



*A Handbook for the Castaway*

*short story by Alex Jeffers*



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By noon o' the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, as being convinced both I were alive and would survive, I looked 'round about myself. I took stock. This was my position: I was utterly alone. The *Golden Panther* foundered and all hands lost. Myself was lost, if living; and tho' regretting not my survival could not doubt as my fine captain and fond shipmates all were drowned, a very famous feast for the fishes of this perverse warm sea. Sweet Tom, indeed, my especial camarado, often boasted he couldn't swim a stroke. "Hot bath water," he would say, "ashore in port, with a pretty man to bring me tabaccie and rum and kisses, is all the water I wish ever to become intimate with. Altho'," he'd say, "pretty men are still rarer'n hot water or ports of call, my dear, and myself would gladly settle for *your* attendance. Say you, hey, Robin? Would attend me at bath in Freetown or Port o' Spain and we return to the Caribees?" And I: "Who to attend on Robert?" My camarado: "Why, Tom himself. Who other?" Tom was drowned, I could not doubt it. Sweet Tom was surely drowned.

I was not a man to thank the Lord for His mercies, precious few as they were; nor call on Him in my distress. I knew not why myself of all the company should be spared. The tempest blew up in the night, whistling away the unfamiliar stars, whilst all lay unawares. I ought say: we lay insensible; for Captain Jack had ordered out an extra portion of rum after our relieving the Spanish galleon of its ballast of Mexico silver and Peruvian gold; and generous he was with it whilst himself and his new boy enjoyed the same ship's Canary wine. His intent being of following the lightened Spaniard to Manila, a place we had never any of us seen, to find what answer that port might make either to our guns or its own

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strayed coin; but that plan went gone for nought when the storm discovered us and capriciously threw the *Panther* upon the reef. Did that sportive tempest too, I have occasioned to wonder, find out the Spaniards? In the infinite mercy of the papists' God, no doubt it played a gentle zephyr across their canvas and guided them easy to port. Their treasure, at the least, gone to the devil with all my friends.

This all by the way. We'd our rum or Canary; Captain and boy went to the cabin; some of us sailors below to hammocks in the hold; others – myself and my dear camarado among 'em – remaining on deck, the night being hot and heavy and still. Said Sweet Tom with a rummy breath: "I mislike these seas where the stars are strange and no ports civil or not for our landing. God's will, Cap'n'll bring us soon home." And thereupon fell sweetly asleep in my arms; and I followed after.

And then discovered myself coughing the very ocean from my lungs and nothing in my arms but sea and night and a mighty wind. Somehow a broken spar came to hand and supported me up. Waves tossed me as I were a morsel of straw. The *Panther* too they tossed, for I saw her away but saw no-one in the rigging for masts and yards all were gone; saw no-one at the crazily spinning wheel; saw – oh, bleeding Christ Jesus! – saw her heel about and strike broadside some obstruction as halted her career, as stove her in completely. Cried I out in horror and despair; swallowing more ocean as doing it. And then my friendly spar and myself go rushing past wrack and wreck; and next I knew was new morning as if the storm had never been. I lay full stretch on sand, my feet in water that lapped as it were a warm bath, one hand in water that purled like a freshening stream, if it too was warm.

It was a stream. It was fresh. Plunged my face into it and drank, sweet water being a commodity rarer'n silver in southern seas, then spewed up all my refreshment and half the ocean besides. Then wondering sat up and gazed about, bemused.

'Twas a shore much alike many another in those latitudes, saving the lucky stream. Twice lucky, as water one might healthfully drink, and I had little expectation of discovering rum or Canary wine soon; and for this fact as I had otherwhere observed: that where fresh water flowed always lay a passage thro' the reef. I should have been smashed like the *Panther*,

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and my ribs the easier stove in than stout British timber, otherwise.

Along on either hand ran a broad strand of tawny sands; before, the placid waters that Spaniards would call lagoon and, not so far out, white surf on the disastrous reef; and beyond all the ocean. My spar lay bobbing but I saw no other evidence of the *Panther*; I waded out and brought in the spar, planting it upright in the sand where its height was no taller than my own head, and tied to it my scarlet kerchief as were a flag and I claiming the shore for no sovereign saving it be myself.

Inland, a hill or mountain at a little distance, and barbarous forest; coconut palms on the verge being all I recognized.

There is no profit in saying how I fared nor how I employed the 1<sup>st</sup> day in my island, nor indeed the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Suffice it as was water to drink; I not without matter to eat; – if the nature of it would quail the Britishman, well, I had ate worse and it not fresh but rotted when a child in that green and pleasant land: after months out of port, too, fresh meats were meat, and fresh, if not off Christian sheep or cattle. I slept in shelter, tho' I need not, and tolerable comfort. The air being warm and breeze calm and myself alonesome, I had no requirement of all the clothing I owned: viz, a very raggedy shirt or chemise which as it would not any longer serve to cover my shoulders I pressed it into service to shade my head against the sun-stroke; torn canvas breeks drying so stiff with salt as I took 'em off for comfort then found little occasion to don again when washed and soft but walked about proud as Adam in Paradise; a stout leather belt, it also stiff and ungainly after its bathe but useful for the carrying of my knife, – the which I should have been unhappy without, – and a purse of Spanish eights and doubloons: no use in all the world to me but pretty enough and of no such weight as I felt encumbered. I had no boots. I required none. I had no handsome periwig or cravat or frock coat, no fine high hat with a plume to say *milord* to: these had never owned. Had rings of excellent gold thro' both my ears; another on my hand that Sweet Tom gave me in earnest; saving its ruby gone adown a-side him in the wreck to the bottom of the sea; it having come from its seat some days previous and he carrying it for me against a goldsmith. Where such to be encountered in these unwholesome latitudes a question never answered.

I find myself now in the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. Have proved to myself it were an

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island by way of walking all 'round it, an ambulation of I know not how many hours; excepting 'twas past dawn when I set out and scarce afternoon on my return. The hours of the day in this latitude I could not measure; nor at night discover any stars I knew. – Finding no fresh water elsewhere, then determined to make my unhappy landfall the seat of my solitary kingdom, and sat me down to survey the realm and take stock. Imprimis, there is myself and my poor equipage; secundo, a splintered spar of good cedar with red Chinee silk fluttering bravely. There is a good stream of sweet water. In rocks along about the lagoon, mussels, winks, and crabs of various sorts; a-swim in lagoon itself, many handsome fishes whether or no I own hook or net to catch 'em. I might eat gull or cormorant, tho' the meat's not tasty, can I contrive to knock one down. I have knocked down nor scrupled to eat a lizard which it was the size of a fox but slow as a tortoise and sweet to the tooth, if I should rather have it cooked. The discovery of fire for another day. In fine, I shall not starve, for have also found fruits and salads which I know to eat, including the estimable coconut; I shall not parch; of a night may sleep in a handsome bower fragrant of leaves and blossoms, not rum and sweat and sick and the hard tarry planks of the deck beneath me.

I wept as I were a babe in arms. “Tom!” I cried aloud; “Sweet Tom! Brave Cap'n Jack!” My eyes streaming and salt, I drew from my purse a piece on which I marked stamped the head of the Spanish king; and be he king in America so well as in Spain, so here in my island were I sovereign of all I surveyed and this stiff golden fellow and his companions all my subjects and all my friends. “Oh, Tommy!” cried I again; “and my merry camaradoes! All drowned!”; and I hurled His Spanish Majesty far off across the lagoon.



This is how it stood with Captain Jack and Sweet Tom and myself: I was the elder to Tommy by a few years tho' neither knew how many, for if ever told I had forgot the year of my birth. A lad was I of no family; and with no family unless it be the band

in which I travelled by the English roads, stealing and scraping and often chased and often beaten; whereof our General might have treated me kindly for he thought me pretty but as often as might be he was drunken. His Lieutenant did not like me, neither. One or t'other would like have killed me, one day, I've no doubt, in drink or in malice, and felt no more remorse than who kicks a dog or drowns a cat.

Was a port on the coast we came upon in our rambles, I asked not county or town; but I was asking a pretty man (a gentleman, as I thought), of a loaf or a pasty or a tuppenny to buy such for I was famished; and he saying: "A strong, handsome lad ought not to beggary or brigandage. Happen I'm seeking a boy, in very truth. Would take ship with me, eh, lad, across the sea to Jamaica and be my boy?"

This gentleman (and I'll not name him and him no gentleman, in truth), he thereupon took me along to a doss house by the docks, the where the whores for two groats fed me and washed me and shaved my head against the lice, all the while chucking and petting and fooling me, which I did not like; and calling me: "Pretty boy; Pretty; Oh, but M<sup>r</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ did find himself a pretty." For why I knew what it was my gentleman wanted of me when they put me in a closet with only a shirt to cover me, an apple to munch, and a bed – well, I knew the bed weren't for slumber. Well howsomever, my M<sup>r</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ had fed me and I now so little hungry as I had never been; had made me clean which was a wonder; and General and Lieutenant and Corporals (for our band was an army in small) all had had me, in the ditch and by the roadside and never offered a cup of Porter to make me merry. In short, I thought I liked him well enough tho' his member stood up bigger than my General's, – the one being a man and t'other not yet, – and hurt me something fierce when he introduced him to my arse; but he did not hit me when I cried. Poured more Porter for me instead, saying: "This to comfort you." In fine, he took me for his boy, he being captain of a Jamaica merchant; and that is the way of my going to sea.

At sea he was not so kind. I will not say so much for I do not like to remember it, but there was, in the one instance, a matter of tall boots wanting polished and myself sincerely puzzled as to why there was no rag and blacking to do it; and after, a whip. No more o' that.

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In Kingston in Jamaica I crept away without no more'n my clothing that I admired for had never had so fine; and scarce thinking of the coin he'd promised for faithful service. I misdoubt he didn't find another boy to polish his boots and warm his bunk and please his prick as he called: "M<sup>r</sup> Handsome-Does," for the voyage back to England. It never suited him to call me by my proper name; not Robert nor Bobby nor Fine Robin, but always Boy and Lad when it wasn't Puppy.

Having reached this point in my reflections, the which both happy for saying faretheewell to M<sup>r</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ and unhappy being alone and friendless in Kingston Port, a rough place; – I hardly knew what it meant also to be penniless for had never been otherwise; – having, I say, come upon this 1<sup>st</sup> landfall in the Caribees in my recollection; I discovered myself hungering and a little faint, having lain a-stretch in the sun, being, as I have said, naked as a babe. Now, and I yet his boy, Captain Jack was in the sometime habit of calling me his fine Portugee, tho' as much English as he and born in Britain as he was not, or his Romany lad, for my being of dark complexion, not fair going ruddy like himself. Notwithstanding, my limbs as had before been clothed now were stinging red; and in especial my prick. And so then before going to seek out sustenance I took down the kerchief of scarlet Chinee silk that Captain Jack gave me one time and fashioned a kind of clout of it with my belt, to guard my privities against the burning of the sun. – So must I look a proper savage now! Thinking it nearly gave me to laugh; thinking too that to cover my nakedness if even in suchwise were the earliest proper British and Christian act I had performed in my island. The next I would be raising a manor house to myself and riding to hounds after lizards, crying: "Tally-ho!" Captain Jack it was told me of manors and hunts, myself having no experience in that kind. Captain Jack who gave me the kerchief and was so fond with my parts, privy to him and not private; he would never mislike seeing his gift used to bag them up. Thinking which there was no help for it but to open up the silken bag again, there standing on the strand by the spar that was all remained of Captain Jack's *Panther*, take him out as was within, play with him as the Captain might like to do again were he not drowned for all I were no boy no more, he always loving me well and his proper boy drowned as much as himself; but tho' I wept for him as I

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did so, and for myself, and got it over quick and fierce as could be; then licking the stuff off my hand; then making up the clout again; then going by the rocks in the lagoon where I harvested winkles; the which I ate 'em as I gathered 'em, slippery and salt, until sated.

Whereupon meant to retreat out of the sun to the shade of my bower but, imprimis, knocking down a coconut and cracking it open, I drank the liquid within, cooler than the water of the stream. I contemplated the spar that saved my life, it looking the less fine for the loss of its gay, fluttering, red pennon; thinking: "Should build it into any house I might raise; or leave it stand a memorial of my fellows?" With my knife prised out bits of the coconut's sweet meat and chewed on 'em. Thus came to fall asleep there in the full heat of the afternoon, and woke me not till night when I felt cold; and hot too, in my skin, as 'twere a fever; and my head aching worsen after a night o' drinking all the grog in Port o' Spain with Sweet Tom, the Captain, and our camaradoes.

Surely I was very ill, quaking with fever and spewing up winkles and coconut meat; – for as I truly believed myself back aboard the *Golden Panther* with Tom wanting to comfort my distress and I fending off his hands as wished to caress, crying: "No! For God's mercy, don't touch me. I burn. I burn!" So he was sluicing me with cool water – (I had got somehow into the stream, was flopping about in the shallows like the very ugly mermaid we saw once at the mouths of the Oroonoko), – calling me a foolish lad for stopping in the sun without a hat, and then I: "But Tommy! You're dead. You're drowned." And he: "As will you be, Robin, if you don't take care." Whereupon I sat up in the stream, knowing where I was tho' still ill; shaking the water out of my ears tho' I seemed yet to hear his voice and know him near-by.

I continued ill for some period, I know not how many days; nor how nor what I fed myself; seeing Tom again from time to time who railed away with me but did not deign again to offer advice; until I woke and knew myself well again; and famished; and knew I must change my habitation, as the pleasant bower was foul with sick and shit and stank of piss. Indeed, I found I had never removed my fine silk clout but shat and pissed into it. So then went down again by the stream, keeping as much as might out of the sun; bathed; washed out the kerchief and hung

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it on a bush to dry. Then, a-sitting naked on the bank, I thought me how, were Tommy or the Captain to see me, they should call me a sad and sorry fellow, all my burned skin flaking off me in tatters; and I resolved to better myself.



**S**o then in Jamaica's Kingston had lived some while on the street corner and near the docks, filching my victuals and sleeping raw, my fine clothes growing filthy and raggedy. "At the least," says I to myself, "here's no General nor M<sup>r</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ who'd treat me cruelly"; altho', in very truth, I wanted companionship; and gazed with envy on other boys as had their fine captains to cuff'em and call'em Puppy and give'em sugar-cane to chew. "Why," thought I, remembering what the whores in that English port said; and M<sup>r</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ himself, likewise: "I'm prettier than the last one of'em." – And that were a strange thing about Kingston and, so to speak, all those other ports in the Caribees as weren't Spanish, whether British, Dutch, or French: no fancy-houses by the docks and no whores for the sailors but nobody minding the lack. Even in my old band, the General had his woman, a sorry wench and he preferred my arse to her quint, when he weren't too drunken for his prick to stand; so shared her out, often as not, among the Corporals. Lieutenant as well (who were an older fellow than the General, tho' nobody liked him nor would have him for their master), kept company with a slangy tart that sometimes gave me a morsel if I were specially famished, being her own babe had died a-borning; whereupon Lieutenant'd thrash her and myself both. But I never saw a woman near the wharves at Kingston. Only brave captains with their boys and sailors with their camaradoes; and I thought how fine they looked and desperately wished to be of their company. The Navy men who might have taken me on (for they never did have sufficient sailors in His Majesty's Navy), frightened me, for all they were rumbustious and wild as any seamen; M<sup>r</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ had turned me against honest merchants; nothing would do but I should go for a pirate's boy.

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Came a day and a bold ship into port they called the *Golden Panther*, – I had no letters then so couldn't parse her name but I liked the fierce, snarling yellow cat carved under the bowsprit. I liked, too, the look of the captain, he being handsome and tall, with hair under his grand hat that was as golden as the carved and painted cat, with great red mustachios and blue eyes at once merry and sad. As grubby as I was, I liked that his linen were clean and white, his britches and waistcoat simple and black, his boots not so well polished as might be. Was a stout youth by him on whom his regard was fond, tho' not fond in the way as tho' were comrades; but no boy; and I liked that, too. When he came down onto the dock I ran to him, stumbling at his feet, crying: "Cap'n! Cap'n! You're needing a boy? I'll shine your boots up proper, I will!"

Glancing down on me as I were a stinking turd in the street, Captain Jack nodded once; then turning to the youth said: "Clean this, will you, Josiah." He nudged me with his boot. "I'll take a better look at it after."

So the youth Josiah took me by the collar and led me into the inn Captain Jack favored, crying for hot water and soap. Making a nicer job of it than the whores had, he bathed me, saying: I was a little starved but ought plump out well given proper victual; and saying: I had the right of it; Captain Jack had no boy, – he, Josiah, having grown so the Captain liked him not so much, not to bed him; and I did know as that was what was wanted? Yes, I said: 'twas what I expected and I brave enough to bear it so only I might go once more to sea. For a fact, was a little scared, for the Captain's britches were snug and I had seen what he owned stuffed down the right leg; I thought, soft as it was, as big as M<sup>r</sup> \_\_\_\_\_'s, hard. But I thought: "This Josiah was his boy and still loves him, so he's not cruel." Then Josiah took my chin in hand, saying: "I'll have my eye on you, so watch how you treat my Captain, boy, if he take you on." Then shook his head and with his hand shook mine, saying: "It's a proper puppy after all, under the muck." Then smiled. "You'll do. He'll like you. What's your name?"

So I told him: Robert.

"Well, my Robin," said he: "my name you know already and I'm pleased to make your acquaintance." Here, his other hand with the soap came upon my privities and introduced him to them specially. "Mind you

keep all this clean,” he warned, “or Cap’n won’t like you.”

“But it’s my arse he’d be wanting, innit, sir?” I protested. I had never thought about washing those parts specially, being as the rest o’ me were dirty and no help for it. “I’m not to bugger him, am I? I couldn’t!”

“Bugger the Captain?” Josiah laughed merrily. “With what? This little morsel? I’ll wager you can’t do more’n piddle with it yet. Bide a bit, we’ll see.” So saying, he leaned o’er the tub where I sat and fiddled my little member till he stood up proud; then washed him all without; then peeled back the skin and washed beneath. I liked it tho’ it scared me more’n the thought of the Captain’s prick. A little soap got in his one eye and stung. Then Josiah had me stand in the bath and drenched me clean. Then, he kneeling by the side of the tub, beckoned me nearer, smiling, put his hands on my fundament, and put his mouth on my parts.

“Oh!” said I, but he made no reply, being as his mouth was full. I wanted him never to stop but after a time he did, releasing me from the happy ministrations of his tongue and warm comfort of his lips; leaning back smiling, saying: “You see why it wants to be clean.”

But what I was seeing was how his own prick had got stiff in his britches, not so big as the Captain’s, – nor M<sup>r</sup> \_\_\_\_\_’s Handsome-Does; – but big enough, and bulging, and making a blot of wet thro’ the cloth. Josiah laughed again. – He was a merry youth was poor Josiah, who always treated me kind; I loved him near as dear as the Captain only he perished not long after of a Spanish musket ball thro’ the eye and into the brain; and weren’t we all over sorrowful then? My Captain, he wept. – So grabbed me under the arms, lifting me from the bath and towelling me dry; and then standing before me, his legs spread, said: “Unbutton him out, Robin. Show me how you’ll do for my Cap’n. I swear ’tis clean as his and near as clean as yours.”

Well, and after, when Josiah took me in to Captain Jack’s chamber and Captain had give me a look of guarded approbation, I clothed in cast-offs of Josiah’s that were clean and fitted me nicely, Josiah said: “You’ll find an apt pupil, Cap’n Jack.” And the Captain smiled very nicely for Josiah and very sweetly for me, called me: lovely child; and bade me come to him.

So went I to sea again, aboard the *Golden Panther*, sure hunter of the

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Caribees; I being no less than Captain Jack the Pirate's boy.



**1**<sup>st</sup> item on my new program which I would perform as best I might for love of Captain Jack and Sweet Tom, was the making of fire. And so I found out a pleasant place deeper into the forest and a step from the stream for my new dwelling; there excavating a little pit and lining it 'round with stones; then laying a bed of dry tinder for the which I used the husks of coconuts. Laid by, too, a ready supply of fallen timber of which was plenty in the forest, I only wishing an axe to break some of 'em up convenient. Tho', wishes being granted, I had rather my camaradoes preserved and the *Panther* not sunk – in that case wanting no axe; else, having one ready to hand.

For steel I had the edge of my trusty knife. For flint I searched some, the rock in my island being mainly coral and no use for the purpose. And yet, in fine, I had a comfortable little smolder going and feeling a proper Englishman at his hearth for tho' dressed (or undressed, like) as a savage in nought save clout and shady hat which, I forgot to say, I had plaited together out of palm fronds against the sun as had made me ill. Lacking only pipe and Porter, was I. There being no remedy I forbore to regret; but went out to knock down another of the sluggish lizards, the which I butchered him nicely and skewered him in pieces and cooked him and ate him. He lacked savor, lacking salt.

Now, after my illness, I made myself a new man. The tale o' my doings were tedious, being I became a man of business, always doing, or about to do, or just having done and ready for a new employment; – always to some purpose, lest I stop to think. Too, every task I purposed to attempt required all the time in the world, there being no chandler's near-by to provide such as an axe; or rope; fish-hooks or line or needles; or a measure of canvas to make me an awning for my new-built house or a sail for the canoa I made from a tree which I felled it by fire and then hollowed it out by fire as well. Once, I broke the handy sharp point off my knife; then were more careful with it, having no other and being it

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had served me nicely all along. Fish-hooks I tried to fashion from bones, both lizard and gull (for had made a sling of lizard gut with which to hurl stones and knock 'em from the air), neither serving; finally took a one o' my ear-rings and beat the soft gold to shape, grinding the point till sharp; the line, of threads drawn from my old canvas breeks. I went fearful of losing it and for that, maybe, never did; tho' never snaring many fishes neither till making a net of coconut fiber and going out in my canoa into the lagoon to cast it.

All o' this taking up, as I said, all the time in the world. I kept no count of the days, nor the seasons such as there were; but I'm thinking 'twere some several many years. I know that my scarlet Chinee-silk clout which had been the kerchief given me by Captain Jack wore thro' in holes and my privities peeking out thro' 'em; so then must put it aside, placing it as a treasure with Tommy's finger-ring in a pretty shell on a shelf in my little house; and went about naked again being now black as a savage and proof against the sun. Howsomever, I forever kept certain of being busy all the day so to sleep in the night. Only then at evening, after supper, sitting at my fire with a coconut to hand for liquor, then had time in the world for thinking and remembering.

I began to tell of Tommy but never encountered him, being occupied with myself's misadventures and taking service with Captain Jack. Notwithstanding, 'twas Sweet Tom as I thought most on those evenings by my fire; being it was he was my companion and my friend and my camarado all those years until he was lost. I mind me, both loved the Captain, and he ourselves still, as we were sons or younger brothers, after no longer pleasing him as beddable; time to time, one or t'other of us played a game or two with another sailor or a jolly landsman in port; – I'm meaning to say: was more to it 'tween Tom and myself, than my liking his prick and the clever things he did with him, and he contrariwise mine. Those clevernesses I remembered when I lay abed, or mornings when I woke, myself a man whose member never fails but to stand to attention of a morning before I piss. Tom liked that. In fine, I was fond and loving of Tommy and he of myself.

So, then, I might rouse of a morning early, meaning to plan what I would purpose to do that day; let it be fishing from my canoa in the la-

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goona or gathering in fruits or harvesting salt from my pans; attempting once again to make from clay a proper vessel as would hold water and not burst in the fire (a task I never yet succeeded in); or whatsomever; but all my *intentions* and *meanings* to distracted by the eager sailor – (I called my prick: “my sailor”) – demanding attention. Now, I might simply grab him and roughly stroke him till he were satisfied; I might ignore him and go by the water to piss out his stiffness, my own water spraying about and wetting me, whereupon I would bathe. More like, I would lie back in my bed, by now somewhat of a proper couch and comfortable enough, remembering my Tommy till it nearly seemed he were there nearby; and he told me how to go about it.

That was what we used to like, Sweet Tom and myself. Oh, when I discovered him for Captain Jack and he a lad, I taught him a pretty way with his mouth; and then the Captain bettered my lessons; and Tommy as apt a student as ever I was. We did not cease from pleasing one another thuswise, both grown to men; tho’, be it said, was none of our fellows willing to try the endeavor excepting he’d prenticed with the Captain; nor none kept himself clean enough so I’d wish it of him. They were all for buggery, our company. Tom and I both liked a little bugging and being bugged; whether properly, up the arse, or just introducing one’s member between t’other’s thighs. Captain Jack told me the name for that practice in scholar’s Latin, once, but I misremember now. Howsomever, what specially pleased us, myself and Tom, was to be near one to t’other, gazing on him fondly, watching his handsome sailor wake up and make his salute. Sometimes were cannon or muskets as would shoot; sometimes old salts as chewed their tabaccie, not smoked it nicely in a pipe, and spat.



**D**iscovered Tom for Captain Jack, I said. For myself, I think it was, in fine. That being in Port o’ Spain, that’s not a Spanish town for all its name, but British. I was not so grown as the Captain would have me away from his bunk, no hair about my privities

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yet nor yet a beard. What he used say was: I was to eat his spunk, he liked it, and eating it would make me strong; he liked too my little privates as fitted all in his mouth, prick and ballocks alike together, even the former being stiff; but whensoever it came about I might produce my own emission, he, Captain Jack, would not eat it nor would not like it, tho' myself would continue to cherish. This said with kind pets and caresses; and true, in the event.

So, I weren't grown but had killed my 1<sup>st</sup> man: who was a Spaniard with black eyes and handsome black beard that tried to climb aboard the *Panther* when we grappled onto his fine ship, whereupon I came up on him, he unprepared to see a little lad, as he thought, with a sharp blade as might skewer him up under the jaw. He looked to be surprised when I took the knife away and blood jetted out of his throat, crying out – what I remembered after, as having killed him: – “Madre de dios! Muerto por no más que niño.” Then, his blood having spoiled my chemise new-given by the Captain, I shoved him o'er the rail he'd tried to mount, he falling between the two ships and being properly drowned or crushed. Then went to find the Captain to show how my shirt was spoiled, who promised me another and said what it was the Spaniard meant: *Mother of God! Murdered by no better than a little child*. So I was pleased by that and it was the only Spanish I ever learned the meaning of. Captain wrote it down for me in ink.

Too, tho' not yet capable of emission, I knew the day were coming; and Captain Jack knew it too, marking how my trembles and judders when he'd played me well were like his own in small, and gazed on me strangely then; so that when recovered from my fit I would wish to take his big, handsome prick again in my mouth, biggest and handsomest I ever met notwithstanding I'd like Tom's as well, later; and make my Captain forget. Or might cajole him, which he seldom did, to bugger me. He never liked to cause me pain.

So when Captain Jack's *Golden Panther* sailed bravely into Port o' Spain to spend our new-gained Spanish doubloons and quarter-pieces and eights, I knew it time to look out for a new boy, myself to become no more'n a common pirate-sailor tho' the Captain's fond friend still. Was no lad on the docks as rushed up on him babbling as myself had done at

Kingston; but I minded to watch out.

Was also that time in port a brave ship which her name were French, Captain said; but I'll use the English of it: *Lily-flower*; and her captain a buccaneer called Monsieur, which is just to say *M<sup>r</sup>* as they do in France. Monsieur came from Haiti but *Lily-flower* sailed out of Martinique against the Spanish from Cartagena and Panama; and, truth to tell, against British ships too; tho' no-one said a word about that at Port o' Spain, her crew being a merry lot of French cut-throats free with their blades and having gold to spend, – Spanish or British or Dutch or French making no never mind; – and Monsieur himself as fierce a man as I ever did have the advantage of meeting. For I did meet him; himself and Captain Jack encountering one another at a tavern where one rushed on t'other as it were – (thought I, afraid) – to slay him. Only 'twas for embracing and shouting for joy and kisses on the cheeks. Now, I think I said, Captain Jack weren't born in Britain, but in France. His papa was an Englishman but his mama French, she being of a family having connections to the plantations in Haiti. So when it became time my Captain might no longer stay in England, he scarcely more than a wicked lad, to Haiti he came; where he met Monsieur, not yet having gone to sea for a pirate either of 'em. I learned all this after.

So one's calling t'other: "Mon frère" or "Mon chéri," that is, *My brother* and *My dear*, or Captain calling Monsieur: François, his proper name. And Monsieur asks: "Josiah?" My Captain: "Dead, poor fellow, shot thro' the head. But here's Robin." So I shook the hand offered me, which 'twas almost hidden in the lace off his shirt-sleeve and owning a pretty ring as had a nice jewel for every finger on it; Monsieur looking me up and down, nodding his chin and saying, – what it meant: "A likely lad." (The French I misremember.) By which I knew he knew when 'twas sorrowful enough as I knew it myself; and I ready for a proper fit of sulking, the which Captain Jack would mislike; when the Captain: "Killed himself a Spaniard just t'other day."

Thereupon Monsieur called for grog and nothing would have it, but should drink my health and proceed to make me very merry; then very drunken; then sick. Went I 'round back of the tavern meaning to sick up in private in the alley behind. The which I commenced to do, feeling very

miserable and fine and manly.

Having completed this employment, I turned away from the gutter, wiping at my mouth with my hand; when I observed somebody watching who was a mite of a scrawny lad. As I was minding to round on him for watching what it wasn't his business; and making me ashamed when I thought I might be proud; he said: "Will you help me, please?" I shouted nevertheless: "Get away with you, puppy!"; for not understanding him as he had said it in French; but then he said the English. And a proper dignified little man he wanted to be; and seemed; only for the tears as glittered at his eye-lashes. "Please," said he again; "will you help me?" "What's your trouble, then, laddy?" said I, as it were, uncaring.

Now, this was a handsome pretty boy, of black hair and green eyes and pouting red lips; clothed as fine as Monsieur, as well, with lace at neck and wrist, a gold ring at one ear where it was bloodied, being new; dressed fine and French-wise, then, excepting no shoes and the little feet grubby. And stinking badly of piss, the which I did not like at all. His French I had not understood but knew 'twere French; so thought he came off the *Lily-flower*, being perhaps Monsieur's boy. Happened I was right imprimis, tho' not secundo. Seemed Monsieur were a man for men, as would I come to be, Sweet Tom also; liking not young boys specially as seeming, to him, much alike women. – Captain Jack'd have two words to say to that, I dare say, who liked women still less than grown men. – Tho' I wasn't thinking of the Captain that moment, I admit.

The boy was Tom, an English lad. His tears being about to flood, I made to comfort him, saying: "Come along with me." But he startled: "I daren't, lest my master see me with you." I: "How may I help you and I mayn't be seen? What's the trouble, then, Sweet Tom?" The 1<sup>st</sup> time I called him that, his favorite name ever after, what no man save my Captain cared to say lest he discover my fist in his ear, two or four of his teeth like dice thrown on the deck as a game.

Happen he'd been with his papa, the mother being perished, aboard a British merchant for Jamaica; the father having indentured himself to a sugar plantation in that island; when the ship was set upon by buccaneers. These no less than Monsieur and his French bully-boys aboard the *Lily-flower*; and one of 'em a surly bad man by name Pierre as said,

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upon setting eyes on little Tom: he'd forfeit all his share of the plunder, he would, in exchange for the boy. Which he ripped crying from his poor papa's arms; and stuck the man as continued to protest. Then taking Tom aboard the *Lily-flower*, set to treating him worser'n M<sup>r</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ ever thought to treat me. Not by buggery, the which a boy can withstand and come to like, even. By such as shaving his head when he had no lice, none too careful with the razor neither; or making him caper about naked whilst crying: what a pretty-pretty fellow he was!; or putting him in fine clothing and pissing on him where all his camaradoes watched to laugh at the fun. Was worse as well, I imagine, what Tommy never cared to tell me; or happily forgot. I neglected to say: Pierre was a famously ugly fellow whom you'd shudder to look at as you saw him, as I did when I did; who wanted always to spoil what was fine, such as my Tom; and who owned a mislike of Englishmen as gnawed at his temper like poison. All of which to say: he took after Tom not because he liked him but the contrary.

So some of this story told, I was as near to tears as Tom and angry as I think I had never been; but petted and kissed the sad, stinking lad, saying: "Don't fear, don't cry." He: "They say *your* master is a good man, tho' a pirate." I, agreeing: "That he is, is Captain Jack, the finest man and bravest captain ever sailed the Spanish Main." Tom: "And English. Will you tell him? Will he help an English boy?"

To this made I no reply, having come over crazy-mad as has happened since; and leading him into the back of the tavern said: "Show me this Pierre." Whereupon Tom pointed the man out at table with his mates, drunken and foolish and ugly as I cannot say. Whereupon said I: "Stay here quiet, Sweet Tom"; and proceeding across the chamber to face Monsieur where he sat drinking with my Captain, the both of 'em merry. Said I to Monsieur: "Your man Pierre has mistreated my friend." The Captain: "Your friend?" And Monsieur, surprised: "Pierre? A very bad dangerous man. Not a one you ought want for an enemy, chéri." And I, being as I said crazy-mad: "Cannot be my enemy and he's dead, can he?" Then Monsieur laughed aloud, then narrowed his eyes at me, then held back Captain Jack who would cuff me and send me scurrying to the *Panther*; said simply: "Attempt it, chéri," sitting back with his mouth

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cruel and eyes hard.

In short, I went to Pierre as it were a servant lad with a jug of grog for him and stuck him with my nice knife that had killed the Spaniard. The new mouth in his throat bloodied a 2<sup>nd</sup> shirt for me.

Then brazen as you please led Tom over to Captain Jack and Monsieur; said to Monsieur: “My friend will depart your company to-day.” And to the Captain: “We wish to bathe now, Cap’n.”

Tom being very quiet and still-like, tho’ trembling. Had flinched when I took his hand in mine, the which being bloodied and slimy; and he, as later said: afraid more of me than my handsome Captain, who regarded him as to speculate or judge; or of fierce Monsieur as laughed, calling: “Mon dieu! Quel enfant!”, – that is, *My God, such a boy*, – and calling to Pierre’s camaradoes: that they should carry away the corpse and think themselves happy the ferocious lad didn’t do for them as well; and calling: “More liquor!”

But I: “We wish to bathe now, Cap’n and Monsieur, if it please you.”

In the Captain’s chamber up-stairs o’ the inn was a fine tub; was hot water and soap. Tom, poor lad, had not been bathed since a year and half a year when torn from his papa’s arms; was afraid so as not able even to weep; but I stripped him naked and bundled him and myself into the tub, the which being large and ourselves small handily sufficed to contain the both; whereupon I tended him very gently until at last he wept on my breast; then washed of his face again, and dried him, and took him with me into Captain’s bed. I like to say I made my 1<sup>st</sup> emission that night, into Sweet Tom’s hands; myself telling him how to help me and himself licking my spunk into his little mouth and eating it. So then slept we very sweetly, tumbled together like puppies, and soundly; till Captain very kindly woke us in the morning.

So then my shipmate camaradoes made much of their Fine Robin, the which I liked; saying: I was a proper little pirate now and had have a golden ear-ring thro’ my ear. And another: “Two ear-rings! For has murdered two men; isn’t it a brave tiny cutthroat!” And Tommy saying, quiet and small: that he did not like the ear-ring Pierre had put on him employing no rum for the needle so it festered and would not heal till the

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ring be taken out and put thro' mine own ear; its brother ear on t'other side owning a ring the Captain give me. I ever after the only sailor of the *Golden Panther* as had 'em in either ear. But to Tom the Captain gave a fine gold finger-ring with a handsome ruby; it being too big for Tommy's hand, strung it on a ribbon 'round his neck under his chemise; until such time as my hand grew large whereupon he gave it me. And back to the beginning o' my tale.

For Sweet Tom joined the *Golden Panther's* company; being captain's boy as it were I had planned it. But Captain Jack had changed his practice; loving me well, as he said, and keeping me with Tommy by his side and in his bunk for some little time to come. Tommy being fearful of a grown man, I might comfort him; and teach him how to please our Captain. And the Captain, tho' misliking any longer to sport with me, being I might now spot him with my spunk or mistake to put it in his mouth, said: he liked to watch myself's and Tommy's play; and have his two bold boys by him as he slept. So remained very happily together we three; until I became a great hairy youth as needing to shave and owning a proper prick; which, the Captain sadly said: it sickened him to look upon without clothes; when I moved my slumbers to a hammock among the other sailors in the hold or a pallet on the deck where Tommy joined me as he was able. 'Twere not so long after, neither, as Tommy learned to make his own spunk shoot; and Captain Jack must needs acquire himself a new boy; and Sweet Tom came a-looking for me. And kept by me, and myself by him, very many years and excellent adventures on the Spanish Main, till Captain Jack purposed to venture the southern seas.

Oh, 'twere very nearly happier I should be drowned with my Tom than have lost him.



**S**o, it being deep night with bright moon and myself unaccountably unable to sleep, tho' tired of a day's labors, am standing aside my spar which it still stand on the shore marking my landfall and memorializing my friends. My hand on it, as 'twere a comfort.

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The waters of the lagoon calm; and white surf crashing out against the reef. Myself watching; watching where the surf break and where it don't, that being the passage thro' as my spar brought me when my ship were foundered in the storm. Then comes a brave little jolly-boat thro' the passage, which it's marked by moonlight; and the boat being rowed by a single man which, his back turned, I cannot make him out; and I, afraid, step closer on the spar.

Then grounds ashore and ships his oars proper; and stands; and steps out the boat; and turns. "Has grown very hairy and black and wild," says he; "and naked as a savage besides. Has become a cannibal, my Bobby, as would cook me and eat me?"

And I: "Oh, Tom, Tommy, it's you?" My voice all chokey and hoarse, it being I know not how many years since I spoke aloud, there being no purpose of it.

"Tis I," says he: "Your only Tom. Who other? And the *Panther* anchored safe offshore, and our Cap'n Jack and camaradoes awaiting you fondly, Robert. Devil of a task it's been, finding you again," he says. "Shall we back to the Caribees?"

'Tis Tom, a proper fine youth as newly come a man, nicely shaved and barbered for Captain Jack mislikes his sailors slovenly; with cap and blouse and breeks, cutlass at his side and musket in his belt; and I ashamed for being naked and wild and hairy and black, tho' clean for have always kept so; and says he: "Oh, Robin, and there's your sailor. But haven't I missed the sight o' him and longed to find him again."

But I still afraid to approach and never so as to touch him. Whereupon throws him down his cap, unstraps his belt and allows cutlass fall; takes him off his shirt; and off his breeks; and says: "Here's mine," holding him in his hand stiff and pretty as ever was.

Here's my sailor, him being hard; of length maybe seven inches on the foot; of girth so my hand scarce compass him; being red and hot and veiny; having a hood of skin on him as slips o'er his head to hide him, or draws down to show his face. He likes my hand as makes him laugh with tickling, or beats him proper so he weep salt tears of his single eye. And here's his ballocks as hang loose underneath and like my hand likewise, tho' gentler; or creep up close one on t'other and on him, as two happy

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lads a-bed with their captain. And captain roars, shooting his spunk as spurts out on my belly and breast, myself roaring likewise; and little boys chortle being happy for making us happy; and so to lick the bitter stuff into my mouth, and so to swallow, and so to sleep.



**S**o then wake me in my lonesome bed of a morning, my heartless little sailor stiff; and take him in hand to pleasure him and him me; and so to labor and it another day.



Composed September 1995, Boston, Massachusetts, with special thanks to Michaels Ford, Bronski, and Lowenthal. Dedicated, after the fact and with some rue, to Larry Hyman: in a previous life a pirate's boy. Anachronisms, implausibilities, and extravagances intended. See also Daniel Defoe: *Robinson Crusoe*; RM Ballantyne: *The Coral Island*; Johann David Wyss: *The Swiss Family Robinson*; JM Barrie: *Peter Pan*; William Shakespeare: *The Tempest*; Armstrong Sperry: *Call It Courage*; Mel Keegan: *Fortunes of War*; BR Burg: *Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition*. Note that most of these works are (or are generally read as) "children's books."



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