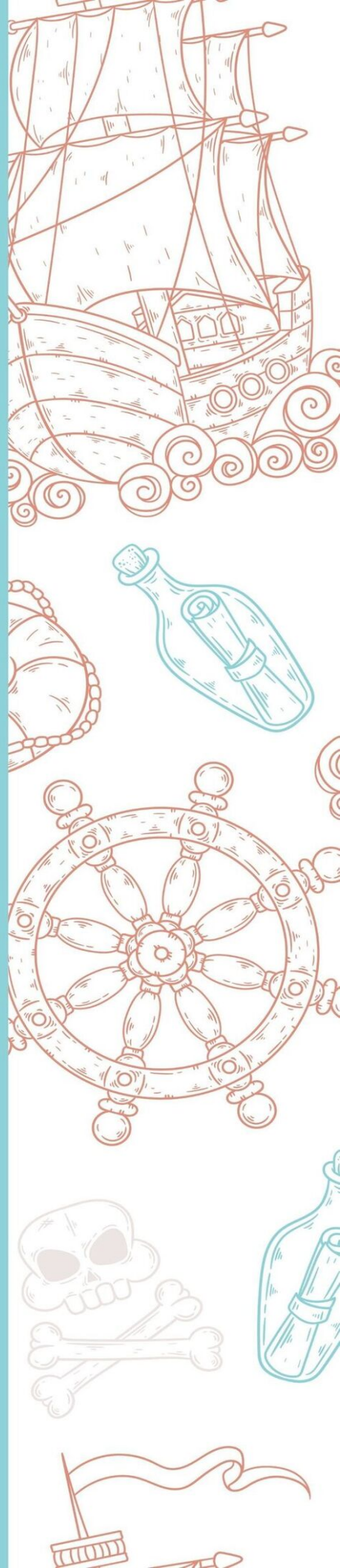


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# A PIRATE OF THE CARIBBEES

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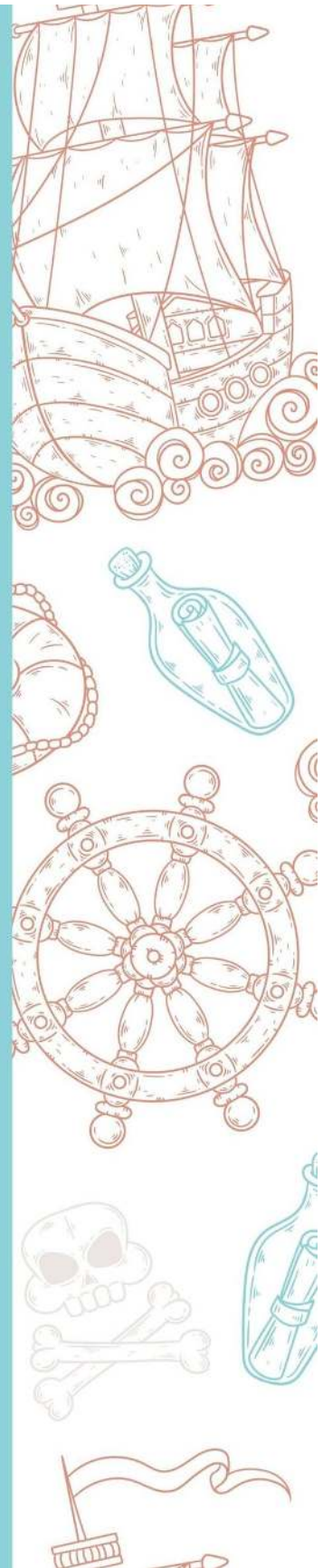


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*Harry Collingwood*





**HARRY COLLINGWOOD**

*A Pirate of the Caribbees*

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## One

# *A Frigate Fight in Mid-Atlantic*



“**E**ight bells, there, sleepers; d’ye hear the news?—Rouse and bitt, my hearties! Show a leg! Eight bells, Courtenay! and Keene says he will be much obliged if you will relieve him as soon as possible!”

These words, delivered in a tone of voice that was a curious alternation of a high treble with a preternaturally deep bass—due to the fact that the speaker’s voice was “breaking”—and accompanied by the reckless banging of a tin pannikin upon the deal table that adorned the midshipmen’s berth of H.M. frigate *Althea*, instantly awoke me to the disagreeable consciousness that my watch below had come to an end, especially as the concluding portion of the harangue was addressed to me personally, and accompanied by a most uncompromising thump upon the side of my hammock. So I surlily growled an answer—

“All right, young ‘un; there’s no occasion to make all that hideous row! Just see if you can make yourself useful by finding Black Peter, will you, and telling him to brew some coffee.”

The lad was turning away to do my bidding when a pattering of naked feet became audible as their owner approached, while a husky voice ejaculated—



“Who’s dat axin’ for Brack Petah? Was it you, Mistah Courtenay?” And at the same instant the shining, good-natured, grinning visage of a gigantic negro appeared in the narrow doorway, through which the fellow instantly passed into the berth, bearing a big pot of steaming hot coffee.

“Ay, you black demon, I it was,” answered I. “Is that coffee you have there? Then find my cup and fill it, there’s a good fellow, and I’ll owe you a glass of grog.”

“Hi, yi!” answered the black, his eyes sparkling and his teeth gleaming hilariously, “who you call ‘brack demon,’ eh, sah? Who eber hear of brack demon turnin’ out at four o’clock in de mornin’ to make coffee for young gentermen, eh? And about de grog, Mistah Courtenay; how many glasses do dis one make dat you now owe me, eh, sah? Ansah me dat, sah. You don’ keep no account, I expec’s, sah, but *I* do. Dis one makes seven, Mistah Courtenay, and I’d be much obleege, sah, if you’d pay some of dem off. It am all bery well to say you’ll *owe* ‘em to me, sah, but what’s de use ob dat if you don’ nebber *pay* me, eh?”

“*Pay* you, you rascal?” shouted I, as I sprang to the deck and began hastily to scramble into my clothes, “do you mean to say that you have the impudence to actually expect to *be paid*? Is it not honour and reward enough that a gentleman condescends to become *indebted* to you? Pay, indeed! why, what is the world coming to, I wonder?”

“Bravo, Courtenay, well spoken!” shouted young Lindsay, the lad who had so ruthlessly interrupted my slumbers, “how well you express yourself; you ought to be in Parliament, man! Give it him again; bring him to his bearings. The impudence of the fellow is getting to be past endurance! Now then, you black swab, where’s the sugar? Do you suppose we can drink that stuff without sugar?”

After a search of some duration the sugar was eventually found in a locker, in loving contiguity to an open box of blacking, some boot brushes, a box of candles, a few fragments of brown windsor,—one of which had somehow found its way into the bowl,—and a few other fragrant trifles. In my haste to get on deck, and betrayed by the feeble light of the purser's dip, which just sufficed to render the darkness visible, I managed to convey this stray morsel of soap into my coffee along with the sugar wherewith I intended to sweeten it, and only discovered what I had done barely in time to avoid gulping down the soap along with the scalding liquid into which I had plunged it. A midshipman, however, soon loses all sense of squeamishness, so I contented myself with muttering a sea blessing upon the head of the unknown individual who had deposited this "matter in the wrong place," and dashed up the hatchway to relieve the impatient Keene.

I shivered and instinctively buttoned my jacket closely about me as I stepped out on deck, for, mild and bland as the temperature actually was, it felt raw and chill after the close, stifling atmosphere of the midshipman's berth. It was very dark, for it was only just past the date of the new moon, and the thin silver sickle—which was all that the coy orb then showed of herself—had set some hours before; moreover, there was a thin veil of mist or sea fog hanging upon the surface of the water, through which only a few of the brighter stars could be faintly distinguished near the zenith. There was no wind—it had fallen calm the night before about sunset, and we were in the Horse latitudes—and the frigate was rolling uneasily upon a short, steep swell that had come creeping up out from the north-east during the middle watch, the precursor, as we hoped, of the north-east trades—for we were in the very heart of the North Atlantic, and bound to the West Indies. I duly received the anathemas of my shipmate Keene at my tardy appearance on deck, hurled a properly spirited

retort after him down the hatchway, and then made my way up the poop ladder to tramp out my watch on the lee side of the deck—if there can be such a thing as a lee side when there is no wind.

It was dreary work, this tramping fore and aft, fore and aft, with nothing whatever to engage the attention, and nothing to do. I therefore eagerly watched for, and hailed with delight, the first faint pallid brightening of the eastern sky that heralded the dawn; for with daylight there would at least be the ship's toilet to make—the decks to holystone and scrub, brasswork and guns to clean and polish, the paintwork to wash, sheets and braces to flemish-coil, and mayhap something to see, as well as the possibility that with the rising of the sun we might get a small slant of wind to push us a few miles nearer to the region where the trade wind was merrily blowing.

The dawn came slowly—or perhaps it merely *seemed* to my impatience to do so—and with daylight the mist that had hung about the ship all night thickened into a genuine, unmistakable fog, so thick that when standing by the break of the poop it was impossible to see as far as the jib-boom end.

The fog made Mr Hennesey, our second lieutenant and the officer of the watch, uneasy,—as well it might, for we were in the early spring of the year 1805, and Great Britain was at war with France, Spain, and Holland, at that time the three most formidable naval powers in the world, next to ourselves, and the chances were that every second ship we might meet would be an enemy,—and at length, just as seven bells were being struck, he turned to me and said—

“Mr Courtenay, you have good eyes; just jump up on to the main-royal yard, will you, and take a look round. This fog packs close, but I do not believe it reaches as high as our mastheads, and I feel curious to know whether anything has drifted within sight of us during the night.”

I touched my hat, and forthwith made my way into the main rigging, glad of even a journey aloft to break the dismal monotony of the blind, grey, stirless morning, and in due time swung myself up on to the slender yard, the sail of which had been clewed up but not furled. But, alas! the worthy second luff was mistaken for once in his life; it was every whit as thick up there as it was down on deck, and not a thing could I see but the fore and mizzenmasts, with their intricacies of standing and running rigging, their tapering yards, and their broad spaces of wet and drooping canvas, hanging limp and looming spectrally through the ghostly mist-wreaths. I was about to hail the deck and report the failure of my experimental journey, but was checked in the very act by feeling something like a faint stir in the damp, heavy air about me; another moment and a dim yellow smudge became visible on the port beam, which I presently recognised as the newly risen sun struggling to pierce with his beams the ponderous masses of white vapour that were now slowly working as though stirred by some subtle agency. By imperceptible degrees the pallid vision of the sun brightened and strengthened, and presently I became conscious of a faint but distinct movement of the air from off the port quarter, to which the cloths of the sail against which my feet dangled responded with a gentle rustling movement.

“On deck, there!” I shouted, “it is still as thick as a hedge up here, sir, but it seems inclined to clear, and I believe we are going to have a breeze out from the north-east presently.”

“So much the better,” answered the second luff, ignoring the first half of my communication; “stay where you are a little longer, if you please, Mr Courtenay.”

“Ay, ay, sir!” answered I, settling myself more comfortably upon the yard. And while the words were still upon my lips the stagnant air about me once

more stirred, the great spaces of canvas beneath me swelled sluggishly out with a small pattering of reef-points from the three topsails, and a gentle creak of truss and parrel, as the strain of the filling canvas came upon the yards; and I saw the brightening disc of the sun begin to sweep round until it bore broad upon our larboard quarter. Then some sharp words of command from the poop, in Mr Hennesey's well-known tones,—dulcet as those of a bullfrog with a bad cold,—came floating up to me, followed by the shrill notes of the boatswain's pipe and his hoarse bellow of, "Hands make sail!" A few minutes of orderly confusion down on deck and on the yards below me now ensued, and when it ceased the *Althea* was running square away before the languid but slowly strengthening breeze, with studding-sails set on both sides.

Meanwhile the log was gradually clearing, for it was now possible to see to a distance of fully three lengths of the ship on either hand, before the curling and sweeping wreaths of vapour shut out the tiny dancing ripples that seemed to be merrily racing the ship to port and starboard. Occasionally a break or clear space in the fog-bank swept down upon and overtook us, when it would be possible to see for a distance of a quarter of a mile for a few seconds; then it would thicken again and be as blinding as ever. But every break that came was wider than the one that preceded it, showing that the windward edge of the bank was rapidly drawing down after us; and as these breaks occurred indifferently on either side of, or sometimes on both sides at once, with now and then a clear space right astern to give a spice of variety to the proceedings, my eyes, as may be guessed, were kept pretty busy.

At length an opening, very considerably wider than any that had thus far reached us, came sweeping down upon our starboard quarter, and as I peered into it, endeavouring to pierce the veil of fog that formed its farther extremity, I suddenly became aware of a vague shape indistinctly perceptible through the

intervening wreaths of mist that were now sweeping rapidly along before the steadily freshening breeze. I saw it but during the wink of an eyelid, when it was shut in again, but I knew at once what it was; it could be but one thing—a ship, and I forthwith hailed—

“On deck, there! there’s a strange sail about a mile distant, sir, broad on our starboard quarter!”

“Thank you, Mr Courtenay,” promptly responded the “second.”

“What do you make her out to be?”

“It is impossible at present to say anything definite about her, sir,” I answered. “I saw her but for a second, and then only very indistinctly, but she loomed up through the fog like a craft of about our own size.”

“Very well, sir,” answered Hennesey; “stay where you are, and keep a sharp lookout for her next appearance.”

Once more I returned the stereotyped, “Ay, ay, sir!” as I sent my glances searching round the ship for further openings. The next that overtook us swept down upon our port quarter; it was fully a mile and a half wide, and when it bore about four points abaft the beam another shape slid into it, not vague and shadowy this time, as the other shape had been, but clearly distinct—a frigate, unmistakably, under a similar spread of canvas to our own, and as nearly as possible our own size. So close indeed was the resemblance that for a second or two I was disposed to fancy that by some strange trick of light and reflection the fog was treating me to a picture of the old *Althea* herself, but a more steadfast scrutiny soon dispelled the illusion. There were certain unmistakable points of difference between this second apparition and ourselves, some of which were so strongly characteristic that I at once set her down as a French frigate.

The plot was thickening, and it was not wholly without a certain feeling of exhilaration that I again hailed the deck—

“A frigate broad on our port quarter, sir, with a very Frenchified look about her!”

“Thank you again, Mr Courtenay,” answered Hennesey, with an unmistakable ring of delight in his jovial Irish accent, which, by the way, had a trick of growing more pronounced under the influence of excitement. “Ah, true for you, there she is,” he continued, “I have her! Mr Hudson, have the kindness to jump below and fetch me my glass, will ye, and look alive, you shmall anatomy!”

A gentle ripple of subdued laughter from the forecabin at this sally of our genial “second” floated up to me from the forecabin, a glimpse of which I could just catch under the foot of the fore-topsail, and I could see that the men were all alive down there with pleasurable excitement at the prospect of a possible fight. Young Hudson—a smart little fellow, barely fourteen years old, and the most juvenile member of our mess—was soon on deck again with the second lieutenant’s telescope; but by this time the fog had shut the stranger in again, so, for the moment, friend Hennesey’s curiosity had to remain unsatisfied. Not for long, however; the presumably French frigate had not been lost sight of more than two or three minutes when I caught a second glimpse of the other craft—the one first sighted—on our starboard quarter.

“There is the other fellow, sir!” I shouted. “You can see her distinctly now. And she too is a frigate, and French, unless I am greatly mistaken.”

“By the powers, Mr Courtenay, I hope you may be right,” answered Hennesey. “Ay, there she is,” he continued, “as plain as mud in a wineglass! And if she isn’t French her looks belie her. Mr Hudson, you spalpeen, slip down below and tell the captain that there are a brace of suspicious-looking craft

within a mile of us. And ye may call upon Mither Dawson and impart the same pleasant information to him." Then, turning his beaming phiz up to me, he continued—

"Mr Courtenay, it's on the stroke of eight bells, but all the same you'd better stay where you are for the present, until the fog clears, since you know exactly the bearings of those two craft. And I'll thank ye to keep your weather eye liftin', young gentleman; there may be a whole fleet of Frenchmen within gun-shot of us, for all that we can tell."

"Ay, ay, sir!" I cheerfully answered, my curiosity having by this time got the better of my keen appetite for breakfast; moreover, having been the discoverer of the two sail already sighted, I was anxious to add to the prestige thus gained by being the first to sight any other craft that might happen to be in our neighbourhood.

My stay aloft, however, was not destined to be a long one, for the fog was now clearing fast, and within ten minutes it had all driven away to leeward of us, revealing the fact that there were but the two sail already discovered in sight—unless there might happen to be others so far ahead as to be still hidden in the fog-bank to leeward. But before I left the royal yard I had succeeded in satisfying myself, by means of my glass—which had been sent up to me bent on to the signal halliards— that the two strangers were frigates, and almost certainly French. They were exchanging signals at a great rate, but we could make nothing of their flags, which at least proved that they were not British. To make assurance doubly sure, however, we had hoisted our private signal, to which neither ship had been able to reply. There was no doubt that they were enemies; and this fact having been satisfactorily established, I was permitted to descend and snatch a hasty breakfast.



And a hasty one it was, for I had scarcely been below five minutes when we were piped to clear for action, and I was obliged to hurry on deck again. But a hungry midshipman can achieve a good deal in the eating line in five minutes, and in that brief interval I contrived to stow away enough food to take the keen edge off my appetite, promising myself that I would make up my leeway at dinner-time—provided that I was still alive when the hour for that meal came round. This last thought sobered me down somewhat, and to a certain extent subdued my hilarious spirits; but they rose again as, upon gaining the deck, I looked round and saw the cheerful yet resolute faces of the captain and officers, and noted the gaiety with which the men went about their duty.

The strangers had by this time shown their bunting,—the tricolour,—so there was no further question of their nationality or of the fact that we were booked for a sharp fight, for they had the heels of us and were overhauling us in grand style; we could not therefore have escaped, had we been ever so anxious to do so. And, had we made the attempt, we should certainly have been quite justified, for it had now been ascertained that they were both forty-gun ships, while we mounted only thirty-six pieces on our gun deck. Escape, however, was apparently the very last thought likely to occur to Captain Harrison; for although he kept the studding-sails abroad while the ship was being prepared for action, no sooner had the first lieutenant reported everything ready than the order was given to shorten sail; and a pretty sight it was to see how smartly and with what beautifully perfect precision everything was done at once, the studding-sails all collapsing and coming in together at exactly the same moment that the three royals were clewed up and the flight of staysails on the main and mizzen masts hauled down.

“Very prettily done, Mr Dawson,” said the skipper approvingly. “Our friends yonder will see that they have seamen to deal with, at all events, even

though we cannot sport such a clean pair of heels as their own.”

The two Frenchmen were by this time within less than half a mile of us, converging upon us in such a manner as to range up alongside the *Althea* within the toss of a biscuit on either hand, but neither of them manifested the slightest disposition to follow our example by shortening sail. Perhaps they believed that, were they to do so, we should at once make sail again and endeavour to escape, whereas by holding on to everything until they drew up alongside us, we should fall an easy prey to their superior strength, if indeed we did not surrender at discretion.

And, truly, the two ships formed a noble and a graceful picture as they came sweeping rapidly down upon us with every stitch of canvas set that they could possibly spread, their white sails towering spire-like into the deep, tender blue of the cloudless heavens, with the delicate purple shadows chasing each other athwart the rounded bosoms of them as the hulls that up-bore them swung pendulum-like, with a little curl of snow under their bows, over the low hillocks of swell that chased them, sparkling in the brilliant sunlight like a heaving floor of sapphire strewn broadcast with diamonds.

They stood on, silent as the grave, until the craft on our larboard quarter—which was leading by about a couple of lengths—had reached to within a short quarter of a mile of us, when, as we all stood watching them intently, a jet of flame, followed by a heavy burst of white smoke, leapt out from her starboard bow port, and the next instant the shot went humming close past us, to dash up the water in a fountain-like jet a quarter of a mile ahead of us.

“That, I take it, is a polite request to us to heave-to and haul down our colours,” remarked Captain Harrison to the first lieutenant, with a smile. “Well, we may as well return the compliment, Mr Dawson. Try a shot at each of them with the stern-chasers. If we could only manage to knock away an important

spar on board either of them it might so cripple her as to cause her to drop astern, leaving us to deal with the other one and settle her business out of hand. Yes, aim at their spars, Mr Dawson. It would perhaps have been better had we opened fire directly they were within range, but I was anxious not to make a mistake. Now that they have fired upon us, however, we need hesitate no longer.”

The order was accordingly given to open fire with our stern-chasers, and in less than a minute the two guns spoke out simultaneously, jarring the old hooker to her keel. We were unable for a moment to see the effect of the shots, for the smoke blew in over our taffrail, completely hiding our two pursuers for a few seconds; but when it cleared away a cheer broke from the men who were manning the after guns, for it was seen that the flying-jib stay of our antagonist on the port quarter was cut and the sail towing from the jib-boom end, a neat hole in her port foretopmast studding-sail showing where the shot had passed. The other gun had been less successful, the shot having passed through the head of the second frigate’s foresail about four feet below the yard and half- way between the slings and the starboard yardarm, without inflicting any further perceptible damage.

“Very well-meant! Let them try again,” exclaimed the skipper approvingly. And as the words issued from his lips we saw the two pursuing frigates yaw broadly outward, as if by common consent, and the next instant they both let drive a whole broadside at us. I waited breathlessly while one might have counted “one—two,” and then the sound of an ominous crashing aloft told me that we were wounded somewhere among our spars. A block, followed by a shower of splinters, came hurtling down on deck, breaking the arm of a man at the aftermost quarter-deck gun on the port side, and then a louder crash aloft caused me to look up just in time to see our mizzen-topmast go sweeping

forward into the hollow of the maintopsail, which it split from head to foot, the mizzen-topgallant mast snapping short off at the cap as it swooped down upon the maintopsail yard. Two topmen were swept out of the maintop by the wreckage in its descent, and terribly—one of them fatally—injured, and there were a few minor damages, which, however, were quickly repaired. Then, as some hands sprang aloft to clear away the wreck, our stern-chasers spoke out again, the one close after the other, and two new holes in the enemy's canvas testified to the excellent aim of our gunners; but, unfortunately, that was the extent of the damage, both shots having passed very close to, but *just missed*, important spars.

The French displayed very creditable smartness in getting inboard the flying-jib that we had cut away for them, and by the time that this was accomplished they had drawn up so close to us that by bearing away a point or two to port and starboard respectively, both craft were enabled to bring their whole broadsides to bear upon us, which they immediately did, taking in their studding-sails, and otherwise reducing their canvas at the same time, until we were all three under exactly the same amount of sail—excepting, of course, that we had lost our mizzen-topsail with all above it, while theirs still stood intact. As for us, our guns were all trained as far aft as the port-holes would permit, and as our antagonists ranged up on either quarter, within pistol-shot, each gun was fired point-blank as it was brought to bear. And now the fight began in real, grim downright earnest, the crew of each gun loading and firing as rapidly as possible, while the French poured in their broadsides with a coolness and precision that extorted our warmest admiration, despite the disagreeable fact that they were playing havoc with us fore and aft, one of our guns having been dismantled within three minutes of the arrival of the enemy alongside us, while the tale of killed and wounded was growing heavier with

every broadside that we received. But if we were suffering severely we were paying our punishment back with interest, as we could see by glancing at the hulls of our antagonists, the sides of which were torn and splintered and pierced all along the broad white streak that marked the line of ports,—some of which were knocked two into one,—while their yellow sides were here and there broadly streaked with crimson as the blood drained away through their scuppers. It is true they were fighting us two to one, but, after all, their advantage was more apparent than real, for, running level with us as they were, they could only fight one of their batteries, while we were fighting both ours, and our guns—every one of them double-shotted—were being better and more rapidly served than theirs.

I will not attempt to describe the fight in detail, for indeed any such attempt could only result in failure. And as a matter of fact there was very little to describe. We simply ran dead away to leeward, the three of us, fighting almost yardarm to yardarm, and exchanging broadsides as rapidly as the guns could be loaded and run out. After the first ten minutes of the fight there was little or nothing to be seen, for the wind was fast dropping again, and the three ships were wrapped in a dense white pall of smoke that effectually concealed everything that was going on at a greater distance than some fifty feet from the observer. The most impressive characteristic of the struggle was *noise*—the incessant crash of the guns, the discharge of which set up a continuous tremor of the ship throughout the entire fabric of her; the rending and splintering of timber as the enemy's shot tore its way through the frigate's sides; the shrieks and groans of the wounded and dying, cut into at frequent intervals by some sharp order from the captain or the first lieutenant; the curt commands of the captains of the guns: "Stop the vent! run in! sponge! load! run out!" and so on; the creak of the tackle blocks, the rumble of the gun carriages, the clatter of

handspikes, the dull thud of the rammers driving home the shot, the rattling volleys of musketry from the marines on the poop, the occasional rending crash of a falling spar, and the terrific babble of the Frenchmen on either side of us, sounding high and clear in the occasional brief intervals when all the guns happened to be silent together for a moment,—I can only compare it all to the horrible confusion raging through the disordered imagination of one in the clutches of a fiercely burning fever. Our people fought grimly and in silence, save for an occasional cheer at some unusually successful shot; but the Frenchmen jabbered away incessantly, sometimes reviling us and shaking their fists at us through their open ports, and more often squabbling among themselves.

At length, when the fight had lasted about half an hour, the wind dropped to a dead calm, and the Frenchman on our starboard side, who had forged somewhat ahead of us, made an effort to lay himself athwart our bows before he lost way altogether. But we were too quick for him, for his mainmast was towing alongside and stopped his way; so we did with him what he tried to do to us, driving square athwart his bows as his bowsprit came thrusting in between our fore and main masts, when we lost not a moment in lashing the spar to our main rigging. But, after all, it resolved itself into tit for tat, for the other fellow put his helm hard aport and just managed to drive square athwart our stern, where he raked us most unmercifully for fully five minutes, until he drove clear, bringing down all three of our masts before he left us. Of course we could only retaliate upon him with our stern-chasers, which we played upon him with considerable effect; but what we lacked in the way of adequate retort to him we amply made up for to his consort, raking her time after time with such good-will that in a few minutes her bows were battered into a mere mass of torn and splintered timber. Somebody on board her cried out that they

had struck, but as her marines kept up their fire upon us from the poop, while her main-deck guns continued to blaze away whenever she swung sufficiently for any of them to bear, no notice was taken of this intimation; and presently our skipper gave the order to cut her adrift, so that her people might have no chance to board—a proceeding that would have proved exceedingly awkward for us in our then weakened condition.

But it presently became evident that they had no thought of boarding us; on the contrary, their chief anxiety was clearly to escape from the warm berth that they had thrust themselves into; for a few minutes later, the fire on both sides having slackened somewhat, we observed that both craft had their boats in the water and were doing their best to tow off from us, and almost immediately afterwards the French ceased firing altogether. I believe our skipper—fire-eater though he was—felt unfeignedly thankful at this cessation of hostilities, for he immediately followed suit, giving the order for the men to leave the guns and proceed to repair damages. This was no light task, for not only were we completely dismasted, but the hull of the ship was terribly knocked about, the carpenter reporting five feet of water in the hold and twenty-seven shot-holes between wind and water, apart from our other damages, which were sufficiently serious. Moreover, our “butcher’s bill” was appallingly heavy, the list totalling up to no less than thirty-eight killed and one hundred and six wounded, out of a total of two hundred and eighty!

## Two

### *The Althea Founders*



**T**he French having ceased firing, and manifesting an unmistakable anxiety to withdraw from our proximity, we bestowed but little further attention on them, for it quickly became clear to us that our own condition was quite sufficiently serious to tax our energies to the utmost. The first task demanding the attention of the carpenter and his mates was of course the stoppage of our leaks, and a very difficult task indeed it proved to be, owing to the rapidity with which the water was rising in the hold; by manning the pumps, however, and employing the entire available remainder of the crew in baling, we succeeded in plugging all the shot-holes and clearing the hold of water by noon, when the men were knocked off to go to their well-earned dinner. Then, indeed, we found time to look around us and to ask ourselves and each other where the French were and what they were doing. There was no difficulty in furnishing a reply to either question, for our antagonists were only a bare four miles off, and close together. But bad as our own plight was, theirs was very much worse; for we now saw that the frigate which we had raked so unmercifully was in a sinking condition, having settled so low in the water indeed that the sills of her main-deck ports were awash and dipping with



every sluggish heave of her upon the low and almost imperceptible swell, while her own boats and those of her consort were busily engaged in taking off her crew. With the aid of my telescope I could distinctly see all that was going on, and I saw also that the end of the gallant craft was so near as to render her disappearance a matter of but a few minutes. Hungry, therefore, as I was, I determined to remain on deck and see the last of her. Nor had I long to wait; I had scarcely arrived at the decision that I would do so, when, as I watched her through my glass, I saw the boats that hung around her shoving off hurriedly one after the other, until one only remained. Presently that one also shoved off, and, loaded down to her gunwale, pulled, as hastily as her overloaded condition would permit, toward the other frigate. She had scarcely placed half a dozen fathoms between herself and the sinking ship before the latter rolled heavily to port, slowly recovered herself, and then rolled still more heavily to starboard, completely burying the whole tier of her starboard ports as she did so. She hung thus for perhaps half a minute, settling visibly all the time; finally she *staggered*, as it were, once more to an even keel, but with her stern dipping deeper and deeper every second until her taffrail was buried, while her battered bows lifted slowly into the air, when, the inclination of her decks rapidly growing steeper, she suddenly took a sternward plunge and vanished from sight in the midst of a sudden swirl of water that was distinctly visible through the lenses of the telescope. The occupants of the boat that had so recently left her saw their danger and put forth herculean efforts to avoid it; they were too near, however, to escape, and despite all their exertions the boat was caught and dragged back into the vortex created by the sinking ship, into which she too disappeared. But a few seconds afterwards I saw heads popping up above the water again, here and there, while a couple of boats that had just discharged their cargo of passengers dashed away to the rescue and were soon

paddling hither and thither among the little black spots that kept popping into view all round them. I waited until all had seemingly been picked up, and then went below to secure what dinner might be remaining for me.

When, after a hurried meal, I again went on deck, the horizon away to the northward and eastward was darkening to a light air from that quarter, that came gently stealing along the glassy surface of the ocean, first in cat's-paws, then as a gentle breathing that caused the polished undulations to break into a tremor of laughing ripples, and finally into a light breeze, before which the surviving French frigate bore up with squared yards, leaving us unmolested.

Meanwhile the crew, having dined, turned to again for a busy afternoon's work, which consisted chiefly in clearing away the wreck of our fallen spars, and saving as many of them and as much of our canvas and running gear as would be likely to be of use to us in fitting the ship with a jury-rig. And so well did the men work, that by sunset we were enabled to cut adrift from the wreck of our lower masts, and to bear up in the wake of the Frenchman, who by this time had run us out of sight in the south-western quarter.

But, tired as the men were, there was no rest for them that night, for it was felt to be imperatively necessary to get the ship under canvas again without a moment's delay; moreover, despite the fact that the shot-holes had all been plugged, it was found that the battered hull was still leaking so seriously as to necessitate a quarter of an hour's spell at the pumps every two hours. The hands were therefore kept at work, watch and watch, all through the night, with the result that when day broke next morning we had a pair of sheers rigged and on end, ready to rear into position the spars that had been prepared and fitted as lower masts. The end of that day found us once more under sail, after a fashion, and heading on our course to the southward and westward.