaging in the broad Atlantic may have its pleasures, but these, such as they were, did not appeal to either Kettle or his companions. They were thorough-going steamer sailors; they despised sails, and the smallness of their craft gave them qualms both mental and physical. By day the sun scorched them with intolerable glare and violence; by night the clammy sea mists drenched them to the bone. For a larger vessel the weather would have been accounted favorable; for their cockle shell it was once or twice terrific. In two squalls they ran into, breaking combbers lifted the lifeboat to the thwarts, and they had to bale for their bare lives. They were cramped and sore from their constrained position and want of exercise; they got sores on their wrists and salt-grime on every inch of their persons; they were growing

of apes, and then with one accord they made for the pantry and the steward's store-room. The gold which had loved them was forgotten. Those Canary fishing schooners land on the salvages sometimes, said McTodd, "so I heard once in Las Palmas."

At last, however, a kindly slant of wind took the lifeboat in charge and hustled her wetly out into the broad Atlantic, and when she had run the shores of Europe and Asia out of sight, and there was nothing round them but the blue heaving water, with here and there a sail or a steamer's smoke, then Senior Antonio saw fit to give Captain Kettle a course."

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"St. st. Mananna," said the Portuguese,

There was no verbal argument about the matter. "Work or suffer," was the simple motto. The islanders went upon, and it answered admirably. They knew the breed of the Portuguese of old."

At last, by dint of daring and toil, the secret of the passage through the noisy spouting reefs was won; it was sounded carefully and methodically for sunken rocks, and noted in all possible ways, and the old P. & O. lifeboat was hoisted on the Duncansby's davits. The Portuguese were driven down into the stokehold to represent double watches of a dozen men and make a requisite steam; McTodd fingered the rusted engines like an artist, and Kettle took his stand aloft with the steam wheel on the upper bridge."

They had formally signed articles, and apportioned themselves pay. Kettle as master, McTodd as chief engineer and the Portuguese as fireman, because salvage is apportioned pro rata, and the more pay a man gets the bigger is his bonus. Of which account (at McTodd's suggestion) they awarded themselves paper stipends which they could feel proud of, and put down the Portuguese for the ordinary fireman's wages then paid out of Gibraltar, neither more nor less. For as the engineer and the fireman were to be divided up somehow, and it would be pity for a pair of unclean dagoes to have more than was absolutely necessary, seeing that they would not know what to do with it."

Captain Kettle felt it to be one of the supreme moments of his life when he rang on the Duncansby's bridge telegraph to "stand by." Here was a bit of fortune such as very rarely came in any shipmaster's way; not getting salvage, the larger part of which an owner would finger, for mere assistance; but taking to port a vessel which was derelict and deserted, the greatest and the rarest of all maritime adventures. But he had not much time for sentimental musings in this strain. A terribly nervous bit of pilotage lay ahead of him: the motive power of his steamer was feeble and uncertain, and it would require all his skill and resources to bring her out into deep blue water. Slowly she backed or went ahead, dodging round to get a square entrance to the fair way; and then with a slam Kettle rang on his telegraph to "full speed ahead," so as to get her under the first possible command."

She started out into the narrow winding strait, dodging every rock in her bows, and the rear of the surf closed round her. Rocks sprung up out of the deep—hungry black rocks as deadly as explosive torpedoes. With a full complement of hands and with a pilot far more acquainted with the place, it would have been an infinitely dangerous piece of navigation; with a half-dozen men, however, which had only one man all told upon her decks, and he almost a stranger to the place, it was a miracle how she got off unscathed. But it was a miracle assisted with the most brilliant skill. Kettle had surveyed the channel in the lifeboat and steamed every rock in his bows, and when the test came he was equal to it. It would be hard to come across a man of more iron nerve."

Backing, and going ahead, to get round right-angled turns of the fairway, shaving reefs so closely that the wash from them creamed over her rail, the battered old steam engine every minute of her life was every fathom of her onward way; but never once did she actually touch, and in the end she shot out into the clear deep water and gaily lit diamonds from the wave tops into the sunshine."

It is possible for a man to concentrate himself so deeply upon one thing that he is almost insensible to the world, and until he had worked the Duncansby Head out into the open Captain Kettle was in this condition. He was dimly conscious of voices hailing him, but he had no leisure to give them heed. But when the strain was taken off, then there was no more disregarding of the world, and he was aware of the half-sun raft which seven men with dumpy paddles were frantically laboring toward him along the outer edge of the reefs."

Without a second thought he rang off engines, and the steamer lost her way and fell off into the trough and waited for them. From the first he had a foreboding as to who they were; but the crew were obviously cast away; and by all the laws of the sea and humanity he was bound to rescue them. Ponderously the raft paddled up and down the steamer's lee. Kettle came down off the bridge and threw them the end of a halliard, and eagerly enough they scrambled up and clambered on to the steamer's rail. They looked around them with curiosity, but with an obvious familiarity. "I left my pipe stuck behind that stanchion," said one, "and by gum it's there still."

"Po's'sle doer's stove in," said another; "I wonder if they've scooped my chest?"

"You Robinson Crusoes seem to be making yourselves at home," said Kettle. "One of the men knuckled his shock of hair. 'We was on her, sir, when she happened her accident. We got off in the captain's boat and she got smashed to bits landing on Great Salvage, under. We've been afloat ever since, and we built that raft and cooked till we got her out, and ferried over here. It was tough living, but I guess we were better off than the other poor beggars, who got swamped in the other boats.'"

"The other two boats got picked up."

"The sailor shrugged his shoulders. "No, sir, Captain Mulready's on the raft down yonder. He's ails and crumpled up to find the other two boats, and you've got her out. She'd a list on when we left her that would have scared Beresford, but she's chucked that straight again, and who's to believe it was ever there?"

Kettle gritted his teeth. "Thank you, my lad," he said. "I quite see. Now get her out, and let yourself something to eat, and then go forward and turn to." Then leaning his head over the bulwark, he called down, "Jimmy!"

"The broken man on the raft looked up. "Hullo, Kettle, that you?"

"No, thanks, I'm off to the island. I'll start a picnic there of my own. Good luck, old man."

"If you don't come aboard willingly, I'll send and have you fetched. Quit fooling."

"O, if you're set on it," said the other, tiredly, and scrambled up the rope. He looked around him with a drawn face. "To think she should have lost that list and righted herself like this. I thought she might turtle any minute when we quit her. And I'm not a seaman, either."

"I know you aren't. Come into the chart-house and have a drop of whisky. There's your missis' photo stuck up over the bed-foot. How's she?"

"Dead, I hope. It will save her going to the workhouse. It's not as bad as that."

"If you'll tell me, why not? I shall lose my ticket over this job sure, when it comes before the board of trade, and what comes her likely to give me another ship?"

"Well, Jimmy, you've got to have a small one, and live on your insurance."

"I dropped that years ago, and drew out what there was. Had to—with eight kids, you know. They take a lot of feeding."

"Eight kids? By James!"

"Yes, eight kids, poor little beggars, and they and me all got to hungry from now onwards. But they do say work houses are very comfortable nowadays. You'll look in and see us sometimes, won't you Kettle?"

He lifted the glass which had been handed to him, and drank a hearty toast, and he deserved it, he thought that whisky from a

chandler in Rio. It's a drop of right, isn't it?"

"Here, drop it," said Kettle. "I'm sorry," said Captain Mulready. "But you shouldn't have had me on board. I should have been better picking by myself in Great Piton yonder. I can't make a cheerful salutation for you, old man."

"Brace up," said Kettle. "By the Lord, if I'd only been a day earlier with that raft," said the other musingly. "I could have taken her out, as you have done, and brought her home, and I believe the firm would have kept me on. There had been no inquiry, only 'delayed,' that's all; no one cares so long as a ship turns up some time."

"It wouldn't have made any difference," said Kettle, frowning. "Some of those lousy Portuguese have been on board and scooped all the money."

"What money?"

"Why, what she'd earned. What there was here in the chart house drawer."

"The dished man gave a tired chuckle. "O, that's all right. I put it in Las Palmas and there it is in the bank there and sent home the receipt by the B. and A. mail boat to Liverpool. No, I'm pleased enough about the money. But it's this other thing I made the bungle of, just being a day too late with that blasted raft."

Kettle heard a sound and sharply turned his head. He saw a grimy man in the doorway. "Mr. McTodd," he said, "who the mischief gave you leave to quit your engine room? Am I to understand you've been standing there in that doorway listening to the captain's own engine's come back, so I handed her over to him and came on deck for a spell. As for listening, I've heard every word that's been said. Captain Mulready, you have my very deepest condolences."

"Now keep your hands off me," said the engineer, who had been standing in the doorway at the end of the tiddly. "I'm as mad about the thing as yourself, and I don't mind blowing off a few rounds of temper. I don't know Captain Mulready, and you do, but I'd hate to see any man all crumpled up like that if I could help it."

"He started out into the narrow winding strait, dodging every rock in his bows, and the rear of the surf closed round her. Rocks sprung up out of the deep—hungry black rocks as deadly as explosive torpedoes. With a full complement of hands and with a pilot far more acquainted with the place, it would have been an infinitely dangerous piece of navigation; with a half-dozen men, however, which had only one man all told upon her decks, and he almost a stranger to the place, it was a miracle how she got off unscathed. But it was a miracle assisted with the most brilliant skill. Kettle had surveyed the channel in the lifeboat and steamed every rock in his bows, and when the test came he was equal to it. It would be hard to come across a man of more iron nerve."

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"No, thanks, I'm off to the island. I'll start a picnic there of my own. Good luck, old man."

And he indicated with a little nod a window high up on the side of the church where the wind was blowing in and making a draught.

"I straightened up and passed on, and when I had finished my part of the collecting and got back to the rear of the church sent the sexton to close that window, and as he saw it go up, the man that had made the request sent a friendly glance down the aisle to me."

"Later, at one time and another in the course of my experience, I received various requests while passing the plate, and more than a notion for the minister, but I was always ready for them after that."

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