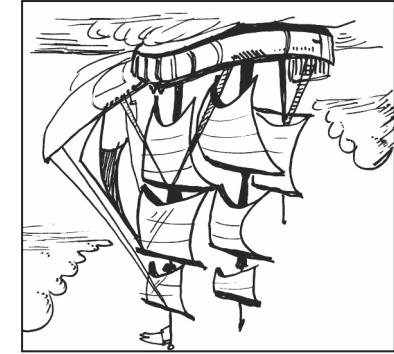
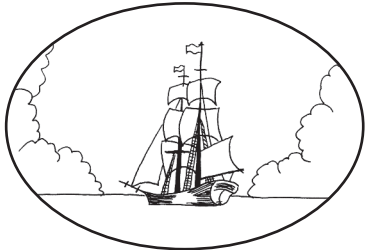


I know. You have been so patient, listening to my story. You've waited a long time for this moment. When I began I promised you pirates, and pirates you shall have. But the busy adventures and scandalous behavior you so eagerly await had a different effect on me at that moment. You think for pirates as romantic fellows, as Robin Hoods to be admired for their derring-do, their forceful personalities, and their ability to seize the best in life for themselves. What men of destiny!

Yes, my friends, lost on the high seas, no sign of land, with uncertain coordinates and supplies running low, and then – miracle above all – a small dot on the horizon. A dot that soon grew to reveal itself – another ship! Certainly the mutiny plans would be put aside, at least for the nonce.



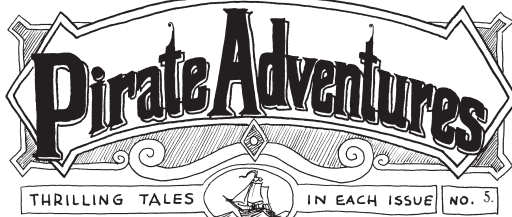
This number contains part five of "Captain Dick's Pirate Story," a serial tale of Spirited Adventure on the High Seas for All to Enjoy.



Naked Rabbit

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"CAPTAIN DICK'S PIRATE STORY" IN THIS NUMBER



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Chapter Ten:  
A Ship Appears on the Horizon

Our supplies were running low. Our position was uncertain. Though we had no proper charts to speak of, we also had not seen land in the longer than we had expected. Fresh water was becoming scarce. The crew was unhappy, and I was mad as a march hare. Mutiny was certain. Though I would have seen perfectly in any man's action owing to my condition, I now know that there was a legitimate plot afoot. Had an extraordinary set of events not occurred, I would be now a spectre on the waves, a mere floating phantom in a watery grave.

That morning I could feel that something was about to happen. The looks on the men's faces, the cautious way in which they avoided my gaze... I was stark raving mad, to be sure, but this was no hallucination. Friny Albert told me later, with his last breath, that this was to be the day they mutinied against poor Dick. But I'm getting ahead of my tale.

Yes, my friends, lost on the high seas, no sign of land, with uncertain coordinates and supplies running low, and then – miracle above all – a small dot on the horizon. A dot that soon grew to reveal itself – another ship! Certainly the mutiny plans would be put aside, at least for the nonce.

From the crew's next our lookout exclaimed – a ship! A schooner! This was good news. Such a ship could indicate our proximity to an established trade route, or even good fishing waters. We could be much closer to our goal than we had thought! The crew of this new ship could give us the aid we sorely needed! Excitement rolled through our vessel!

I would be served a stew, in the Captain's quarters, away from the men, and I would wonder at the contents of the bowl. Would one feeding me rotten meat or moldy gruel, merely for sport? I took to caring at the mess with the men, unable to keep my eyes off them, watching their little movements, trying to guess at their stratagem. It made for many an uncomfortable meal, and probably a few bouts of indigestion besides.

And it was not just the crew. Our ship had been infiltrated by forces darker than those of simple mutiny. From the corner of my sleep-deprived eye I could see the scuttling and scurrying of tiny pixies – faces pressed against the insides of mirrors, their hideous tiny feet leaving tracks everywhere... I had taken to searching throughout the ship for them, opening every locker and moving every barrel in search of the minuscule pests.

Such aberrant behavior! Such a madness held me in its thrall! My check takes to blushing to recall the events now, but know truly that a fever had taken me! In the clear light of this day I can promise you no diminutive enemies could ever have been found aboard that ship. I am not one given to see spirits and devils in the dark. Old Dick is a pragmatic, practical man.

Had you seen me then – scraggly hair obscuring the wild look in my eyes, muttering to myself, shambling about in a fog of reason, dirty clothing askew, you would think me a perfect resident of Bedlam! Even my memory of it is hazy, as though it happened to another, or was told to me rather than lived by me. How long would it have continued, and how long would the men have endured my madness before sense and self-preservation drove them to action?

As it would happen, a single, terrible event would solve all of these issues.

## Chapter Nine: Madness Claims the Captain

Life aboard ship can be hard, my friends. Yet the Spirit of Man is a wondrous thing. Despite the troubles and tribulations, the company of your fellows grows to fill the empty spaces created by drudgery and routine. Eventually you shall feel what the French call "esprit de corps."

Even those moral fugitives from that dire land recognize the bonds of friendship amongst a well-working crew! And work is all one does aboard ship, from the Captain on down. One may spend one's youth with a hazy notion of what it means to command a vessel. The child thinks the Master is a tyrant, lying abed all day, shouting out orders, being fed delicacies, enjoying any and all manner of games and diversions, and stopping those only for an even-more delightful meal or fascinating entertainments from dancers and acrobats! Maybe trained animals will visit him next!

By the time my first command was passed to me you can bet that Old Dicky no longer entertained such fluff. I would imagine that even you, dear reader, no longer hold such childish notions, but even so, it may be novel to you to know what duties belong to that office. Nor may it be as clear to you why "esprit de corps" is of such value, despite its froggy origins.

The Captain of a vessel is more than just the "top dog." The bosun may be boss of the deck, and his word is law amongst the men. But the Captain commands the ship with the firm knowledge that this relationship is already in place. He does not issue orders directly to the men, but rather to his lieutenants, who have the obligation to see that those orders are carried out by the assignment of various duties



so, I could feel the tensions rising amongst the men, some of whom felt that my election to Captain had been hasty, ill-connected, and correctable. My career as bosun crew. A ship is quite small, and what gossip I could not hear directly was easily inferred.

It's hard to put in words what happened to me next, my friends. Scorn me though you may, laugh – if you can find it to do so, for I hardly understand it myself. The combination of duty, exhaustion, and worry over the men had built up within my breast. A deckhand could look me askance, and my face would twitch noticeably; what was that look about? What secret did he have? Was he plotting against me, as many others had contemplated? Did he think me a fit Captain? Or was that look a mocking one?

to the men. Thus the Captain does lead, but through proxy. In turn he must be kept abreast of whatever goes on aboard ship, but only through those proxies. They must gather and digest such information as will be important to relay.

Thus a Captain – a good one, mind you – must be at the apex of all that occurs on a ship. He must be simultaneously aware of all that happens and be able to order that steps be taken to correct problems, manage resources, and act decisively from a position of intelligence and authority.

I would dearly love to report to you on my efficiency and natural talent at leadership. How I would savor the satisfied smiles on your lips as I regaled you with lists of my accomplishments. And how sweetly you would doze off, losing consciousness as I listed the nevertheless tedious perfections of my command. It is at the cost of your imminent slumber that I tell you the truth. Certainly my tale has more value when you know that I was ill-equipped to run the ship, and that I failed at nearly every task the office required of me.

Old Dicky worked hard, to be sure, managing his bedraggled crew. But we were too wounded, too weak to run properly. And with no proper head to steer the beast, we were fast coming apart at the seams. Having lost the greater share of our force and many of the men aboard the "Madeleine" besides, the men were somber, even at the happiest of times. No sea chanty on the pipes for this lot, no nights on deck with stories of past voyages and rousing good cheer.

Neither were they besotted with doom – we had sustained a loss, but were not slated to die just yet. The voyage had gone awry, but not by so much we feared for our lives. Even