

The ship's name was no help. "There have been hundreds of ships called "Madelaine," and probably even more with names like "Garfish" and "Scotsman." There are probably more named "Victory" or "Intrepid" but Dick's sea vessels creeping in the Queen's Navy, and I had always assumed he had meant Elizabeth II. The current monarch of the United Kingdom since 1952. Is it possible he had meant Victoria? That would make Dick impossible old, as Victoria died in 1901! The only Queen before that was Queen Anne in the 1700s!

And I was certain I'd find some kind of verification. Cappy Dick's tale. Surely some of this information would be burning with curiosity, I began to check the details of

But could I sleep that night? Not at all! I rushed home, scribbling notes to myself so that I could remember it all for myself. The "Madelaine," John Rackham, a Queen, it was all so confusing at the time. I scrawled pages and pages before collapsing with exhaustion. The next night I raced to Old Pete's, hoping Dick would be there. I was not alone; there were about fifteen of us. But Dick did not show, and we shuffled home, disappointed and not just a bit worried. Even if the old salt were lying through his teeth, I had to know what the end of this story was like!

And what of the mysterious post? The King of Spain? Such fanciful descriptions of "The Americas"? The details did not add up!

Yet as the topman cried out "the black flag!" we were somewhat relieved. Every sailor knows that pirates run the black flag to show they will spare the lives of a cooperative crew. The red flag, the "jolie rouge," would mean no quarter, no one spared. Perhaps we would not be sent to Davy Jones just yet. Perhaps if we obeyed the ruffians we would live another day.

The flag was clear now – a skull atop a pair of crossed swords. A familiar emblem for some, and word spread over the ship like a flame. The sign of the notorious pirate, John Rackham!

Chapter Twelve: Cappy Dick Retires for the Night

Dear Reader, I have been relaying to you the fantastic tale of old "Cappy" Dick, the colorful sailor we had grown accustomed to seeing at Old Pete's Tavern. The man we thought was merely a picturesque rummy had turned out to be quite a storyteller! And none of us there could believe a single word he said.

The way he talked of ships and sailors was so old. Surely no one had sailed like this in centuries. The topic is not in my expertise, but I was fairly certain sailors no longer sat in a crow's nest or had to eat hardtack! We knew that Cappy Dick was ancient, but certainly his lifespan was not so supernatural.

But we listened, rapt with attention, as hours crept by. So many hours that Old Pete finally had to tell us to go home – he had waited patiently almost an hour after closing, hoping Dick would end his epic. At the mere mention of

But as I told you, this was not the "jolie rouge," and Calico Jack did not mean to kill us – not yet anyway. Was this delirium for Old Dick? You must recall my crew was about to mutiny. Though I did not perceive any evidence of their plot, I could sense the uneasiness and rebellion swirling below deck. No man confronted me, yet I could tell by wink and glance that my command was nearing its end. Perhaps in that way the pirate was going to give me a reprieve. The men were anxious – to the final man, beating them back? Oh, was with our last breath, to the final man, beating them back? Of course we would!

Did I not say a skull atop two crossed swords? The emblem of Jack Rackham! The fond they called Calico Jack! He was a flashy dresser, that one, clad in the most hideous floral vests and breeches I had ever seen! It was the height of fashion for the times, and he cut a dandy figure, but every one of us had heard stories in one or another. When the lookout shouted to us that his flag flew a notorious brigand – but every one of us had heard stories in one or another. When the lookout shouted to us that his flag flew

As to "John Rackham," that is an entirely common name! Imagine the sense of relief when Old Cappy Dick turned up at Old Pete's, three days later, looking as if he had been on one hell of a bender. He cackled when we chastised him for being gone so long, and with a gaze from his thick, rheumy eye, he held us entranced with the first words that came out of his mouth, continuing right where he left off in his extraordinary story.

And what of the mysterious post? The King of Spain? Such fanciful descriptions of "The Americas"? The details did not add up!

Chapter Eleven: We Learn the Villain's Name

Perhaps all that is true. But what is also true is that I, your humble narrator, was, at this same moment of realization, now that pirates were to figure prominently in my own personal story, terrified. For me, a man of the Queen's Navy, a Captain, low on supplies and morale, nearly defenseless, and mad, a ship full of pirates was a death's sentence. Certainly their schooner could outrun the "Madelaine." They would board us and kill us as soon as speak to us. We were dead men, even now.

What would pirates care for our lives? We had spoils – chests of coin to purchase goods in the East Indies! When we lost the Garfish and the Scotsman, we lost our tools, our clothing, our supplies – but not the gold, safely ensconced in the belly of the Dear Madeleine. These pirates could not have known what we carried, but they were about to be very happy men.



I don't remember any further discussion amongst us. Somehow a good quantity of flour sack was produced in record time and with my silent nod we ran it up as fast as possible. For good or ill, we would put ourselves in the hands of one of the most notorious blackguards the Caribbean had seen.

No, ye likely haven't, because you've lived a soft life, you, with your telephones and your Choco-Pies! You've not been to sea with a crew of men, working away, exposed to the sun and the salt, none of your showers and your manicures!

You think me a coward now, your head filled with lurid tales and the boasts of men who talk big and experience little. They would have you think it's the measure of a man to beat down the world around him, yes? Invictus! But if I am the master of my fate, would I throw away those future years leaping into the jaws of certain death? Is it wise to jump into hazard, guns ablaze, sword-a-swinging and teeth gritted against all port or another. When the lookout shouted to us that his flag flew

And such an irony! If I had not been deposed by the pirate captain that day, and had instead been killed by him, I would have, with that one decision, been ensnared forever as captain, in effect accepting my seat of power long into memory. The relief on the faces of my men was a palpable thing, as tangible as the spray of sea whipping through our beards on the winds that carried Jack's ship ever closer. Faced with the dilemma of a mad captain – that being yours truly, your humble narrator, at that moment still somewhat convinced that pixies might be crawling through our hull – and the indeterminate hands of a wildly unpredictable adversary, my men knew the best odds were with the pirate. I suppose I should have felt a winge of shame at that realization, if not for the fact that I also regarded my fate better served under Jack than on my own.

Not me. I'm wise enough to know when it's important to stand your ground and when you give in to a higher power, and when I saw Jack Rackham's standard flapping in the breeze I knew I'd live another day – I knew I'd live to tell the likes of you what I'd seen and done.

And such an irony! If I had not been deposed by the pirate captain that day, and had instead been killed by him, I would have, with that one decision, been ensnared forever as captain, in effect accepting my seat of power long into memory. The relief on the faces of my men was a palpable thing, as tangible as the spray of sea whipping through our beards on the winds that carried Jack's ship ever closer. Faced with the dilemma of a mad captain – that being yours truly, your humble narrator, at that moment still somewhat convinced that pixies might be crawling through our hull – and the indeterminate hands of a wildly unpredictable adversary, my men knew the best odds were with the pirate. I suppose I should have felt a winge of shame at that realization, if not for the fact that I also regarded my fate better served under Jack than on my own.

"CAPTAIN DICK'S PIRATE STORY" IN THIS NUMBER

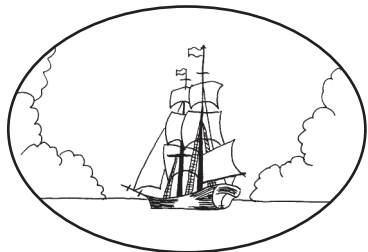
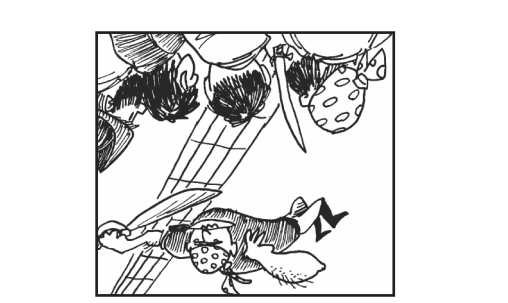


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So what happens to those so-called heroes, those hot-heads who barge in the first sign of a conflict, tearing away at the world with whatever they happen to grab at the last moment? They're torn apart by a foe who can see them coming, who is prepared for an assault, and who knows their move before it's been made. They end up on the deck in

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