

Chapter 12: Warned Of Danger By A Countryman

A little while after this there came in a Dutch ship from Batavia; she was a coaster, not an European trader, of about two hundred tons burden; the men, as they pretended, having been so sickly that the captain had not hands enough to go to sea with, so he lay by at Bengal; and having, it seems, got money enough, or being willing, for other reasons, to go for Europe, he gave public notice he would sell his ship. This came to my ears before my new partner heard of it, and I had a great mind to buy it; so I went to him and told him of it. He considered a while, for he was no rash man neither; and at last replied, "She is a little too big - however, we will have her." Accordingly, we bought the ship, and agreeing with the master, we paid for her, and took possession. When we had done so we resolved to engage the men, if we could, to join with those we had, for the pursuing our business; but, on a sudden, they having received not their wages, but their share of the money, as we afterwards learned, not one of them was to be found; we inquired much about them, and at length were told that they were all gone together by land to Agra, the great city of the Mogul's residence, to proceed from thence to Surat, and then go by sea to the Gulf of Persia.

Nothing had so much troubled me a good while as that I should miss the opportunity of going with them; for such a ramble, I thought, and in such company as would both have guarded and diverted me, would have suited mightily with my great design; and I should have both seen the world and

gone homeward too. But I was much better satisfied a few days after, when I came to know what sort of fellows they were; for, in short, their history was, that this man they called captain was the gunner only, not the commander; that they had been a trading voyage, in which they had been attacked on shore by some of the Malays, who had killed the captain and three of his men; and that after the captain was killed, these men, eleven in number, having resolved to run away with the ship, brought her to Bengal, leaving the mate and five men more on shore.

Well, let them get the ship how they would, we came honestly by her, as we thought, though we did not, I confess, examine into things so exactly as we ought; for we never inquired anything of the seamen, who would certainly have faltered in their account, and contradicted one another. Somehow or other we should have had reason to have suspected, them; but the man showed us a bill of sale for the ship, to one Emanuel Clostershoven, or some such name, for I suppose it was all a forgery, and called himself by that name, and we could not contradict him: and withal, having no suspicion of the thing, we went through with our bargain. We picked up some more English sailors here after this, and some Dutch, and now we resolved on a second voyage to the south-east for cloves, &c. - that is to say, among the Philippine and Malacca isles. In short, not to fill up this part of my story with trifles when what is to come is so remarkable, I spent, from first to last, six years in this country, trading from port to port, backward and forward, and with very good success, and was now the last year with my new partner,

going in the ship above mentioned, on a voyage to China, but designing first to go to Siam to buy rice.

In this voyage, being by contrary winds obliged to beat up and down a great while in the Straits of Malacca and among the islands, we were no sooner got clear of those difficult seas than we found our ship had sprung a leak, but could not discover where it was. This forced us to make some port; and my partner, who knew the country better than I did, directed the captain to put into the river of Cambodia; for I had made the English mate, one Mr. Thompson, captain, not being willing to take the charge of the ship upon myself. This river lies on the north side of the great bay or gulf which goes up to Siam. While we were here, and going often on shore for refreshment, there comes to me one day an Englishman, a gunner's mate on board an English East India ship, then riding in the same river.

Sir," says he, addressing me, "you are a stranger to me, and I to you; but I have something to tell you that very nearly concerns you. I am moved by the imminent danger you are in, and, for ought I see, you have no knowledge of it."

"I know no danger I am in," said I, "but that my ship is leaky, and I cannot find it out; but I intend to lay her aground to-morrow, to see if I can find it."

"But, sir," says he, "leaky or not leaky, you will be wiser than to lay your

ship on shore to-morrow when you hear what I have to say to you. Do you know, sir," said he, "the town of Cambodia lies about fifteen leagues up the river; and there are two large English ships about five leagues on this side, and three Dutch?"

"Well," said I, "and what is that to me?"

"Why, sir," said he, "is it for a man that is upon such adventures as you are to come into a port, and not examine first what ships there are there, and whether he is able to deal with them? I suppose you do not think you are a match for them?" I could not conceive what he meant; and I turned short upon him, and said: "I wish you would explain yourself; I cannot imagine what reason I have to be afraid of any of the company's ships, or Dutch ships. I am no interloper. What can they have to say to me?"

"Well, sir," says he, with a smile, "if you think yourself secure you must take your chance; but take my advice, if you do not put to sea immediately, you will the very next tide be attacked by five longboats full of men, and perhaps if you are taken you will be hanged for a pirate, and the particulars be examined afterwards. I thought, sir," added he, "I should have met with a better reception than this for doing you a piece of service of such importance."

"I can never be ungrateful," said I, "for any service, or to any man that offers

me any kindness; but it is past my comprehension what they should have such a design upon me for: however, since you say there is no time to be lost, and that there is some villainous design on hand against me, I will go on board this minute, and put to sea immediately, if my men can stop the leak; but, sir," said I, "shall I go away ignorant of the cause of all this? Can you give me no further light into it?"

"I can tell you but part of the story, sir," says he; "but I have a Dutch seaman here with me, and I believe I could persuade him to tell you the rest; but there is scarce time for it. But the short of the story is this - the first part of which I suppose you know well enough - that you were with this ship at Sumatra; that there your captain was murdered by the Malays, with three of his men; and that you, or some of those that were on board with you, ran away with the ship, and are since turned pirates. This is the sum of the story, and you will all be seized as pirates, I can assure you, and executed with very little ceremony; for you know merchant ships show but little law to pirates if they get them into their power." - "Now you speak plain English," said I, "and I thank you; and though I know nothing that we have done like what you talk of, for I am sure we came honestly and fairly by the ship; yet seeing such a work is doing, as you say, and that you seem to mean honestly, I will be upon my guard."

"Nay, sir," says he, "do not talk of being upon your guard; the best defence is to be out of danger. If you have any regard for your life and the lives of all

your men, put to sea without fail at high-water; and as you have a whole tide before you, you will be gone too far out before they can come down; for they will come away at high-water, and as they have twenty miles to come, you will get near two hours of them by the difference of the tide, not reckoning the length of the way: besides, as they are only boats, and not ships, they will not venture to follow you far out to sea, especially if it blows." - "Well," said I, "you have been very kind in this: what shall I do to make you amends?"

"Sir," says he, "you may not be willing to make me any amends, because you may not be convinced of the truth of it. I will make an offer to you: I have nineteen months' pay due to me on board the ship -, which I came out of England in; and the Dutchman that is with me has seven months' pay due to him. If you will make good our pay to us we will go along with you; if you find nothing more in it we will desire no more; but if we do convince you that we have saved your lives, and the ship, and the lives of all the men in her, we will leave the rest to you."

I consented to this readily, and went immediately on board, and the two men with me. As soon as I came to the ship's side, my partner, who was on board, came out on the quarter-deck, and called to me, with a great deal of joy, "We have stopped the leak - we have stopped the leak!"

"Say you so?" said I; "thank God; but weigh anchor, then, immediately."

"Weigh!" says he; "what do you mean by that? What is the matter?"

"Ask no questions," said I; "but set all hands to work, and weigh without losing a minute." He was surprised; however, he called the captain, and he immediately ordered the anchor to be got up; and though the tide was not quite down, yet a little land-breeze blowing, we stood out to sea. Then I called him into the cabin, and told him the story; and we called in the men, and they told us the rest of it; but as it took up a great deal of time, before we had done a seaman comes to the cabin door, and called out to us that the captain bade him tell us we were chased by five sloops, or boats, full of men.

Very well," said I, "then it is apparent there is something in it." I then ordered all our men to be called up, and told them there was a design to seize the ship, and take us for pirates, and asked them if they would stand by us, and by one another; the men answered cheerfully, one and all, that they would live and die with us. Then I asked the captain what way he thought best for us to manage a fight with them; for resist them I was resolved we would, and that to the last drop. He said readily, that the way was to keep them off with our great shot as long as we could, and then to use our small arms, to keep them from boarding us; but when neither of these would do any longer, we would retire to our close quarters, for perhaps they had not materials to break open our bulkheads, or get in upon

us.

The gunner had in the meantime orders to bring two guns, to bear fore and aft, out of the steerage, to clear the deck, and load them with musket-bullets, and small pieces of old iron, and what came next to hand. Thus we made ready for fight; but all this while we kept out to sea, with wind enough, and could see the boats at a distance, being five large longboats, following us with all the sail they could make.

Two of those boats (which by our glasses we could see were English) outsailed the rest, were near two leagues ahead of them, and gained upon us considerably, so that we found they would come up with us; upon which we fired a gun without ball, to intimate that they should bring to: and we put out a flag of truce, as a signal for parley: but they came crowding after us till within shot, when we took in our white flag, they having made no answer to it, and hung out a red flag, and fired at them with a shot.

Notwithstanding this, they came on till they were near enough to call to them with a speaking-trumpet, bidding them keep off at their peril.

It was all one; they crowded after us, and endeavoured to come under our stern, so as to board us on our quarter; upon which, seeing they were resolute for mischief, and depended upon the strength that followed them, I ordered to bring the ship to, so that they lay upon our broadside; when immediately we fired five guns at them, one of which had been levelled so

true as to carry away the stern of the hindermost boat, and we then forced them to take down their sail, and to run all to the head of the boat, to keep her from sinking; so she lay by, and had enough of it; but seeing the foremost boat crowd on after us, we made ready to fire at her in particular. While this was doing one of the three boats that followed made up to the boat which we had disabled, to relieve her, and we could see her take out the men. We then called again to the foremost boat, and offered a truce, to parley again, and to know what her business was with us; but had no answer, only she crowded close under our stern. Upon this, our gunner who was a very dextrous fellow ran out his two case-guns, and fired again at her, but the shot missing, the men in the boat shouted, waved their caps, and came on. The gunner, getting quickly ready again, fired among them a second time, one shot of which, though it missed the boat itself, yet fell in among the men, and we could easily see did a great deal of mischief among them. We now wore the ship again, and brought our quarter to bear upon them, and firing three guns more, we found the boat was almost split to pieces; in particular, her rudder and a piece of her stern were shot quite away; so they handed her sail immediately, and were in great disorder. To complete their misfortune, our gunner let fly two guns at them again; where he hit them we could not tell, but we found the boat was sinking, and some of the men already in the water: upon this, I immediately manned out our pinnace, with orders to pick up some of the men if they could, and save them from drowning, and immediately come on board ship with them, because we saw the rest of the boats began to come up. Our men in the

pinnace followed their orders, and took up three men, one of whom was just drowning, and it was a good while before we could recover him. As soon as they were on board we crowded all the sail we could make, and stood farther out to the sea; and we found that when the other boats came up to the first, they gave over their chase.

Being thus delivered from a danger which, though I knew not the reason of it, yet seemed to be much greater than I apprehended, I resolved that we should change our course, and not let any one know whither we were going; so we stood out to sea eastward, quite out of the course of all European ships, whether they were bound to China or anywhere else, within the commerce of the European nations. When we were at sea we began to consult with the two seamen, and inquire what the meaning of all this should be; and the Dutchman confirmed the gunner's story about the false sale of the ship and of the murder of the captain, and also how that he, this Dutchman, and four more got into the woods, where they wandered about a great while, till at length he made his escape, and swam off to a Dutch ship, which was sailing near the shore in its way from China.

He then told us that he went to Batavia, where two of the seamen belonging to the ship arrived, having deserted the rest in their travels, and gave an account that the fellow who had run away with the ship, sold her at Bengal to a set of pirates, who were gone a- cruising in her, and that they had already taken an English ship and two Dutch ships very richly laden. This

latter part we found to concern us directly, though we knew it to be false; yet, as my partner said, very justly, if we had fallen into their hands, and they had had such a prepossession against us beforehand, it had been in vain for us to have defended ourselves, or to hope for any good quarter at their hands; especially considering that our accusers had been our judges, and that we could have expected nothing from them but what rage would have dictated, and an ungoverned passion have executed. Therefore it was his opinion we should go directly back to Bengal, from whence we came, without putting in at any port whatever - because where we could give a good account of ourselves, could prove where we were when the ship put in, of whom we bought her, and the like; and what was more than all the rest, if we were put upon the necessity of bringing it before the proper judges, we should be sure to have some justice, and not to be hanged first and judged afterwards.

I was some time of my partner's opinion; but after a little more serious thinking, I told him I thought it was a very great hazard for us to attempt returning to Bengal, for that we were on the wrong side of the Straits of Malacca, and that if the alarm was given, we should be sure to be waylaid on every side - that if we should be taken, as it were, running away, we should even condemn ourselves, and there would want no more evidence to destroy us. I also asked the English sailor's opinion, who said he was of my mind, and that we certainly should be taken. This danger a little startled my partner and all the ship's company, and we immediately resolved to go away

to the coast of Tonquin, and so on to the coast of China - and pursuing the first design as to trade, find some way or other to dispose of the ship, and come back in some of the vessels of the country such as we could get. This was approved of as the best method for our security, and accordingly we steered away NNE., keeping above fifty leagues off from the usual course to the eastward. This, however, put us to some inconvenience: for, first, the winds, when we came that distance from the shore, seemed to be more steadily against us, blowing almost trade, as we call it, from the E. and ENE., so that we were a long while upon our voyage, and we were but ill provided with victuals for so long a run; and what was still worse, there was some danger that those English and Dutch ships whose boats pursued us, whereof some were bound that way, might have got in before us, and if not, some other ship bound to China might have information of us from them, and pursue us with the same vigour.

I must confess I was now very uneasy, and thought myself, including the late escape from the longboats, to have been in the most dangerous condition that ever I was in through my past life; for whatever ill circumstances I had been in, I was never pursued for a thief before; nor had I ever done anything that merited the name of dishonest or fraudulent, much less thievish. I had chiefly been my own enemy, or, as I may rightly say, I had been nobody's enemy but my own; but now I was woefully embarrassed: for though I was perfectly innocent, I was in no condition to make that innocence appear; and if I had been taken, it had been under a

supposed guilt of the worst kind. This made me very anxious to make an escape, though which way to do it I knew not, or what port or place we could go to. My partner endeavoured to encourage me by describing the several ports of that coast, and told me he would put in on the coast of Cochin China, or the bay of Tonquin, intending afterwards to go to Macao, where a great many European families resided, and particularly the missionary priests, who usually went thither in order to their going forward to China.

Hither then we resolved to go; and, accordingly, though after a tedious course, and very much straitened for provisions, we came within sight of the coast very early in the morning; and upon reflection on the past circumstances of danger we were in, we resolved to put into a small river, which, however, had depth enough of water for us, and to see if we could, either overland or by the ship's pinnace, come to know what ships were in any port thereabouts. This happy step was, indeed, our deliverance: for though we did not immediately see any European ships in the bay of Tonquin, yet the next morning there came into the bay two Dutch ships; and a third without any colours spread out, but which we believed to be a Dutchman, passed by at about two leagues' distance, steering for the coast of China; and in the afternoon went by two English ships steering the same course; and thus we thought we saw ourselves beset with enemies both one way and the other. The place we were in was wild and barbarous, the people thieves by occupation; and though it is true we had not much to seek of them, and, except getting a few provisions, cared not how little we had to do

with them, yet it was with much difficulty that we kept ourselves from being insulted by them several ways. We were in a small river of this country, within a few leagues of its utmost limits northward; and by our boat we coasted north-east to the point of land which opens the great bay of Tonquin; and it was in this beating up along the shore that we discovered we were surrounded with enemies. The people we were among were the most barbarous of all the inhabitants of the coast; and among other customs they have this one: that if any vessel has the misfortune to be shipwrecked upon their coast, they make the men all prisoners or slaves; and it was not long before we found a spice of their kindness this way, on the occasion following.

I have observed above that our ship sprung a leak at sea, and that we could not find it out; and it happened that, as I have said, it was stopped unexpectedly, on the eve of our being pursued by the Dutch and English ships in the bay of Siam; yet, as we did not find the ship so perfectly tight and sound as we desired, we resolved while we were at this place to lay her on shore, and clean her bottom, and, if possible, to find out where the leaks were. Accordingly, having lightened the ship, and brought all our guns and other movables to one side, we tried to bring her down, that we might come at her bottom; but, on second thoughts, we did not care to lay her on dry ground, neither could we find out a proper place for it.